

A Day in the Life

色いろいろ *Iro iroiro* Be Colorful!

To the teacher: Please conduct the activities on page 4 of this series before reading the text. After that, read the text with the students, and help them to compare their own awareness of colors with the perceptions of color in Japan as described in the text, noticing the differences and similarities.

**Iro* means "color" and *iroiro* means "various" in Japanese.



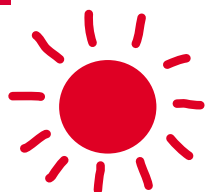
How many colors are there in the rainbow? Obviously, the actual number of colors in the rainbow does not differ, but in Japan, it is said there are seven, in the United States, six, in Germany five, and in Russia, the answer seems to differ from one person to another.

In addition, specific colors have associations with particular things. For example, most Japanese think of apples as red. Colors may be linked to certain things and images, as well as to expression of certain feelings.

"Red," for instance, in Japan evokes images of auspicious or happy occasions symbolized by the colors red and white (*kōhaku* 紅白). Such images and associations of colors, however, are not necessarily universal. Differences in modes of expression and images emerge as a result of many factors including the natural environment, social conditions, and traditional culture. In this issue, A Day in the Life offers materials and examples for considering the differences and similarities in the language and role of colors as reflected in Japanese language and culture.

あか
赤

Red



1. *Taiyō no iro* 太陽の色 The color of the sun

If you ask "What color is the sun?" most Japanese will answer, "Red." What color do you draw the sun? And what kinds of things do you associate with the color red?



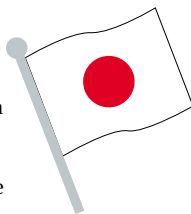
4. *Akachan* 赤ちゃん Baby

A newborn baby is bright red, thus the name.

2. *Hi no maru* 日の丸

The "rising sun"; Japan's national flag

Japan's flag consists of a red sun on a white ground. Flags have been used from long ago as symbols of a nation and its people. One can get a glimpse of a country's culture by seeing how colors, not to mention motifs, are used to express geographical location, religious beliefs, ways of thinking, and traditions. The round red ball on Japan's flag represents the sun, but for other countries, red can represent blood, revolution, independence, courage, soldiers, love, communism, fire, and zeal. What colors are used in the flag of your country? What do the colors in the flag signify?



5. *Kōhaku manjū* 紅白饅頭

Red and white bean-jam sweets

Pairs of red and white *manjū* are frequently presented as gifts to guests attending wedding receptions, and other auspicious commemorative events.



6. *Sekihan* 赤飯

Red-bean rice

Rice cooked with *azuki* 紅豆 beans. Like *kōhaku manjū*, *sekihan* is a dish frequently served on auspicious occasions.



3. *Kōhaku no mizuhiki* 紅白の水引 Red and white gift wrap string ornaments

Mizuhiki are made by rolling thin strips of paper into strings which are then covered with glue and dried. Red and white are colors used to decorate and enhance places where auspicious and happy occasions are held. The photograph shows *shūgi-bukuro* 祝儀袋, gift wrap string ornaments for weddings and other auspicious occasions.

Phrases

Akaku naru 赤くなる: Embarrassment, to blush

Makka ni natte okoru 真っ赤になって怒る: Grow red with anger

Akaji 赤字: Red ink, deficit spending, loss (cf., *kuroji* 黒字: black ink, profits)

Aka no tanin 赤の他人: A complete or perfect stranger

しろ
白 White



ゆき 雪
9. Yuki
Snow

A country snowscape.

Phrases

Hakushi ni modosu 白紙にもどす (lit., "go back to the blank page"): Means going back to the beginning, starting at "square one," etc.

Shiroi me de miru 白い目で見える (lit., "look with the whites of one's eyes"): To scorn, treat coldly



しろむく 白無垢
10. Shiromuku
Wedding kimono
Wedding kimono used in traditional style ceremony.



ウェディングドレス
11. Wedding dress

Many brides in recent years are married in Western-style wedding dresses, but some wear the traditional *shiromuku* for the marriage ceremony and change into a wedding dress for the wedding reception.

くろ
黒 Black



すみ 墨
12. Sumi
Black ink

Calligraphy is brushed on pure white paper with pitch black ink. The kanji *sumi* consists of the kanji 黒 (black) and the radical 土 (earth).



も 喪
13. Mo
Mourning

Black and white are the usual colors of mourning today. This tradition goes back to the formal wear frock coats introduced from Europe in the late nineteenth century. Before that, mourning attire was white or made of undyed linen fabric. The photograph shows a *kōden* 香典 (condolence gift) envelope strung by black and white *mizuhiki*.

Phrases

Shirokuro o tsukeru 白黒をつける (lit., "draw the line between black and white"): Clarify whether right or wrong, good or bad

Me o shirokuro saseru 目を白黒させる: To roll one's eyes in fright, surprise, or anguish

Haraguroi 腹黒い (lit., "black belly"): Ill-intentioned, evilhearted



髪と目
14. Kami and me
Hair and eyes

There are various shades of black, but "black" figures in many words and expressions referring to hair and eyes.

• *Kurokami* 黒髪 (black hair):

Synonymous for "beautiful hair" of a woman

• *Shirome* and *kurome* 白目と黒目 (lit., "white eye, black eye"): White of the eye and iris (and pupil) of the eye



こうはくたいこう 紅白対抗
7. Kōhaku taikō
Red and white team competition

Competitors at elementary schools and of other groups are usually divided into "red" and "white" teams. When large groups are divided into several teams, other colors such as blue, yellow, and green may be used, but whenever there are two sides, they are usually called the "red" and "white" teams.



だるま
8. Daruma

Doll representing the meditating figure of Daruma (Bodhidharma), the founder of the Zen sect of Buddhism. The base of the figure is weighted so that even when toppled over, the doll stands upright again. The eyes are simply a pair of white circles, as here. You make a wish and paint in one eye. When the wish comes true, you can celebrate by painting in the other.

黄

Yellow



15. *Himawari* ひまわり

16. *Tanpopo* たんぽぽ

Sunflower

Dandelion

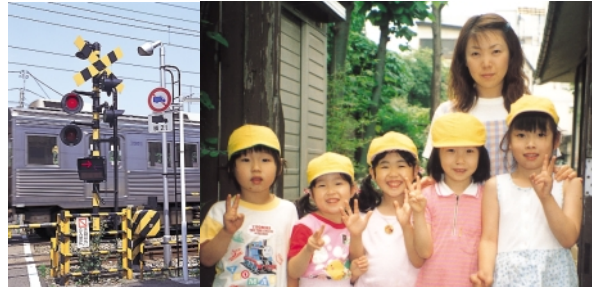
Flowers entice pollen-carrying insects with their bright yellow petals.



Phrases

Kuchibashi ga kiroi くちばしが黄色い (lit., "beak is yellow"): Refers to someone who is inexperienced or young

Kiroi koe 黄色い声 (lit., "yellow voice"): The shrill voice of women and children



17. *Fumikiri* 踏切

18. *Kodomo no bōshi* こどもの帽子

Railway crossing

Schoolchildren's caps

The Japan Industrial Standards (JIS) code designates yellow and yellow-and-black stripes as signifying warning. Yellow is used at railway crossings to indicate caution, school children's hats are bright yellow to increase visibility for motorists, and the bumpy lines installed in station floors and sidewalks to guide the visually impaired are yellow.

青

Blue



19. *Aozora and Umi* 青空と海
Blue sky and sea

20. *Ao and Midori* 青と緑
Blue and green

The new, young foliage of spring is called *shinryoku* (lit., "new green") or *aoba* (lit., "blue leaves"). This usage of *ao* when referring the new spring foliage also suggests "youth," "newness," "immaturity," as seen in the words for "youth" and "young man": *seishun* 青春, *seinen* 青年, *aokusai* 青くさい, and *aonisai* 青二才.



21. *Jinzu* ジーンズ

22. *Seifuku* 制服

23. *Kendōgi* 剣道着

Jeans

School uniform

Kendō togs

Traditional blue fabric was colored using indigo dyes, and even today indigo blue is a common color in Japanese clothing. The suits (called "recruit suits") worn by university students visiting potential employers for job interviews as well as the standard attire of office workers is often dark blue of various shades.

Phrases

Aoku naru 青くなる (to grow pale): To pale when ill or stricken by fear or worry

Jūnihitoe 十二単 (12-layered kimono): The costume of high-ranking ladies-in-waiting in the court from the Heian period (710-94) onward consisted of 12 or more layers. Colors passed down from olden times often come from the names of flowers and plants. Various hues of pink, for example, include *sakura* 桜 (cherry blossom or pale pink), *momo no hana* 桃の花 (peach blossom or bright pink), *kōbai* 紅梅 (dark pink plum pink). Many tints of green are named after plants: *wakakusa* 若草 is the bright lush green of new grass in spring, *aodake* 青竹 is the bright green of new growth bamboo, and *oikatake* 老竹 is the dark, grayish green of the mature bamboo trunk. Other color names come from plants grown specifically for dyestuffs such as 紅花 *benibana* (safflower). One of the most favored colors of the Heian period was the bright yellow of the *yabuki* flowers of a variety of rose (Kerria japonica).



みどり
緑

Green


24. Ryokucha 緑茶
Green tea

Green tea is made by a process that preserves the green color of the tea leaves. (*Cha*, or tea, as a general term is associated with the color "brown.")


26. Kabuki no jōshikimaku
歌舞伎の定式幕
Kabuki theater curtain

Broad stripes of green, black, and persimmon orange decorate the main curtain on the kabuki stage.

25. Ryokuōshoku yasai 緑黄色野菜

Lit., "green and yellow" vegetables; colored vegetables

Vegetables whose edible parts contain 600 or more micrograms of carotene per 100 grams, such as spinach, carrots, squash, and tomatoes, come under this category. When packing a *bentō* lunch (see photo), care to include foods of different colors helps assure a nutritional balance. Red can be represented by vegetables like tomatoes and carrots, green by leafy vegetables or asparagus, and yellow by egg or citrus fruit.

27. Midori no hi 緑の日
Greenery Day

Green is the color widely used to mean "vegetation," "trees" and "foliage" in general. April 29th, the birthday of the Emperor Shōwa, who was especially devoted to nature and natural science, is celebrated as a national holiday dedicated to gratitude for nature's bounties and spiritual enrichment through appreciation and enjoyment of nature.

Photos: Hongō Jin (3, 5, 6, 8, 12, 13, 16, 17, 19, 24, 25), Kodansha Publishers (9, 10, Jūnihitoe)

Activities

Part I Coloring

Paint the picture below with the colors you like.



Part II Q and A

- あなたの好きな色は何ですか。
What is your favorite color?
- どうしてその色が好きですか。
Why do you like that color?
- Fill in the blanks below.
(1) Write in the names of the crayon colors in Japanese in the boxes and English on the line _____.
(2) Write in the name and a picture of the things you associate with those colors (English or Japanese)
(3) Write in what you feel or the images you think of for those colors (e.g., red → passion, celebration, etc.) and do the same for (2).
(4) Compare your chart with other students'. Are there a lot of similarities? How much difference is there?
(5) In your country, what colors are identified as "happy" or auspicious colors? Which are ill-omened or ominous colors?
(6) Are there colors in your country or local region that have special meaning? What colors are those? What meaning do they have?

あ か

a ka
Red

Things of the color:

Images & feelings
of the color:

き い ろ

ki i ro

Things of the color:

Images & feelings
of the color:

あ お

a o

Things of the color:

Images & feelings
of the color:

し ろ

shi ro

Things of the color:

Images & feelings
of the color:

く ろ

ku ro

Things of the color:

Images & feelings
of the color:

み ど り

mi do ri

Things of the color:

Images & feelings
of the color: