

# Meeting People



In this series we will “meet” real-life individuals and consider from various angles the culture they represent. In each issue we will introduce a person or group of people and the events they are part of, as well as provide the necessary information on the TJF website for discussing those events. We hope these stories will prompt students to think about their own situations, discuss the similarities and the differences, and gain a fuller awareness of the multi-layered nature and rich diversity of culture. In this issue, we meet Nana, a fifth-grade elementary school student in Tokyo. This is a story from her experiences in fourth grade.

## Meet Nana Jan Taught Me to Treasure All Living Creatures

### We Want to Keep a Hamster

#### ハムスターを飼いたい

One day in May, Nana’s mother said, “A friend of mine has a hamster (ハムスター) that had babies. If I ask her, we could have one. Would you like to keep a hamster?” Nana had only kept goldfish. She wasn’t sure she liked animals. She decided she didn’t really want to have a hamster at home. Then Nana thought that since her class (クラス) at school, Yo-nen, Ichi-kumi (4年1組 the fourth grade class 1),<sup>1</sup> didn’t have a pet, maybe her classmates would like to keep a hamster. She decided to consult her teacher and the class and see.



**Profile**

年齢: 11才 (公立小学校5年)

家族: 両親、兄1人

住所: 東京都港区

趣味: 絵をかくこと

特技: 水泳、リレー



At first everyone said they wanted to have a class hamster. The teacher, Uto-sensei said, “All right, but let’s talk it over in a *gakkyūkai* (学級会 class meeting) first.”

In the meeting, some members of the class who had once had hamsters were in favor of the idea: “They’re so cute—let’s have one!” But Sari said, “We once had a hamster, but we couldn’t go away on trips because you have to take care of it every day.” Then another classmate said, “Pretty soon summer vacation is going to start. What are we going to do on holidays (休みの日)<sup>2</sup> and long vacations like in summer and at New Year’s?” They also realized they had to think about what would happen when they moved on to fifth grade and the members of the classes would change.<sup>3</sup> Uto-sensei reminded them, “Taking care of any living thing is not easy.”

ナナの学校の年間行事 (School year calendar at Nana’s school)

4	5	6	7	8	9	10
-6 始業式 1学期 First term begins, commencement ceremony (Entrance ceremony)	-18 プール開き Pool classes begin	-19 終業式 夏休み Ceremony marking last day of classes, Summer vacation begins	-20-22 林間学校 Summer school trip ( <i>rinkan gakkō</i> )		-1 始業式 2学期 Second term begins, commencement ceremony	
-24 遠足 School excursion					-30 運動会 Field day	
Spring break	First term			Summer vacation		



Unfortunately, it didn't seem like a good idea. But when the chairperson of the meeting took a vote, the majority of the class wanted to have a hamster as a class pet. They decided that everyone should talk it over with their parents and then discuss it again in class the next day.

After holding several class meetings, six members of the class agreed to take care of the hamster during holidays and one offered to take the hamster as a family pet at the end of fourth grade. Finally they decided to take one of the baby hamsters. Nana was delighted! Her classmates had discussed the idea she had presented and offered to cooperate in caring for a class pet, so now she was sure the hamster would be all right when she brought it to school.

When the hamster came to class, they decided to give it a name. At first it seemed as if the name would be "Ham," since it was a hamster, but Uto-sensei said, "That's not very imaginative!" So the students thought some more, and finally chose the name "Jan," because he was a ジャンガリアン (Dzungarian) hamster.

There was a lot to learn about taking care of a hamster. After putting Jan into the cage that had been prepared, he got his tiny foot caught in the bars on the floor of the cage. They quickly laid down layers of newspaper. At first, classmates who had experience taking care of hamsters were appointed "Jan leaders," and they took charge of his daily care, putting in new feed, changing the water supply, and cleaning the cage. The other students watched how they did it, and after everyone had learned what to do, it was decided to make taking care of the hamster part of the duties of the *nitchoku* (日直 class day-leaders).<sup>4</sup> On weekends, the students took turns taking the hamster home, and they made a journal, called the "Jan Notebook" to record how Jan was when they were tak-

ing care of him. The students' mothers were all very cooperative, and they even formed the "Jan's Moms Club."

At first, Keita, who had once had a hamster, bought a box of hamster food for Jan and brought it to school. But that posed a problem the students had to think about. Uto-sensei looked at the box and saw that the price was ¥800. "That's expensive. Do we expect Keita to keep on paying that much for the hamster food?" The class had another meeting and the students suggested various ways of paying for Jan's food like selling their books to a second-hand bookstore, sharing money from their allowances, and collecting stamps to sell to collectors, but it turned out to be difficult to agree on what to do, and the days went rapidly past. Nana and her classmates began to worry about what would happen if Jan's food ran out.

Around that time, Minoru brought to school the skin shed by a snake and the class decided to display it in the classroom. The students began to tell about their own special treasures—rock crystals, pretty stones, antique coins, fossils and such. These stories ended up providing the hint to the solution of Jan's food fund. Each student would bring one of his or her treasures to school, look up information about it, and they prepare a display of the items with explanations as a mini-mini museum (博物館). They invited their school friends, teachers, and parents to come to their museum and show them through the exhibits. By charging 10 yen a person, they could raise money for Jan's food.

Jan became a regular member of the class. He even cooperated in the fund-raising campaign. He sat in his cage at the entrance to the museum wearing a sign around his neck that said: "Donations Please," and many visitors contributed. Hamsters are nocturnal creatures, but Jan gradually began to stay awake in the daytime, often energetically spinning his exercise wheel while classes were in session.



1. クラス: Students in each grade at Japanese elementary schools are divided into one or more classes, called "kumi" (like Nana's Yo-nen, Ichi-kumi), and except for classes like music and science, that are held in separate classrooms, they have all their classes in the same classroom taught by their homeroom teacher. Classes are made up of 40 students or less, about an equal number of girls and boys. Class discussion meetings (*gakkyūkai*) or long homerooms are held about once a week at which students discuss class matters and plan and conduct various activities.
2. The Japanese school year begins in April and ends in March. Most schools operate on a three-term system, the first term lasting from April to July, the second term from September to December, and the third term from

- January to the end of March, but there are some differences from one region of the country to another.
3. Each year of the six years of elementary school, the members of the classes in each grade are shuffled. The procedures and timing of class reshuffling differs from one school to another. At Nana's school, the members of each class and the teacher changes at the beginning of third grade and the beginning of fifth grade.
4. 日直: Two at a time the students in each class take turns daily taking charge of regular class tasks. The 日直 pair is responsible for taking roll, leading the morning assembly, giving various announcements to the class, and keeping the class journal (*gakkyū nisshi* 学級日誌).

11	12	1	2	3
-16-17 学芸会 Performing arts festival	-25 終業式 冬休み Ceremony marking last day of classes, Winter break begins	-8 始業式 3学期 Third term begins, commencement ceremony	-22 ミニ音楽会 Mini concert	-22 修了式 Ceremony marking the last day of the school year
		-15-19 書初め展 Kakizome exhibit of New Year's calligraphy homework	-20 大掃除 All-school cleaning day	-25 卒業式 春休み Graduation, Spring break begins
Second term		Winter break	Third term	
			Spring break	

## Goodbye, Jan

さようなら、ジャン



Winter came. The students who would take turns taking Jan home during winter break were decided, and it was not long until classes would come to an end. Then one day, when the class came back from physical education class, they discovered that Jan wasn't moving anymore. Thinking that maybe he

would come back to life, during the following third and fourth periods, they tried to warm him up. Nana thought to herself, "You were so full of energy when we went out to gym class; please, please come back to life!" But during the lunch hour, they got the science teacher to examine him, and he confirmed that Jan was dead. Nana felt very sad and others in the class were crying. Uto-sensei didn't bother starting after-lunch classes, but just let the children mourn poor little Jan. Nana thought to herself, "Maybe Jan knew that if he died when he was being taken care of during the winter break, that person would feel responsible, so he decided to die before the holiday began."

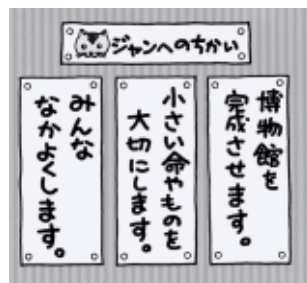
The class discussed what kind of funeral to hold for Jan. Everyone wanted to send him off to a happy life in heaven. The class built a small altar, made mourning badges, and decorated the altar with offerings. They even made a black-and-white striped curtain to hang up around the room. They darkened the classroom and in their own way held a wake and an *o-sōshiki* (お葬式 funeral)<sup>5</sup>. Along with all the other students, Nana put her hands together in prayer in front of the little altar. She whispered to the spirit of Jan: "It was so much fun being with you, Jan. Thank you!" Her classmates laid letters and sunflower seeds for Jan on the altar. After that, they made a grave for Jan in one corner of

the school garden and buried him there. Ami had brought a bouquet of chrysanthemums, and they pulled off the petals to make a soft bed for Jan in the grave. They each said farewell to Jan, putting one scoop of earth into the grave. Nana felt very sad, but as she watched her classmates making the grave and sending off Jan to the other life, she thought to herself that Jan was lucky to have so many caring friends.

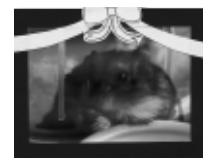
After Jan was buried, the students of Yo-nen, Ichi-kumi agreed to make a list of pledges that they thought would make Jan happy in heaven and posted it on the bulletin board.

Pledges to Jan:

- We will complete our Museum
- We will treasure life and all things, no matter how small
- We will learn to get along with each other



Nana often looks at the photograph of Jan she has at home and wonders what Jan is doing now. Sometimes she goes to visit Jan's grave in the school garden. Before, she hadn't really liked animals, but after getting to know Jan, she had gotten comfortable with him and gotten quite fond of him. She still didn't really love animals, but she thought that once she got used to a pet, she would love and cherish it. Jan had taught her, she thought, how it feels to care about living things.



<sup>5</sup> 葬式: Most funerals in Japan are held according to Buddhist tradition. The usual Buddhist-style funeral consists of a *tsuya* (通夜 wake) held through the night by close relatives of the deceased and a formal religious ceremony and farewell ritual held the day following the wake. A curtain with broad black and white vertical stripes is usually hung around the hall in which Buddhist funeral services are held. Chrysanthemums are the flowers most commonly used for decoration at funerals.

The illustration shows the altar as the children actually arranged it. They added the cross, although it doesn't have anything to do with Buddhism.

## Classroom Activities

1. Choose the words from the choices below that fit in the parentheses. (Answers on following page.)

- ① お母さんの友だちのハムスターが( )を産みました。
- ② 菜々は、このハムスターをクラスの( )にしたいと思いました。
- ③ 学校で、先生とクラスの( )に話しました。
- ④ ハムスターに( )という名前をつけました。
- ⑤ ( )の日は、交代で世話をしました。
- ⑥ ミニミニ( )をつくって、その入場料でえさ代を払いました。
- ⑦ ( )、ジャンは死んでしまいました。
- ⑧ みんなで( )をしました。

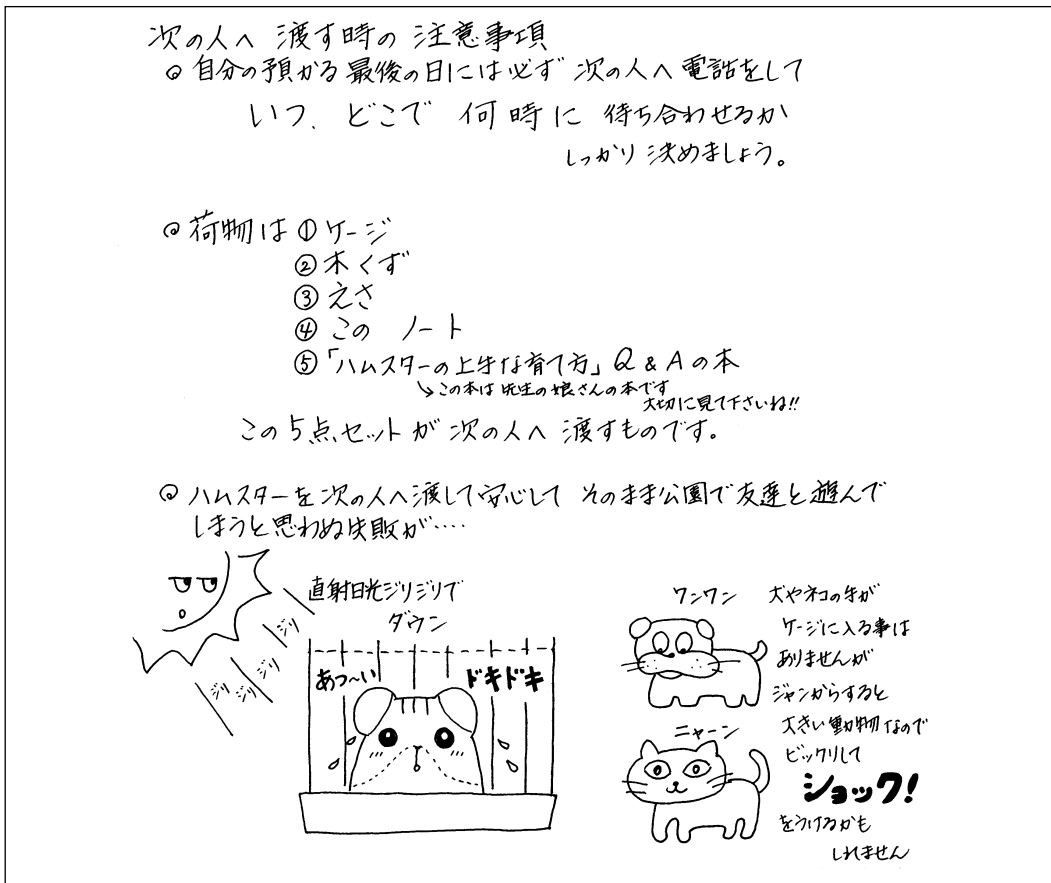
ジャン	休み	赤ちゃん
お葬式	ペット	冬
博物館	友だち	

### Hint

- ① Mother's friend's hamster had babies.
- ② Nana thought it would be nice to make this hamster their class pet.
- ③ At school, she told her teacher and the class about the hamster.
- ④ They gave the hamster the name Jan.
- ⑤ On holidays, they took turns taking care of Jan.
- ⑥ They made a mini-mini museum, and the admittance fee to the museum paid for Jan's food.
- ⑦ When winter came, Jan died.
- ⑧ Together, the children held a funeral.

2. The following is a page from the "Jan Notebook." Here the mother of the person who took care of Jan wrote some

notes for the next person to take care of the hamster. Try to imagine what kinds of things are written in the notebook.



[To the teacher: You may want to make an assignment to the students, based on this page, asking them to call a classmate and arrange a time and place to meet and hand over Jan. For the translation of this page, see the box below.]

3. Let's have a discussion on the theme of pets.

**Points**

- \* Types of pets
- \* Taking care of pets (what kinds of care are needed; what you have to be careful of)
- \* Reasons for having pets; for not having pets
- \* Robot pets
- \* Relationships between pets and humans

If there were someone or some members of your class who wanted to have a pet, how would you decide? What kinds of things would be a problem. How would you resolve the problems?

Are there differences in the problems your class talked about and the problems Nana's class discussed? If they were different, why do you think they were different?

Answers for Classroom Activity 1: ①赤ちゃん ②ペット ③友だち ④ジャン ⑤休み  
 ⑥博物館 ⑦冬 ⑧お葬式

**Translation of page from the "Jan Notebook":**

Handing Jan over to the next person to take care of him  
 \* On the last day of your turn taking care of Jan, be sure to call up the next person and clearly decide, when, where, and at what time you will meet.  
 \* Items: Hand over to the next person the 5 items: 1. Jan in his cage, 2. the bedding supply, 3. food, 4. this notebook, 5. the *Hamusutā no jōzu na sodate-*

**Vocabulary**

ハムスター	hamster
動物	animal
犬	dog
ねこ	cat
ペット	pet
家族	family
飼う(飼います)	keep [a pet]
夏休み/冬休み	summer vacation/winter vacation
世話を(します)	care (take care of)
えさ	pet food
死ぬ(死にます)	die
生まれる(生まれます)	born

For reference information to support the discussion, see the following topics in the PDF edition of the newsletter on the TJF Website at <http://www.tjf.or.jp/eng/ce/ce04nletter.htm>. ➡ Pet Statistics, Problems with Pet Care, Laws: Revision of the "Law on Protection and Care of Animals," Robot Pet

kata Q&A [Q&A for Good Care of Hamsters] book.  
 \* After you hand Jan over to the next person, don't make the mistake of putting the hamster down and playing in the park before he or she takes Jan home. Something terrible could happen. . .  
 [Jan could get sick from being left out in the hot rays of the direct sun and he could die of fright.]  
 [Dogs and cats can't get their paws through the bars of the cage, but they are big animals and getting a fright could be a dangerous shock to Jan.]