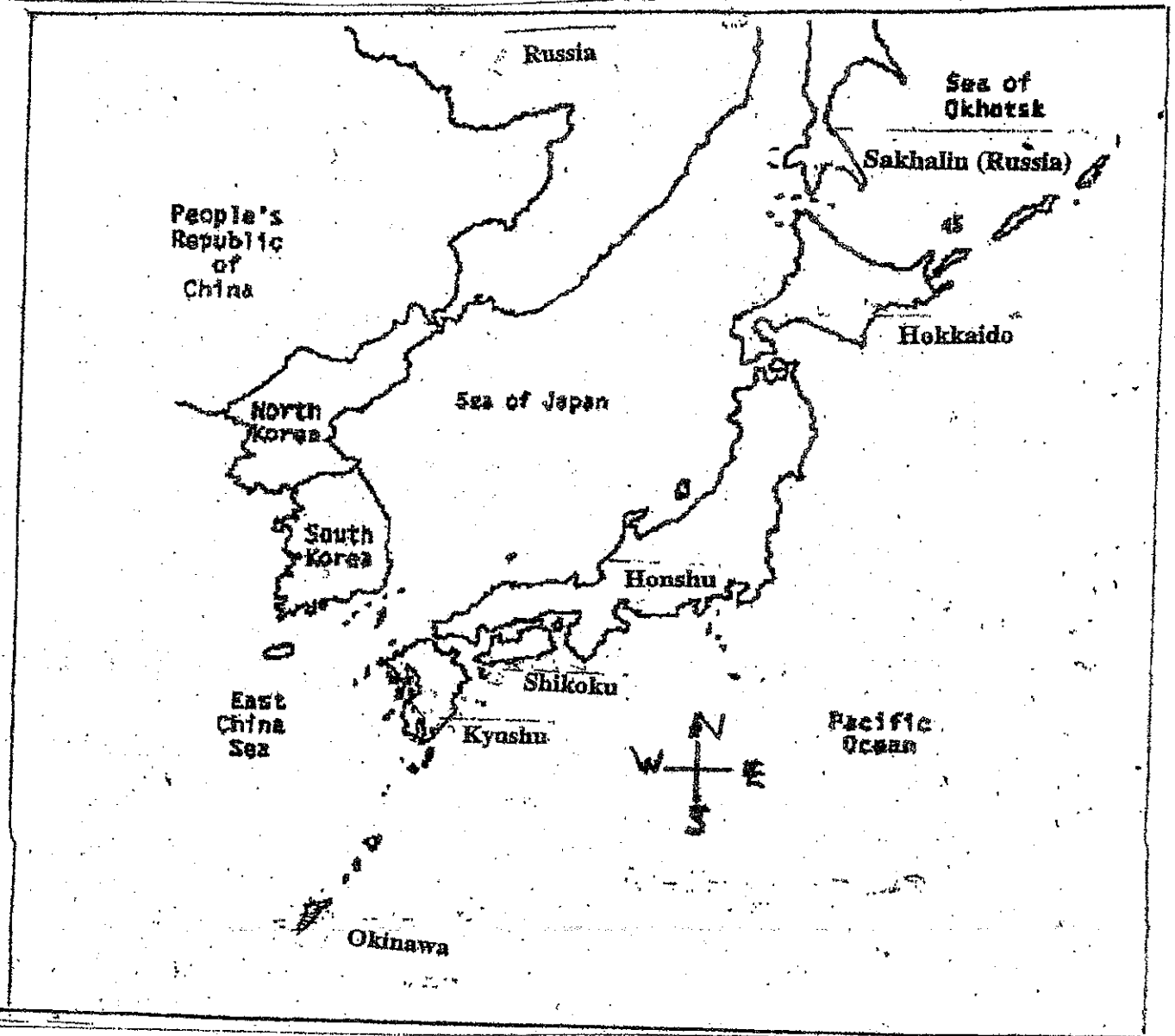


NAME: _____

PER. _____

Directions: Using the map below and the information on the other side of this handout, answer the questions below directly on the handout. Make sure to put your name and period.



1. Which Japanese island is the largest?
2. What part of mainland Asia is closest to Japan?
3. What are some advantages / disadvantages of being an island nation?
4. How might the geography of Japan have influenced its culture and development?
5. Based on geographical considerations, how might society within Japan have been organized?

Handout # 1: ^{DO NOW} The Impact of Geography on Japan's History and Culture

The nation of Japan is a long and narrow chain of islands (archipelago) located in the North Pacific Ocean, parallel to the easternmost edge of the Asian continent. **Japan's islands spread over 2,360 miles from northeast to southwest**, located on the map between 45 degrees 33 minutes north latitude to 20 degrees 25 minutes north latitude. The country lies very close to Russia, the Korean peninsula, and China.

The Japanese islands are separated from the Asian continent by the Sea of Okhotsk in the north and both the Sea of Japan and the East China Sea in the west. The Pacific Ocean is off the eastern and southern coasts of Japan.

- Korea is only 124 miles away, across the Korean Straits.
- Historically, the seas have served as a natural geographic barrier between the Japanese archipelago and Asia.

Before the modern age, the distance across these waters kept foreign contact to a minimum and prevented any foreign force from invading Japan. The attempts by the Mongols in the late 13th century to invade were turned back by the *kamikaze*, divine winds, which referred to the surprise arrival of monsoons just as the Mongols attacked.

- This relative isolation has had a tremendous effect on the nature and direction of Japan's social and cultural development. As a benefit of this geographic isolation, the Japanese have been able to absorb and adapt elements of foreign culture and technology from nearby countries and the West without submitting to foreign political rule.

A strong social and cultural identity was created as a result of this natural isolation, and also as a result of a period of self-imposed isolation from 1630 through 1853. However, this political and economic isolation was not total and some Western European influences still entered the country by various means.

Formed by volcanoes, the Japanese islands mainly consist of the tops of mountains that have risen from the sea. **The distance from coast to coast is less than 200 miles. Yet, the mountainous terrain and the many swiftly flowing rivers and streams made this small distance extremely difficult to travel before modern transportation systems developed. Due to the mountains, the rivers of Japan are generally too swift for transportation purposes.**

The four main islands (also known as the "Home Islands") of the Japanese archipelago account for about 98% of Japan's total land mass.

Hokkaido, the northernmost island, is approximately 32,246 square miles in area.

Honshu, the main island, is about 89,194 square miles in area.

Shikoku, the smallest of the four, is about 7,258 square miles in area.

Kyushu, the southernmost island, covers an area of 17,135 square miles.

These four main islands are surrounded by nearly 4,000 smaller islands, many of which are rocky, uninhabited and barren.

Geographically diverse, Japan includes rocky coastal areas, flat plains, deep valleys, numerous mountains, and rushing rivers. **72% of Japan's land is mountainous**, including over 500 mountains that are over 2,000 meters high. **Only about 11% of the land is arable (suitable for farming).**

Japan is located primarily in the northern Temperate Zone. Yet, the country spans 2,360 miles northwest to southeast and the climate varies between regions. During the winter, the average temperature ranges from about 60 degrees Fahrenheit in the south to about 22.8 degrees in the northern areas. During the summer, the averages range from about 83 degrees in the south to 68 degrees in the north. The climate in Japan is most like the middle belt of the eastern United States and to the countries of central and southern Europe.

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