This resource guide is intended to enhance the study of Japan and its culture in your classroom or for your own self-study. The handouts included in the packet are some of the Japan Information & Culture Center’s most requested topics from teachers and students. The following resources are also available from the JICC upon request:

- Coloring Book packet
- Japanese Folk Tales
- *Kenta: My Life in Japan*
- *Elementary School Life* packet
- *Junior High School Life* packet
- *Senior High School Life* packet
- Niponica Magazine
- Map of Japan
- *Japanese Tourism Information*

The JICC also has videos and cultural items for loan. For more information and to reserve items, email JICC@ws.mofa.go.jp
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Overview of Japan

LAND
- 145,883 sq. miles (slightly smaller than California)
- 73% of land is mountainous and hilly, 12.5% of the land is agricultural
- Consists of more than 6,800 islands
- Four major islands: Hokkaido, Honshu, Shikoku & Kyushu
- Tallest mountain: Mt. Fuji (12,388 ft)
- Largest cities by population: Tokyo, Yokohama, Osaka, Nagoya & Sapporo

CLIMATE
- Ranges from Subarctic in the north to Subtropical in the south
- Most of Japan is in the Northern Temperate Zone
- Rainy season, tsuyu, in the summer with typhoons frequently occurring in August – October

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Winter Average</th>
<th>Hokkaido</th>
<th>Tokyo</th>
<th>Okinawa</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
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<td>27 F</td>
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<th>Summer Average</th>
<th>Hokkaido</th>
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<td>67 F</td>
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POPULATION
- 126,451,398 (2017 est.), 10th largest in the world. Roughly 1.7% of world population. Life expectancy at birth is 85.3 years, 2nd longest in the world (2017 est.)

RELIGION
- Shintoism 79.2%, Buddhism 66.8%, Christianity 1.5%, other 7.1% (Note: many Japanese practice both Shintoism and Buddhism). (2012 est.)

EDUCATION
- Compulsory education: 9 years (elementary to middle school; ages 6 to 15)
- Japan has one of the highest literacy rates in the world (99% of total population)
- Academic Year: starts mid-April to end of March; three semesters with 6 week summer break
- Since 2011, students have begun learning English from the 5th grade and as of 2020 students from 3rd grade will begin learning English

GOVERNMENT
- Constitutional monarchy with a parliamentary government
- Chief of State: Emperor Naruhiito
- Head of Government: Prime Minister Shinzo Abe
- The legislative branch (Diet) consists of two chambers (House of Representatives & House of Councilors)

CURRENCY
- Yen (¥)
- 2018 average exchange rate: ¥110.42 per US $1.00

TRADE
- 3rd largest economy in the world (Nominal GDP, 2014)
- Top Exports in 2016: Transport Equipment (Including motor vehicles), semiconductors, iron and steel
- Top Imports in 2016: Mineral fuels (petroleum), clothing
- Major trading partners: China (largest), United States, South Korea, Taiwan, Australia, Thailand (2017)

TRADITIONAL CULTURE HIGHLIGHTS
- Japan’s four forms of classical theater were named UNESCO Intangible Heritage of Humanity in 2008:
- **Noh** is Japan’s oldest musical theater where the story is told through not only dialogue but also dance, song, and musical accompaniment. Leading characters wear hand-painted masks and boldly patterned costumes.
- **Kabuki** is an all-male theater that is known for the rhythm of the lines spoken by the actors, extravagant makeup and costumes, and mechanical devices for special effects.
- **Kyogen** is a classical comic theater featuring highly stylized actions and dialogue that historically was staged between noh performances although now is sometimes performed independently.
- **Bunraku** is a traditional puppet theater dating back to the 17th century which is performed to the accompaniment of narrative singing and *shamisen* (a three-stringed instrument) music.

- **Chao/Sado** or tea ceremony is a highly structured method of preparing green tea or *matcha* and has strong roots in many aspects of everyday life in Japan.
- **Ikebana** or Japanese flower arrangement originated in Buddhist flower offerings. It is a meditative and sometimes spiritual art form where natural substances such as flowers or leaves take on symbolic meanings through the ways they are placed in an arrangement.
- **Shodo** or Japanese calligraphy is learned by most students from a young age. Calligraphers use a brush and black ink to create strokes that bring out the beauty in each *kanji* (Chinese character) or *kana* (characters derived from *kanji*).
- **Ukiyo-e**, literally meaning ‘picture,’ but commonly referring to wood block prints, became a popular art form Edo period with the invention of the printing press. *Ukiyo-e* are famous throughout the world, perhaps the most famous being ‘The Great Wave’ by Katsushika Hokusai.

**MODERN CULTURE HIGHLIGHTS**

- **Anime** or Japanese animated movies or shows have been entertaining Japanese youth and adults alike from the 1960s. It is also a top cultural export of Japan.
- **Manga** or Japanese comics became one of Japan’s most popular forms of literature in the 1960s. Spanning many genres and age ranges, some of today’s most popular anime started out as manga.
- **Takarazuka** refers to Japan’s famous all-female musical theatre troupe from the Hyogo Prefecture. The Takarazuka Revue performs not only traditional Japanese operas and dramas, but Western musicals and original material as well.
School Life in Japan: Overview

Japan follows a 6-3-3-4 school system where elementary school is six years, junior-high school (JHS) is three years, high school is three years, and university is four years. The school year consists of three semesters, beginning in April and ending in March, which means students get homework over summer vacation. There are three major vacations: summer (6 weeks), winter break (2 weeks), spring break (2 weeks). The school day begins around 8:30 AM and ends around 3:00 PM. Students often have club activities or preparatory school (juku) in the afternoon. Every year students from elementary to high school will participate in a sports festival (undokai) to promote health and sports and allow parents to come watch their children in friendly competition.
Elementary School

- Children enter 1st grade in the April after their 6th birthday.
- In many schools, students take turns to serve lunch to their classmates. The lunch is prepared by the school or local school lunch centers.
- Students attending public schools walk to school every day since there are no school buses. This custom teaches responsibility, pedestrian safety, and independence. They have a special yellow hat they must wear when walking called tsugaku boshi.

Junior High School

- Education is compulsory for the 9 years of elementary and JHS school.
- In elementary and JHS schools, students clean the classrooms, halls, and yards of their school every day as a means of teaching respect for the space they work in and share with others.
- While elementary school students may be exposed to the English language via foreign language activities class, English is a mandatory, graded class in middle school.

High School

- 98.8% of middle school students go on to high school, and the majority of them graduate (Statistics Bureau of Japan, 2019).¹
- Most elementary, middle, and high schools require students to wear uniforms.
- In order to attend public high school, students must take an entrance exam. Some students may even live in or attend a school outside of their prefecture if it excels in an area of study they are interested in.
- Both JHS and HS students participate in cultural festivals which can include chorus competitions, student run food or game booths, and performances or club activity demonstrations.

University

- The number of international students attending Japanese universities in 2018 was 298,980, a 12% increase from the year before (Japan Student Services Organization, 2018).²
- In 2017, there were 86 national universities, 90 public universities, and 604 private universities in Japan. National universities are extremely competitive and consistently rank among the top schools in Japan.³
- In the 2017-2018 school year, 18,753 Japanese students were studying abroad at American universities (IIE, Open Doors Data 2018).⁴

School Life in Japan:

Sample Schedule

Students in Japan study many subjects commonly found in the U.S. school system including math, science, language arts, foreign languages, physical education, and home economics. However, Japanese schedules also incorporate civics, fine arts, and ethics, as well as traditional arts such as shodō (calligraphy) and haiku. Shodō is an artistic form of writing kanji and kana (phonetic characters derived from kanji) using ink and brush. Before going home, students are expected to clean their school and possibly attend club activities.
The first Japanese writing system was adapted from that of China sometime in the fifth or sixth century. This writing system, called kanji, consists of pictures (or logograms) that represent words or ideas. Since these characters were originally from the Chinese language, they could not accommodate the different sounds and words found in Japanese. Thus, two other writing systems called hiragana and katakana were developed. Today, Japanese people must learn kanji, hiragana, and katakana in order to read and write everyday Japanese.

Kanji are originally Chinese characters that use a number of strokes to represent words, which can combine to express further ideas or concepts. They often have several pronunciations, and the correct one is determined by the surrounding characters. Today, Japanese people must learn about 2,000 kanji for literacy, though traditional texts, proper names, and technical writing show as many as 50,000 kanji in existence. By sixth grade, students are expected to read and write approximately 1,000 kanji.

The other two writing systems, hiragana and katakana, are phonetic scripts, both made up of 48 characters. Each character represents a different sound consisting of a consonant plus a vowel, a consonant cluster plus a vowel, or just a vowel. Hiragana can be used to write any Japanese word, while katakana is mainly used for loan words such as konpyuutaa (computer) or hanbaagaa (hamburger), as well as foreign names and places.

Useful Phrases

HELLO || KONNICHIWA
GOOD MORNING || OHAYO
PLEASE || ONEGAI SHIMASU
THANK YOU || ARIGATO
IT'S OK || DAIJIBU
SEE YOU LATER || MATA NE

GOOD MORNING || OHAYO
おはよう
THANK YOU || ARIGATO
ありがとう
IT'S OK || DAIJIBU
ありがとう
SEE YOU LATER || MATA NE
またね
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<th>Hiragana</th>
<th>罗马字</th>
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</tbody>
</table>

Hiragana is a syllabary composed of 46 characters, and is characterized by the use of curved lines and round strokes. It is one of the three Japanese writing systems, along with katakana and kanji. Hiragana are used together with kanji to write word endings and other ordinary Japanese words which are not normally written with kanji, such as adverbs, and some nouns and adjectives.
Japanese Language: Activity

Draw an image, write the English meaning, draw the Hiragana, or write the pronunciation of the Japanese word using the Roman (English language) alphabet. Use the Hiragana chart to help with this activity.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Picture</th>
<th>Kanji</th>
<th>Hiragana</th>
<th>Romanization</th>
<th>English</th>
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<tr>
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<td>いぬ</td>
<td></td>
<td>DOG</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><img src="image2.png" alt="Tree" /></td>
<td>木</td>
<td>き</td>
<td>KI</td>
<td>TREE</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><img src="image3.png" alt="Cat" /></td>
<td>猫</td>
<td>ねこ</td>
<td>NEKO</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><img src="image4.png" alt="Horse" /></td>
<td>馬</td>
<td></td>
<td>UMA</td>
<td>HORSE</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><img src="image5.png" alt="River" /></td>
<td>川</td>
<td>かわ</td>
<td></td>
<td>RIVER</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><img src="image6.png" alt="Bird" /></td>
<td>鳥</td>
<td>とり</td>
<td>TORI</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><img src="image7.png" alt="Flower" /></td>
<td>花</td>
<td>ばな</td>
<td>HANA</td>
<td>FLOWER</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><img src="image8.png" alt="Mountain" /></td>
<td>山</td>
<td></td>
<td>YAMA</td>
<td>MOUNTAIN</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Japanese Song: KiraKira Boshi (Twinkle Twinkle Little Star)
Annual Events
There are many holidays and festivals celebrated throughout the year in Japan. The most important national holiday is New Year’s which is spent with the family over a three to four day period and includes shrine and temple visits, delicious food, and traditional games. Each season in Japan has a number of holidays so be sure to celebrate with your class!

**O-shōgatsu (New Year’s):** January 1st

In the past, a new year meant a new harvest so traditionally, this time was meant to thank the gods (kami) for their previous year’s harvest and to pray for a fruitful harvest in the upcoming year. Now, friends and family participate in *hatsumōde* (the first shrine or temple visit of the year), send and receive *nengajo* (New Year’s greeting cards), eat *o-sechi* (traditional food that is arranged to represent good luck and fortune), and play traditional games like kite-flying and spinning tops. Children receive *o-toshidama* (spending money) from family and relatives. Together, families reflect on the past and look forward to the upcoming year.

**Setsubun:** February 3rd

“*Fuku wa uchi, oni wa soto* (fortune in and demons out)” is the chant said while opening windows and doors and throwing beans into the air on February 3rd. Originally on the last day of the lunar year, members of the Imperial Court would observe this holiday to dispel bad spirits and winter gloom while welcoming the coming spring. For good health, it is believed that one must eat the number of beans equivalent to their age.

**Hina matsuri (Doll Festival):** March 3rd

Dedicated to the happiness and healthy growth of girls, this holiday originated from a purification ritual that used paper dolls. From the Edo period on, these dolls were crafted and designed into the *hina-ningyo* (dolls dressed in traditional court apparel) that we see today. Peach blossoms and offerings of white sake, *hishimochi* (diamond shaped rice cakes), and *arare* (rice cake pellets) are displayed along with a set of *hina-ningyo*.
**Kodomo no hi (Children’s Day): May 5th**

May 5th was originally called Tango no sekku (Boys’ Day) but today, it celebrates the healthy growth and future success of all children. Carp streamers called *koi nobori* fly on rooftops celebrating each family member in the household. Warrior dolls called *musha-ningyo* are set out. On this day, children eat *kashiwa-mochi* (rice cakes wrapped in oak leaves) and *chimaki* (rice dumplings wrapped in bamboo leaves).

**Tanabata (Star Festival): July 7th**

Once a year, the “cowherd star”, Altair, and the “weaving princess star,” Vega, appear connected by the Milky Way. This event is the center of a romantic story about forbidden love between a princess and a commoner who are forced to meet only once a year by crossing the Milky Way. On this day, people write wishes on strips of paper and attach them to leaf bearing bamboo stalks in their backyards or front entrances.

**Shichi-go-san: November 15th**

Three, five, and seven are considered lucky numbers in Japan. For this reason, families with boys aged three and five and girls aged three and seven visit Shinto shrines to pray for good health and safety. Boys are dressed in *haori* (half-coat) and *hakama* (divided skirts) while girls may wear kimono. Nowadays, children may also wear Western style suits or clothing. *Chitose-ame*, a type of sugar candy meant to give one thousand years of happiness, and *sekihan*, rice with red beans, are eaten in celebration.

**O-misoka (New Year’s Eve): December 31st**

On New Year’s Eve, Buddhist temples strike bells 108 times to symbolize the purification of the 108 earthly desires. This custom, known as *joya no kane*, takes about one hour and occurs just before midnight. *Toshikoshi soba*, or New Year’s Eve buckwheat noodles, are eaten on this day because the long noodles represent a long life.

*More information on Japanese holidays and festivals is available online at Kids Web Japan:*
web-japan.org/kidsweb/explore/calendar/january.html
web-japan.org/atlas/festivals/festi_fr.html
Origami

History

Origami (折り紙) is the Japanese art of paper folding. First introduced to Japan from China by Buddhist monks in 6th century CE, it is a combination of the words “ori”, meaning “to fold”, and “kami”, meaning “paper”. Originally, origami was used solely for religious ceremonies due to the high price of paper. Many origami shapes, such as the crane, were seen as good luck.

The first known origami book was published in Japan in 1797. The Hiden Senbazuru Orikata (‘How to Fold a Thousand Cranes’) made the secrets of origami public and allowed people all over Japan to practice origami for the first time.

Up until the influence of Akira Yoshizawa, origami was primarily regarded as a children’s past time. In 1954, Yoshizawa used origami to understand and teach geometrical problems to adult factory employees. He went on to create more than 50,000 origami models, modern techniques such as wet-folding, and the first diagramming system to describe the folds of origami models.

Origami first began its spread to the United States and England in the 1900s and was popularized in the latter half of the century by origami pioneers like New Yorker Lillian Oppenheimer. The popularity of origami has given rise to origami societies such as the British Origami Society and OrigamiUSA, which have been essential to the spread of origami overseas.

Sadako and the Thousand Paper Cranes

By Eleanor Coerr

In the book Sadako and the Thousand Paper Cranes, Eleanor Coerr tells the true story of Sadako, a young Japanese girl who developed leukemia after the atomic bombing of Hiroshima in WWII. Inspired by the Japanese legend that says folding 1000 paper cranes will grant the folder a long life, Sadako set out folding origami cranes while confined to her hospital bed. However, in 1955, Sadako died at the age of 12 before finishing the 1000 cranes. Three years after her death, the Hiroshima Peace Park built a statue of Sadako holding a paper crane as a gesture of peace and hope. Today, children all over the world fold bundles of 1000 paper cranes to be placed by her statue in Hiroshima.

More information on Sadako and her story is online at:
www.pcf.city.hiroshima.jp/virtual/VirtualMuseum_e/exhibit_e/exh0107_e/exhi_top_e.html

Hiroshima Peace Memorial
hpmmuseum.jp/?lang=eng
Origami: Crane (Tsuru 鶴)

Origami Resources
www.origami-usa.org/
www.paperfolding.com/
www.kimscrane.com/ (Kim's Crane origami supplies- located in Virginia)
www.tammyyee.com/origami.html (Printable origami sheets & instructions available)
web-japan.org/kidsweb/virtual/origami/index.html (Kidsweb Japan Virtual Origami)
Cooking: *Onigiri*

*Onigiri* (rice balls) are a beloved snack in Japan. They are made simply by using your hands and cooked Japanese short grain rice. Adding different fillings like pickled plum, tuna and mayo, chicken, etc. can add interesting flavor to your snack. *Onigiri* are perfect for lunch, picnics, outdoor activities, and any time a quick, delicious meal on the go is necessary.

**Ingredients (Serving size = 1 onigiri)**

1 cup cooked Japanese short grain rice
1 sheet *nori* (dried seaweed) cut into 4 strips
Salt

*Optional fillings: salted, flaked salmon; canned tuna mixed with mayonnaise; Japanese pickled plum.

**Directions**

1. Moisten hands with water so that the rice does not stick. Take a pinch of salt and spread evenly over the palms of your hands.

2. Use a sticky, short grain rice where the grains adhere together. Place the rice on the palm of one hand and gently shape the rice until all grains stick together.

3. (Optional) Use two fingers to form a hole in the middle of the rice. Insert your choice of filling. Cover the hole with some rice to hide the filling.

4. Place the clump of rice on the palm of one hand and cup your hand to make a triangular shape. Using the same triangular shape for your other hand, turn the rice several times in your palm, while pressing the rice into the shape of a thick triangle.

5. Stand each triangle of rice in the middle of each piece of *nori*, and then wrap the sides of the *onigiri*. Now your onigiri are ready to eat!

*Recipe and photos courtesy of Niponica, #16, 2001*
Visit Programs: DC Metropolitan Area

The DC Metropolitan Area has a number of visit programs for teachers looking to bring Japanese culture to their students. If you are not located within DC, Maryland, or Virginia, please contact your local Consulate General of Japan for information on Japan related activities in your area.

JICC Educational Program
1150 18th Street NW, Suite 100, Washington, DC 20036
Tel: (202)238-6900
Web: www.us.emb-japan.go.jp/jicc/index.html

The JICC provides educational programs for elementary (3rd grade and older), junior, and senior high school students in the Greater Washington DC Metropolitan Area. This multi-faceted introduction to the society and culture of Japan includes a power-point presentation, a display of Japanese artifacts, an introduction to geography, food, language, and a high level of audience participation. The programs are tailored to suit the age of the participating students. For more information and to schedule a visit, please contact Ms. Melinda Marquardt at melinda.marquardt@ws.mofa.go.jp or 202-238-6945.

Japan-America Society of Washington, DC
1819 L Street NW, Level B2, Washington, DC 20036
Tel: (202)833-2210
Fax: (202)833-2456
Email: info@jaswdc.org
Web: www.jaswdc.org

Japan-America Society (JASW) promotes understanding of Japan to elementary school children from the 1st grade and up through the Japan-in-a-Suitcase program. To interest them in Japan and the world beyond, a team of English and Japanese speaking volunteers make use of cultural objects and visual aids to illustrate contemporary life in Japan. The presentations are customized and available in single or serial form. Possible activities include origami, language activities, and a chopstick challenge. Students also learn about the daily life of Japanese children. Teachers interested in arranging a visit to their school are invited to contact JASW at (202) 833-2210.

JETAA Ambassadors Program
Email: jetambassador@jetaadc.org
Web: jetaadc.org/jet-ambassadors-program/

The JET Ambassadors Program is a volunteer-based program allowing JET alumni to visit interested schools in the DC metro area and share their experiences from Japan. They provide interactive self-designed presentations on topics ranging from school life in Japan and geography to Japanese culture, food, and many others. The program aims to educate younger generations of American students about Japan and raise international awareness throughout the community, as well as give former JETs the chance to reconnect with their own experiences.
Useful Websites

Resources for Students
- **Kids Web Japan**: an introductory site to Japan for kids.
- **Web Japan**: Online information and videos on Japan including pop culture, geography, daily & school life
  [http://web-jpn.org/index.html](http://web-jpn.org/index.html)

Resources for Educators
- **The Freer & Sackler Galleries** – Smithsonian’s Museum of Asian Art
  [https://www.freersackler.si.edu/](https://www.freersackler.si.edu/)
- **Asia Society**: A K-12 Resource website.
- **The Association of Teachers of Japanese**: contains teaching resources and pedagogical studies primarily for college and university instructors
  [www.aatj.org/aatj](http://www.aatj.org/aatj)
- **The East Asian Curriculum Project (EACP) of Columbia University**: Asia for educators at all levels.
  [http://afe.easia.columbia.edu](http://afe.easia.columbia.edu)
- **ePals**: An international online learning community, classroom collaboration, and penpals.

Online Data and Statistics
- **2017 Statistical Handbook of Japan**
- **U.S State Department information on Japan**
  [http://www.state.gov/p/eap/ci/ja/](http://www.state.gov/p/eap/ci/ja/)
- **CIA World Factbook**

General Resources
- **Japan National Tourism Organization**: travel planning and information on festivals, activities, and food.
  [www.jnto.go.jp/eng](http://www.jnto.go.jp/eng)
- **Japan-Guide**: Online resources on Japanese culture, art, life, history, travel etc.