

Language Lizard Unit: *Teaching about Japan*

Japan

Culture, Language and Customs

Language Lizard Books Used:

[Language Lizard book](#) in Japanese/English;

Recommended: [Farmer Duck](#), [Little Red Hen and the Grains of Wheat](#) or [Fox Fables](#) in Japanese/English

Additional Books: See lessons 1 and 2

Focus Languages: Japanese, English

Grades: 1-3

Authors: Kelly Kunz (native English speaker) and Seiko Yamazaki (native Japanese speaker)

Affiliation: The authors are students at West Chester University of Pennsylvania. Kelly is studying in the Teacher Education Program for Elementary Education. Seiko is a graduate student in Clinical Psychology at West Chester University.

Teaching about Japan:

These two lessons have been designed to help students

- learn about different cultures and customs of people in Japan and in the United States;
- hear and see new languages and text;
- build an appreciation of the diverse languages present in the world and in the United States;
- introduce important Social Studies concept such as Culture and Geography;
- build positive relationships among students in the classroom to promote the acceptance of diversity among students as a part of the classroom environment while demonstrating teacher support of linguistic diversity.

The Language Lizard books recommended for use in these lessons: [Farmer Duck](#), [Little Red Hen and the Grains of Wheat](#) or [Fox Fables](#) in Japanese/English. Additional books in Japanese/English may be substituted for or used in addition to the book used in these lessons. In this case, teachers should help clarify for students that these stories are not from Japan (ex. The Crow King, Dragon's Tears).

These lessons are easily aligned with state standards and national standards in Social Studies and Language Arts. The National Council for the Social Studies Themes that these lessons support include: Culture, People, Places and Environment, Individual Development and Identity, Global Connections and Individuals, Groups and Institutions.

Lesson Plan One: Introduction to Japan

Note: This lesson is designed to be co-taught with a person who is native to Japan. We encourage teachers to involve in the classroom, families and community members who have diverse international experiences. Involvement may include co-teaching, presentations by native speakers of Japan or collaboration on planning lessons so that classroom teachers can integrate authentic experience and knowledge of Japan into their teaching. If a person with experience living in Japan is not available to come into the classroom, this lesson may be taught by the classroom teacher alone, adapting the lesson as needed.

Goals:

1. Students will learn about Japanese language, writing and culture.
2. Students will develop an appreciation for languages and countries other than their own.

Objectives:

1. Students will analyze a Japanese tale.
2. Students will describe one thing they learned about Japanese contemporary culture.
3. Students will compare a story (Japanese tale or other) to stories they know from their native culture.

Before (Anticipatory Set):

1. As students enter the room, give them nametags and ask them to write their name on the bottom. (Japan expert will write their name in Japanese above it.)
2. Until the entire group is ready to start, students may practice writing their names in Japanese on a separate piece of paper. (If no expert is available to help with children's names, children can practice writing Japanese characters, alphabet or numbers)
See the website <http://web-japan.org/kidsweb/>
3. Introduce the concept of Japanese culture by asking the students what they already know about Japan. (Japan expert can describe her/his life in Japan)
4. Introduce the book, *Wisdom Tales from Around the World*, by Heather Forest. Read one of the Japanese tales, *Empty-Cup Mind*, and ask students what they think the message of the story is. If students struggle with finding the message, guide them by rereading key lines of the tale.
5. "We will be learning about Japanese culture today, and in order to do that, everyone needs to have an open mind." Explain that learning about different cultures is a new and exciting experience, but at times can be difficult because many of us have not experienced living in a different cultural atmosphere.

During (Procedures):

1. Ask for a volunteer to point out Japan on the map. "Can you find Japan?"

2. Ask, “What about Japan is different than most of the other countries that you see on the map?” (Japan is made up of a bunch of islands). The four main islands are: Honshu, Shikoku, Kyushu, and Hokkaido. 96% of the Japanese population lives on those islands.
3. Teacher will say, “Honshu, Shikoku, Kyushu, and Hokkaido,” and encourage the children to say the islands names correctly along with her. The teacher can then show photos of Japan in children’s books or from the internet.
4. Ask the students, “Who can show us where Montana, one of the states in the United States, is located?”
5. Point out Montana on the map and show them how it is about the same size as Japan. Japan has about 127.5 million people living there. Montana, on the other hand has about 945,000 inhabitants. Explain to children that Japan is a country, just like the United States is a country. There are many similarities between Japan and the U.S. and there are also some differences between the two countries. (Teachers can choose to elaborate on the information presented here depending upon the age of the children)
6. Introduce children to some pop culture of Japan such as...
 - Pokemon, Dragon Ball, Hello Kitty, and Sailor Moon cartoons.
 - Sushi. Japan regularly consumes fish for all meals.
 - Playstation, the Wii, and Nintendo were all made in Japan.
 - Discuss with children, what they know about these Japanese products/traditions. (Teachers can choose to elaborate on the information presented here depending upon the age of the children).

After (Closure):

1. Gather students on carpet to read a story in Japanese and English. Japan experts can select a story from Japan, or one of the following dual language books may be used:
 - [*Fox Fables*](#) by Martin Waddell
 - [*Little Red Hen and the Grains of Wheat*](#) by Jago
 - [*Farmer Duck*](#) by Dawn Casey
 - *Urashima and the Kingdom Beneath the Sea* retold by Ralph F. McCarthy

The Japan expert can read the Japanese text to the children. Teachers may have a Japanese speaker record the book on audio CD if a guest is not available to read to the children in person.

Point out to children the text in English and in Japanese. Explain that people who are native Japanese speakers or native English speakers as well as people who choose to learn English or Japanese as a new language can read this text. Children may choose to learn Japanese as they get older, too.

5. Ask children questions about the story, comparing it to stories they know:
 - “What did you like about the story?”
 - “Is this story similar to any that you know?”
 - “How is it similar or different?”
6. Ask for a few volunteers to tell us something that they learned about Japan today. Have students point out Japan on the world map, again. Remind students that Japan is a country and the U.S. is a country and that there are similarities as well as differences in the countries that they will learn about in lesson 2.

Assessment:

1. During the lesson procedures, observe students as they analyze *Empty-cup Mind* to determine the lesson that the story conveys. (Objective 1).
2. During the lesson closure, assess student responses as they:
 - describe something they learned about Japan today (Objective 2)
 - compare the story (Japanese or other) to stories they know from their native culture (Objective 3).

Materials:

- Name tags
- World map
- Pictures of Japan

Resources:

Websites:

Japan for Kids <http://web-japan.org/kidsweb/>

Books:

[*Fox Fables*](#) by Martin Waddell

[*Little Red Hen and the Grains of Wheat*](#) by Jago

[*Farmer Duck*](#) by Dawn Casey

Urashima and the Kingdom Beneath the Sea retold by Ralph F. McCarthy

Wisdom Tales from Around the World by Heather Forest

Kids Around the World: We Live in Japan by Alexandre Messenger and Sophie Duffet

Lesson Plan Two: Exploring Japan

Note: This lesson is designed to be co-taught with a person who is native to Japan. We encourage teachers to involve in the classroom, families and community members who have diverse international experiences. Involvement may include co-teaching, presentations by native speakers of Japan or collaboration on planning lessons so that classroom teachers can integrate authentic experience and knowledge of Japan into their teaching. If a person with experience living in Japan is not available to come into the classroom, this lesson may be taught by the classroom teacher alone, adapting the lesson as needed.

Goals:

1. Students will learn about Japanese New Year, food and culture.
2. Students will develop an appreciation for languages and countries other than their own.

Objectives:

1. Students will compare Japanese New Year to their celebration of the New Year in the U.S and/or in other countries.
2. Students will illustrate Japanese celebration of the New Year.

Before (Anticipatory Set):

1. As students enter the room, hand them a piece of paper with their name written on it in Japanese. (If no expert is available to help with children's names, the teacher can substitute Japanese characters, alphabet or numbers) See the website <http://web-japan.org/kidsweb/>
1. Start by asking children, "What are your favorite holidays that you celebrate?" "What are some of the traditions that occur when celebrating these holidays?" Teachers will make a list on the chart paper of the holidays and traditions that children respond with.
2. Briefly discuss different holidays and what traditions occur during each. Tell students they will be learning about an important holiday in Japan.

During (Procedures):

1. Have students locate Japan on the world map.
2. Tell them that in Japan, the New Year is the biggest holiday celebrated. "What is one of the most popular holidays that we celebrate in the United States?"
3. Introduce the Japanese New Year, "Gantan." Teacher will say the name aloud a few times for children to learn. Children will copy this word into their notebooks and give students the opportunity to practice saying "Gantan" aloud.
4. "Akemashite omedetou" translates as "Happy New Year"... Teachers will repeat this numerous times with children repeating the term in Japanese. Students will turn to a partner and wish them a happy new year in Japanese. Students will copy these words into their notebooks.
5. Demonstrate how to bow and address someone and say "Happy New Year."
6. The teacher or an expert on Japan can explain to the students, the following Japanese traditions related to New Year's Eve and New Year's Day in Japan:
 - On December 31, New Year's Eve, everyone eats a buckwheat noodle in order to "live longer" and that the long noodle 'represents' long life.

- Ask, “What do you do in the United States on New Year’s Eve?” “How do many people in the U.S. celebrate New Year’s Eve?”
- Ask the students if they have any experience in other countries, and how New Year’s is celebrated there.
- Explain: The New Year’s celebration starts at 12:00 am on January 1st, and everyone goes to temple. Ringing a bell 108 times is a custom. Stores are open, and food and drinks are being served in the streets. It is comparable to a big party, and the party is going on across the entire country.
- On New Year’s Day, Japanese people go to shrine to celebrate the New Year.
- Ask, “What kinds of things do you receive during the popular holidays in the United States?” “Do you receive presents for the New Year?” Children in Japan typically receive money for the New Year. Presents are not given.
- Tell the children about the dishes that are served on New Year’s Day. The food goes in a certain type of lunchbox called a “jubako” and once the food is placed inside, the combination is called “osechi”. (Kelp rolls, black beans, mashed sweet potatoes with chestnuts, canned dried sardines, herring roll, fish cakes).
- Explain: At night, when you dream the first dream of the New Year, it is important that you see good things in your dream.
- The celebration lasts two to three days.
(If a Japan expert is available, they may adapt this information to reflect their family’s customs, if different, or elaborate as they like on the information presented. Photographs and illustrations of information presented here will aid children in understanding these concepts).

Closure (After)

1. Discuss similarities and differences in New Year’s celebrations between the two countries. Use a T-chart on the board.
2. Explain how different countries celebrate the New Year in similar ways; however, New Year’s is a big deal in Japan.
3. Ask students what they learned about Japan today.
4. Draw a picture of what you think a New Year’s celebration may look like in Japan. Children can consult pictures that are provided. (computer)
5. Have children share their illustration and describe one thing they learned about New Year’s in Japan.

Assessment:

1. Observe students during the lesson closure, as they compare New Year’s in Japan and in the U.S. (Objective 1).
2. Collect students’ illustrations of New Year’s in Japan.

Materials:

- Name tags
- notebooks

- Pictures of Japan
- World map
- Paper and crayons/colored pencils for illustrations

Resources:

Websites for photos of New Year's foods and customs:

<http://japanesefood.about.com/od/japanesenewyearfood/a/newyearfood.htm>

<http://www.japan-guide.com/e/e2064.html>

Books:

Kids Around the World: We Live in Japan by Alexandre Messenger and Sophie Duffet

Japan for Kids <http://web-japan.org/kidsweb/>