

## A LETTER TO THE SHOGUN

*When U.S. Commodore Matthew Perry arrived in Tokyo Bay on his first visit to Japan, in July 1853, he carried a letter from the President of the United States. Millard Fillmore. The letter requested that trade relations between the two countries be established. The United States was already becoming a major participant in the race for the East Asian market. Little did the president know how momentous the occasion was, or with what eagerness the Japanese would eventually respond to the challenge.*

### A LETTER FROM THE PRESIDENT OF THE UNITED STATES

Millard Fillmore  
President of the United States of America. To His Imperial Majesty, The Emperor of Japan. Great and Good Friend!

I send you this public letter by Commodore Matthew C. Perry, an officer of the highest rank in the Navy of the United States, and commander of the squadron now visiting your Imperial Majesty's dominions.

I have directed Commodore Perry to assure your Imperial Majesty that I entertain the kindest feelings towards your Majesty's person and government; and that I have no other object in sending him to Japan, but to propose to your Imperial Majesty that the United States and Japan should live in friendship, and have commercial intercourse with each other. The constitution and laws of the United States forbid all interference with the religious or political concerns of other nations. I have particularly charged Commodore Perry to abstain from every act which could

possibly disturb the tranquillity of your Imperial Majesty's dominions.

The United States of America reach from ocean to ocean, and our territory of Oregon and state of California lie directly opposite to the dominions of your Imperial Majesty. Our steamships can go from California to Japan in eighteen days. . . .

Japan is also a rich and fertile country, and produces many very valuable articles. . . . I am desirous that our two countries should trade with each other, for the benefit both of Japan and the United States.

We know that the ancient laws of your Imperial Majesty's government do not allow of foreign trade except with the Dutch. But as the state of the world changes, and new governments are formed, it seems to be wise from time to time to make new laws. . . . If your Imperial Majesty were so far to change the ancient laws as to allow a free trade between the two countries, it would be extremely beneficial to both. . . .

Many of our ships pass every year from California to China; and great numbers of our people pursue the whale fishery near the shores of Japan. It sometimes happens in stormy weather that one of our ships is wrecked on your Imperial Majesty's shores. In all such cases we ask and expect, that our unfortunate people should be treated with kindness, and that their property should be protected, till we can send a vessel and bring them away. . . .

May the Almighty have your Imperial Majesty in his great and holy keeping! . . .

Your Good Friend,  
Millard Fillmore

1. What is the tone of the letter from President Fillmore to the Japanese Emperor?
2. What is the purpose of this letter?
3. What are some of the specific things that President Fillmore wants?
4. What argument does he make to try and convince the Japanese?