



# NEW YEAR

## —Let's Make a *Nengajō*—

New Year is a celebration that is familiar to all students and provides an opportunity for young people to reflect on the differences and similarities between cultures and to understand more about Japan. In this lesson students learn keywords and phrases associated with the occasion and learn about some of the main customs. They discuss these within the context of their own experience of major festivals then learn to read and make *nengajō* (New Year cards).



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## OBJECTIVES

### LANGUAGE OBJECTIVES

- To learn key vocabulary items related to New Year
- To learn to read and say set phrases related to New Year and *nengajō*
- To learn to write *nengajō* using correct phrases and draw the animals as well as write their names

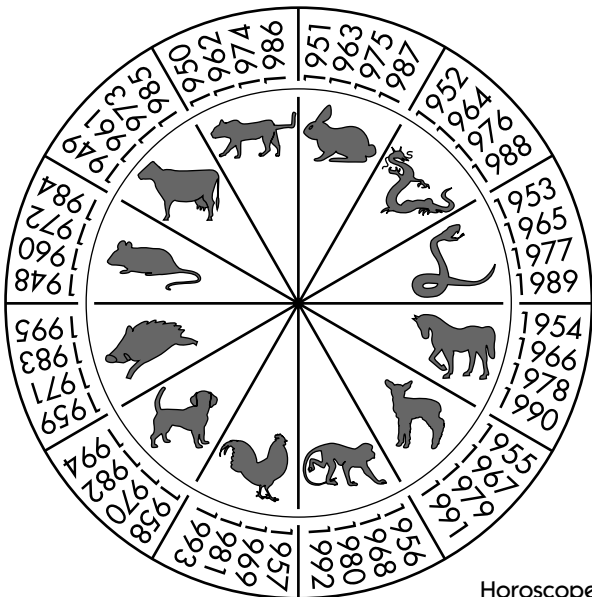
TARGET FUNCTIONS	TARGET EXPRESSIONS	TARGET VOCABULARY
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>❖ Reading and pronouncing new hiragana words</li> <li>❖ Listening and repeating set phrases</li> <li>❖ Listening for information from the video</li> <li>❖ Listening and understanding instructions</li> <li>❖ Reading and writing <i>nengajō</i></li> <li>❖ Asking the teacher for information</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>❖ あけましておめでとうございます</li> <li>❖ 今年もよろしくおねがいします</li> <li>❖ 本年もよろしくおねがいします</li> <li>❖ 平成～年, 元旦</li> <li>❖ ～は日本語 / 英語でなんですか</li> <li>❖ Set classroom phrases 聞いてください / 見てください / ～してください</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>❖ お正月, あけましておめでとうございます, 年こしそば, おとしだま, かどまつ, もち, おせちりょうり, ぞうに, はつもうで, かきぞめ</li> </ul>

### CULTURAL OBJECTIVES

- To learn about a traditional festival in a modern-day context
- To understand how language and culture are embedded in each other
- To look at differences and similarities from a global perspective and think about what different festivals mean to different people
- To understand Japanese culture in the context of other cultures, not to view it simply as “unique”

**SOURCE MATERIALS**

- Video "Seasons and Festivals," TDK, or Handout #1 (A New Year story from Japanese Resources Centre Primary School Pack "Japanese Houses")\*
  - Video recorder
  - Board and markers/chalk
  - Handout #2\*
  - Handout #3\*
- Examples *nengajō*
- Animal horoscope from Japanese Resources Centre Primary School Pack "Japanese Folktales," or use charts in *Kimono 1* (CIS communication) or *Japanese in Modules 2* (ALC Press Inc.)
  - Card
  - Scissors
  - Color pens



Horoscope

**PROCEDURE**

**Preceding lessons**

I teach my New Year lesson as the first lesson of the new term (usually about 3rd or 4th of January). During the last week of the previous term, just before Christmas, I show my students photographs taken in Japan of Christmas lights, Christmas cake, and my British friend playing Father Christmas to a group of kindergarten children (!). I talk about the Western influence of Christmas in Japan (children may eat Christmas cake—sponge cake not fruitcake; parents of some families give presents to the children; Christmas music played in shopping centers, and so on). This leads on to discussion of what Christmas means to different people. Next we make Christmas cards by first learning how to make origami Christmas trees and

Father Christmas faces. The class must listen to the instructions from me in Japanese (I find that the children soon understand instructions such as おってください, おりこんでください, くりかえしてください through repetition and imitation). They then attach the finished shapes to cards and write メリークリスマス and よいお年を(すごしてください)

**1. Preparation**

Before the class, write the keywords (お正月, あけましておめでとうございます, としこしそば, お年 だま, かどまつ, もち, おせちりょうり, ぞうに, はつもうで, かきぞめ) on the blackboard.

**2. Greeting**

As the students arrive they are greeted with あけましておめでとうございます (also written on the board) and encouraged to work out the meaning for themselves.

**3. Reading the words in groups (5 mins.)**

The students work in small groups and try reading the words on the board. (For beginner or mixed ability groups, I usually distribute laminated kana charts so that less able children can look up the symbols if they need to.)

**4. Reading the words as a whole class (5 mins.)**

As a whole class, we go through the words on the board and the children read them out loud. I don't give the meanings at this stage but children may recognize parts of words they have already learned such as 月, 年, and そば.

**5. Watching a video (10 mins.)**

I tell the students that we are going to watch a video about New Year. (Alternatively they can read Handout #1, the story about customs and foods associated with the New Year.) They should listen for the Japanese words they have learned and write next to them the English meanings. (In addition to the English commentary, the Japanese family can be heard speaking in Japanese.)

**6. Pooling the meanings of the words (5-10 mins.)**

After the video we pool the meanings of the words and discuss questions that arise from them. At this stage children are especially interested in the idea of receiving money, not presents. (What do they think? Do they receive money as presents and if so, when? This could lead to an interesting discussion of different family customs at New Year, birthdays, and other celebrations.) Two of the words はつもうで and かきぞめ do not appear in the video and so this is a useful opportunity to develop dictionary skills (one of the requirements

of the British National Curriculum). Check beforehand to make sure the words are in the particular dictionary you use.

### 7. Discussion on New Year (5–10 mins.)

The discussion is widened to include the experiences of the class. What do they do at New Year? What other celebrations happen around New Year? We can discuss the Japanese New Year, thinking about some of the technical differences between Japan and other cultures but also looking at how it is an important celebration for many communities.

### 8. More information about Japanese New Year (5–10 mins.)

I get the class to write down, in English, the different aspects of the Japanese New Year celebration that they noticed on the video and encourage them to think about what activities are special to New Year. (If the children don't pick these out, you need to mention certain things: kimono are only worn on special occasions; *osechi ryōri* is mainly eaten at the New Year; there are special New Year decorations—bamboo, *mikan*, pine branches). If there is time I show the video again so that they can check if they have remembered everything. Otherwise we pool information.

### 9. Handout #3 (5–10 mins.)

I give out the Handout #3 on *nengajō*. The children read the introductory section; then I split the children into groups of four, give out examples of *nengajō* (collected from friends from past years) and strips of card (Handout #2) with standard New Year phrases on one set of strips and English translations on the other. Each group works out how to read them out loud and then sees if they can find examples of these phrases on their *nengajō*. Once they have done this, they show me (tasks 1 and 2 on Handout #3).

### 10. Writing a *nengajō* (10 mins. and homework)

They have a go at writing their own *nengajō* (task 4). First they need to find out which animal year they are in (Kimono book 1, lesson 4 and Japanese in Modules, book 2 and 7 both have necessary charts and information). They also need to address, sign, and date (using 平成 ~ 年 and 元旦) the card correctly. If there is time, they can also try task 3 (I find it is useful with mixed ability groups to have extra tasks for the more able students).

### 11. Follow-up activity

Homework is to complete the *nengajō*, which then I display, with an explanation, in the foyer of the school. We decorate the display with branches of Douglas pine and a large banner over the top

(made by the children) with the words あけましておめでとう. Another activity I have used as a follow-on activity with beginners groups is making the animal horoscope. I originally designed this for a primary group as a way of bringing the theme of Japan into a math lesson, but it works equally well with secondary school students. I usually demonstrate the activity, giving the instructions in Japanese for children to look, listen, and copy. I teach them the words for the 12 animals first by writing them on the board in hiragana as a reading activity.

Try toasting and eating *mochi*, dipped in soy sauce! I have had Japanese friends send *mochi* from Japan (although recently it is possible to buy it in good Chinese supermarkets even outside London) and I have also got the children to have a go at pounding it themselves—use small amounts using a mortar and pestle (or a wooden meat beater in a large bowl) for the best results. This is also a good end-of-term activity that you can do before Christmas.

### 12. Evaluation

- ❖ Card writing
- ❖ Discussion
- ❖ Homework
- ❖ Reading
- ❖ Presentation

## STUDENT RESPONSES

Children have commented in various ways, both about this lesson and about learning Japanese in general. One thing of which I am acutely aware is that they begin learning Japanese without having practically any accurate knowledge of Japan at all. Here are some of the things they say to me at the beginning of a course:

“Japanese people are only allowed to have one child, aren't they?”; “Hong Kong is in Japan, isn't it, Miss?”; “At New Year they do dragon dance”; “The Japanese only eat raw fish.”

By the end of the course I make sure that every child can find Japan (and Hong Kong and China) on a map, have had the experience of eating some kinds of Japanese food such as *yakisoba* (chow mein) and *chirashi-zushi* (vinegared rice with fish, vegetables, egg, etc.) and, in general, have a wider pool of knowledge about Japan.

Their responses to the Christmas and New Year lessons are always very enthusiastic and I was particularly delighted one year when one student said, quite spontaneously, after watching the video: “It's just like Christmas at our house. All that food and meeting relatives!”

## REMARKS

## Exploring Similarities and Embracing Differences

Events within the calendar year offer a number of opportunities to explore, within the language classroom, the rich cultural heritage of the Japanese people. On one level, I can use such opportunities to introduce my students to aspects of festivals such as the clothes that are worn, the food that is eaten, the places where celebrations are held, the order and content of the ceremonies. In other words, my students can learn what “they” (the Japanese) do on specified days of the year. To only explore on their level, however, would leave a gap of understanding between “them” and “us,” whereas I want my students to be able to think about and explore the whole spectrum of so-called differences and similarities along which the human race stands. Instead of seeing the Japanese at one end and themselves at the other, they can begin to realize that:

- 1) Differences are to be celebrated as a way we can explore and enjoy the diverse nature of human and the world;
- 2) Under the surface, we can discover many parallels and similarities with our own lifestyle which may not be immediately obvious on first inspection;
- 3) Within our own society, there are many differences between people and traditions.

In this way, through exploring similarities and embracing differences not only between my students’ lives and those of Japanese, but also between themselves, I hope to open the minds of my students to a country and people with which they have as yet had only limited experience.

I was very fortunate to have the opportunity to live and work for an extended period in Japan. This experience (and that of traveling through many other Asian countries) has changed and opened up my own attitudes both to the diverse nature of the world’s cultures and also to my own country. Many of the children I teach still have a narrow view of culture and society, one which I recognize as similar to mine at their age. Whether they go on as adults to live and work abroad or never move out of their own country, the world really is much smaller nowadays, especially because of technological advances. Therefore, we as teachers cannot afford to miss the opportunities to broaden children’s attitudes to different cultures and to share with them what we ourselves have experienced. I also truly believe that the children I teach are more open to learning about other cultures and peoples because they themselves live in a multi-ethnic society.

It is essential, to take advantage of this situation and to get the children to expand on this and reflect on what differences really are about. Whether a group is multi- or mono-ethnic in its make-up, teaching culture through language offers the opportunity to explore students’ different concepts even of the same event (New Year, Christmas, etc.) and to look at how ways of celebrating major events are very diverse. In general, it is an opportunity to break down stereotypes within groups and extend this new knowledge to my students’ images of Japan and Japanese people.

## COMMENTS

Students enjoy looking at *nengajō*. Nowadays, it is becoming quite common to include pictures of one’s family. It may be a family portrait or just the children. One family included their pet mouse for the year of the rat. People who get married towards the end of the year use the card as an opportunity to notify people of their marriage and change of address, as well as express their desire to continue to be guided by their family and friends.

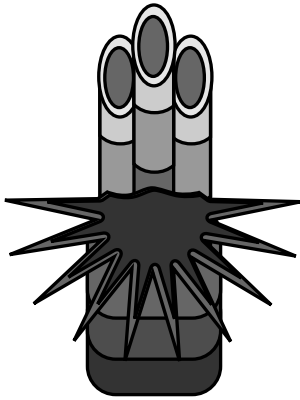
Something else about *nengajō* which may be worth mentioning is the lottery and how each card bought from the post office is numbered. The lottery drawing takes place on 15th January each year. If a postcard you receive has the correct number you could win a major prize such an overseas holiday or a huge, fancy TV. Minor prizes include letter writing sets or a sheet of two New Year’s postage stamps. Some people also pay 53 yen for their postcards rather than the regular cost of 50 yen. The extra 3 yen is donated to charity.

# お正月 **NEW YEAR**

—A story to read aloud—

## TARO DESCRIBES THE NEW YEAR HOLIDAY

I love the New Year holiday. My father's office is closed for three days at the beginning of January so my parents, Hana and I always go to my grandparents' house for a few days so we can all be together with them and my uncle and aunt and cousins, Hiroko and Masayuki. The



かどまつ

road out of Tokyo on New Year's Eve are even busier than usual with people going home for New Year so I'm always glad when we finally reach my grandparents' farm. It's much more peaceful there. We always have new clothes for New Year so I know, at some point, grandmother will say how smart I look and how grown up I'm getting! Hana loves having new clothes but I don't! When we arrive the first thing we see are the かどまつ which my uncle has put on each side of the front gate. They are made of pine branches, bamboo and straw. Pine trees represent long life in Japan. Sometimes my grandparents have already put traditional decorations over the front

entrance but sometimes they wait until we arrive so that we can help. We put up pine branches, mandarin oranges and a twisted straw rope called しめなわ. All these things are meant to bring good luck and keep evil away. When we go inside I know the first thing my mother will comment on is how clean and sparkling everywhere looks. Everybody in Japan gives the house a good clean before New Year. My grandparents have a small altar in the main room. We love helping to decorate it at New Year. As well as oranges, ferns and straw, we also put two rice cakes, called かがみもち at the front of the altar. These rice cakes are to please the gods. We eat rice cakes, of course. My mother sometimes buys them ready made but my grandmother always makes them in the traditional way. If we're helping, Hana usually measures out rice because she says she is more careful than I am. The cakes take a lot of kneading, though, and I think I'm better at that than she is.



かがみもち

While my grandmother, mother and aunt are busy in the kitchen we like listening to our grandfather telling us about old New Year customs. My favourite is the ししまい ceremony because it doesn't usually take place in Tokyo nowadays. Somebody in the village dresses up as a lion and dances from house to house. The lion is supposed to drive away any evil spirits that might be lurking in the house. We always eat a traditional dish on New Year's Eve. It's called



ししまい

としこしそば. そば are noodles and としこし means seeing out the old year and seeing in the new. The noodles are long and thin and so we say they mean a long life. We have another New Year dish, called ぞうに which is also meant to give us a long life. It's a kind of soup made from rice cakes, radish and other vegetables. It's very popular at New Year. This year Hiroko and I are going to be allowed to stay up until midnight to see in the New Year. Hana and Masayuki think it's not fair but they're younger than us.

It's going to be really exciting. All over Japan, at midnight, everyone will be listening out for じよやのかね which means the ringing of the temple bell. At every temple, all over Japan, the temple bell is rung one hundred and eight times. Although our grandparents' farm is not very near the temple, my grandfather says he has never yet failed to hear the sound of the bell carried on the wind. I'm determined to count all one hundred and eight chimes.

On New Year's Day my grandparents always get out the traditional toys and games. My favourite is こま or spinning top. I'm getting quite good at it. Masayuki and I usually play a game of はねつき. It's a bit like badminton.



My grandparents usually receive lots of New Year cards. It's great fun when they arrive. They all get delivered at one time because the Post Office keeps back all the cards for each house until New Year. We get presents at New Year, too. Children get お年玉 which is money in a special envelope. Grown-ups give presents to people who have been helpful to them during the year. We call the year-end gift-giving せいぼ.

Before we go back to Tokyo we all go to the shrine, or sometimes the temple, to pray for health and happiness in the coming year. We have to pay this visit after じよやのかね but no later than the 7th January. This visit is called はつもうで.

The New Year holiday always goes far too quickly. All too soon it will be time to go back to Tokyo and school.

あけましておめでとうございます

ほんねん  
本年もよろしくおねがいします

ことし  
今年もよろしくおねがいします

へいせい      ねん      がんとん  
平成      年      元旦

A Happy New Year

I look forward to our continued  
friendship this year.

I look forward to our continued  
friendship this year.

1st January,

## —ACTIVITY SHEET—

ねんがじょう **NEW YEAR CARDS**

Exchanging New Year greetings cards is a very important custom in Japan. People start preparing for this in November and the post offices accepting New Year cards from 15th December. All the cards are delivered on (not before) 1st January. New Year cards are usually in the style of postcards and people either buy them from the shops or draw their own cards on blank postcards. The cards come in various designs—a popular motif is the animal for that year (from the Chinese zodiac calendar). Do you know which is the animal for this year? There are also special New Year cards made by the Ministry of Posts and Telecommunications (MPT) called おとしだまつきねんがはがき which have lottery numbers printed at the bottom. The winning numbers are announced by the MPT on 15th January and people win prizes such as television, stereos, and sheets of stamps.

**タスク 1**

- In groups, works out how to read the expressions printed in kanji and hiragana on the strips of paper which your teacher has given to you. Say them out loud to 先生 then see if you can match each expression with its English meaning.
- Now check your answers with 先生.
- Now look at the examples of ねんがじょう which your teacher has given to you and see how many of the expressions you can find.

**タスク 2**

- Answer the following questions about your group's ねんがじょう. Jot down the answers on paper. Look at the picture side first:  
Who is the card to and who is it from? (first name and surname—which is which?)  
Write down the message in ローマン。Can you work out what it means?
- Now take your answers to 先生 then write up your message with its English meaning on the board.

**タスク 3**

- Look at the address side or your examples of ねんがじょう and answer these questions:  
What is the name of the prefecture?  
What is the name of the city?  
What is the section ( ~丁目 ) number?  
What is the surname of the person it is addressed to?  
What order is the address written in?
- Now take your answers to be checked by 先生.

**タスク 4**

- Write your own ねんがじょう. You may want to illustrate it with the this year's animal. If you have tried タスク3, then you could try writing a local address in katakana/kanji.