

# The Japan Forum Newsletter

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国際文化フォーラム通信

Feature:

## Why Japanese- Language Education in Our District?

Case Study of Menasha Joint School District  
in Wisconsin, U.S.

The number of students studying Japanese language in U.S. elementary and secondary schools has rapidly risen in recent years. In order to include not only secondary teachers but also teachers at the elementary school level, the National Council of Secondary Teachers of Japanese changed its name to National Council of Japanese Language Teachers (NCJLT). There is now a strong consensus that continuity in Japanese-language teaching should be promoted from pre-school to university level. While Japanese-language teaching has a relatively longer history at the secondary and university level, at the elementary school level, it has just begun. New programs and resources need to be developed.

This issue of *The Japan Forum Newsletter* tells about the adoption and development of Japanese-language education in a school district in Wisconsin. The district has developed its own foreign-language programs based on national standards and the curriculum guide developed by the State of Wisconsin, and Japanese language has been a successful part of its K-12 program. There is also strong interest in interaction with schools and communities in Japan. What is the driving force behind this remarkable progress? In this feature, administrators, school principals, teachers, the children themselves and their parents, share their views.



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## Why and How Was Japanese-language Education Introduced to Menasha?

**Rocco D'Amelio**

Principal, Jefferson Elementary School



Rocco D'Amelio

The concept of teaching a foreign language at the elementary level in Menasha's schools emerged during the 1991-92 school year. The administrators were asked by District Superintendent William Decker to envision new programs that our school district might offer to better prepare students for the future. One of the suggestions was introductory exposure to a foreign language. This idea corresponded with two other unrelated supporters of elementary-level foreign language teaching. School District Foreign Language Department Coordinator Sandy Briones, had expressed interest in the development of such a program, but had not been aware that any elementary school would welcome it. The other source of support came from a citizen's forum that was being conducted by the school system.

The connection of these three interested parties resulted in the development of a School District Goal Study Committee. A study was developed by Director of Curriculum and Instruction William Ott, and a committee of teachers, parents, principals, and foreign language teachers. The district goal was to provide a more comprehensive foreign language program for students and to further develop student skills in oral and written

communication. This was to be done by studying the feasibility of providing a foreign language experience in all elementary schools.

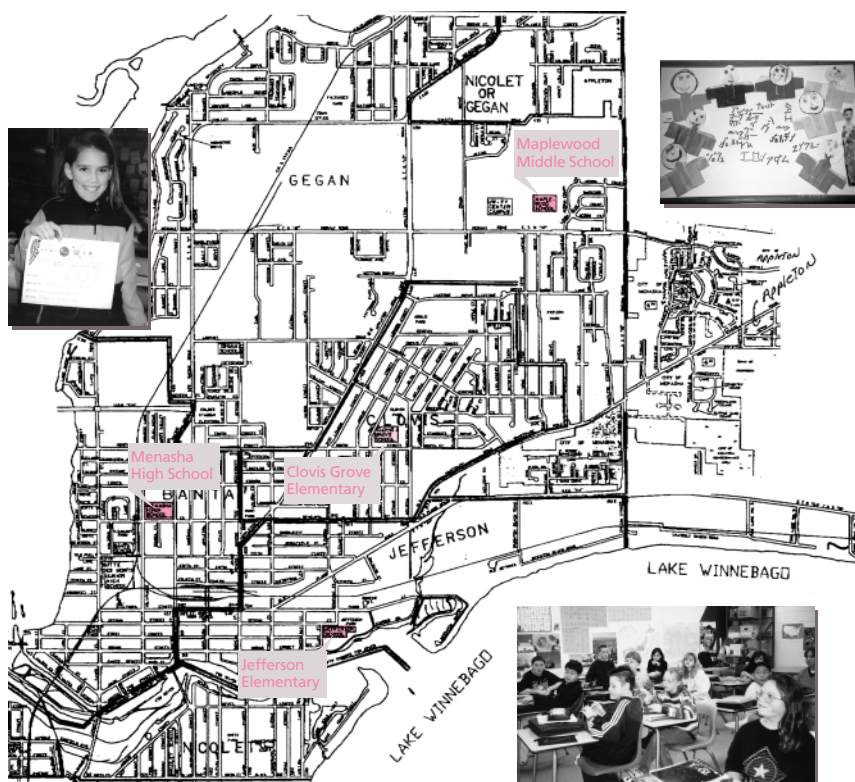
The study consisted of reports from national organizations, information from Department of Public Instruction Consultant Paul Sandrock, and a presentation from the elementary foreign language program being implemented in Ferndale, Michigan. The committee also made site visits to see six state school district programs.

The study group completed a mission statement and program philosophy. They established goals and identified pupils to be served, worked out a budget for staff and materials, developed patterns of organization and staffing, and created sample schedules that included minutes of instruction per grade level. They selected languages and a time table for implementation.

The resulting proposal was presented to the Board of Education, which agreed to implement the pilot after-school program at Clovis Grove Elementary School. The class was called Foreign Language Study Buddy Class because participants were encouraged to register with a sibling, parent or friend to make it easier for them to practice together between classes. The first class session taught German, as parents had been given a questionnaire with various languages from which to choose, and a number of families in the area have German heritage. The class was taught by one of the middle school teachers. The group consisted of seven sets of parents and children and was a definite success. The evening class changed from German to Japanese during the next year because the District Board of Education had decided to implement the foreign language program and Clovis Grove was assigned the Japanese language. The evening class was helpful in developing a group of supportive parents and teachers who saw how quickly the children learned. They enjoyed the experience and continued to participate in the remaining classes. This helped to implement the program. A Japanese cultural series was also provided for parents and staff from the Clovis Grove and Jefferson schools. Participants were able to experience art, origami, and examples of culture in daily life.

The selection of languages to be taught was based on several factors. The district al-

Menasha School District



ready taught German and Spanish in the middle and high school curriculum. These programs had a well-established reputation. The addition of a third language would allow the program to present a base language in the Slavic, Romance, and Oriental languages. The existing German and Spanish programs satisfied two of the three base languages. Japanese was selected because of the possible opportunities for future student career choices and because our district had some experiences with the Sister School and JALCAP programs that were in existence at Jefferson Elementary School and led by its principal, Tom Westermeyer. The committee determined that the elementary schools should attempt to equally divide the number of students in each language so that there would be sufficient participation in each language program by the time the children reached the middle and high schools. The elementary schools were paired for the selection of languages according to the number of children and resulted in the following assignments: Clovis Grove and Jefferson Schools—Japanese, Butte des Mort and Nicolet Schools—Spanish, and Gegan School—Ger-

man. The program started with kindergarten and first grade in the first year, and added a grade level in each subsequent year.

We are very proud of the commitment that our leadership has shown and continues to show through Superintendent Dr. Michael J. Thompson, and Dr. Keith Fuchs, in his capacity as Director of Curriculum and Instruction, in providing our elementary foreign language program. The goals of our program are to: (1) provide an exposure to other languages and cultures; (2) promote global awareness in a rapidly changing world; (3) develop the ability to listen, speak, read and write while interacting in real life situations; (4) heighten awareness and tolerance of non-English speaking people; and (5) serve the nations' needs in commerce, diplomacy, and education.

This comprehensive K-12 curriculum will seek to have all students participate in the program. No students will be deprived of the opportunity of learning another form of communication, benefiting from the cultural values of foreign language study, attaining greater academic achievement in other areas of studies or exploring a career choice.

### Student Participation

The Menasha Joint School District offers instruction in Japanese language and culture from kindergarten through grade twelve. There are presently 580 students kindergarten through grade five engaged in the integrated Japanese program at Jefferson Elementary and Clovis Grove Elementary Schools. As students from Jefferson and Clovis Grove enter Maplewood Middle School (grades six through eight) they can continue in the Japanese program in grade six. Beginning with grade seven, students can elect to either take or not to take a foreign language. Foreign language is an elective in grades seven through twelve. Our present seventh grade students represent the first group of students who have participated in the Japanese program since the first grade and they are at a point where they must decide whether to continue to participate or not. We are pleased to report that more than 60 percent of the students who participated in Japanese in grade six have elected to continue in grade seven. We believe that, as the students who have participated in the K-6 Japanese program proceed through middle school and into high school, our Japanese program will continue to grow and flourish.

**Number of Students Taking Japanese, 1999-2000 School Year**

School	No. of Students	Students Enrolled in Japanese Program
Clovis Grove Elementary	377	377
Jefferson Elementary	203	203
Maplewood Middle School	806	138
Menasha High School	1126	27

Note: The first students to begin taking Japanese starting in elementary school are still in junior high school, so the figure for high school shown here is quite small. In the next two years, this figure can be expected to rise sharply.

### A Principal's Support for the Japanese-language Program



**Barbara Drinkwine**  
Principal,  
Clovis Grove  
Elementary School

There are significant ways a school principal can support Japanese-language programs at the elementary level. The first way is to provide as many opportunities as possible for guests from overseas to visit the school. Encouraging people from other schools to visit and see what the Japanese-language program is all about is another way. Support for the teaching staff and the Japanese-language program encourages its continuity and facilitates successful learning by the students.

Another way we principals can sustain our Japanese-language programs is to make them known to the public by emphasizing the educational advantages to students. Research shows that the earlier a student begins to acquire a second language the better the language is learned. It is also advantageous because it increases a student's capacity to learn other subject matter as well. As we are living in a global society, we must encourage learning about and acceptance of other cultures. The awareness and understanding of another cultures enhances our capacity to live in harmony with all the societies on our planet.

We have strong support for the Japanese-language program at Clovis Grove Elementary School. One significant support is through the arts. Musically, we offer instruction through the Suzuki string instrument method. Through our vocal music program, Japanese songs are taught and holiday programs include a variety of Japanese cultural experiences and topics. Classroom teachers use as much of the Japanese language as they can to reinforce new learning for their students.

As you can see, the overwhelming support of the Japanese-language program is well documented. As part of the group that traveled to Japan last October, my perspective has changed as well. Even though our trip was only a week long, I came home with a very positive image of the families, schools, cities, and culture we saw. The people of Japan are amazing! We were greeted with kindness, courtesy, and friendship. We have so much to learn from each other, and now that Menasha teaches Japanese, language need not be a barrier in the future!

## Japanese-language Education: Coordination and Collaboration in School

**Lynn Sessler Schmaling**

Teacher of Japanese, Clovis Grove Elementary School



Lynn Sessler  
Schmaling

Living and teaching in a small town in North-eastern Wisconsin, I am often asked: "Why do you teach Japanese to elementary school children?" It is true that we, as Japanese teachers in the United States, often answer such a question by citing the numerous studies that indicate the benefits of the extended, sequential study of a foreign language and the need for students in the twenty-first century to be able to communicate with others in our increasingly global society. But we do need to ask ourselves an even more important question: Do we truly understand the needs of our students so that we can offer them a meaningful experience as they begin their study of Japanese language and culture at the elementary school level?

In addressing the aforementioned question, we have developed and focused on three main goals for our elementary school Japanese language program: (1) to create a content-focused curriculum that uses Japanese language in the context of other school subject areas, (2) to have students engage in age-appropriate, meaningful communication, and (3) to ensure that all our students obtain a level of personal attainment in their study of a foreign language and, at each different level, feel comfortable in their use of Japanese.

To achieve this goal, it is imperative that we give our students numerous opportunities to use the same content in a different context. In the classroom, we recycle grammar patterns and vocabulary as the students move from kindergarten through grade five, constantly relating it to other topics in science, social studies, mathematics, and other curriculum areas. We will, for example, recycle the same grammar pattern used in a science

unit during a social studies unit. This approach diverges from the old ideal of practicing one grammar concept per topic, not taking into consideration that the normal speaker of a foreign language will use a single grammatical pattern in many different situations.

For example, during the fourth grade, our

students do a unit of study on the planets of the universe. In Japanese class, we review the planet names, their position in the universe and make comparisons of their size, distance from the sun, surface temperature, all in Japanese. Our content standards for this unit of study are the use of comparisons (. . . *yoru* . . . *wa* . . . *desu*), superlatives, and descriptive adjectives. Recycled vocabulary and grammatical patterns include numbers, colors, kanji for the days of the week (as they are used for the planet names), and the basic noun/adjective sentence pattern (. . . *wa* . . . *desu*).

After giving the students ample situations to practice the above mentioned grammar and vocabulary, performance is assessed by having the students create a poster about a planet (using an actual picture of the planet copied from an image downloaded from the Internet) and report to the class, in Japanese, three pieces of information about that planet. As a middle school student, these same students will once again recycle this comparative grammar pattern, for example, during a unit on school/daily life while telling their Japanese penpals about their likes/dislikes and comparing class subjects.

It is not so important that students at the elementary and middle school level be able to compare or use the superlative in their communication in Japanese as that they be able to communicate, in Japanese, what was meaningful to them at that certain point in time, during that particular unit of study. We stress learning to communicate, in Japanese, content that is meaningful to the students. Only when communication is meaningful will they find a sense of fulfillment in studying Japanese, perhaps in future elect to continue their study.

Another important element to the success of our foreign language program is the cooperation and collaboration of homeroom teachers. As Japanese language teachers, we work to connect with other areas of study in the classroom, not only in terms of core subject areas but also such as life skills, critical thinking and fine arts. Elementary teachers of standard subjects may see Japanese language study (or any foreign language study at the elementary school) as taking time away from other subject areas. By using the



content-related approach, we can collaborate with the teaching of a given subject area by the homeroom teacher, allowing them to devote more time to completing tasks in other areas. By cultivating this cooperative relationship, we have gained the respect and support of teachers, who will reciprocate by using and encouraging their students to use Japanese to complete basic classroom tasks,

such as asking for items, counting lunch tickets, or describing the weather.

In this way, Japanese language education at the elementary level has demonstrated that it can be an asset, not an exotic frill, in the context of the regular school curriculum. We have been able, through content coordination and staff collaboration, to use it as the vehicle for greater fulfillment of our professional purpose.

### Bringing Students More than Just Language



**Oshima Teruhiko**  
Teacher of  
Japanese, Jefferson  
Elementary School

It has been nearly four years since I started teaching in the Menasha Joint School District. I still remember how nervous I was about teaching elementary school students. Although my four years have been filled with many embarrassing mistakes and tough challenges, I find my current assignment most rewarding. This opportunity to work with elementary grade students has brought

me further understanding of my own language and culture.

Contrary to common belief, it is not easy for native speakers of Japanese to become instructors of Japanese language in the United States. You are required to teach Japanese effectively as well as undertake numerous duties. You need to have a good understanding of the American education system in order to be able to function in school. Being from Japan, learning a different educational system and, most importantly, how to handle American students isn't as easy as you might think. We have to get through a lot of things besides obtaining working visas and teaching certificates, which can be tough enough!

Despite some headaches, it has been worthwhile. I really enjoy what I am doing. Being a native speaker of Japanese, I hope that I can bring to my class something more than just the language. By utilizing my knowledge of the language and culture of Japan, I would like to help students in Menasha widen their knowledge of and interest in Japan and the Japanese language.



### Teacher Testimony

Mrs. Joanne Gerritts, second grade teacher at Clovis Grove, says: "the integration of Japanese into our elementary curriculum has been an inspiration for my second graders as well as for me. Through daily lessons, we have enthusiastically absorbed the language and culture of Japan. All of us are seeing a much bigger world than Menasha, Wisconsin."

Our parents have been enthusiastic about Japanese language learning. They have hosted Japanese visitors, been active in an earlier Study Buddy program, and affirm the importance of the Japanese-language program."

### Parent's Perspective

A parent whose daughter has gone on to middle school offered many insights about the Japanese-language program: "The Japanese-language program was a very positive experience for my daughter. She plans to continue to take Japanese through high school. I can remember being part of the Study Buddy group. It helped us get used to hearing the language. We cooked and took field trips that had a very positive effect. The Japanese-language program opened my daughter's mind to another culture. She has a totally different perspective on the world than I do. She will use this to her advantage as she gets older. She plans to travel to Japan when she is in high school."

### Students Speak

Students are enthusiastic learners of Japanese. They are very proud of their accomplishments in learning a new language. The following quotes about the program tell the story.

"I think it's cool because you can go into Japanese industry—so much comes from Japan." (Paige Berg)

"I think it's fun because you learn a lot of things and this will be an advantage to me." (Amanda Messerschmidt)

"I like learning a whole new language and would be able to use it if I go to Japan." (Alex Koehnke)

"You get to learn a whole new language and get to see all new things Japanese people use in their culture." (Brandon Ketchum)

"I want to go to Japan and speak the language rather than have others interpret for me all the time." (Sheri Thompson)

"I like taking Japanese because you learn neat projects and I like the teacher." (Leah Schwartzbauer)

"I think Japanese is fun because you can learn more in class about the world than without Japanese." (Kayla Korth)

"We get to talk about animals in Japanese. You will be able to get a different job when you get older." (Zach Knaus)

"Someday I want to go to Japan and instead of saying, 'Hold on a minute until I look that up!' I'll be able to talk with them." (Lauren Schultz)

"I think the Japanese program is great because you can learn about different foods and how Japanese culture is different." (Alaina Unmuth)

"I like Japanese because it is fun to talk in another language and to know about their animals and do fun partner projects!" (Molly Moran)

"I haven't taken Japanese for long because we only moved here a year ago but it is new learning for me and it is lots of fun!" (Tiffany Myers)



## How Does the School District Support Japanese-language Education?

**Dr. Keith Fuchs**

Deputy Superintendent, Menasha Joint School District



*Dr. Keith Fuchs*

The Mission Statement of the Menasha Joint School District clearly indicates that we will provide a pre-kindergarten through grade twelve educational program that offers students an opportunity to maximize individual potential. All of our students will have the opportunity to gain the knowledge and skills necessary to equip them to function as lifelong learners and responsible citizens in their community. Recognizing that the community to which today's students belong is a global community, the Menasha Board of Education, in 1992, issued a challenge to the Menasha World Language department to create an innovative plan for implementing a Kindergarten-through-Grade 12 World Language Program. The goal of this program was to effectively prepare our students to function in and actively shape the global society of the twenty-first century.

For the past eight years our world language department has made a concerted effort to fulfill this goal and to define and refine our K-12 program. It is our belief that language and communication are at the heart of the human experience and that we must educate students who are equipped linguistically and culturally to communicate in our pluralistic society and abroad. The result of our effort has been the development of a world language program that provides all of our students exposure to and knowledge of languages and cultures other than English. This program will promote a global aware-

ness and second-language competence.

It is the objective of our K-12 Japanese program to have students learn the Japanese language and understand and appreciate the Japanese culture. We want each of our Japanese students to be able to communicate in Japanese, to use the language in both personal and career opportunities, and to gain satisfaction and fulfillment as a lifelong learner of Japanese. We want them to be aware of different perspectives reflected in both the language and behaviors of other people and to possess the language skills and understanding of other cultures that will be necessary to be productive members of the diverse communities in which we all live.

During the past several years we have seen a significant increase in the interest that other school districts have shown in creating an elementary world language program. We have had numerous visitors to our district to see this very exciting program and in all cases they have been very impressed with the overall program and intrigued and fascinated with our Japanese program. Our program has been recognized throughout the State of Wisconsin and recently the University of Wisconsin-Oshkosh created a program of teacher training in the Japanese language.

We believe that students of Menasha are just beginning to realize the multitude of positive experiences that they will encounter in their future as a result of their involvement in our world language program.

### Grant from the U.S. Department of Education

The Menasha Joint School District was fortunate to receive a grant totaling \$100,000 from the United States Department of Education to support continuation of a strong, ongoing K-5 foreign language program in our schools. With matching funds supplied by the school district, we will be able over the next three years to adopt a unique K-5 Japanese-language program in our middle school and high school.

There are several components to the grant, which include development of K-12 benchmark assessments for Japanese, smooth articulation of our students between elementary school Japanese and middle school as well as into high school Japanese courses. Our first component from this grant will enable us to take the time and develop the resources to develop K-12 curriculum that is standards-based and content-related, while meeting the needs of individual students. As we strive to meet our goal of Japanese-language education of "all students, all levels, all the time," it is necessary for us to look closely at offering Japanese classes, K-12, so that students can engage in meaningful communication as well as obtain personal success at their own pace. This is a difficult but inspir-

ing mission, one that is necessary if we truly want to prepare all of our students to live in the global community of the twenty-first century.

And that leads into the second component of our grant: connecting the community within our city, state, and world to our students learning Japanese. We anticipate making several connections with our business community to offer upper level students the chance to engage in communication in Japanese while exploring future career options. Our technology component, which will enable students K-12 to create electronic performance portfolios as well as begin communicating through photos and words on the Internet with our sister schools in Ōgo, Japan.

Finally, in order to complete the preceding objectives it is important that we rely on the outside resources of experts in the fields of standards education and foreign language to help us piece together. All our elementary foreign language teachers will attend workshops this summer to improve their language skills and learn more about creating standards-based materials and curriculum. Also, through the grant, all our foreign language teachers, grades K-12, will have the opportunity to attend workshops, visit immersion schools and receive special in-servicing from experts around our state.

# Ōgo and Menasha Elementary Schools: Toward Closer Ties

A special friendship tie was formed between four American and Japanese elementary schools in 1998 through the assistance of the Japan Forum. Among them, Clovis Grove Elementary School in Menasha, Wisconsin and Ōgo Elementary School in Ōgo, Gunma Prefecture have moved rapidly to form a closer relationship and made impressive progress in a short period of time.

Acting as go-between for the two schools, TJF advised at the outset that they establish a relationship on a friendship-exchange basis, engaging in activities such as the following: (1) video penpal projects, (2) school event report exchange, (3) artwork and class project exchange, (4) language and culture exchange and (5) e-mail correspondence.

The proposed activities were adopted and carried out by both schools. Then, in October 1999, three administrators and one teacher from Menasha School District visited Japan and met their counterparts in Ōgo reconfirming their two schools' commitment to maintaining the relationship. That visit paved the way for a new phase in their relationship and even further progress.

The two sides expressed their (1) mutual desire to expand their relationship from the elementary school level to include the middle school level so that students could have a total of nine years of association with each other throughout their primary and intermediate

school years, (2) hope that ties between municipal offices in their respective locales similar to those between their schools might be possible, and (3) the Mayor of Ōgo expressed his desire to pay a visit to the Mayor of Menasha and the city, bringing with him twelve middle school students and several citizens of the town of Ōgo in August, 2000.

The Ōgo proposal to visit Menasha was welcomed by the Mayor and school and plans to welcome the Ōgo delegation have already begun. The Japanese middle school students will be invited for homestay experiences with families in Menasha during their stay and discussions are expected to take place regarding the formation of a sister city relationship between the two mayors at that time. As matchmakers we at the Japan Forum feel that the school-to-school and city-to-city relationship between Ōgo and Menasha is ideal to fostering stronger and closer ties between the two schools. Their experience can serve as a model for other schools.

## Establishing Relationship with Japanese Schools



**Dr. J. Michael Thompson**  
Superintendent,  
Menasha Joint  
School District

The Menasha Joint School District values its developing relationship with the schools in Ōgo, Japan. As one of the few American schools with a comprehensive Japanese-language curriculum, we are particularly interested in the valuable resources such a sister-school relationship has to offer. Learning first-hand about Japanese culture can only

assist us in enriching the learning program for our students who study Japanese. Moreover, the personal relationships we will be able to establish with Ōgo officials, school personnel, citizens, and students will create a bridge between Menasha and Ōgo that will lead to an improved worldview for members of both communities. We greatly anticipate the visit to Menasha of a delegation from Ōgo later this year.

A bulletin board display at Clovis Grove Elementary School of kanji with illustrations made by grade five students at Ōgo Elementary School for Clovis Grove students of Japanese. In return, Clovis Grove students started a similar project to help students in Ōgo study English.



# The Way We Are

## Life at Home

📷:Photographer

あと10分だけ、  
寝かせてくれ。

### Sleeping

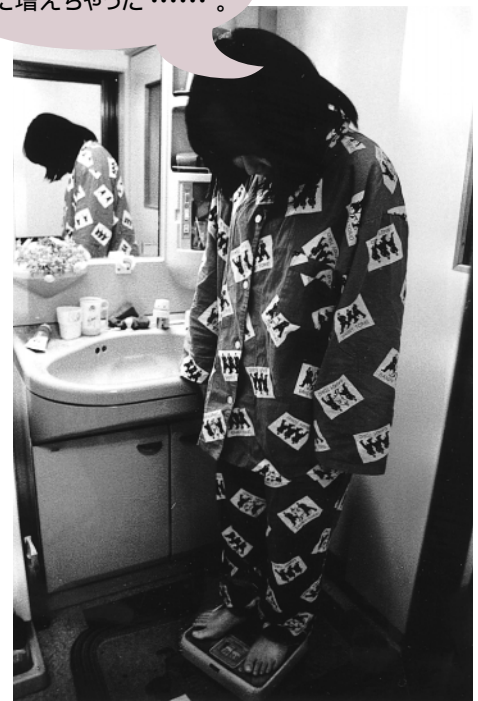


My brother, Yoshitaka, never gets up until it's almost too late to get to school in the morning. He must have been chatting with his girlfriend till late at night by cell telephone again. "Just let me sleep 10 more minutes!"

📷 Kuroda Akiko, Hiroshima prefecture

あちゃー、  
また増えちゃった……。

### Dieting



Since a year ago, Chisato has been trying to lose weight. Her weight goes down, but then it goes up again, over and over! Tonight, after her bath, she gets on the scales once again. "Yikes! It went up again!"

📷 Oyama Noriko, Miyagi prefecture

### Cooking



おいしい  
お菓子を作るよ!

Tomomi is good at making cakes and candies. She moves around the kitchen briskly and works with a practiced hand. She is also skilled at kendo, and holds the *shodan* rank. "I'm going to make a really yummy snack."

📷 Arai Keisuke, Hyōgo prefecture

こんど  
今度のライブまでに、  
この曲をマスターしなきゃ。

### Playing the guitar



Taking high school classes by correspondence course, Shino works at a fast-food curry shop. Right now, her favorite pastime is playing the base guitar for small house audiences. "I've got to master this piece before our next performance."

📷 Saeki Naotoshi, Tokyo

仕上げが大切!!



Mio is a girl of many talents. She works at a fast-food shop. She is also skilled at the comic research and drawing comics. "The first step is the most important!"

📷 Kondō Yumiko, Tokyo



## Doing the Wash



天気<sup>てんき</sup>がいい日の洗濯<sup>ひのせんたく</sup>って、気持ちいい!

Yuka is hanging up the wash in the garden. She doesn't have to be asked to help with housework, but does it on her own initiative. "It feels good to hang up the wash on such a beautiful day!"

📍 Morita Hitomi, Hiroshima prefecture

お、今日<sup>きょう</sup>もメールがたくさん来てるぞ。

## Computers



Hideaki's hobby is computers. He forgets about himself—and his homework—when it comes to computers. He has made many friends through the Internet. "Look at all the mail that came in today, too!"

📍 Sakai Akiko, Gifu prefecture

次<sup>つぎ</sup>はスポーツニュースを見ようよ。

## Lounging on the sofa,

## watching TV



My big brother Jun'ichi and my father are on the sofa watching TV after dinner. This is one of those times when the family can all relax together. "Let's watch the sports news next."

📍 Wataki Maiko, Ōsaka

I have known Masami since elementary school. We tell each other stupid jokes and laugh like crazy. She is very good at sewing her own clothes, and her dream is to have her own brand and open a shop. "Ha! ha! ha! ha! ha!"

📍 Akamine Hiromi, Okinawa prefecture

## Drawing comics



talents—she is a member of the photo club, drama club, and club at school. In odd moments while studying, she loves to finishing touches are the most important!"

, Kanagawa prefecture

はーっはっはっはっはっは〜。

## Lounging and laughing



# A Day in the Life

はなみ  
花見

Hanami

Enjoying the Cherry Blossoms

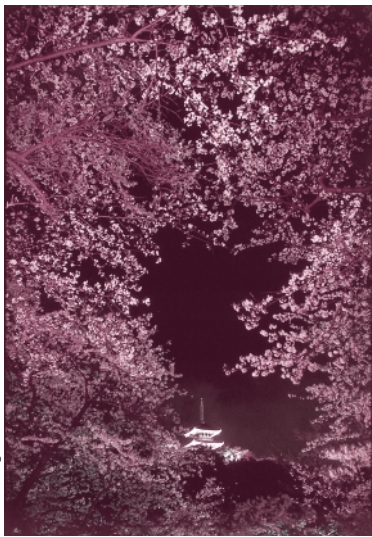


Photo: Hongō Jin

さくらもほくたちの入学を  
お祝いしてくれてるみたい！

Look! The cherry blossoms are celebrating our first day at school!

Yozakura 夜桜

Cherry blossoms at night

After the sun goes down, the cherry blossoms cast pale shadows against the dark sky. Enjoying the flowers by night, too, is a special pleasure of the season.

The cherry blossom is Japan's national flower. The advent of the cherry blossom season between late March and early April not only heralds the coming of spring but the beginning of the new academic year for schools and of the new fiscal year for businesses. During this period, the weather authorities at the Meteorological Agency report on the advance of the *sakura zensen*, "the cherry blossom front," as warm weather moves northward, and people begin to look forward with anticipation to its arrival and the true end of winter's cold that it signals. As the trees begin to bloom, people gather beneath them to enjoy the flowers.

The Japanese cherry blossoms open all at once and the petals fall after a relatively short span, about one week or 10 days, and their very delicacy and transience have poignant and poetic appeal. In this issue, we look at this best-loved of flowers in Japan and the events and artifacts that express this appeal.

Nyūgakushiki 入学式

Celebrating entrance to a new school

In Japan, the school year begins in April, and so does the fiscal year for businesses. During this month, the cherry blossoms are in the full bloom of spring, heightening the experience of starting something new. Schools hold commencement ceremonies for new classes of entering first-year students. First-grade students receive a brand-new school satchel—called a *randoseru* (from Dutch, ransel)—from their parents or grandparents when they begin school.



4.5

4.10

3.25

3.31

Fukuoka

Hiroshima

Kyoto

Osaka

Tokyo

はなみ  
花見、いつにしようか。  
So, when shall we have our *hanami*?

3.20

やっぱり、  
花より団子だよな。  
Give me a sweets before flowers.

ああ、  
わくわくしちゃう。  
Oh, I can hardly wait!

1.18

Naha

## Cherry blossoms in other countries

In the early twentieth century (in 1909 and 1912), Japan presented gifts of flowering cherry trees to the United States as symbols of goodwill, and these were planted in Washington, D.C., where they are now one of the most attractive sights of that city. In other countries, including the Republic of Korea, China, Australia, New Zealand, as well as countries in Europe and South America, the Japanese cherry blossom season can be enjoyed just as in Japan.



Hana yori dango 花より団子

"If I have to choose, I'd take food before flowers."

Proverb that expresses the priority people give to things that are real and tangible in contrast to those that are abstract and difficult to grasp.



Photo: Hongō Jin

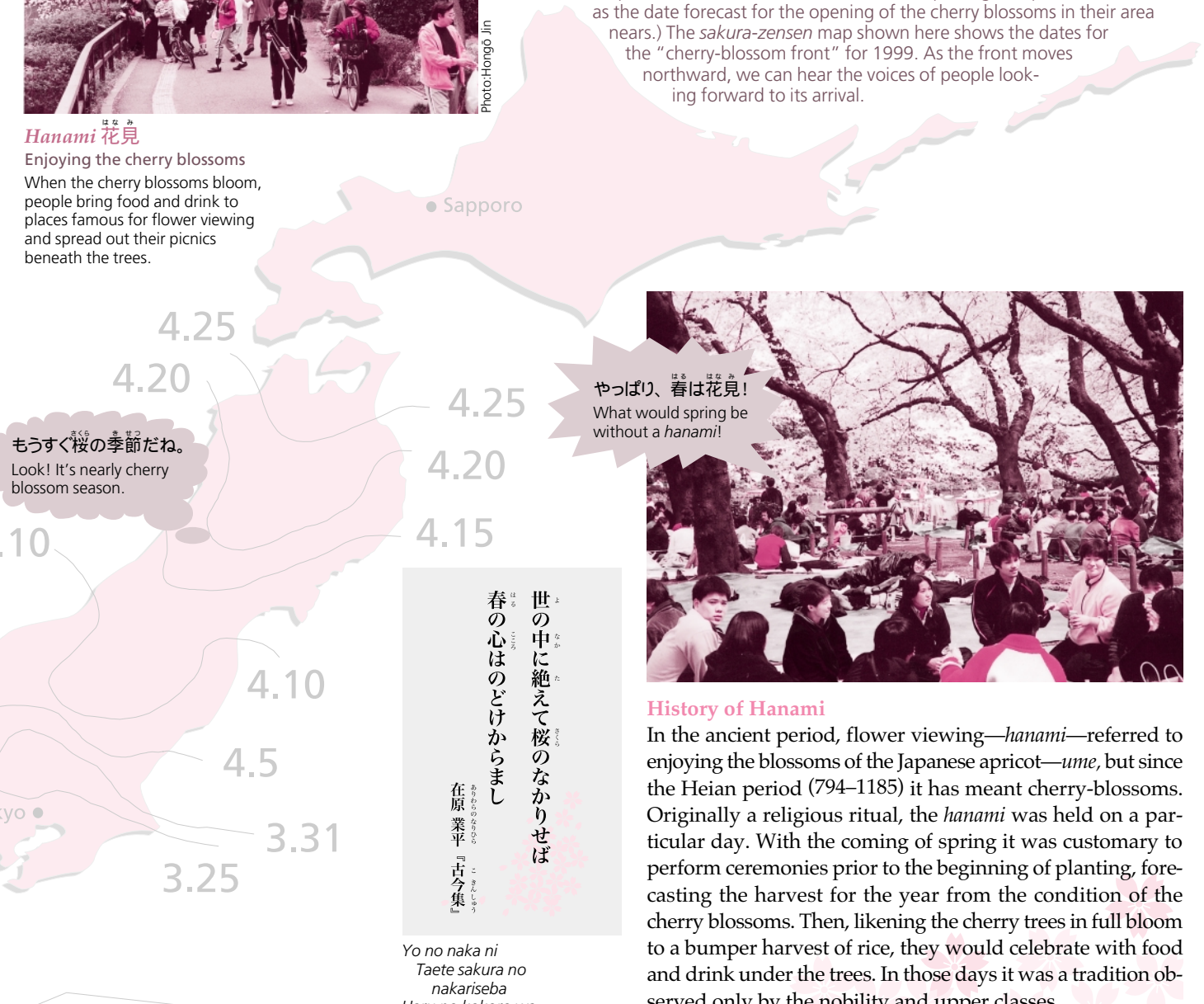
**Hanami** 花見

Enjoying the cherry blossoms  
When the cherry blossoms bloom, people bring food and drink to places famous for flower viewing and spread out their picnics beneath the trees.

**Sakura zensen** 桜前線

The cherry blossom "front"

The line formed across the Japanese archipelago by the locations where the cherry blossoms have begun to open is called the *sakura zensen*, using the weather broadcasting term "front," as in "cold front," or "cherry blossom front." The daily weather report on television includes news on where the *sakura zensen* stands and where the blossoms are out as well as when it can be expected to move further northward. (People begin to plan their *hanami* as the date forecast for the opening of the cherry blossoms in their area nears.) The *sakura-zensen* map shown here shows the dates for the "cherry-blossom front" for 1999. As the front moves northward, we can hear the voices of people looking forward to its arrival.



やっぱり、春は花見!  
What would spring be without a *hanami*!

**History of Hanami**

In the ancient period, flower viewing—*hanami*—referred to enjoying the blossoms of the Japanese apricot—*ume*, but since the Heian period (794–1185) it has meant cherry-blossoms. Originally a religious ritual, the *hanami* was held on a particular day. With the coming of spring it was customary to perform ceremonies prior to the beginning of planting, forecasting the harvest for the year from the condition of the cherry blossoms. Then, likening the cherry trees in full bloom to a bumper harvest of rice, they would celebrate with food and drink under the trees. In those days it was a tradition observed only by the nobility and upper classes.

From medieval times, the way cherry petals fall at the height of their beauty (that is, before they have withered and become unsightly) and the transience of their span assumed symbolism both in the warrior code and in Buddhism. Soon the cherry blossoms became an expression of the samurai way of life. The custom of *hanami* spread to the warrior class, and the warlord Toyotomi Hideyoshi (1537–98), who played a major role in the unification of the country, held historically grand *hanami* to flaunt his power. Cherry blossom parties spread to commoners in the era of cultural ferment toward the end of the seventeenth century known as Genroku (1688–1704). Families, groups of friends, or workmates would gather for merry feasting and drinking.

Today, *hanami* is no more than a private, popular opportunity for having a good time.

世の中に絶えて桜のなかりせば  
春の心はのどけからまし  
在原業平 『古今集』

*Yo no naka ni  
Taete sakura no  
nakariseba  
Haru no kokoro wa  
Nodoke karamashi*  
If there were no  
cherry blossoms  
in this world  
How much more tranquil  
our hearts would be in spring.  
(Ariwara no Narihira,  
*Kokinshū*)

In other words, it is because of the unpredictability of the blooming and falling of the cherry blossoms that spring is such a time of agitation and excitement.

もうすぐ桜の季節だね。  
Look! It's nearly cherry blossom season.

Okinawa  
\*Be sure to check the actual location of Okinawa on a full-scale map.

**Sakura fubuki** 桜ふぶき  
Cherry blossom "snowstorm"  
When cherry blossom petals start falling heavily, the flurry blossoms are described as a "cherry snowstorm."

# 桜あれこれ

## Sakura Miscellany



2   ( )



3   ( )



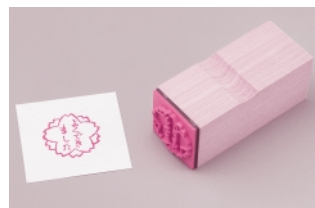
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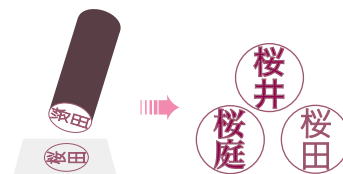
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7   ( )



9   ( )



Compiled by Kawauchi Sayumi © Ai Kikaku Center

Photos (1, 2, 3, 4, 6, 8, 9): Hongō Jin

- A. でんしゃ *densha* / B. かんばん *kanban* / C. おかね *okane* / D. はんこ *hanko* / E. のみもの *nomimono* / F. むかしばなし *mukashi banashi* / G. おかし *okashi* / H. スタンプ *stanpu* / I. なふだ *nafuda*

- a. stamp / b. folk tale / c. name tag / d. drink / e. personal seal / f. money or coin / g. train / h. sign / i. confection

**J.** *Sakura-mochi*: Seasonal Japanese confection (*wagashi*) for March and April. This one is made by rolling up a ball of sweet red-bean paste (*anko*) in a pancake made of flour paste dyed pink and then wrapping the whole in a salt-preserved cherry-tree leaf.  
**K.** Carved with the characters of the person's surname, they are used in place of a signature. Japanese names incorporating the character for *sakura* are fairly common, including Sakurai 桜井 ("cherry well"), Sakurada 桜田 ("cherry field"), and Sakuraba 桜庭 ("cherry garden").  
**L.** The cherry tree motif, Japan's national flower, can be found carved on the back of 100 yen coins.  
**M.** The superexpress "Sakura" is a sleeper train that runs between Tokyo and Nagasaki in Kyushu. The front of the train is marked with a *sakura* motif.  
**N.** The Sakura Bank is one of Japan's largest banks. Its logo features the cherry blossom that is such a familiar symbol to all Japanese. The bank's image color, moreover, is pink. Another business that takes

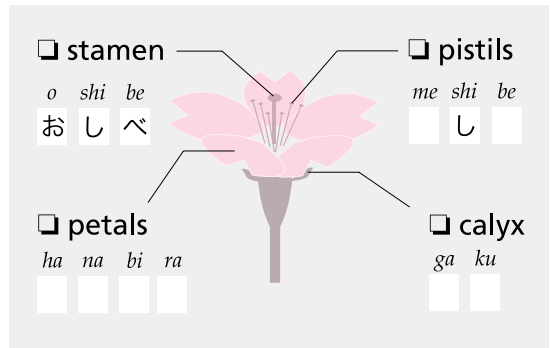
advantage of this motif is Sakuraya, a well-known chain of electric appliance discount shops. Many other kinds of shops, including drug stores and supermarkets, often use the name "Sakura."  
**O.** Children at kindergartens usually wear a name tag; this kind of cherry-blossom-shaped, pink name tag holder is especially common.  
**P.** The kind-hearted old man, "Hanasaka-jiisan," became famous when he tossed ashes over a withered cherry tree and made the tree come into bloom.  
**Q.** *Sakura-yu*: This tea is made by steeping a salt-preserved cherry blossom in hot water. It is often served in place of regular green tea at weddings and other celebrations.  
**R.** Elementary school teachers often use stamps like this to mark their students' papers. Those who have done their assignments properly or finished a project can earn this badge of achievement. In the center of the cherry blossom motif are written the words "yoku deki-mashita" ("well done!").

# Activity on Cherry Blossom

## Science

## 理科

- (1) The structure of the cherry blossom
- The parts of the cherry blossom are written in roman letters. Try to complete the blanks with the proper hiragana character.
  - How many petals does a cherry blossom have?
- (2) The cherry blossom “seasonal front”; the cherry blossom forecast.
- Check the map in page10-11, and answer the questions below.
    - a. What day of what month did the cherry blossoms begin to bloom in Tokyo in 1999?
    - b. What days did the season begin in Osaka, Kyoto, Hiroshima?
    - c. Where do the cherry blossoms open first, Sapporo or Fukuoka? How many days apart?



The structure of the cherry blossom

## Music

## 音楽

The song, “Sakura” has been treasured and passed down since ancient times. Write the reading of the words in roman letters below the hiragana and try singing the song.

さくら さくら やよいの そらーは  
みわたす かざーり かすみか くもーか においぞ  
いずーる いざや いざや みにゆーかん

“Sakura”  
Cherry blossoms, cherry blossoms  
As far as you can see  
Across yayoï\* skies  
Is it mist? Is it clouds?  
Ah, the fragrance!  
Let us go, let us go, and see!

\*Yayoï = third month of the lunar calendar, i.e., March-April

## Let's discuss and think

(1) Using the articles and pictures from page 10 to page 12, see if you can answer the questions in the following dialogue.

- Q: When do the cherry blossoms flower in Japan?  
A: They blossom in \_\_\_\_\_.
- Q: About what month is that?  
A: It's about \_\_\_\_\_. In Japan, the school year, too, begins in \_\_\_\_\_. When the cherry blossoms bloom, people go for \_\_\_\_\_mi then.
- Q: \_\_\_\_\_mi? What does that involve? What kinds of things do they do?  
A: They \_\_\_\_\_ beneath the cherry trees. The cherry blossoms bloom for about \_\_\_\_\_ days. The cherry blossoms are beautiful, too, when the petals are falling.

(2) Q & A about flowers

1. あなたの好きな花はなんですか。  
What flowers do you like?
2. その花はいつ咲きますか。  
When does that flower bloom?
3. どんな色ですか。どんな形ですか。  
What color is it? What shape is it?
6. あなたの国の国花はなんですか。  
What is the national flower of your country?
7. あなたの国や地域で人びとに人気のある花はなんですか。  
What flowers are popular in your country or region?
8. あなたの国や地域で、日々の生活や特別な行事に欠かせない花がありますか。  
Is there any flower that is closely related to daily life or important events in your country or region?



## Sakura Goods Present

Please send your comments on TJF Newsletter!



A “yoku dekimashita” teacher’s stamp, like that introduced in this article, and assorted cherry-blossom motif stationery items, will be sent to the first five persons to reply.

Under the subject line “Sakura Present,” send e-mail to: forum@tjf.or.jp or send fax to +81-3-5322-5215. Give your name, e-mail address, affiliation (school where you are employed), postal address, telephone and fax number. Please include your comments about the TJF Newsletter.



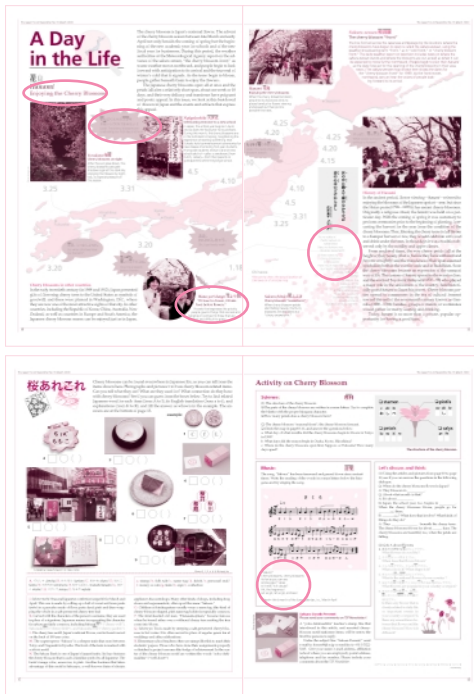
Photo:Hongô Jin

Answers: 2. I-c-O, 3. E-d-Q, 4. H-a-R, 5. B-h-N, 6. G-i-J, 7. D-e-K, 8. F-b-P, 9. A-g-M

## Translation Pathfinders: Between the Exotic and the Different

*In introducing culture to newcomers, one of the most unfortunate tendencies is to over-exoticize it. Every culture is distinctive, and Japan's no more so than any other, so it is important to maintain perspective. While the message to be transferred from Japanese to English often deals with customs, ideas, or other subject matter unfamiliar to readers, the best result is often one that does not draw attention to that fact.*

**Lynne E. Riggs** (Translator, Center for Intercultural Communication)



"A Day in the Life"

Take *hanami*. I must not be the first to think that the common English translation of the term, "cherry-blossom viewing," gives this timeless pastime an odd image. One imagines prim, elegant people poised for a mainly aesthetic, ritual exercise, whereas the reality is nothing so formal, whether in the sixteenth or the twentieth century. So, in the "Day in the Life" feature in these pages, I have studiously avoided "viewing." No one is immune to the spell of the cherry blossoms that burst out on warm late March/early April days as the bitter cold of winter withdraws. The enjoyment of this magic is *hanami*, and cannot be expressed better in English. Still, I doubt that resi-

dents of Washington, D.C. speak of going for a *hanami*, but neither are they likely to say they are going "cherry blossom viewing." They might say they are "going to see the flowers," or "going to have a picnic under the cherry blossoms."

*Say something as it would be said by people in English if it were part of their lives.*

It would be easy, when rendering text such as translated on pp. 10-13 of this newsletter, to leave readers thinking, "how quaint" or "how can mature adults get so excited about a bunch of flowers?" We can readily imagine hearing "Aa, wakuwaku shichau!" in Japanese, but if we translate that as "Oh, I'm getting all excited!" the speaker comes out sounding pretty giddy. What are the words that would go with this in the same context in English? "I can hardly wait!" is a free translation. This is what is meant, but it is not a direct rendering of "wakuwaku." To translate so literally that the speaker sounds silly, naive, or overly sentimental does not translate the meaning, only the individual words.

Even though the translator is called upon to render in English what the Japanese says, sometimes it sounds really odd in the other language.

You might hear a precocious little 6-year-old child on his way to his first day of school remark to his mother, "Sakura mo bokutachi no nyūgaku o o-iwai shite iru mitai!" but where would you hear an American kid say anything like that to anybody in English? Not likely. The deadpan *chokuyaku* on page 10 ("Look, the cherry blossoms are celebrating our first day at school!") gives one pause.

*Mediate meaning with discretion and subtly*

And then there is the phrase "hana yori dango" (p. 10). This falls flat in English, but we press on, floundering through three different attempts to get across the idea, and in the end you'd really prefer the phrase in Japanese just as it is. The girls on page 10 not only have their cake and are eating it too. The cakes are skewered *dango*, presenting another dilemma. The usual translation of *dango*—dumpling—is just untenable. The lack of equivalence with any confection in English calls upon the reader to learn a new word. The translator is the arbiter of what will go untranslated or be perhaps ineptly expressed.

Where I really squirmed was having to translate a ninth-century poem from the *Kokinshū* (p. 11) and the lyrics to the song, "Sakura, sakura" (p. 13). Don't even think that these translations are lyrical; they simply attempt to give the meaning of each line. Both are works of literature that are best appreciated in the original. The special ring of words like "miwatasu kagiri," "kasumi," and "nioi," vividly evoke the landscape of spring. To translate "Sakura" as a song, the translator must actually go one step further, rewriting the poetry and finessing the images for equivalent lyricism in English. Sometimes you can find a standard translation done by a specialist that may be used with permission and attribution, but often that is not an option. Even the generalist translator will face such a serious literary task from time to time.

Japanese is an "in-language," so translating it means unlocking its secrets for those outside. Great discretion can be exercised in this task: either to achieve communication and clarity or to propagate exoticism and mystery. This is not only a creative but an ethical challenge, toward which the translator must aim all the secret weapons of the profession.

# TJF News

## Review

From December 1999  
to February 2000

### TJF Session at 1999 ACTFL Meeting

<b>Date:</b>	Nov. 20, 1999
<b>Place:</b>	Dallas, Texas
<b>Topic:</b>	The Indirect Personal Encounter: Bridging Language Instruction and Intercultural Education
<b>Presenters:</b>	Lynn Sessler Schmaling (teacher, Clovis Grove Elementary School, Menasha, Wisconsin); Mie Ashihara-Lee (teacher, Lick-Wilmerding High School, San Francisco, California)
<b>Commentator:</b>	Cyrus Rolbin (teacher, Phillips Academy, Boston, Massachusetts)

This year's session consisted of two reports on the efforts to further cultural understanding—the main objective of TJF—as well as related to Japanese-language education, using photographic materials that preceded the start of TJF's "Deai" Project (the "Deai" Project is designed to create photographic teaching resources through which high school students can come in contact with Japanese high school students and learn about Japanese, Japanese culture, and society). We asked two teachers, who have been using TJF's photo-

graphic resources to create a forum for "encounter" in their classrooms, to report on their respective activities and experience with the elementary students and high school students.

Lynn Sessler Schmaling is using the photographic panels showing the life of a Japanese elementary school student, "A Day with Kentarō," in her Japanese-language classes. Her students, though they have few opportunities to meet Japanese, began to study Japanese more eagerly, feeling that they had made a friend in Kentarō. Looking at a photograph of Kentarō eating his school lunch, she said, some students had even started pretending to eat, as if they were Kentarō himself. She found that situations like this provided the natural context for teaching vocabulary, like "taberu." Schmaling said that she is working to establish an exchange program with a Japanese elementary school, hoping to be able to make possible actual contact with Japanese elementary school boys and girls for her students who have become familiar with Japan through the life of Kentarō.

In teaching Japanese at the high school level, Mie Ashihara-Lee uses the photographs submitted to the Lives of Japanese High School Students Photograph Contest each year. No only do the students start talking about what they think of the pictures, they begin to reflect on their own lives, and have made an album of pictures of themselves with captions they wrote in Japanese, hoping to be able to transmit their messages to Japanese high school students. Like Schmaling, Ashihara has begun to guide her students from the vicarious encounter made possible through photographs toward actual contact with students in Japan via e-mail and photographic messages.

For ACTFL in 2000, TJF plans to present a workshop session based on samples of "Deai" photographic teaching materials currently being prepared.

### Third Lesson Plan Idea Contest Winning Entries Decided

The winning entries in the 3rd Contest on Ideas and Examples of How to Teach Culture in the Japanese-language Class, held in alternative years since 1995 have been decided. This year 33 entries were received from Australia, Canada, China, New Zealand, United Kingdom and United States, as well as, for the first time, from Germany, Korea, and Thailand. There were 14 entries for the elementary school level and 19 in the secondary school level. The winners are as follows:

#### Elementary school level

**Grand Prize:** Journey in Japan (Mary-Grace Browning, UK)

**Second Prize:** Indirect Personal Encounter (Lynn Sessler Schmaling, U.S.)/*Hinamatsuri* at Our School (Eiko Yonezu Larsen, Canada)

#### Secondary school level

**Grand Prize:** Comparing Cultures Together (Cyrus Rolbin, U.S.)

**Second Prize:** In a School Bag (Miho Miyakawa-Giraud, Germany)/Making a Bridge between Japan and the U.S. (Mie Ashihara-Lee, U.S.)/*Moshi Moshi*—Communicating through Cellular Phones (Sachiko Omoto Renovich, Canada)/ Promoting the Gold Coast (Megan Alexander, Australia)

TJF would like to thank all those who submitted entries to the contest and congratulates the winners for their achievement. The twenty entries that passed the first screening in the Contest will be published in a printed collection during fiscal year 2000. The two winners of the Grand Prizes will be invited to Japan for a ten-day visit.



Left: Schmaling, using slides to report on her teaching experience.

Right: Ashihara, displaying the photographs of Japanese high school students she uses in class. She explains the students' reactions.

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The TJF Newsletter follows the practice of placing the Japanese surname first.

## What Is the Japan Forum?

### Quest for Common Understanding

The Japan Forum (TJF) is a private, independent, nonprofit foundation established in Japan in 1987 and funded initially through a major grant from Kodansha Ltd., Publishers, and donations from five other Japanese publishing-related firms and other organizations. TJF continues to rely on donations, in addition to investment income, business revenues, and membership fees, for the funding of its operations. The main objective of TJF is to promote cultural exchange and mutual understanding among people of different cultures. Language lies at the heart of every culture. Those who inhabit the global community of the 21st century will need to develop new skills to traverse the boundaries between cultures—boundaries essentially defined by language differences. In recognition of the central importance of language skills in facilitating communication and mutual understanding among people around the world, TJF conducts a variety of activities centered around its two essential concerns: language and culture. In all these efforts, TJF honors the individual peculiarities of respective cultures and embraces their underlying commonalities, in order to illuminate both the individuality and the universality of every culture.

To date, these efforts have focused primarily on Japanese language education in elementary and secondary schools in the Asian-Pacific region and Chinese- and Korean-languages instruction in Japanese high school, and we are planning to expand our program to include information on the teaching of other Asian languages in Japan.

TJF also works to disseminate vital information related to language and culture through its publishing activities and book donation program, and now through the use of the Internet as well.

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