



# THE CALENDAR

## —Gateway to a Rich Cultural Heritage—

The calendar is a gateway to events that have provided the very roots of civilization, events that have been and continue to be major contributing factors in the continuing development of human behavior. A study of festivals and other events provides valuable insight into Japan's deep-rooted cultural background. I believe that the introduction of some of these events, particularly those involving children, during the teaching of the names of the months has considerable merit. The objective is to give the children a glimpse of this fascinating aspect of Japanese life as they go about their task of learning the language.



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## OBJECTIVES

### LANGUAGE OBJECTIVES

- To name the months of the year
- To ask and tell others their month of birth (birthday)
- To connect events—some Australian, some Japanese—to months or year

TARGET FUNCTIONS	TARGET EXPRESSIONS	TARGET VOCABULARY
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>❖ Ultimately being able to say the date in Japanese</li> <li>❖ Name months of year and connect months with birthdays and cultural events</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>❖ AはBですか</li> <li>❖ AはBです</li> <li>❖ Januaryはなんがつですか</li> <li>❖ Januaryはいちがつです</li> <li>❖ たんじょうびはしちがつです</li> <li>❖ うんどうかいはいくがつですか</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>❖ 1がつ～12がつ, たんじょうび, なんがつ, あめ</li> <li>❖ Festivals and other events おしょうがつ, せつぶん, ひなまつり, にゅうがくしき, こどものひ, てるてるぼうず, たなばた, おまつり, うんどうかい, はっぴょうかい, しちごさん, クリスマス</li> </ul>

### CULTURAL OBJECTIVES

- To describe some cultural events that occur in Japan during the year
- To compare these activities with their counterparts (if any) in Australia
- To understand that there are similarities and differences between cultures and to learn to understand the other's point of view

## SOURCE MATERIALS

Twelve cards,  
each bearing the name of a month in English

Two cards,

one for the word *たんじょうび*, the other for *なんがつ*

One set of twelve A4 (or similar) size cards  
on each of which an event

for a particular month is illustrated

One set of twelve small cards (four cut from A4 size)  
for every two members in the class

- ❖ The illustrations may be photographs from travel magazines, brochures or other reference material, or simple drawings of those events based on some suitable reference material such as *Japan: An Illustrated Encyclopedia* (Kodansha), *Moons, Months and Seasons: A Pre-Intermediate Japanese Reader* (Kyobundoh), *Hello Japanese for Boys and Girls* (International Internship Programs).
- ❖ Chieko Jones's pictures for the months January through December are attached. You can use them in creating your own cards (see Handout #2).

## PROCEDURE

### Preparation

- Twelve A4 size cards on each of which an event for a particular month is illustrated. Attached to the bottom of each month's illustration but folded under initially to conceal it from view is the name of the event or item depicted, in Japanese (hiragana).
- Twelve small cards (four cut from A4 size) for every two members in the class. These cards contain the same illustrations as in A4 size cards, in color on the front and in black and white on the reverse (to differentiate between front and back when playing games). Space is left at the top and bottom of each illustration for wording. Written on the front at the top is the month of the year in English and at the bottom the name of the event in Japanese (hiragana). On the reverse side at the top is the month of the year in Japanese (hiragana) and at the bottom the event in English or romaji, as appropriate.

1. Lesson commences with the customary greetings and introductions, then progresses to a short revision of the subject matter from the previous lesson, which included the names of the days of the week. For this revision teacher starts by asking *きょうはなんようびですか* and writes the correct response on the board. This question leads to *あしたはなんようびですか* and *きのうはなんようびでしたか*. Further

discussion results from asking *きのうはなにをしましたか*.

2. Teacher produces a card on which the word *たんじょうび* has been written. This is shown to the children who read the word aloud. Teacher asks for the meaning of the word. If no one knows the teacher explains the meaning—birthday. In a similar fashion the teacher then shows the card with *なんがつ* on it. The cards are placed on the board and, with chalk or pen notations the teacher forms the question *たんじょうびはなんがつですか*. The children quickly respond.

As each child tells the teacher the month in which he or she was born in English because they have yet to learn the Japanese name, the teacher produces a card with the name of that month in English and places it on the board, making a line of words in their calendar order.

3. When months are missing from the board, children are asked to say which months are missing. As they do the teacher places their cards on the board in the appropriate positions.
4. Teacher asks children how many months there are in the year and the children count them in Japanese, as the teacher writes the number under each month. Teacher draws children's attention once again to the card *なんがつ* asking the meaning and emphasizing that *がつ* means month. Teacher then explains that by adding *がつ* to the numerals we get the Japanese names for the months. This is carried out on the board and a short quiz follows asking such questions as "January *はなんがつですか*."
5. Children now respond to the teacher's question *たんじょうびはなんがつですか*, this time in Japanese. For example: (わたしの) *たんじょうびはしちがつです*.
6. Teacher produces pictures of activities or items associated with an event and asks the children to describe the activity and to name the event in which the activity takes place (in English). Some will be readily known or guessed (for example, Christmas, sports day, school entrance day). Others will need explanation after the guessing stops. The name of each event in Japanese is revealed by unfolding the bottom portion of the card. Teacher tells the month of the year that the event takes place. Pictures are placed at random on the board.
7. Teacher asks each child in turn to come to the front and select a picture and to place the picture

under its month on the board after first asking, for example, クリスマスはなんがつですか and receiving the answer (クリスマスはじゅうにがつです).

8. When all months have been completed, teacher asks such questions as こどものひはなんがつですか making use of the small playing cards. (Teachers with larger classes may need larger cards for this exercise.) Answers are checked by turning over the cards. This prepares children for the card game which follows.

9. Children are divided into groups of two and each pair is given a set of cards. After deciding who goes first (by *janken*) they take it in turn to quiz each other on the names of months and events. The children being quizzed make their choice from the cards spread out before them. The answer is checked from the reverse side of the cards and if correct, the card is withdrawn from the pack. If incorrect the card remains on the table. The game continues until all questions have been correctly answered.

#### 10. Review

Game over, teacher reviews the names of the months and events as children write them in their notebooks at the end of which the lesson ends.

#### 11. Evaluation

All the children enjoy telling the months in which their birthdays fall. They also show interest in hearing about the events that happen during their birthday month. For further evaluation children are asked, as homework, to write in Japanese the answer to たんじょうびはなんがつですか and to name the event that we have discussed for that particular month. They are encouraged to illustrate their answers with the activity described in class.

#### Note

- In the next lesson a change of class activity takes place: children produce their own monthly calendar. They do this by coloring in an outline drawing of an event on a pre-printed sheet, add the name of the month (in Japanese), the name of the event being depicted for that month and the names of the weekdays. Numbers can be printed small as a guide for children to know where to write the numbers for the days of the week.

\* The basic form for the calendar is attached (see Handout #1).

### Suggestions of activity/event and illustrations appropriate to each month

<b>January</b> .....お正月 (New Year), かがみもち, かきぞめ, and かどまつ: Each being symbols of New Year	<b>July</b> .....たなばた (Stars' Festival): Woman and child tying colored strips of paper to bamboo for good luck
<b>February</b> ....せつぶん (Bean-throwing Ceremony): Boy throwing roasted soy beans at man wearing a demon mask	<b>August</b> .....おまつり (Festivals): Woman in ゆかた and child in はっぴ coat dancing in festival mood
<b>March</b> .....ひなまつり (Dolls' Festival): Emperor and empress from ancient times seated in front of screen	<b>September</b> ....うんどうかい (Sports Day): Girl running and boy kicking ball
<b>April</b> .....にゅうがくしき (School Entrance Ceremony): Boy and girl neatly dressed for their first day at school	<b>October</b> .....はっぴょうかい (Demonstration Concert): Children enacting play on stage
<b>May</b> .....こどものひ (Children's Day): Boy wearing paper かぶと with こいのぼり in the background	<b>November</b> .....しち・ご・さん (7-5-3): Seven-year-old girl, five-year-old boy, and three-year-old girl all in traditional dress, red torii (a Shinto shrine gate) in background
<b>June</b> .....てるてるぼうず (Fine-weather Doll): A simple lucky charm doll	<b>December</b> .....クリスマス (Christmas): Santa Clause, reindeer and Christmas tree

## REMARKS

## The Calendar is a Gateway to a Rich Cultural Heritage

The calendar is a veritable gateway to history and culture. By using it the way I described, teachers can introduce their students to regular events and activities that have influenced and continue to play a large role in the daily lives of Japanese people and their relationships one with the other.

Some festivals are synchronized with the seasons, the spring and autumn *matsuri* being perhaps the most familiar ones in this regard. Originally the spring *matsuri* were celebrated not only because of the beautiful blossoms that cover the countryside during that season but also and primarily to request the gods to provide a rich harvest (especially with rice, the staple of the diet). The autumn *matsuri* served as thanksgiving to the deities for the harvest.

These days most *matsuri* are for fun and relaxation, especially for people in the larger cities, although some of the activities connected with these *matsuri* can at times be quite strenuous. In many of these events their origins are not entirely lost.

Something we should consider is that some of these events have come into Japanese culture by way of Asian neighbors. Chinese culture, for example, has played a large part. Not only were kanji imported

from China for Japan's own writing system but also many other aspects of culture that we might think of as uniquely Japanese might well have come from China or other nearby countries. A good example of this is the *eto* system of naming a year after an animal. This, too, had its origin in China. Of course there are many events that are purely Japanese in origin.

In the same way that Australia, with its multi-cultural society, is experiencing cultural changes, so too has Japan's culture been influenced by its neighbors and trading partners. This will continue because culture does not remain static; it is forever evolving.

Care must of course be taken when choosing events for each month. Ideally each event should:

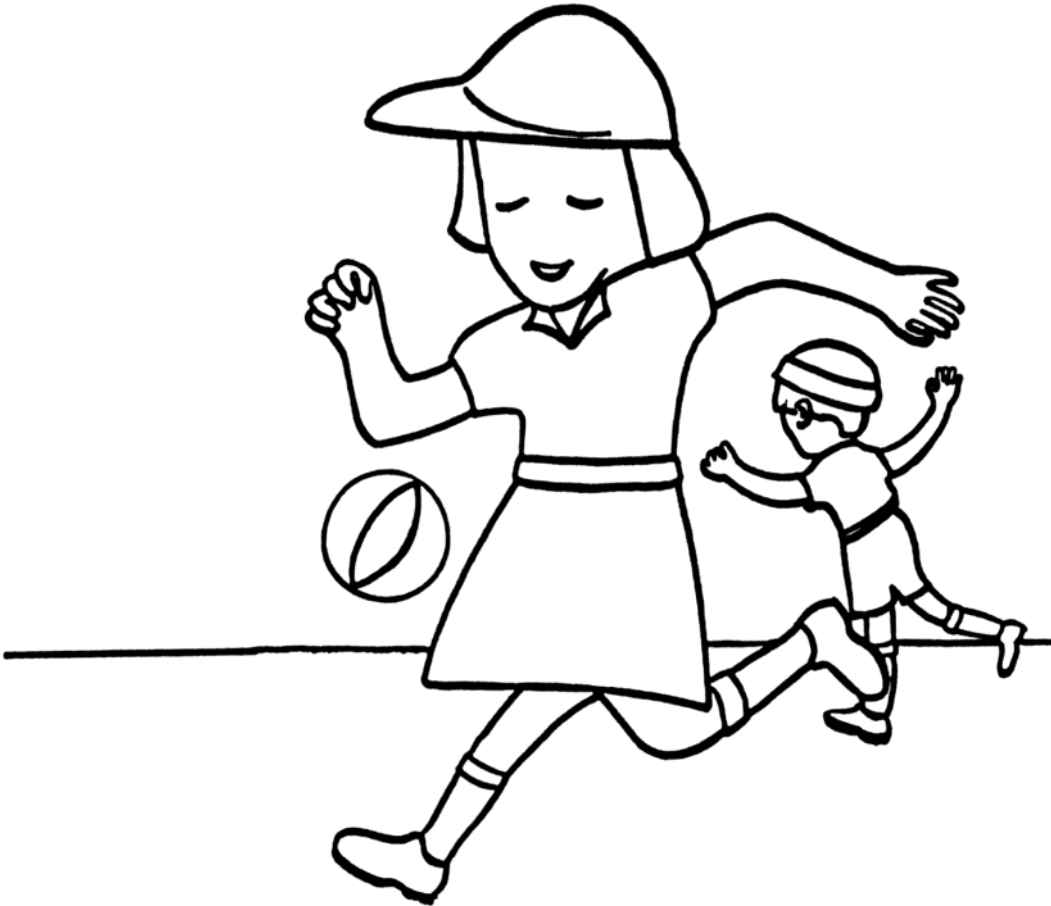
- be suitable for the age level of students in the class
- be one to which the children can readily relate
- be one that can capture the students' attention
- be one that can stimulate the students' imagination
- be bright and colorful

In addition, the events chosen should provide a reasonably even balance when it comes to pointing out differences and similarities between our two cultures.

## COMMENTS

It is important to expose students to hiragana from an early point during first grade. In that sense, this lesson plan, with its cards written in hiragana, should be effective. One further suggestion might be to introduce some kanji, such as the kanji for the numbers (一, 二, 三, 四, 五, 六, 七, 八, 九, 十) and the days of the week (日, 月, 火, 水, 木, 金, 土). It is not necessary to think that kanji should only be introduced after hiragana have been mastered, but to bring in easy-to-remember kanji without hesitation. Effective ways to expose students to kanji is through game cards or calendars posted on the walls.

**SPORTS DAY** ( )



**September** ( )

ようび	ようび	ようび	ようび	ようび	ようび	ようび



JANUARY



FEBRUARY



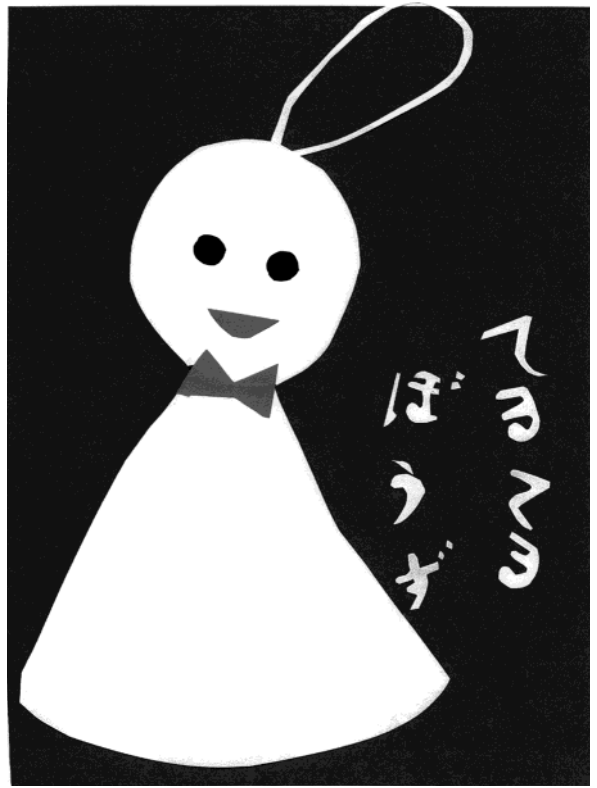
MARCH



APRIL



MAY



JUNE



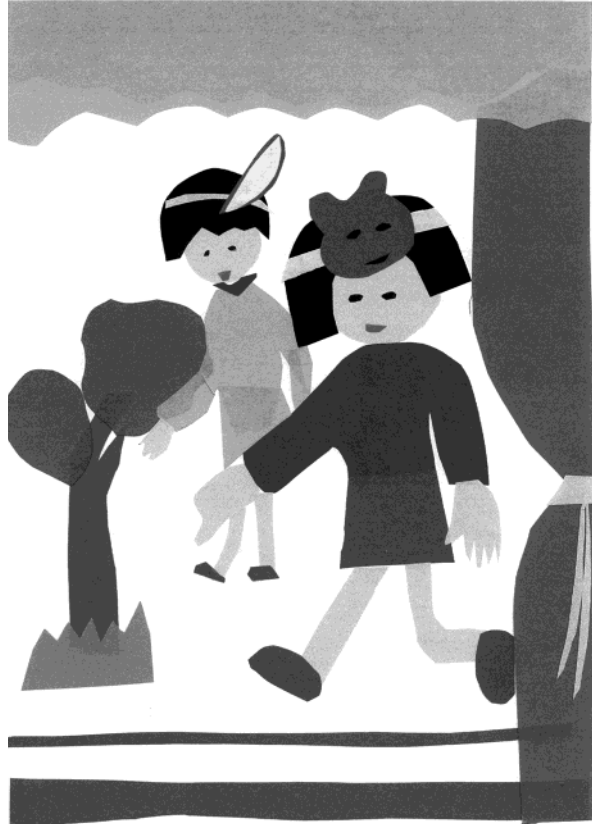
JULY



AUGUST



SEPTEMBER



OCTOBER



NOVEMBER



DECEMBER