

Voices >>>>>

# An Imaginary Trip to Japan

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**Guiding Principle:**

I wish to have the Japanese language and culture become part of our students' lives rather than simply a classroom subject. It is satisfying to see students greet Japanese guests easily in their own language, but even more interesting to watch them bow unaffectedly in the Japanese manner. For me, Happy Mother's Day sounds like Happy Birthday or Happy New Year, so, I suggested in Japanese class that we make a card saying Thank you Mother, as we do in Japan. The youngsters thought this was "cool," and several parents spoke to me about what a pleasant surprise this different approach was. By encouraging involvement from parents, other teachers, and individuals in the community we can foster an open mind toward other cultures, people, and ideas.

**A one-year project**

For my Japanese language class for third-graders, I put together a one-year course around the theme of an imaginary trip to Japan. Over the course of the year, the children thought about what to pack in their luggage, prepared origami wallets with play money, and created their own passports. The handmade passports (see photo) had spaces for their name (written in katakana), age, year in school, family members, and nationality, which the pupils filled in using Japanese. As they made their passports, it was particularly interesting to watch the children rediscovering and appreciating the fact that besides the Canadian students, fully one-third of the class came from all different places in Europe, Asia, the United States, and elsewhere.

**Departure day**

On the day of the trip, the children set off from the "airport." In preparation for this day, I sent out an invitation to their parents and guardians that read, "As we will be departing for Japan on an 11 a.m. flight on March 8th, we would like to invite those who are able to come and see us off at 8:30 a.m. from St. Michaels University School International Airport." The students packed their own luggage in a suitcase (an empty shoebox wrapped and tied in a *furoshiki* cloth), which they had prepared for this day, and assembled at the airport (the school gymnasium). Perhaps because I had some older students there to give airport announcements in English and French, which made it feel more realistic, the students seemed to forget it was an imaginary trip and

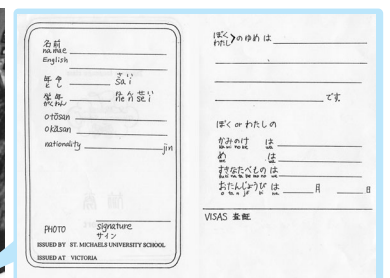
were a little nervous, asking questions like, "What should I do if I run out of money?" and "Are there pick-pockets in Japan?"

I called on some local Japanese residents to play the role of immigration officials, (see photo) having them ask basic interview questions using Japanese the students had studied, like "Name?" "What do you want to do in the future?" and so on. In place of an immigration stamp in their passports, students received a number of sushi stickers based on the results of their interview.

When we "arrived" in Japan, I assumed the role of tour guide and, holding up a flag for the group to follow, led them straight away on a shopping excursion. Using the numerical counters and the exchange rate for the yen and dollar they had been studying, the students "purchased" cards with pictures of goods that had been prepared in advance. Some students searched for souvenirs for their parents or homeroom teacher. The most popular souvenirs included high-tech devices like the Aibo robotic dog, Gameboys, and cameras, as well as licensed character goods like Doraemon, Pokemon, and Totoro from popular animation videos.

**Thinking about Canada and Japan**

The gifts the Canadian students chose for their peers in Japan included books and calendars on Canada, stuffed animals like beavers and bears, ice hockey and basketball paraphernalia, maple syrup, and other items they thought were important in Canada. They told me how they had to consider a variety of things about Canada as well as Japan. I am thinking about working on an imaginary homestay project next, and I would be grateful if the TJF Photo Data Bank could provide photographs of things like the home and school life of Japanese children, their forms of recreation, how they spend their weekends, etc.



A handmade passport

"Immigration"