

**Chapter 13 Viewpoint Activity**

Like the knights of medieval Europe and some heroes of the American West, the samurai of medieval Japan presented an ideal of loyalty and courage that became legendary (textbook pages 327–328). The first excerpt below is from a set of instructions given by a real samurai to his teenage son in 1247. The second is from the *Tale of the Heike*, a collection of stories about the wars in the late 1100s between the Taira (Heike) and the Minamoto families. Here the samurai Kumagai has captured a young Taira warrior. ♦ *As you read, look for the ways in which the story reflects samurai ideals. Then, on a separate sheet of paper, answer the questions that follow.*

**The Samurai in Fact and Fiction**

**Hojo Shigetoki, a samurai, to his son—** Remember that the key to discipline is fair treatment in rewards and in punishments. . . .

Do not be careless or negligent in the presence of subordinates, especially of older men. Thus do not spit or snuffle or lounge about on a chest with your legs dangling. . . . Preserve your dignity. . . . You must treat all servants with proper consideration and generosity, not only your own people but also those of your parents and other superiors. . . .

Remember, however, that there are times when a commander must exercise his power of deciding questions of life or death. In those circumstances since human life is at stake you must give most careful thought to your action. Never kill or wound a man in anger, however great the provocation. Better get somebody else to administer the proper punishment.



**Tale of the Heike: The Death of Atsumori** “Then you have made a good capture,” said the youth. “Take my head and show it to some of my side, and they will tell you who I am.”

“Though he is one of their leaders,” mused Kumagai, “if I slay him it will not turn victory into defeat, and if I spare him, it will not turn defeat into victory. When my son Kojiro was but slightly wounded at Ichi no tani this morning, did it not pain me? How this young man’s father would grieve to hear that he had been killed! I will spare him.”

Just then, looking behind him, he saw Doi and Kajiwara coming up with fifty horsemen. “Alas! look there,” he exclaimed, the tears running down his face, “though I would spare your life, the whole countryside swarms with our men, and you cannot escape them. If you must die, let it be by my hand, and I will see that prayers are said for your rebirth in Paradise.”

“Indeed it must be so,” said the young warrior. “Cut off my head at once.”

Kumagai was so overcome by compassion that he could scarcely wield his blade. . . . weeping bitterly he cut off the boy’s head. “Alas! he cried, “what life is so hard as that of a soldier? Only because I was born of a warrior family must I suffer this affliction! How lamentable it is to do such cruel deeds!”

Sources: (1) *History of Japan to 1334*, by George Sanson (Stanford University Press, 1958); (2) *Anthology of Japanese Literature*, ed. Donald Keene (Grove Press, 1955).

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**Questions to Discuss**

- Besides behavior in battle, what kinds of advice does the samurai give to his son about the way a samurai should act?
- What are Kumagai’s reasons for wanting to spare the young warrior’s life?
- Determining Relevance** In what ways does Kumagai carry out the ideals of the samurai’s advice?