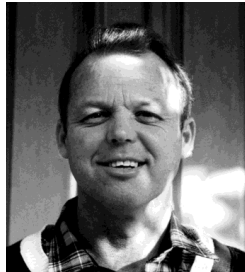




# Japanese Family Life

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**Ages:** 11–13 years old  
**Level:** Beginning  
**Culture:** Interpersonal relationships; family life in Japan  
**Japanese:** Names of family members (*Kimono*, Book 1, Unit 3)



## Objectives

This lesson, which forms the pivotal part of a series of lessons, is built around the theme of Japanese family life. How one refers to one's own family as well as the members of someone else's family are critical issues in the culturally correct use of Japanese and, as such, form the basis of this lesson.

The students are introduced to the idea that "family" and "families," as they occur in the Japanese culture, may be significantly different from those experienced by the mainly European-derived families within the class. For the Asian students, they may recognize many similarities. The average "Aussie" student will learn of the formality which occurs both within families and between families. Australian children from European-Anglo-Saxon backgrounds would have little concept of position within the family and the use of titles rather than names within families. By having the students make up mock families, they can see and interact with, as well as read about, the differences that exist between families in Japan and families in Australia. The requirement in these activities that students continually distinguish between formal and familiar terminology serves to deepen their cultural understanding.

## Materials and Procedure

The theme of Japanese family life was used in the teaching of Japanese at three levels, Years 7, 8 and 9. The students from each level contributed to the final "lesson."

1. Regular lesson commencement: greetings and roll marking.
2. Talk about the theme of families and outline to students the nature of the day's two activities, the purpose of each activity, and the sequence of the lesson. The students are also given some idea of what they may get out of the lesson if they fully participate. The students are then given instructions about setting up the room and forming two teams.
3. Students prepare the room (see Figure 1).
4. Game 1—Find the Family Member Race
  - a. Materials: "Hats," made in a previous class by students in Year 7, carry the various family titles used in the games. Members of the "familiar" family include *ojiisan*, *otōsan*, etc. Members of "formal" family include *chichi*, *otōto*, etc.
  - b. Rules
    - 1) Set up two even teams, assign appropriate Japanese names.
    - 2) One team wears the hats of the "familiar" family; the other team wears the hats of the "formal" family.
    - 3) One un-hatted team member from each team stands at the front.
    - 4) When the teacher, or nominated student, announces a family member, e.g. father, each student must then seek out the student wearing the appropriate hat on the opposite team. The

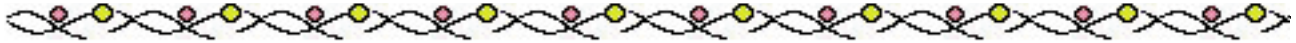
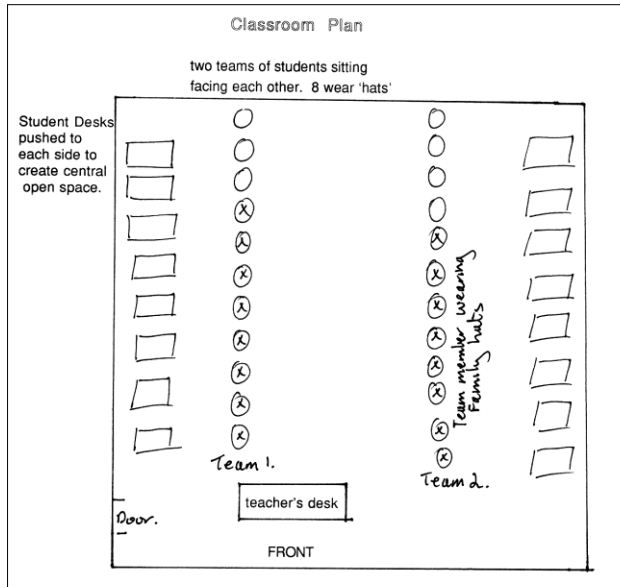


Figure 1



winner is the first person to find that hat and to correctly say aloud the corresponding Japanese title.

- 5) Points are assigned for correct findings and readings. Before the next team member has his or her turn, the hats are moved amongst the team to prevent students memorizing location rather than the word. A small reward may be presented to the winning team after an appropriate number of turns.

## 5. Game 2—Cultural Cards and Families

### a. Materials (see Figure 2)

- 1) The students in Year 9 researched texts on family life and produced cards containing cultural notes and the specific instructions for this game.
- 2) Side One
  - a) A cultural note on some aspect of family life.
  - b) An instruction to the student to either:
    - find a member of a family
    - create a sentence giving some fact about a family member
    - create a sentence that makes a request of a family member using both formal and familiar speech

### 3) Side Two:

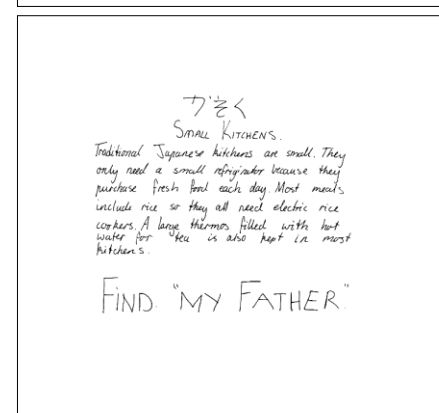
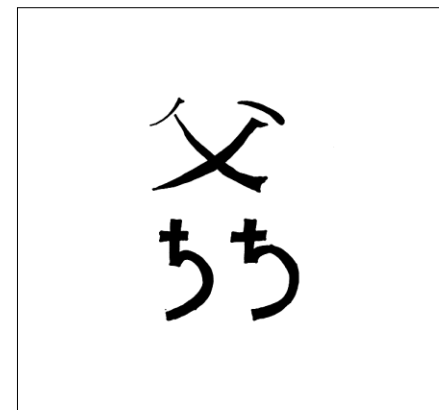
Contains a suggested response to the instruction on Side One.

### b. Rules

- 1) Same basic setting as for Game 1. This game is not a race, but the length of a "turn" is time-limited. Cultural cards are placed on the teacher's desk or some central location.
- 2) One student from each team, in turn, comes out to the table containing the cards; picks up the top card, without turning it over, reads the cultural note to the class and then attempts to carry out the instruction. Carrying out the instruction correctly, in a set time frame, earns that player's team a point. Teams take turns at attempting to complete the tasks. Again winning teams may be rewarded at the teacher's discretion.
- 3) This game will need to finish in sufficient time to allow for review of the games with the students:

Figure 2

An example of a culture card, side one and side two





- a) what was learned
- b) what needs to be worked on
- c) gather students ideas on "improving" or modifying the games
- d) setting follow-up work; maybe a report on Japanese family life or some aspect of it, a vocabulary test, an introduction to the student's own family

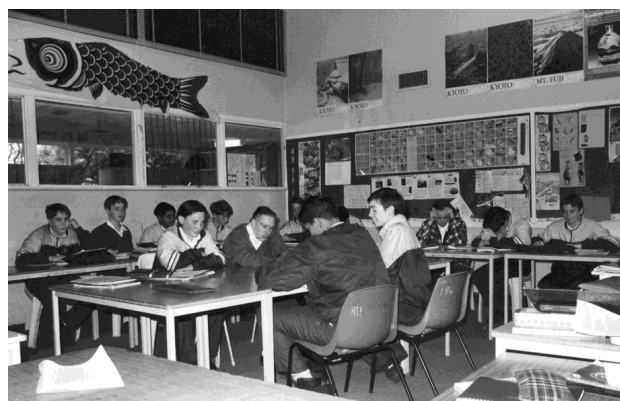
6. Lesson Close: Room returned to normal; formal close in Japanese manner

The integrating of the "cultural" notes on families along with the constant need to identify formal and familiar context will, it is hoped, lead the students to be inquisitive about Japanese families. In follow-up lessons time will be given for discussion of what was heard in this lesson. There will also be opportunities to further their knowledge and understanding through assignments and reports.

### Culture and the Foreign Language Class

This aspect of culture, Japanese family life, was selected for this approach because of its direct relevance to the lives of all students. Each student is (usually) situated in a family of some description, and thus there is a direct point of contact in the student's own life with this topic. Students naturally want to know about the families of those they meet, especially the exotic and different, and they like to compare them to their own family situation. For these reasons it was felt that "family life" would provide a stimulating theme across a number of levels and assist in the building of interest in the study of the Japanese language. Also, a number of our students spend some time in Japan studying at our sister school and living with host families. Therefore a culturally complete understanding of communications within Japanese families is of direct practical significance for many.

A language is embedded within a culture. In order to truly communicate in a foreign language, knowing the structure and vocabulary of the language is not sufficient. One must have a fully developed and sympathetic appreciation of the cultural



framework within which the language resides and from which the persons with whom you wish to communicate come.

This influence of the cultural context goes well beyond differences in grammatical form. It extends into contextual appropriateness of which words to use, in what form, and even whether or not it is appropriate to say such a thing to that person. The importance of cultural understanding extends beyond the use of written and spoken language to the implicit language of gesture. It is with the language of gesture that one can often find oneself in the most difficult of situations.

Knowing the vocabulary and the grammar gives us the tools of language; application of cultural understanding gives us the rules which govern how and when we use those tools. For these reasons it is imperative that foreign language education be seen as a dual process. One part is to have the student accumulate the "facts" of the language: the vocabulary and the grammar. The second part is to imbue the student with a sympathetic feeling for the culture of the people.

The integrating of the cultural notes on families, along with the constant need to identify formal and familiar context will, it is hoped, lead students to be inquisitive about Japanese families. In follow-up lessons, time is given for discussion of what was heard in this lesson. There are also opportunities to further their knowledge and understanding through assignments and reports.

## Comments from the Feedback Committee

### Language Learning

The cultural connection between family structure and roles, as reflected in the labels given to family members, is well articulated in Mr. Mullin's lesson. The games keep student interest high while giving them good practice at switching back and forth between forms.

Once students are familiar with these forms, the next step is to consider in what situations one can naturally use them. As indicated below, students can first introduce their own families. In this case, students must use words such as *chichi*, *sobo*, and *imōto*.

私の父の名前は\_\_\_\_です。

My father [*chichi*] 's name is \_\_\_\_.

私の祖母は\_\_\_\_に住んでいます。

My grandmother [*sobo*] lives in \_\_\_\_.

僕の妹は\_\_\_\_歳です。

My little sister [*imōto*] is \_\_\_\_ years old.

Next, students can converse with each other. In the following two-line conversations, both forms appear very naturally.

あなたのお父さんは何歳ですか？

How old is your father [*otōsan*]?

私の父は45才です。

My father [*chichi*] is 45 years old.

あなたの弟さんの名前は何かですか？

What is your little brother [*otōtosan*] 's name?

私の弟の名前はマイクといいます。

My little brother [*otōto*] is named Michael.

It is important to set up a situation in which words can be introduced naturally. Japanese people might introduce and converse about their families in exactly these terms. There is nothing unnatural about how these words are used; the situations are authentic. It is very important to introduce Japanese in as natural a form as possible to students. Depending on the level of the students, the teacher can use these kinds of fam-

ily introductions and conversations to introduce new sentence patterns and vocabulary.

If one's students will be doing homestays in Japan, the goal of one lesson could be to introduce one's family in Japanese. With such a goal in mind, it will be clear to the students why they are learning to distinguish the usage of *chichi* and *otōsan*, and they will be motivated to do so. The teacher could set up situations where they imagine themselves in Japan and, for instance, are introducing themselves or are having a conversation with their host family. In this way too, the classroom can go beyond learning Japanese and will allow students to see how language can be used for communication.

Another activity could be to have students introduce their families not only in the classroom, but also in letters or on video tape to send, for example, to their sister school. This way they will actually be using their language skills. Producing letters and videos will give them a comprehensive learning experience that includes writing and speaking activities.

### Resources

1. *Nihon o Kataru: Talking about Japan*, Chapter 40 "Jikoshōkai to Aite no Yobikata (How Japanese Introduce Themselves and Address Others)".
2. I recommend the TV program *Sazae-san* for students to familiarize themselves with how family members address each other. This cartoon features a typical Japanese family, and words for grandparents, parents, siblings, and cousins appear very naturally. It is also a good resource for learning about the look of a Japanese household, the way the house is built, everyday life, school life, and more.