



AT HOME ON THE TATAMI

—Learning Various Expressions and Behavior through Role-play—



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PURPOSE

Through role-plays of situations typical in Japanese tatami rooms, this lesson gives the students a grounding not only in various Japanese language expressions but also in the nature of Japanese homes and tatami rooms—their history, structure, and functions, and how they are actually used. The students learn how to behave appropriately when invited to a Japanese person's home.

POINTS TO BE STUDIED

LANGUAGE OBJECTIVES

TARGET FUNCTIONS

- ❖ Asking what it is
- ❖ Asking how it is used
- ❖ Expressing impressions

TARGET EXPRESSIONS

- ❖ ~ですね, ~ですよ, ~は何ですか, ~は~です, ~たり~たり, ~くて, ~でしょう

TARGET VOCABULARY

- ❖ におい, 何畳, 畳, 広い, 部屋, 気持ち, こたつ, ざぶとん, 押し入れ, ふとん, まくら, ねまき, お茶, おかし

CULTURAL OBJECTIVES

- To show that we all share the same aspiration of owning our own home
- To show that the modern Japanese home is similar in many ways to Western-style homes, with just a few differences
- To examine these differences and to ascertain the underlying reasons why they exist
- To dispel the misconception that all Japanese houses are very small by Western standards
- To examine and inform students of life in general in the Japanese home environment and the uses to which the traditional Japanese room is put

SOURCE MATERIALS

- Illustration of *tatami* room (Handout #1*)
 Work sheet (Handout #2*)
 Role-play sheet (Handout #3*)
Tatami room, *shōji*, *futon*

PROCEDURE

Preparation

1. Selected vocabulary is written on the board prior to the start of class.
2. If your school doesn't have the items in a *tatami* room, beach mats resembling *tatami* are readily available, as are Chinese screens to represent *shōji*. A travel rug draped over a small, low table becomes a *kotatsu* and a household bed quilt becomes a *futon*. Large square cushions are available to represent *zabuton*. The rest can be left to the imagination, by showing the illustrations.

1. Introduction (5 mins.)

The students are asked whether or not they have experienced living in Japan and what they think a Japanese home is like.

2. Talking about straw (15 mins.)

The teacher talks about straw and the many uses to which it is put. (See reference on page 3.)

3. Handouts #1 and #2 (10 mins.)

1. The students are asked to examine handout #1 and to name as many objects as possible. In a Japanese-style room, paint is rarely used and decoration is kept to minimum. Paper-covered sliding doors, called しょうじ (障子) softly diffuse the light entering the *tatami* room and at the same time give some measure of privacy. The とこのま (床の間), or alcove, is the main decoration, adjacent to which, in many instances, is staggered or stepped shelving called ちがいだな (違い棚), on which is placed a simple but elegant ornament. Also seen within the とこのま is a かけじく (掛け軸), a hanging scroll bearing an example of beautiful calligraphy or a piece of artwork together with perhaps a piece of pottery, いけばな, a wood carving or the like. The おしいれ (押し入れ) is a roomy cupboard containing such items as ふとん (布団) for sleeping on and ざぶとん (座布団) for sitting on. These items are hidden from view by sliding doors known as ふすま (襖).
2. The teacher explains that rooms are measured by

the number of *tatami* mats they contain and asks the students to look at the arrangements shown on the handout #2 and calculate the dimensions of the rooms. Choose as an example the ten-mat room. Its dimensions are four meters by five meters, its area therefore being twenty square meters. By doing these preliminary calculations, the students will better understand why John was surprised to find such a large room in a Japanese home (Handout #3). But this home is in the country far from the large metropolitan areas. It would be difficult to find such a house in large cities because of the high cost of land there.

4. Role-play (10 mins.)

The situation 1 role-play is designed to establish the items to be found in the *tatami* rooms and their use. The situation 2 role-play (Handout #3) shows a possible activity that takes place between friends. For each lesson, the teacher should select one of these role-plays and give a copy of the script to all members of the class. The students read and rehearse the role-play before selected students act it out.

5. Writing (5 mins.)

Writing practice for new words learned. The homework assignment includes calculating the sizes of the remaining rooms with *tatami* grids.

6. Evaluation

- ❖ Role-play performance
- ❖ The students may be asked to calculate the dimensions of some of the remaining floor plans, write a project about straw and how it is used today, and/or write an illustrated project on a Japanese-style room and name the items it contains.

From the committee

One of the outstanding merits of this plan is that the discussion of flooring and other aspects of houses is not confined to a comparison of Japanese and Australian houses but rather touches on features of housing and lifestyle in various parts of the world. Further effect could be achieved by getting the students to talk briefly about the flooring and building styles of their own homes before introducing the topic of *tatami*. This would draw their attention to the fact that there is diversity even within the same country or region and that such differences often reflect different values held by the different individuals concerned.

Reference

The following approach may be used to arouse the students' interest. The teacher may say the following to the students after writing the word "straw" on the board:

Can anyone tell me what straw is? The word straw refers to the stalks and long, narrow leaves of a wide variety of plants, including wheat, barley, corn and rice. It also includes reeds and rushes. How do we use straw? (The following are typical student responses to this question. Comments in parentheses are suggestions for teachers.)

- ❖ For feeding horses and cattle (chaff and hay).
- ❖ For making baskets, bags and boxes (some examples would be useful).
- ❖ For making hats (the kind of straw hat used in the garden is a good example).
- ❖ For making mats (the roll-up variety comes immediately to mind, but don't forget the humble front-door "welcome" mat).
- ❖ For making snow shoes, sandals and slippers. (There's a marvelous example of a huge straw sandal decoration at the Asakusa Kannon temple in Tokyo.)
- ❖ For making clothing such as skirts and rain-coats (grass skirts in Papua New Guinea and Hawaii, for example. *みの* are good examples once used in Japan).
- ❖ For making paper and cardboard. (Rice-paper and straw-board, for example. Our English word paper comes from the name of a plant that was used by early Egyptians for writing on: papyrus. The Egyptians even used papyrus for making boats.)
- ❖ For making rope. (Some fine examples of decorative rope are to be seen in Japan at shrines, especially at New Year. Photos would be useful.)
- ❖ For making roll-up window blinds and curtains.
- ❖ For wrapping and packaging material. (Some ingenious and creative examples may be seen in Japan.)
- ❖ For brooms and brushes for sweeping and cleaning.
- ❖ For toys (toy horses fashioned from straw found throughout Japan).
- ❖ For fences, walls and roofs of houses (photos of thatched roofs are handy here).

Do you remember the story of the three little pigs and the big bad wolf? What did the little pigs

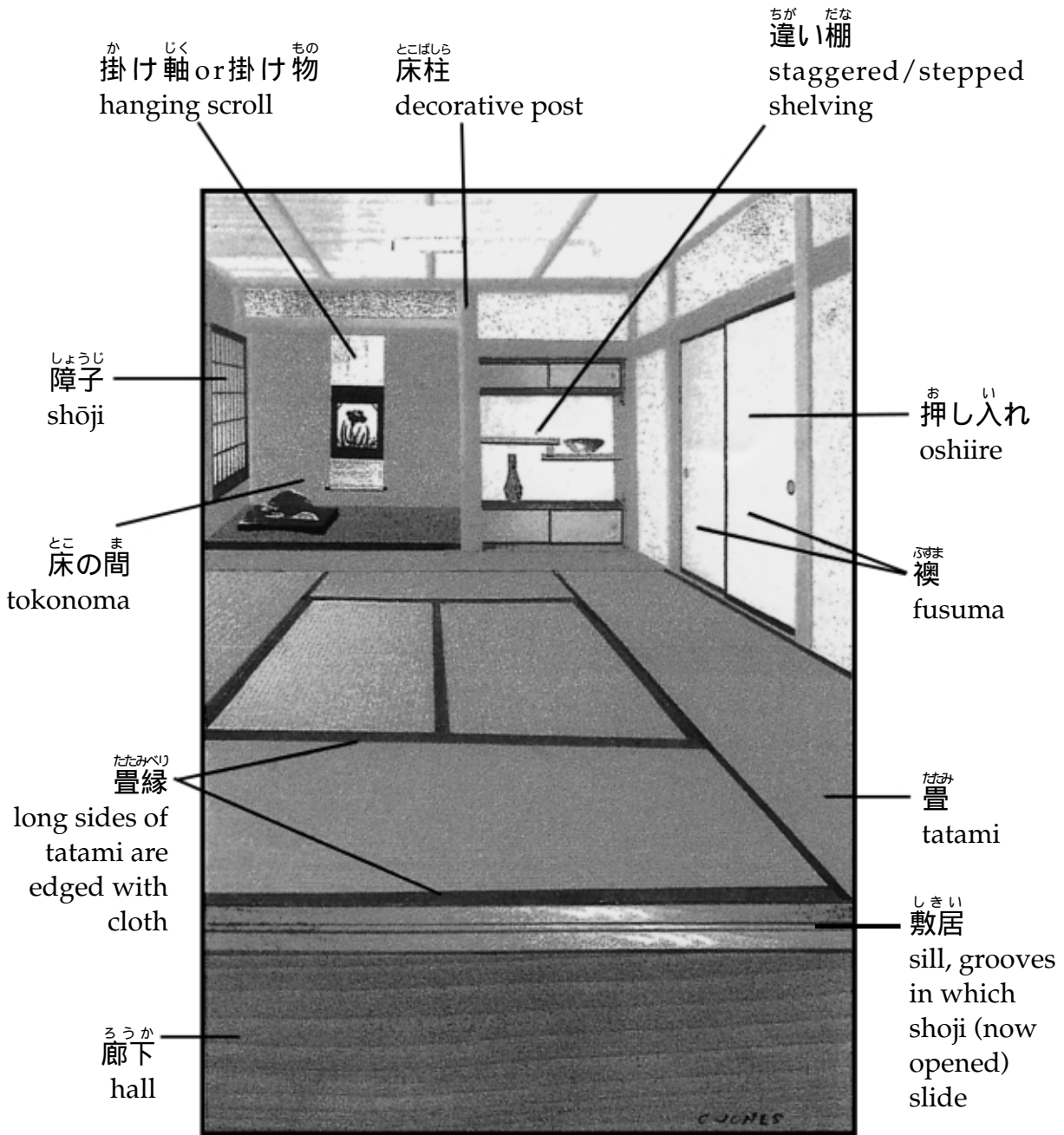
use for making their houses? One used straw, one used sticks and twigs, and the third used bricks. The bricks probably contained straw because when straw is added to the clay used for making bricks, it makes them stronger.

In early times, people all around the world used straw for their roofing material. Does anyone know what we call the straw used for making roofs? (Thatch) The straw is packed together so tightly that it keeps out the rain and snow. You can still see thatched roofs on houses in England and Europe. (For older students: Anne Hathaway's cottage from the days of Shakespeare is a well-known example.) Also it can be seen in Japan on temples, shrines and tea-houses—and even on some old homes in the countryside.

Straw is very useful, isn't it? Who has a straw mat at home? Where do you use it? At home, at the beach, on picnics? When you roll it up you can easily fit it into the family car and take it along with you to sit on during picnics, can't you? In Japan many, many years ago there were no cars; they had not been invented. But the straw mat had been. It, too, could be rolled up or folded, making it easy to move around. Can anyone tell me what Japanese called this mat? The name comes from the Japanese word meaning "to fold," which is *たたむ*, though the mat is called *たたみ*. (The teacher writes the word in *hiragana* on the board: *たたみ*. Because the *kanji* looks a little like a series of *tatami* mats arranged together, it could also be written as an added attraction on the board, if only for extra interest: 畳).

Many years ago someone discovered that if you made a solid base of tightly packed rice straw about five or six centimeters thick, and fastened the *tatami* mat to it, you had a comfortable platform on which to sit, eat and sleep. Nowadays the *tatami* mat is about the size of our modern single-bed mattress, about one meter wide by two meters long. You can no longer fold them up but they are still called *tatami*. *Tatami* are arranged in patterns to cover the entire floor of each room of the house except the *genkan* and hallways. Modern Japanese houses have become very Westernized, with carpeting and polished wooden floors, but in most houses at least one room is kept as a traditional Japanese room with *tatami* matting. The core of the matting is generally still made from tightly-packed rice straw over which is fixed a covering made from woven reeds or rushes, and the size of rooms is still calculated by the number of mats that they contain or could contain.

TATAMI ROOM

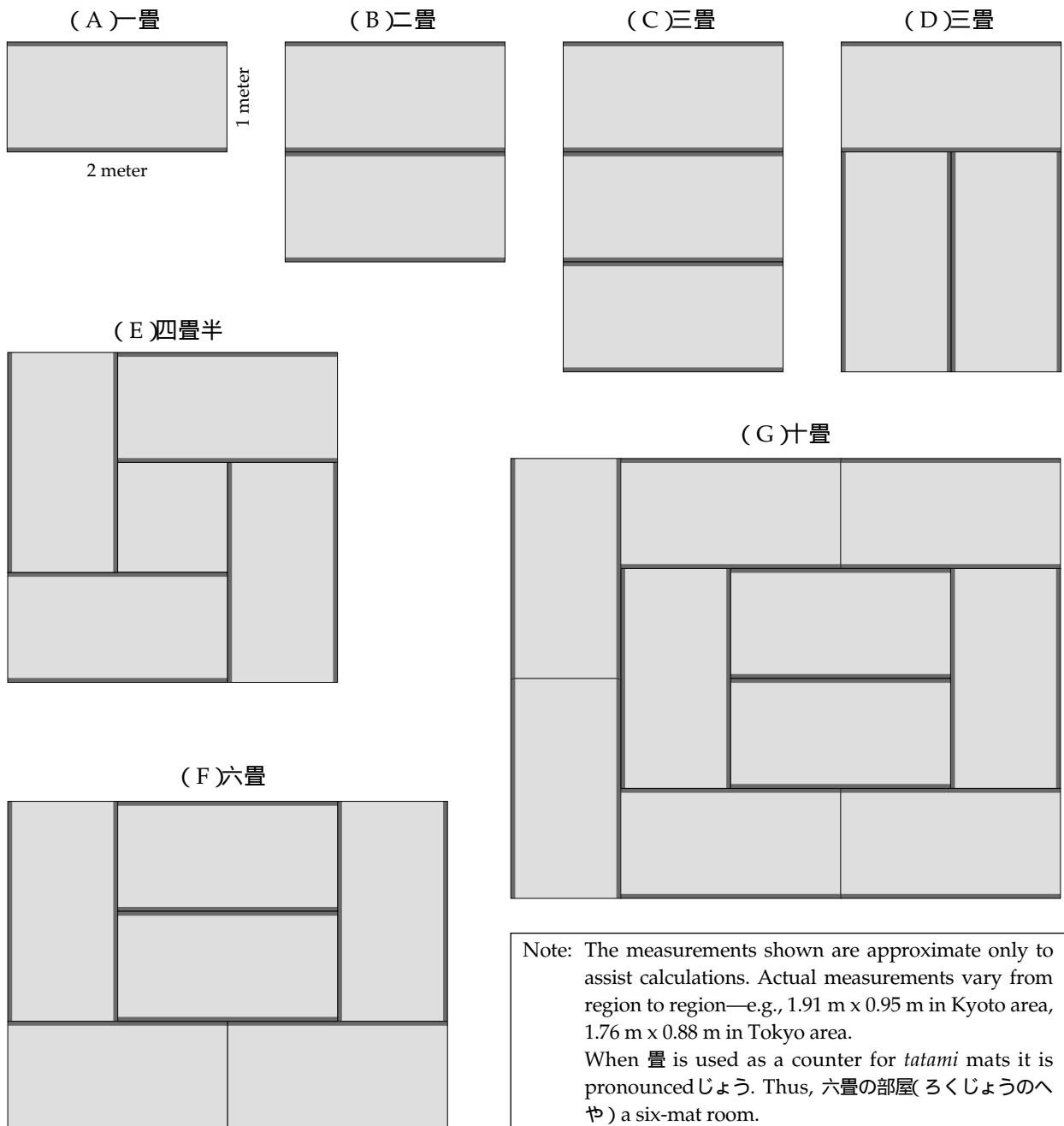


じゅうじょう ま へ や
十 畳 の 間 or 十 畳 の 部 屋
10-mat room

WORK SHEET

名前 _____

- Using the dimensions shown for the *tatami* in diagram (A), calculate the length and width of the floor of the room shown in diagrams (B)~(G).
- Calculate the floor area in square meters of the matting shown in diagrams (A)~(G).



Note: The measurements shown are approximate only to assist calculations. Actual measurements vary from region to region—e.g., 1.91 m x 0.95 m in Kyoto area, 1.76 m x 0.88 m in Tokyo area.
 When 畳 is used as a counter for *tatami* mats it is pronounced じょう. Thus, 六畳の部屋 (ろくじょうのへや) a six-mat room.

ROLL-PLAY SHEET

Situation 1

John, a home-stay student who has been studying Japanese at high school, has just arrived from the airport with Ms. Miyamoto, a member of his host family. They have just entered the Japanese-style room of her large home in the country. Even though this is his first experience of living in Japan, he remembered to take off his slippers before stepping onto the *tatami*. It was one of the things he had learned before leaving his home country. Having heard so much about Japan and Japanese houses, he is quite surprised at the size of the room in this particular house.

- John: いいにおいですね。新しい^{あたら}いたたみですか。
- Ms. Miyamoto: はい、新しい^{あたら}いたたみはほんとうにいいにおいですね。
- John: 広い^{ひろ}部屋^{へや}ですね。何^{なん}じょうですか。
- Ms. Miyamoto: 10じょうです。
- John: あれはとこの^しまですか。
- Ms. Miyamoto: はい、^しそうです。よく知^しっていますね。
- John: 日本語^{にほんご}の授業^{じゅぎょう}で^しなりました。
- Ms. Miyamoto: 日本語^{にほんご}もじょうず^しですね。
- John: いいえ、まだ^しへたです。どうぞ日本^{にほん}のことをいろいろ^{おし}教えてください。
- Ms. Miyamoto: はい、わかり^しました。

Situation 2

Mrs. Tanaka is visiting her friend, Mrs. Yamada, who has invited her into the *tatami* room of her house. Given the choice of coffee or tea, Mrs. Tanaka selects tea. It is so nice she has a second serving when it is offered. But when it comes to having more cake, she politely refuses. How could anyone refuse Japanese cakes?

- Mrs. Yamada: (お)ざぶとんをどうぞ。(She hands her guest a cushion.)
- Mrs. Tanaka: しつれい^しします。(She sits on the cushion.)
- Mrs. Yamada: お茶^{ちや}とコーヒーとどちらがよろしいですか。
- Mrs. Tanaka: お茶^{ちや}をおねがい^しします。
- Mrs. Yamada: すぐも^しってまいります。
- (Brings tea.)
- どうぞ。
- Mrs. Tanaka: いただき^します。(Sips) ... おいしいお茶^{ちや}ですね。
- Mrs. Yamada: もうい^しっぱい^しいかがですか。
- Mrs. Tanaka: はい、いただき^します。
- Mrs. Yamada: おかし^{かし}をもうひとつい^しかがですか。
- Mrs. Tanaka: いいえ、もうけ^しっこう^しです。ごちそうさま^し(でした)。