



GETTING TO KNOW YOU

—Greetings at the Genkan—



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PURPOSE

This insight into Japanese culture is one of a series devoted to Japanese housing and, in particular, home life. This lesson introduces students to the *genkan* (entrance area) and its functions, gives them an insight into everyday Japanese life, and allows them to actively participate in using the type of expressions used at the *genkan* and to compare Japanese housing and Australian housing.

POINTS TO BE STUDIED

LANGUAGE OBJECTIVES

TARGET FUNCTIONS

- ❖ Greetings when going out/coming back
- ❖ Greetings to a person who is going out/coming back
- ❖ Visiting a home and offering greetings

TARGET EXPRESSIONS

- ❖ Greetings such as ~にいきます, 行ってらっしゃい, ただいま, おかえりなさい, ごめんください

TARGET VOCABULARY

- ❖ Greetings, names of everyday objects in the home environment

CULTURAL OBJECTIVES

- To point out the similarities between modern Japanese and Western housing
- To examine any differences between the styles of housing and to discuss the important cultural background to these differences
- To describe the important function of the *genkan*, which provides an ideal introduction to Japanese home life and culture

SOURCE MATERIALS

- Illustration of *genkan* (Handout #1*)
 Role-play sheet (Handout #2*)
 Work sheet (Handout #3*)

PROCEDURE

Preparation

1. Because of its simplicity the *genkan* can be easily improvised in the classroom. All we need is something to represent the shoe cupboard. The door may be the classroom door or, if that is likely to cause some disruption, a make-believe door which because of the wonderful powers of imagination may be sliding or hinged.
2. Write selected vocabulary on the board prior to the beginning of class.
3. Distribute handouts #1-3.

1. Handout #1 (5 mins.)

Students identify objects in the *genkan* and discuss their use and so on. They are prompted to look closely at the handout and to compare the Japanese entry way with their own at home. What are the similarities? What are the differences? What are the possible explanations for any differences? These are examined in detail.

2. Teaching names (10 mins.)

The teacher teaches students the names any objects seen in handout #1: shoe-cupboard, door, step, vase.

3. Handout #2 (10 mins.)

The teacher and the students read aloud the scripts chosen for role-plays in handout #2.

4. Role-play (7 mins.)

Selected students perform role-plays while other students watch and listen. If a step is not available in the classroom "genkan," a strip of masking tape on the floor or some other device can be used to remind children that at this point they have to step up to a higher level.

5. Writing (3 mins.)

The students practice writing the names of objects seen in handout #1.

6. Assignment of homework

The teacher instructs the students to do handout #3 as homework.

7. Evaluation

- ❖ Role-play performance

- ❖ Work sheet (Handout #3)

Remarks

- The choice of the *genkan* of a house for this particular lesson is to introduce students to the entrance area of the Japanese house before proceeding to other sections of the house (in subsequent lessons). It allows us to examine some of the everyday activities and customs that take place in the *genkan*. Most will be ones with which the students can readily relate, while a few differences will emerge to add to the students' interest. For example, the front sliding doors previously used in all Japanese houses are gradually giving way to hinged, Western-style doors with one distinguishing difference: hinged doors in Japan usually open outwards, opposite to those here in Australia. This is shown in one of the handouts prepared for this lesson to test students' observation skills. It also provides a talking point for considering the underlying reasons for this method of opening (e.g., to conserve interior space).
- Activities discussed and recreated through role-plays during this and associated lessons include:
 1. children leaving the house to go to school and returning home;
 2. father going to work and returning home;
 3. mother going shopping and returning home;
 4. children going out to visit friends and returning home;
 5. visitors calling in and leaving;
 6. deliveries being made to the home.

Vocabulary and expressions used would of course be tailored to suit the age and level of learning of the students being taught.
- Formal style Japanese is used in the role-plays. The informal style would sound more natural to Japanese people in a Japanese environment, but it must be remembered that these lessons are for teachers to deliver.

Background of the *genkan*

- For centuries the design of Japanese houses has included a small area immediately behind the front door known as the *genkan*. The dictionary defines the *genkan* as the (front) entrance or vestibule, but this does not describe the real, underlying significance of this area.

The *genkan* is so much a part of Japanese life that even Japanese people give little or no thought to its origin, but the meanings conveyed by the two kanji used to write the word give us a clue to its significance: 玄 (*gen*) conveys the idea of mystery, darkness, the occult, the unseen and the unclean; and 関 (*kan*) is a barrier or check-point.

While the *genkan* of bygone years probably had some religious significance, the modern *genkan* may be thought of as a buffer zone between the outside and the inside, the unknown and the known, the unclean and the clean. Although a person may have entered the privacy of the house, he is not truly in until he has discarded his outside (unclean) street shoes and stepped up into slippers used specifically for the clean indoors. (The interior of the house is built on a higher level than the *genkan*.)

The *genkan* is a feature of every Japanese home and Japanese inn (旅館 *ryokan*). Even in high-rise city apartments, the *genkan* continues to play an important role in modern Japanese life, just as it has done throughout its long history of existence.

Design features of the *genkan*

- The *genkan* is quite simple in design. The floor is usually constructed from material different from that found in the rest of the home. Stone or tiles provide a smooth transition from the outside paved streets to the warm atmosphere of the wooden and tatami interior.

Within the *genkan* is the shoe-cupboard, or *kutsubako* (靴箱), still often referred to as the *getabako* (下駄箱), meaning a box for *geta*, large wooden footwear that are not in frequent use nowadays. In this cupboard are stored the shoes belonging to members of the household. A visitor's shoes are not usually placed in the shoe-cupboard but left close to the step and arranged so that they can be easily slipped into when the visitor is about to leave.

Depending on its size, the *genkan* might also contain a hat-and-coat rack and a cushion or

bench on which to sit when removing one's shoes. Decoration within the *genkan* is kept to a minimum, being confined to, for example, a display of ikebana (flower arrangement), an elegant bonsai, or just a simple vase of flowers or seasonal decoration placed on top of the shoe-cupboard.

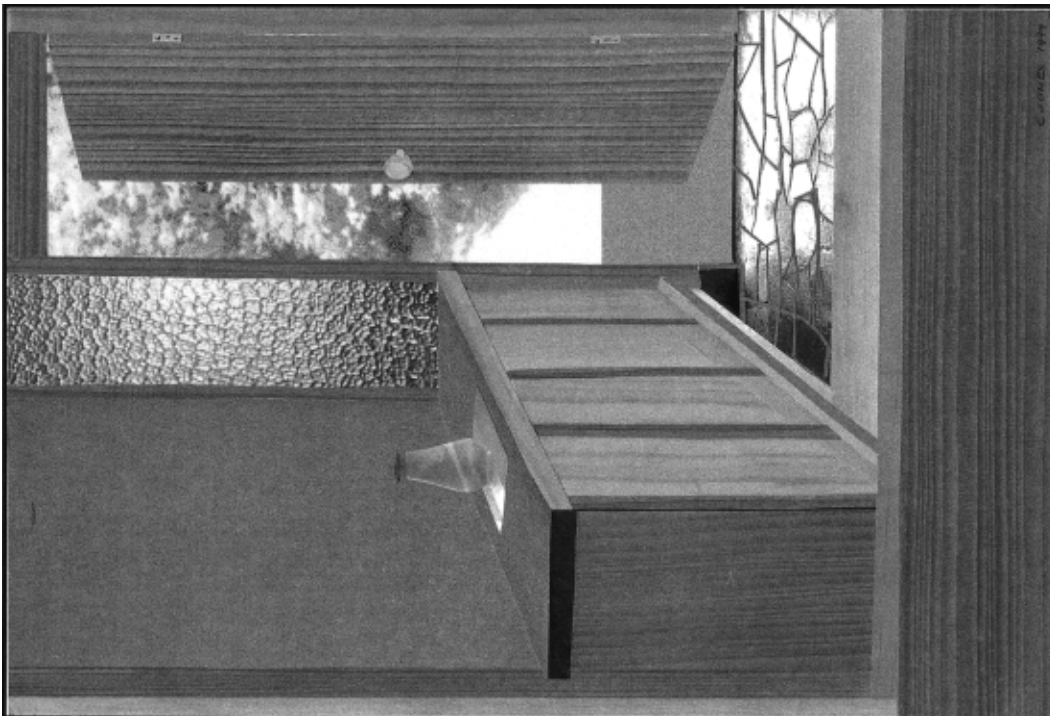
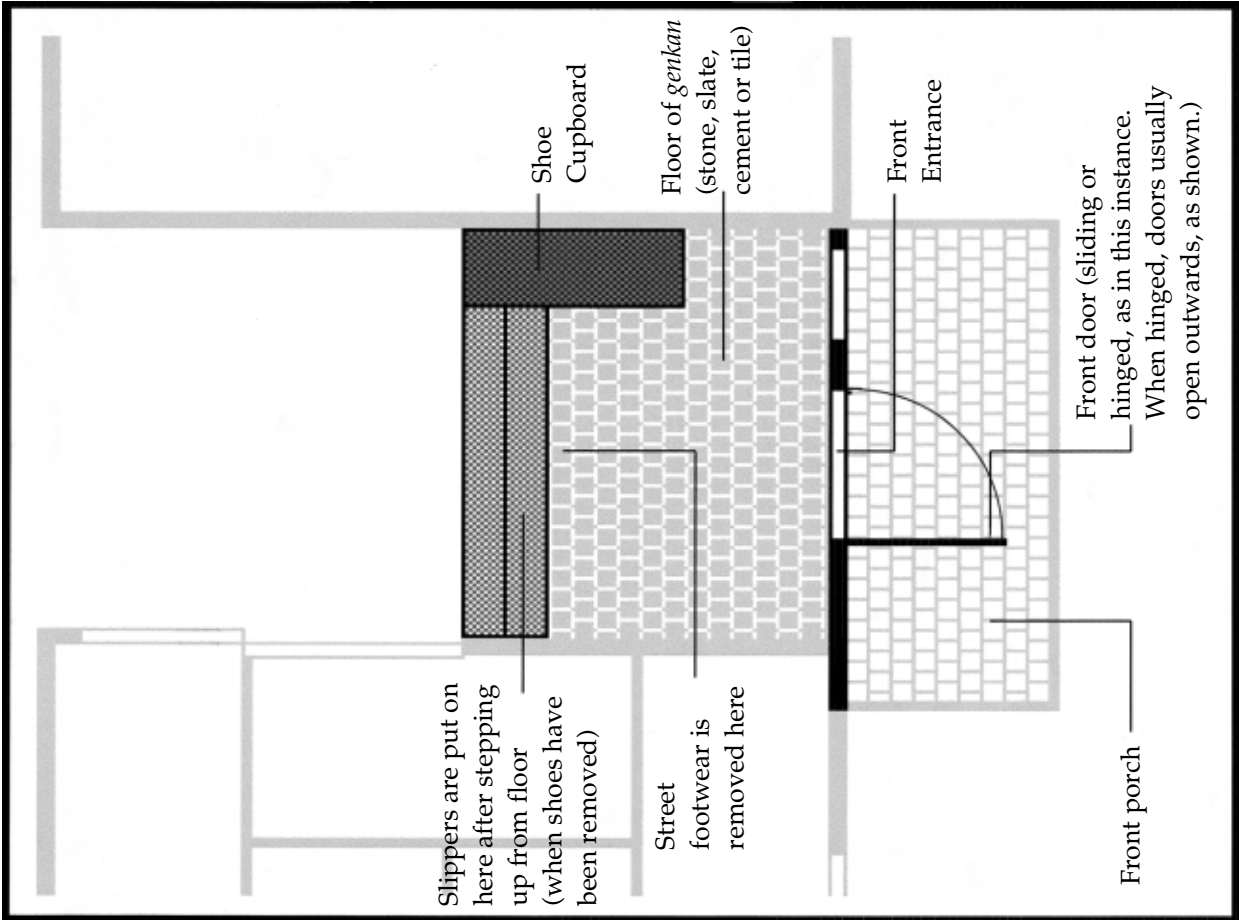
The design of the *genkan* is so simple that it can be easily simulated in the classroom. This, too, makes the *genkan* an ideal and logical introduction to the Japanese way of home-life for students of Japanese language and culture at any entry level.

From the committee

Considering that this lesson is for elementary school level, it would be better to use role-play settings more appropriate to elementary school children than those used in this plan. Situations involving, for example, a child about to leave for school or just arriving home would prompt students to think about the kinds of conversations children have with their parents at such times. It is also important to have students interact with their classmates. The Japanese used in the role-plays should be more natural. This lesson plan would be even more effective if combined with the secondary school-level plan "At Home on the Tatami"

The conversations in the role-plays may be somewhat too polite in their present form, but teachers using this plan could easily adapt the language to suit various kinds of students.

GENKAN



Illustrations by Chieko Jones

ROLE-PLAY SHEET

Situation 1

Child in *genkan* about to leave home to walk to school nearby. Returns later.

Child: いってきます。(がっこうにいてまいります。)

Mother: (opening door): いってらっしゃい。(くるまにきをつけてね。)

(Child: はい、きをつけます。)

Mother watches child walking off, then closes door. Later:

Child: ただいま。

Mother: おかえり(なさい)。(つかれたでしょう。)

Note: Parts in parentheses for slightly more advanced students.

In place of school as the destination, try substituting other words which would be suitable for similar exchanges between other members of the family. Here are some alternatives: デパート、動物園、スーパー、図書館、本屋、魚屋、会社、公園、銀行、田中さんの家。You could also try substituting some common family names in Japan to familiarize students with Japanese names: さとう、すずき、たかはし、たなか、わたなべ、やまだ、やまもと、ほんだ。

Situation 2

Mr. Sato presses the doorbell at Mr. Tanaka's home. They know each other.

Mr. Tanaka, speaking from within: どなたですか。

Mr. Sato: さとうです。

Mr. Tanaka (opens door): さとうさん、こんにちは。

Mr. Sato: こんにちは。たなかさんは、おげんきですか。

Mr. Tanaka: はい、げんきです。さとうさんは、おげんきですか。

Mr. Sato: はい、げんきです。(Hands parcel to Tanaka) どうぞ。

Mr. Tanaka: どうもありがとうございます。

Mr. Sato: どういたしまして。さようなら。

Mr. Tanaka: さようなら。

(Don't forget to include the all-important non-verbal expressions of greeting and thanks—the bows.)

Situation 3

Sliding door opens and a deliveryman enters the *genkan* of Mr. Suzuki's home. He is at the wrong address.

Deliveryman: ごめんください。やまださんのうちですか。

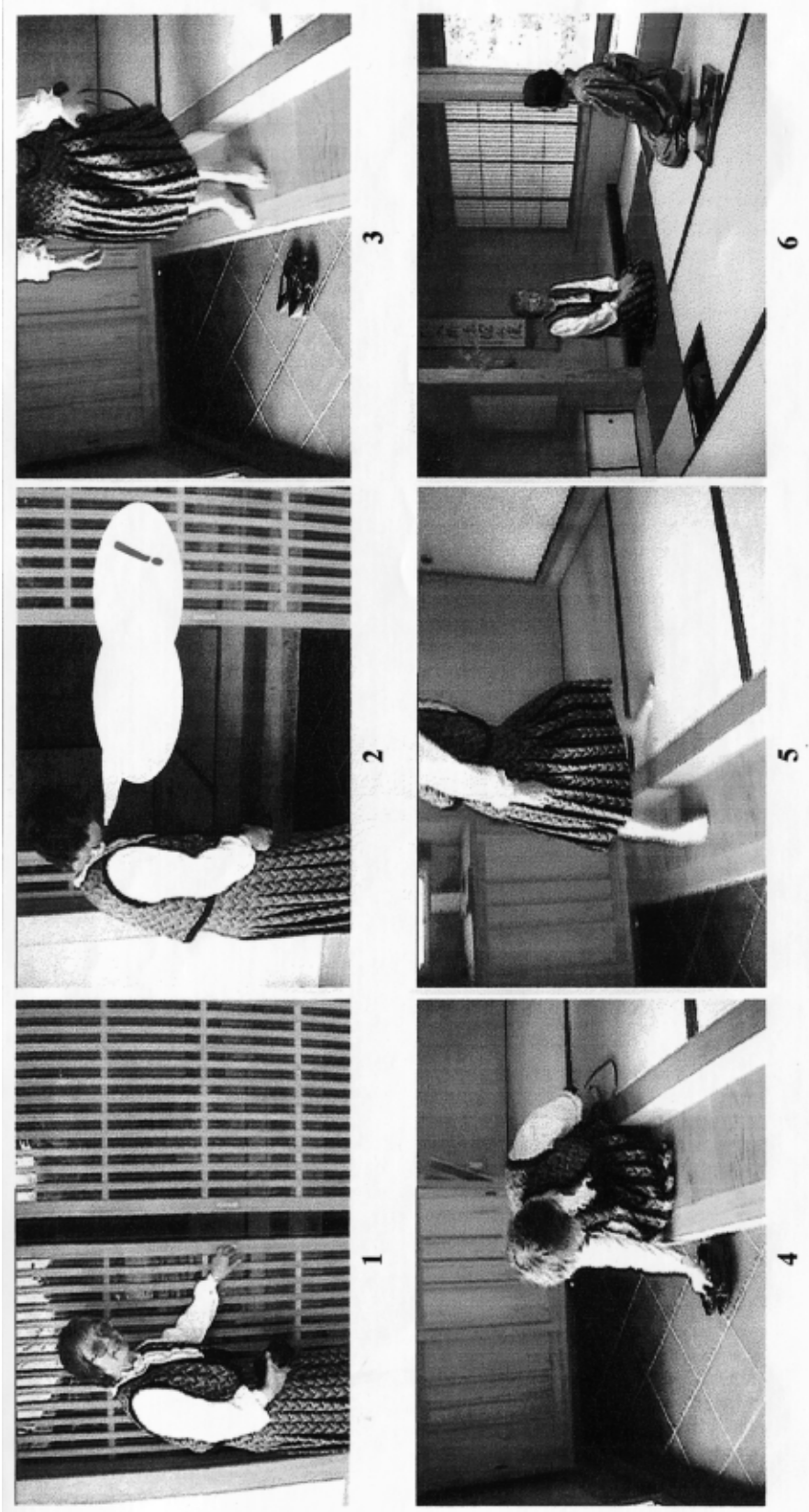
Mr. Suzuki: いいえ、ちがいます。やまださんはとなりです。

Deliveryman: どうもすみませんでした。

Mr. Suzuki: どういたしまして。

Deliveryman bows and leaves, closing the door behind him.

WORK SHEET



(Answers to be in Japanese)

1. What is she doing in Photo No. 1?
2. What is she saying in Photo No. 2?
3. Where is she and what two things has she just done in Photo No. 3?
4. What is she doing in Photo No. 4 and why?
5. In Photo No. 5, she is stepping up into this particular house without slippers. Why?
6. Name as many items as possible that appear in Photo No. 6.