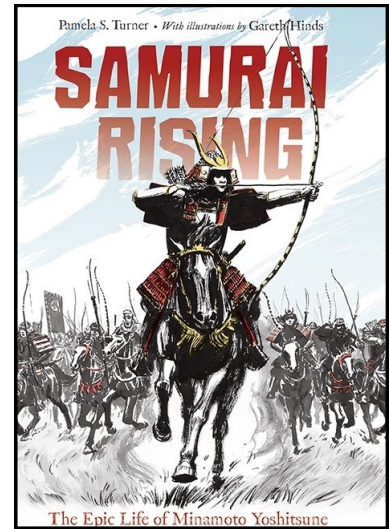


# SAMURAI RISING

The Epic Life of Minamoto Yoshitsune

Pamela S. Turner • Illustrated by Gareth Hinds



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E-book formats also available

Ages 12+ • 256 pages

## Discussion & Activity Guide

**Minamoto Yoshitsune should not have been a samurai. But his story is legend in this real-life saga.**

When Yoshitsune was just a baby, his father went to war with a rival samurai family—and lost. His father was killed, his mother captured, and his brothers sent away. Yoshitsune was delivered to a monastery. Skinny, small, and unskilled in the warrior arts, he nevertheless escaped and learned the ways of the samurai. When the time came for the Minamoto clan to rise up against their enemies, Yoshitsune answered the call. His brave feats—such as storming a fortress by riding on horseback down the side of a cliff—and his glorious victory at sea, secured Yoshitsune’s place in history. His story is still being told centuries later.

Gareth Hinds’s bold illustrations exemplify the brash daring of Yoshitsune and his epic life. This is a sweeping tale of warriors and bravery, rebellion and revenge, which reads like a novel but is the true story of the greatest samurai in Japanese history.



### About the Author

**Pamela S. Turner** is the author of several award-winning books for young readers, including *Life on Earth—and Beyond*, *Hachiko*, and the ALA Notable Children’s Book and Orbis Pictus Honor Book *The Frog Scientist*. Pamela first encountered Yoshitsune’s story while living in Japan.

She now lives in Oakland, California, where she is a black-belt practitioner of kendo, the way of the sword.

[www.pamelasturner.com](http://www.pamelasturner.com)



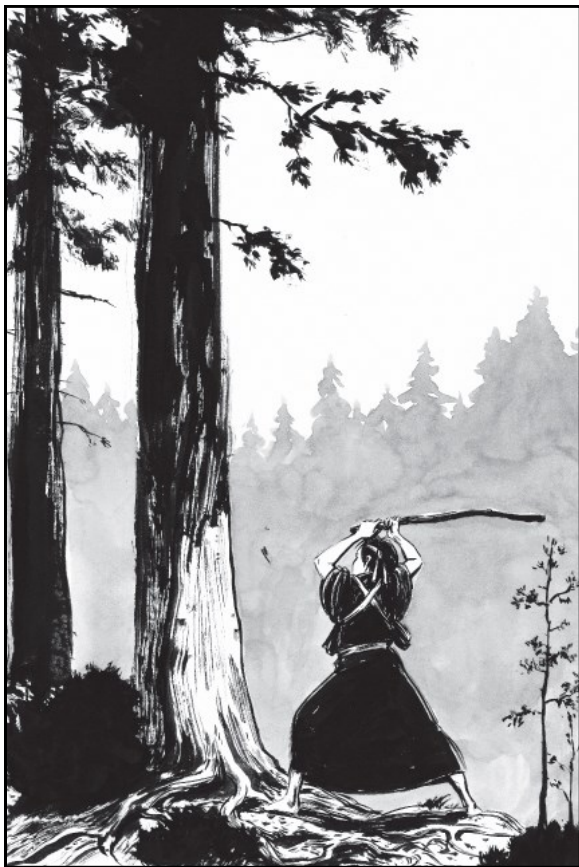
### About the Illustrator

While in college, **Gareth Hinds** made artwork inspired by legends about Yoshitsune. He was therefore thrilled to return to twelfth-century Japan in *Samurai Rising*, this time illustrating Yoshitsune’s real-life adventures. Gareth is a third-degree black belt in aikido and the award-winning creator of graphic-novel

adaptations of *Macbeth*, *Beowulf*, *The Odyssey*, and other classics. He lives in Washington, DC.

[www.garethhinds.com](http://www.garethhinds.com)

# Discussion Questions



## CCSS Correlation:

CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RI.6.1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 8, 10

CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RI.7.1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 8, 10

CCSS.RH.6-8.1, 3, 4, 5, 6, 8, 10

## Before Reading

- What do you think of when you hear the word *samurai*? Discuss as a group.
- Have you ever been to Japan or do you know anything about Japanese culture? Have you ever heard of Minamoto Yoshitsune?
- What can you infer about the story you are about to read from looking at the cover?
- What do you hope to read about in *Samurai Rising*?

## After Reading

- Even though the book is set in feudal Japan, author Pamela Turner uses modern language to tell Yoshitsune's story. She uses phrases like "action-hero" to describe Yoshitsune's father and applies "dumb jocks" to the samurai. Why do you think she does that? How does it affect your understanding of the story?
- Pamela Turner uses strong figurative language throughout the book. Find examples in the text of the following figurative language devices: simile, metaphor, hyperbole, personification, idiom, and descriptive language.
- Define *courage*. How do different characters show courage?
- As a teenager, Yoshitsune wants to become a samurai even though he's small and too old to begin the training. What would you have done if you were Yoshitsune? Would you rather be a monk or a samurai?
- List some of Yoshitsune's character traits. Do you think he is a good guy or a bad guy? Why? Which traits make him a good or bad leader?
- When the Minamoto fight the Taira, they are rebelling against the governing family of Japan. Should a government be overthrown if it's corrupt? Do you think people owe allegiance to themselves and their own conscience, or to their government?
- How would you define *loyalty*? On page 107, according to the author, "Many samurai treated the notion of loyalty as a suggestion rather than an iron principle." What do you think of this common practice of switching sides?
- What do you think of the samurai treatment of the commoners in the cities and villages? Can you think of any modern countries where everyday people are still unjustly treated by their government or the military?

## Discussion Questions (continued)

- Yoshitsune is asked to kill his uncle by his brother Yoritomo, though he doesn't agree with the command. What would you do if you were Yoshitsune? What would you do if you were given a command by a leader that you did not agree with? Do you think samurai should have had a choice about which commands they followed?
- *Seppuku* is the act of ritual suicide, which Yoshitsune's uncle was the first to practice. Why do you think the samurai adopted this ritual? What traits of the samurai would make seppuku make sense?
- Do you think Yoshitsune's leadership style was more or less effective than that of his brother's or his enemy's? Why or why not?
- Why do you think Yoshitsune's friends followed him when he became a fugitive, even though it was dangerous and eventually led to their deaths?
- How would this story be different if it was written from Yoritomo's perspective, or Munemori's?
- Discuss how women were treated in 12th-century Japan, whether they should have been allowed to be warriors, and why or why not.
- Yoshitsune grows up with the legacy of his famous, heroic uncle and great-grandfather. What is a *legacy* and how does it impact Yoshitsune? What do you think is Yoshitsune's legacy?
- What questions would you have for Minamoto Yoshitsune? Given what you know about his life, what answers do you think he'd give you?
- After reading *Samurai Rising*, why do you think Yoshitsune's story has remained so important to history? What people or stories from American history do you think will be remembered for 800 years?
- How do the illustrations add to or detract from the book? Discuss the style in which they are done and why this style might have been chosen.
- Take a look at the extensive back matter in *Samurai Rising* after you've finished reading the story. Which facts particularly enhance your understanding of Yoshitsune's story?
- In the chapter notes, author Pamela Turner makes a comparison between Yoshitsune and Luke Skywalker (and according to her website, the light saber duels in Star Wars are influenced by Kendo [Japanese swordsmanship]). In what ways do you think their stories are similar?



# Activities & Research Projects

- Match the Japanese vocabulary words below with their appropriate definitions and practice your pronunciation of each word.

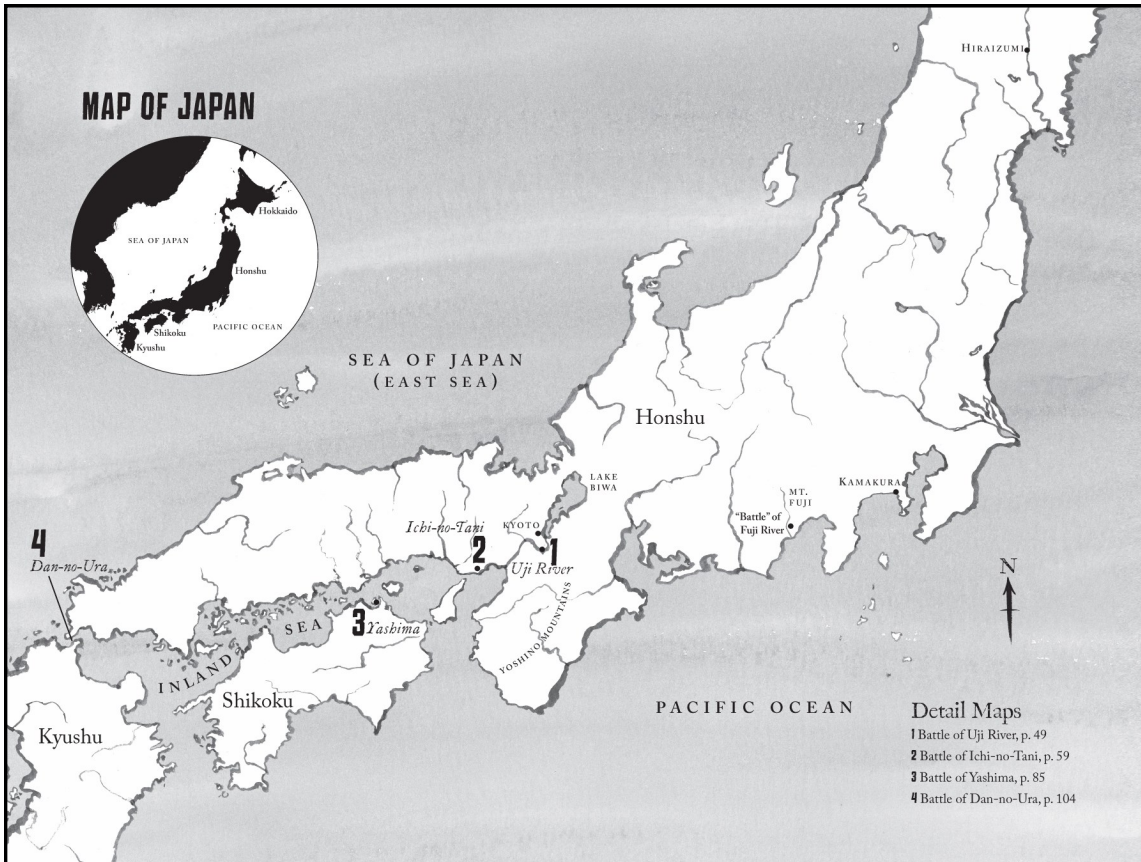
\*Please note that in Japanese the *r* sound is very soft; the pronunciation is actually somewhere between an *r* and an *l*. A vowel with a line over it indicates a drawn-out sound. For example, *ō* is pronounced like the long *o* sound in the English word *row*, but is held for a beat longer. In general, Japanese words do not have a stressed syllable.

1. *go* (goh)\_\_\_\_\_
2. *haiku* (hye-koo)\_\_\_\_\_
3. *kanji* (kahn-jee)\_\_\_\_\_
4. *katana* (kah-tah-nah)\_\_\_\_\_
5. *kumade* (koo-mah-day)\_\_\_\_\_
6. *mono no aware*  
(moh-noh noh ah-wah-ray)\_\_\_\_\_
7. *naginata* (nah-gee-nah-tah)\_\_\_\_\_
8. *sake* (sah-kay)\_\_\_\_\_
9. *samurai* (sah-moo-rye)\_\_\_\_\_
10. *seppuku* (seh-poo-koo)\_\_\_\_\_
11. *shirabyōshi* (shee-rah-byoh-shee)\_\_\_\_\_
12. *shogun* (shoh-goon)\_\_\_\_\_
13. *tachi* (tah-chee)\_\_\_\_\_
14. *yamabushi* (yah-mah-boo-shee)\_\_\_\_\_

- A. a pole with an iron claw at the end, used for dragging mounted samurai off their horses
- B. the Chinese characters used to write Japanese
- C. a female artist who danced, sang, and beat a drum
- D. rice wine
- E. a board game invented in ancient China that is still very popular
- F. an armed servant of the nobility
- G. wandering holy men
- H. a traditional form of Japanese poetry expressed in three lines with a five-seven-five syllable pattern
- I. long, curved samurai blade
- J. a spear with a curved blade at the end
- K. the classic samurai blade
- L. originally a military “chief of staff” for the nobility but later the samurai ruler of Japan
- M. ritual suicide
- N. the poignant awareness of fleeting beauty

- Draw your own illustration to accompany a scene in the book.
- Research an event from the “Yoshitsune and the Wider World” time line on page 174. Then write an essay about the similarities and differences between Yoshitsune’s story and that world event.
- Discuss the difference between writing historical fiction and historical nonfiction and complete one of the following writing exercises:
  - Rewrite a scene from *Samurai Rising* in a fictionalized, narrative structure.
  - Write a scene based on looking at one of the illustrations.
  - Write a plausible, imagined scene between Yoshitsune and his friends Benkei (ben-kay), Ise Saburō (ee-say sah-boo-roh), Tadanobu (tah-dah-noh-boo), Tsuginobu (tsoo-gee-noh-boo), and Washinoo (wah-shee-no-oh). Or write a similar scene between Yoshitsune and Shizuka (shee-zoo-kah).
- Professional critics have called *Samurai Rising* “exciting,” “gritty,” “shocking,” “awesome,” and “a page-turner.” Teachers and librarians say it’s a great book for reluctant readers. Do you agree with these assessments? Who do you think will enjoy reading *Samurai Rising*? Write a review of *Samurai Rising*.

# Activities & Research Projects (continued)



## Vocabulary Quiz Answer Key

1. E
2. H
3. B
4. K
5. A
6. N
7. J
8. D
9. F
10. M
11. C
12. L
13. I
14. G

- Use the book's chapter notes and the internet to learn more about the places from the story listed below as they are today. Summarize your findings in one paragraph each. And practice your pronunciation of the place names!

**Biwa** (bee-wah): large lake near Kyoto

**Dan-no-Ura** (dahn-noh-oo-rah): naval battle site in the straits between the islands of Honshu and Kyushu

**Fuji** (foo-jee) **River**: battle site in central Japan

**Hiraizumi** (hee-rye-zoo-mee): city in northern Japan

**Hiyodorigoe** (hee-yoh-doh-ree-goh-ay) **Cliffs**: steep slope behind the Taira fortress at Ichi-no-Tani

**Honshu** (hohn-shoo): main Japanese island

**Ichi-no-Tani** (ee-chee-noh-tah-nee): Taira fortification on the Settsu coast

**Ikuta-no-Mori** (ee-koo-tah-noh-moh-ree): Taira fortification on the Settsu coast

**Kamakura** (kah-mah-koo-rah): Yoritomo's headquarters in eastern Japan

**Koshigoe** (koh-shee-goh-ay): small town near Kamakura

**Kurama** (koo-rah-mah): temple north of Kyoto

**Kyoto** (kyoh-toh): capital of Japan

**Kyushu** (kyoo-shoo): large Japanese island off the western coast of Honshu

**Seta** (say-tah): small town east of Kyoto, site of a major bridge

**Settsu** (set-tsoo) **Coast**: coastline southwest of Kyoto

**Shikoku** (shee-koh-koo): large Japanese island off the southwest coast of Honshu

**Uji** (oo-jee) **River**: major river flowing out of Lake Biwa

**Yashima** (yah-shee-mah): island off the coast of Shikoku

**Yoshino** (yoh-shee-noh) **Mountains**: rugged area south of Kyoto

# Activities & Research Projects (continued)

- Create family trees for the book's four main families and show how they all connect in the story. For an additional challenge, also add in unnamed characters (wives, relatives, etc.) from the story. Remember to practice your pronunciation of these names!

## The Minamoto

**Yoshitsune** (yoh-shee-tsoo-nay): *our main character*

**Yoritomo** (yoh-ree-toh-moh): *Yoshitsune's elder half brother and leader of the Minamoto samurai*

**Noriyori** (noh-ree-yoh-ree): *another half brother of Yoshitsune*

**Kiso Yoshinaka** (kee-soh yoh-shee-nah-kah): *Yoshitsune's cousin*

**Yukiie** (yoo-kee-ee-ay): *Yoshitsune's uncle*

**Tametomo** (tah-may-toh-moh): *Yoshitsune's uncle; famous archer who commits first known seppuku*

**Yoshiie** (yoh-shee-ee-ay): *Yoshitsune's great-grandfather; a famous barbarian-fighter*

**Yorimasa** (yoh-ree-mah-sah): *distant relation of Yoshitsune; commits seppuku*

**Tokiwa** (toh-kee-wah): *Yoshitsune's mother*

**Yoshitomo** (yoh-shee-toh-moh): *Yoshitsune's father*

## The Taira

**Kiyomori** (kee-yoh-moh-ree): *leader of the Taira samurai*

**Noritsune** (noh-ree-tsoo-nay): *Kiyomori's nephew and a famous archer*

**Munemori** (moo-nay-moh-ree): *son of Kiyomori and leader of the Taira after his father's death*

**Atsumori** (ah-tsoo-moh-ree): *Kiyomori's nephew*

## The Imperial Family

**Go-Shirakawa** (goh-shee-rah-kah-wah): *the Retired Emperor and head of the imperial family*

**Antoku** (ahn-toh-koo): *Go-Shirakawa's grandson; emperor of Japan*

**Mochihito** (moh-chee-hee-toh): *one of Go-Shirakawa's sons*

## The Hiraizumi Fujiwara

**Hidehira** (hee-day-hee-rah): *lord of Hiraizumi*

**Yasuhira** (yah-soo-hee-rah): *Hidehira's heir*

**Tadahira** (tah-dah-hee-rah): *younger son of Hidehira*

### Additional Information:

For videos, images, and other interesting tidbits related to Yoshitsune, his times, and how his story has been told through the centuries, please visit the author's website at <http://bit.ly/1RWWukx>.

To learn more about the illustrator's process for this book, please visit his blog at <http://bit.ly/1Ye3GKQ>.