**From Millard Fillmore, President of the United States of America, to His Imperial Majesty, the Emperor of Japan**

**November 13, 1852**

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.

*Who is the “I” in this? Who is the “imperial majesty?”*

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 [relations] with each other.

*What does the US want from Japan?*

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 tranquility of your imperial majesty’s dominions. …

*What is the US assuring Japan of?*

Our great State of California produces about sixty millions of dollars in gold every year,  besides silver, quicksilver, precious stones, and many other valuable articles. Japan is also a rich  and fertile country, and produces many very valuable articles. Your imperial majesty’s subjects  are  skilled in many  of  the  arts.  I  am  desirous  that  our  two  countries  should  trade  with  each  other, for the benefit both of Japan and the United States.

*Summary:*

We know  that  the ancient laws of your imperial majesty’s government do not allow of  foreign trade, except with the Chinese and 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. There  was a time when the ancient laws of your imperial majesty’s government were first made. …

*Summary:*

If your imperial majesty is not satisfied that it would be safe altogether to [repeal] the ancient laws which forbid foreign trade, they might be suspended for five or ten years, so as to  try  the experiment.  If  it  does  not  prove  as  beneficial  as  was  hoped,  the  ancient  laws  can  be  restored. The United States often limit their treaties with foreign states to a few years, and then  renew them or not, as they please.

*Summary:*

I  have  directed  Commodore  Perry  to mention  another  thing  to  your imperial majesty.  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.  We  are  very  much  in  earnest in this.

*What does the US want from Japan?*

*What does the US want from Japan?*

Commodore Perry is also directed by me to represent to your imperial majesty that we  understand  there  is  a  great  abundance  of  coal  and  provisions  in  the  Empire  of  Japan.  Our  steamships, in  crossing  the  great  ocean,  burn  a  great  deal  of  coal,  and it is  not  convenient  to  bring it  all  the way  from America. We wish  that  our  steamships  and  other  vessels  should  be  allowed to stop in Japan and supply themselves with coal, provisions, and water. They will pay  for  them  in  money,  or  anything  else  your  imperial  majesty’s  subjects may  prefer;  and  we  request your imperial majesty to appoint a convenient port, in the southern part of the empire,  where our vessels may stop for this purpose. We are very desirous of this.

These  are  the  only  objects  for  which  I  have  sent  Commodore  Perry, with  a powerful  squadron, to pay a visit to your imperial majesty’s renowned city of Edo: friendship, commerce,  a supply of coal and provisions, and protection for our shipwrecked people.

We have directed Commodore Perry to beg your imperial majesty’s acceptance of a few  presents. They are of no great value in themselves; but some of them may serve as specimens of  the  articles manufactured in  the United States,  and  they  are intended  as  tokens of our sincere  and respectful friendship. …

*Why did the US send gifts to Japan?*

[Seal attached]

Your good friend, Millard Fillmore

1. How would you describe the tone of President Fillmore’s letter?

2. Why does the president mention that he has dispatched Perry “with a powerful squadron”?

3. If you were the emperor of Japan, how would you respond to this letter?

4. How would you explain and justify the Japanese seclusion policy to President Fillmore?