

What We Have Gained, What We Have Lost

Akane (Second-year high school student, Chiba)

Izuho (First-year university student, Tokyo)

Lisa (Second-year high school student, U.S.)

Reported by Karino Ayako



Akane

I got my first cell phone when I entered junior high school. My school was rather far away from home, so my parents gave it to me because they were worried about my safety. My parents pay my phone bill, which is about 5,000 yen a month.



Izuho

I received a cell phone as a present from my parents at the end of junior high school, when I passed the entrance exam to the high school I wanted to go to. The cell phone I'm using now is my fourth. When I was in high school, the charges on my phone were about 8,000 yen a month, and my parents paid for it. Now, if I use more than 8,000 yen, I have to cover the rest with my own money from working part-time jobs.



Lisa

I'm here in Japan since September last year as an exchange student. I've had a cell phone since I was in my third year of junior high. In the U.S., my parents gave me a prepaid card worth around 10,000 yen for one year's use. Here in Japan, my cell phone bill is about 3,000 yen a month.

 You can listen to their voices and read their self-introduction in easy Japanese.

Q: Do you always have your cell phone with you? Which functions do you use most often?

Izuho: I have my cell phone with me most of the time, even when I go in to soak in the bath. I really like the way the sound echoes in the bath (laughter). The function I use the most is voice phoning, because I think you can get across your feelings more accurately if you phone than by just sending text. I also like using the other functions of cell phones, like games and the scheduler. At the moment, I'm really devoted to my phone's GPS tracking system! I found my way here by GPS today, in fact!

Akane: I take my cell phone to school everyday, but I switch it off until after school. I don't have it with me all the time when I'm at home either. I phone, text, and occasionally take photos. I also use it for checking train timetables and finding out when movies are showing and so on.

Today, cell phones have become an essential item for high school students, among whom ownership is as high as 96 percent. But not all students use their phones in the same way. Three students, Akane, Izuho, and Lisa, gathered to talk about their cell phones and how they use them.

Lisa: Sometimes I take my cell phone to school, sometimes I don't. To me private time is important. I don't like it when people think they can get hold of me just any time they please. In the States my father drives me to school, so I use my cell phone to call Dad to come and pick me up after school.

Q: How often do you text? Do you reply to your messages immediately?

Akane: I'm very slow at writing text, so I don't often send it to my friends. I sometimes exchange text with members of my family. My father sends all his text in hiragana. He sends messages like, "きょうのがっこう、どうだった?" (How was school today?) He's late coming home from work, so I don't have much time to talk to him, you see. I think he writes these messages on his way home. Meanwhile, my little sister sometimes sends me messages like, "おねえちゃん、大好きだよ!" (I love you, O-Nee-chan!) A little embarrassing, yes, but it makes me happy.

Lisa: I only send text about three times a day, too. I try to respond to text messages as soon as I can, but sometimes I can't. On such occasions, I hear a lot of my Japanese friends demand, "Why didn't you reply?" But my American friends aren't like that.

Q: Do you use *emoji* (emoticons) or any other special characters?

Izuho: My friends use a lot of *emoji*, but I don't. I don't feel like myself when I use them. So sometimes my friends misunderstand me and ask, "Are you angry?"

Akane: Once when I sent a message without any *emoji*, I got



Talking about the advantages and disadvantages of cell phones made these three students think again about something they have come to take for granted.

a reply saying, “Are you joking? Or are you serious?” Since then, I add an *emoji* when I want to make sure they know I’m joking around.

Lisa: In English texts, we often use emoticons and shorten words, like “because” to “cuz.” We drop the vowels or misspell words on purpose—like “vry” for “very,” “skool” for “school,” and “4ever” for “forever.” That’s the cool thing to do.

Q: What do you think are the disadvantages of cell phones?

Lisa: One thing I really dislike about cell phones is how some people talk loudly on them. In the U.S., people often forget to turn off their cell phone in church, in the library, or at concerts. In fact, one actor walked out of the theater after three cell phones rang during his performance.

Akane: On the trains here some people get so immersed in their cell phones, either texting or playing games, that they don’t realize they’re occupying two seats, although there are people who want to sit down. I think people’s cell phones can make them less considerate of other people.

Izuho: One of the greatest disadvantages of cell phones is that there’s a tendency to become dependent upon them. I hate it when we’re out eating and talking together and a friend fiddles with his or her cell phone the whole time. Still, maybe I can’t talk; I rely so heavily on the conveniences of my cell phone. So here I am, a guy who can’t let go of his cell phone because of its amazing functions! (laughter)

Akane: A lot of people run a blog or personal profile site from their cell phone. I hear about people who post their portraits on their profiles or who actually go and see people they meet via their blog, but I think such things are pretty risky.

Izuho: If it’s anonymous, I’d write anything freely. It gives you great freedom, but at the same I think it’s very dangerous. Once a friend of mine had nasty things written about him on his profile page and it really stressed him out. You can’t guess the tone of a message when it’s just written in words, and it can make the reader imagine all kinds of things.

Q: What would you do if you couldn’t use your cell phone from tomorrow?

Lisa: It’d make me a little afraid to be on the streets at night. Once at night in Shibuya there was a man who followed me for about 10 minutes. I immediately called a friend and stayed on the line. It reassured me.

Izuho: I think the hardest thing is that I couldn’t just call up someone right away, even if he or she is far away, if I didn’t have a cell phone.

Akane: Life would be a lot less convenient, but I don’t think my life would change that much. But it would be a shame if I can’t send text to a friend when I want to ask them something I need to know. For instance, at night when you can’t call using your home phone, if you have a cell phone you can just send text to ask an urgent question.

Izuho: But I also think many good things might happen if we didn’t have cell phones. To begin with, we would be talking more to people. For example, if we couldn’t rely on the phone’s GPS, we’d be asking people for directions.

Lisa: I think we’d become more responsible if there were no cell phones. For example, when we’re meeting friends, we would be sure to find out where we’re going to meet in advance and leave home early in order not to be late.

Akane: I sometimes hear about people who get all worried when somebody doesn’t reply right away to their text message, or people who are left out of the loop in their circle of friends because of cell phones. Maybe, if we didn’t have cell phones, relationships between people would be better.

Lisa: In the end, I think if each person keeps a mind of his or her own and doesn’t overuse cell phones, they can be a lot of fun.



Cell phones show the personality of their owners—some simple and clean, others pasted with their favorite print-club stickers, their straps dangling accessories.

My favorites



好きなことば (favorite phrase)

Akane: ありがとう Thank you.

Izuho: 今を生きる Living in the now.

Lisa: Smile often.

好きな色 (favorite color)

Akane: エメラルドグリーン。海の色だから。
Emerald green, because it’s the color of the sea.

Izuho: 紫。なぜか、小さい頃から好きでした。
I don’t know why, but I have liked purple since I was a child.

Lisa: 薄いピンク色。美しい桜の花を思い出させてくれるから。
Pale pink. It reminds me of beautiful cherry blossoms.

今、熱中していること (current passion)

Akane: 映画を観て、その原作を読むこと。
I enjoy watching films and reading the original stories they are based on.

Izuho: 日本舞踊 Japanese traditional dance.

Lisa: 日本語の勉強 Learning Japanese.