

Student Handout 2

Readings on Education for Edo Period Boys and Girls

A model curriculum for young samurai was set forth in 1670:

Those born to a warrior family should have lessons in sequence as follows: first, from ages seven or eight, practice in writing the first characters; from eleven, twelve or thirteen, reading the words of the Four [Confucian] Books, and also learning the tea ceremony, deportment, recitation of noh [theater], and playing the noh hand drum; from fourteen to seventeen, defensive fencing, swordsmanship, handling the spear, horseriding, archery, musketry, and next falconry and board games [go, chess, and backgammon]; and from eighteen or nineteen, military administration, tactics, the composition of Chinese and Japanese poetry, and medicine.

—Adapted from the translation in Hall, p. 717.

What about education for girls?

“A woman does not need to bother with learning; she has nothing to do but be obedient.”

“When women are learned and clever in speech it is a sign that civil disturbance is not far off.”

—Matsudaira Sadanobu (1758–1829) Edo statesman, cited in Fister, p. 12.

Up to the age of seven, girls are to be instructed in the same way as and together with boys; but beyond that age they are to be segregated. Thereafter, they are to be taught reading and writing through the Japanese kana syllabary, while they are also to learn to make supplementary use of Chinese characters. They are to commit to memory ancient poems of classical type, to become acquainted with the primary Chinese classics, and also read treatises on women by orthodox scholars. After the age of ten they are not to be allowed to go outside their homes, where they are taught sewing, weaving, and arithmetic at the same time that their attention is devoted to household economics.

—Guidelines for the education of women written by Kaibara Ekken in the *Wazoku dojikun*. Adapted from Fister, p. 12.

Seeing that it is a girl's destiny, on reaching womanhood, to go to a new home, and live in submission to her father-in-law and mother-in-law, it is even more incumbent on her than it is on a boy to receive with all reverence her parents' instructions. Should her parents, through excess of tenderness, allow her to grow up self-willed, she will infallibly show herself capricious in her husband's house, and thus alienate his affection, while, if her father-in-law be a man of correct principles, the girl will find the yoke of these principles intolerable. She will hate and decry her father-in-law, and the end of these domestic dissensions will be her dismissal from her husband's house, and the covering of herself with ignominy. Her parents, forgetting the faulty education they gave her, may indeed lay all the blame on the father-in-law. But they will be in error; for the whole

disaster should rightly be attributed to the faulty education the girl received from her parents. . . .

—Moral instruction for women from the Onna daigaku (Great Learning for Women) written by Kaibara Ekken in 1715. Excerpted from Chamberlain, pp. 531–536.

Discussion

1) What do you think?

Have students discuss these readings. What surprised them? Are there any similarities between the Edo student curriculum and theirs? What aspects of these do you think are still learned today? Which are not.

2) Education of Women.

Do you think the two women artists in this packet (slides #11 and #15) received an education like the one described on this sheet? How do you think they managed to become so successful? (Even though there were standards of conduct, people found ways to get around them. Both women led unconventional lives. Gyokuran married an unconventional man who encouraged her. Rengetsu retired to a Buddhist monastery, where she could pursue her studies without reproach.)