



2022 History Essay Contest

School 7/8th Grade Winner

Oda Nobunaga

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Oda Nobunaga was a warlord during the Age of Provincial Wars. He is known as the first Great Unifier of Japan and was a brilliant military strategist, conquering most of Japan. The Age of Provincial Wars was a period in Japan in which lords and retainers fought each other seeking to expand their territories.¹ Oda Nobunaga was born on June 23, 1534 as the son of a minor daimyo (lord) named Oda Nobuhide.² Nobunaga succeeded Nobuhide in 1549³ and used his castle as his base.⁴ Oda Nobunaga is the most influential person in the history of Japan.

Oda Nobunaga fought many battles to conquer more land to unify Japan. At the Battle of Okehazama, he launched an attack on the Imagawa clan who was attacking his province. While they were celebrating, Oda circled around their camp and launched a surprise attack, winning and having remaining officers defect from the Imagawa. One of these officers was Tokugawa Ieyasu who would help Nobunaga greatly. Nobunaga entered an alliance with Ieyasu to protect himself against the Takeda clan. He also married off his sister to Azai Namikaza which helped him to conquer Kyoto.⁵

In 1568, a new Ashikaga shogun was set up and a puppet shogun was put in place. The old shogun's brother, Ashikaga Yoshiaki asked Nobunaga to conquer Kyoto and Nobunaga put him as the shogun and used him to justify more conquests. Yoshiaki didn't want to help Nobunaga so he talked to

other daimyos secretly and made an anti-Oda alliance. When Oda campaigned into the Asakura's domain (one of the clans in the alliance) and due to this, Namikaza broke the alliance with Oda because they had a pre-existing alliance with the Asakura. The Azai and Asakura took a toll on the Oda clan, but Oda eventually won at the battle of Anegawa in 1570 with the help of Ieyasu. Oda then waged a war against Buddhist burning down temples and killing thousands of civilians.⁶

One of Oda's strongest enemies was the Takeda clan. Due to the urging of the shogun, Nobunaga launched an attack against them, but lost to Takeda Shingen, the commander. However, in 1573, Takeda Shingen died from illness, which gave Nobunaga time to deal with Yoshiaki who declared that he was their enemy. By late 1573, Nobunaga had destroyed the Azai and Asakura clans. After this, Oda beat the Takeda at the battle of Nagashino and later destroyed them in 1582. Oda won these battles due to his brilliant military tactics.⁷

When Oda was 15, he made a special army of five hundred men with muskets and sent them into battle before the rest of his army.⁸ They performed well at the Battle Anegawa so Oda increased the corps to 3000 people.⁹ Oda had the troops form three lines so that while one line was reloading, the other one was firing, creating continuous fire.¹⁰ He also had every troop use armor.¹¹

Oda's view of religion affected who he fought. He burned down multiple Buddhist temples to weaken his enemies, killing many civilians. The most infamous example is when he destroyed the Enryakuji monastic complex Mt. Hiei near Kyoto, killing 25,000 people. However, the destruction of the Ishiyama Honganji temple-fortress in Osaka separated religion from government and regional powers which was good for Japan. Nobunaga also helped Christian missionaries in Japan to grow and to improve trade with Europeans.¹²

When Nobunaga was going to campaign west, he was betrayed and killed by one of his vassal allies named Akechi Mitsuhide who worked between Oda and Yoshiaki. There are multiple stories about how he died, one saying he died in a fire and another that he committed seppuku (suicide). Oda's

general, Toyotomi Hideyoshi killed Mitsuhide and became Oda's successor, uniting the rest of Japan, with Ieyasu becoming the leader in the end.¹³

Oda Nobunaga is the most influential person in the history of Japan. He influenced Japan's military and economy. He developed, implemented and expanded on the use of firearms, long pikes, ironclad ships, and castle formations.¹⁴ He also made their economy better by making castle towns centers of local economies, built roads, started trade with the Philippines, Siam, and Indonesia, and made a policy that abolished and prohibited policies and opened previously closed union associations and guilds.¹⁵ He also increased trade with Europe.¹⁶ Nobunaga also promoted Japanese arts, most notable being the Japanese Tea Ceremony as being a time to talk politics and business.¹⁷ His most notable achievement was unifying half of Japan, something that Tokugawa Ieyasu would complete, giving Japan 250 years of peace.

Endnotes

1. "Oda Nobunaga." *Oda Nobunaga - New World Encyclopedia*, https://www.newworldencyclopedia.org/entry/Oda_Nobunaga#Oda.2C_Toyotomi_and_Tokugawa.
2. "Oda Nobunaga." *Oda Nobunaga - New World Encyclopedia*, https://www.newworldencyclopedia.org/entry/Oda_Nobunaga#Oda.2C_Toyotomi_and_Tokugawa.
3. "Oda Nobunaga." *Oda Nobunaga - New World Encyclopedia*, https://www.newworldencyclopedia.org/entry/Oda_Nobunaga#Oda.2C_Toyotomi_and_Tokugawa.
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