

A Day in the Life

あめ
雨

Ame Rain

Potsu-potsu, shito-shito, zā-zā . . . Can you guess what these onomatopoeic expressions describe? They are words evoking different types of rain. It rains a great deal in Japan, throughout all four seasons, from gentle drizzles to typhoon-driven rainstorms, from passing evening showers to rain that falls continuously for days on end. In this "A Day in the Life" we focus on rain, the terms that are

A Day in the Life introduces aspects of the cultural backdrop of daily life in Japan by focusing on topics that are often talked about, are considered essential to the culture, or otherwise loom large in the lives of Japanese. Part of the aim of this feature is to encourage readers to consider culture itself from a broad perspective, recognizing, for example, that any given culture, whether Japan's or your own, includes diversity; that different cultures have similarities as well as differences; that cultures evolve with the changing times; and that, while human behavior may be manifested in different ways, at the fundamental level there is a great deal about us that is universal.

The newsletter is printed in full-color and two-color issues alternately. In the full-color issues, *A Day in the Life* looks at the lives of Japanese people in general, while in the two-color issues (with feature articles) it focuses on topics essential to understanding the daily lives of Japanese school students.

Photos: Hongō Jin

used in Japan to express it, and how rain affects the culture and society. Through the example of rain, we can see how geography and climate shapes the lifestyle and the way Japanese use their language. We hope that this theme will prompt students to think about the different ways that natural environment affects people's lifestyles, culture, and language.

Japan's Climate

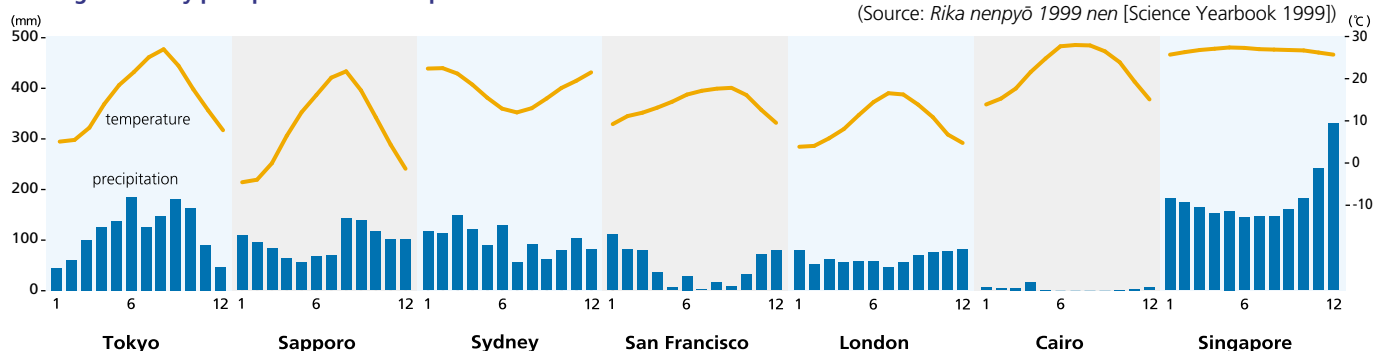
Frequent rain and hot summers are the two prominent features of Japan's climate. The high temperatures and humidity, well-suited to rice-growing, have had an important impact on agriculture. Average rainfall in Tokyo, for example, is 1,800 mm., nearly double the global average of 1,000 mm. The dry and wet seasons are not as distinct as in Southeast Asia and other parts of the world, and precipitation (rain and snow) is high year-round throughout the country. The intensity of rain is relatively strong and varies from season to season. *Tsuyu* 梅雨 (also pronounced as *baiu*) is the term used to refer to the fine, incessant rains of early summer and *naga-*

ame to the long, steady rains of autumn. The typhoons of late August and September bring heavy, storm-blown rain. Rain can be the bearer of blessings as well as difficulty and disaster, as in the case of water shortages or destruction from typhoons.



(Source: *Ame no kotoba jiten* [Dictionary of Rain Words], Kurashima Atsushi, ed., Kōdansha, 2000.)

Average monthly precipitation and temperature



The Language of Rain

There are many words for rain in Japanese, each differing according to intensity, duration, and season. The same is true in warm, damp parts of China south of the Yangtze River. According to one theory, phenomena that play an important role in a given society and culture are often subdivided into various types and described using a wide variety of specialized terms. Often-cited examples are the rich

vocabulary of the Inuit people* for snow and the Arab terminology for camels. Is the same true of rain in Japan? What sorts of phenomena in your country are expressed with such rich vocabularies? What role do those phenomena play in your culture?

(*See *Language Thought and Reality*, Benjamin Lee Whorf, John B. Carroll, ed., 1956)

Kanji Characters with the Ame Radical

The kanji characters used in Japanese are combinations of several parts. The kanji for many semantically related words share the same radical or part. *Kumo* 雲 (clouds), *kaminari* 雷 (lightning and thunder), *yuki* 雪 (snow), *den* 電 (electricity) are several kanji relating to rain that have the *ame* radical.



Kinds of Rain

By intensity

Ōame 大雨 (大 big, 雨 rain): Heavy rain. When the rain is so heavy that flooding and other damage may result, the Meteorological Agency has established levels at which it issues official warnings or alarms to ward off possible disaster.

By season/time of day

Harusame 春雨 (春 spring): Gently falling, fine rain during the warm days of spring.

Tsuyu 梅雨 (梅 plum): Rainy season lasting for about 30 days from around the 10th of June to the 10th of July. The rain that falls during this time of year. The term refers to the long rains that coincide with the season when the fruit of the plum trees ripen. (*Kara tsuyu*: Dry spell resulting from predominantly clear weather during the usually rainy season.)

Yūdachi 夕立: Evening cloudburst or sudden showers of summer. Often accompanied by thunder and lightning.

Living with the Local Climate

Housing

Traditional-style dwellings feature various devices for coping with local climate. Dwellings of old Japan built of wood, which absorbs moisture, were well suited to its humid climate. In regions swept by strong gales, people built windbreaks around their houses and in the coastal areas they protected their houses from sea winds with stone walls. In regions with heavy snowfall, the houses were built with steep roofs to prevent heavy accumulation of snow and extra strong posts to withstand the weight of snow.

What sort of characteristics do houses display as a reflection of the climate in your region?



Amadoi 雨どい:

Eaves troughs for draining water from the roof and channeling it to the ground or into drains.

Umbrellas

According to a survey conducted in 1993, Japanese own an average of 7 umbrellas per person and annual demand for umbrellas was 100 million. For people who live in a country with as much rain as Japan, umbrellas are indispensable. (Source: *Ame no kotoba jiten*)

Most elementary school children commute to school on foot, and it is helpful if they wear bright yellow caps, raincoats, rubber boots as well as yellow umbrellas that stand out clearly when visibility is poor in rainy weather. Younger children have yellow rain covers to put over their school satchels (called *randoseru* ランドセル).

Oki-gasa 置き傘: Sometimes, even though it was clear in the morning, it will start raining in the middle of the day. For times like these, many people keep an extra umbrella at school or workplace, called an *oki-gasa*.



Photo: Nakanishi Yūsuke

By duration

Tōri-ame 通り雨: Sudden downpours that last only briefly, as if passing by quickly.

Naga-ame 長雨 (長 long): Rain, such as that of the early summer (*tsuyu*) and autumn seasons, that falls continuously for days on end.

By characteristics

Taifu 台風: Of the tropical cyclones originating in the low latitudes in the northwest Pacific, the ones with wind velocity near their vortex reaching at least 17 meters per second are called *taifu*. Several typhoons typically sweep over Japan during August and September, often wreaking widespread damage. (Try thinking about how typhoons differ from or resemble hurricanes and cyclones.)

Other Expressions

Ame futte ji katamaru 雨降って地固まる: This phrase suggests how, just as the earth settles more solidly in a landfill after a rain, understanding can often be reached after a certain amount of turmoil and argument has taken place.

Ame onnalame otoko 雨女/雨男: Name for someone whose presence always seems to be accompanied by rain or bad weather. The opposite expressions, for those who seem to bring good weather, are *hare onna/hare otoko*.



Photo: Kanaegaura High School Photography Club

Ori-tatami gasa 折りたたみ傘: Collapsible umbrellas are sold in large numbers. In uncertain weather, it can be bothersome to carry a bulky full-length umbrella. When you can't be sure whether it will rain or not, it is always reassuring to have a foldable umbrella in your bag or briefcase. Recently very light-weight folding umbrellas have been designed that weigh as little as 100 grams.



Kasa-tate 傘立て: Most homes as well as entrances to public buildings have umbrella stands. In public places the umbrella stands are usually brought out specially when it starts raining. One might worry that one's umbrella might be stolen while inside the building, but in most cases, one need not worry. Of course, some do go missing when many people gather in one place. In some cases, such as hotels and museums, the umbrella stands have locks with removable keys. Supermarkets and department stores generally encourage patrons to carry their umbrellas with them into the store, providing plastic bags at the entrance to prevent dripping.



Aiai-gasa 相合い傘: "Two under the same umbrella" is associated with couples in love. A simple sketch like that at right, showing the names of the pair, means "Moriyoshi and Noriko like each other."



Tomorrow's Weather

Tenki yohō 天気予報: The weather report is an inseparable part of daily news broadcasts. It is also possible to get up-to-date Meteorological Agency reports on the weather by telephone by dialing 177. Today the accuracy of weather reports is roughly 80 percent.



When it comes to the schedule of special outdoor events, people of every country naturally tend to worry about the weather. How are weather reports presented in your country?

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あめ 雨ふり 作詞 北原白秋 作曲 中山晋平

あめあめ ふれふれ かあさんが
 じゃのめで おむかい* うれしいな
 ビッチビッチ チャップチャップ ラン ラン ラン

Ame furi [In the Rain]

(Lyrics, Kitahara Hakushū; melody, Nakayama Shinpei)

Rain, rain, keep on raining!
 Mother's coming to meet me
 With a big *janome* parasol
 Oh, how happy I shall be . . .
 Splashing, splashing, all the way home!

*おむかい = おむかえ

Society

Water shortages: Low precipitation during what are normally rainy seasons and prolonged hot spells interrupt the normal rhythms of daily life. In the summer of 1994, for example, temperatures reached record highs and rainfall fell far below the yearly average. Reservoirs nearly dried up and water was in short supply all over the country. Strict regulation of the water supply was begun, prohibiting use of water for pools and fountains, and people started buying bottled water to drink. The damage to farm crops was widespread and in some areas of the country the staple of school lunches was switched from boiled rice to bread and from use of fresh-cooked ingredients to water-conserving frozen foods and canned goods. They even changed from the usual eating utensils to throw-away paper dishes and cups that would not have to be washed. The impact that fluctuations in the weather can have on society has helped to arouse new awareness of the importance of efficient use and conservation of rain water.

The weather is an intimate part of people's daily life and moods. It is mentioned frequently in myths and folk tales, novels and stories, fairy tales, songs, and other literary

Teru-teru bōzu てるてる坊主: The night before a school excursion, it looks like rain . . . The plans for such events usually call for "postponed in case of rain" (*uten enki* 雨天延期) (the opposite is "going ahead even in case of rain" [*uten kekkō* 雨天決行]). No one wants to wake up to find it is raining on the day of a much-anticipated outing. What would you do on such a day? In Japan, we still see little children making "fair-weather" dolls called *teru-teru bōzu* and hang them outside the window. There is even a song to go along with them.

A *teru-teru bōzu* is made by covering a ball of padding with a square of paper or cloth (usually white) to form a round head, and securing it at the "neck" with string or thread. A face is often drawn on one side.



Photo: Nakanishi Yūsuke

てるてる坊主 作詞 浅原鏡村 作曲 中山晋平

てるてるぼうず てるぼうず あしたでんきに
 しておくれ いつかの ゆーめの そらのよ
 に* はれーたら きんのーすずーあげよ

Teru-teru bōzu [Sunshine Doll]

(Lyrics, Asahara Kyōson; melody, Nakayama Shinpei)

Teru-teru bōzu, teru bōzu,
 Please make tomorrow a fine day
 If you'll make it clear and sunny
 Like the blue sky of my dreams
 I'll give you a gold bell.

*そらのよに = そらのように

Gōu 豪雨: Figures given in the *Rika nenpyō* [Science Yearbook] for 1997 state that *gōu* according to the definition of the Meteorological Agency has occurred nine times since 1957. Each of these instances resulted in damage to crops and dwellings and from several dozen to several hundred people perished. Torrential rains accompanying typhoons passing through metropolitan areas like Tokyo can paralyze public transportation networks and cause damage to urban utility systems. The culture and civilization developed by the advanced industrial society is in some aspects quite vulnerable to the effects of natural disasters.

Sansei-u 酸性雨: Acid rain. Rain with a hydrogen ion index of 5.6 points or less. Acid rain has 10 times more hydrogen ions than normal rain, which can seriously damage soil, forests, as well as wetlands. It is believed that automobile exhaust is the cause of acid rain, which is a global problem.

works. Weather often figures in the plot of films and other works. What part does weather play in the life of your country?

Activities

Let's learn and create onomatopoeia! *

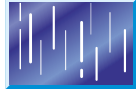
Purpose: To imagine scenes evoked by Japanese onomatopoeic words and understand their meaning.

1. Examine the onomatopoeic words related to rain below. What characteristics of rain do you think they express? Link the word to the appropriate picture.

ぽつぽつ *Potsu-potsu* ・



しとしと *Shito-shito* ・



ザーザー *Zā-zā* ・



2. What other onomatopoeic words could we use? Try imagining various natural phenomena and creating onomatopoeia to describe them.

Answers

ぽつぽつ: the dripping sound and appearance of scattered drops of rain falling, such as when it begins to rain.

しとしと: sound of the long, steady rains that fall all day; continuous, fine precipitation almost without sound. A cloaking, enveloping quiet rain.

ザーザー: Rain that beats down with a fierce pounding sound. Downpour.

*The naming of a thing or action by a vocal imitation of the sound associated with it (as buzz, hiss).

Weather report

Purpose: To enable students to understand features of their local climate and talk about them in Japanese.

Using the weather symbols below, describe the climate of your area, or use them to describe an event or feeling associated with a certain kind of weather.

Sample sentences:

今日ははれです。ともだちとサッカーをします。うれしいです。

今日もはれです。毎日とてもあついです。つかれます。いやです。

今日ははれときどき雨です。かさをもっていきます。

今日はかみなりです。大きい音がします。こわいです。



はれ
hare
clear



曇(くもり)
kumori
cloudy



雨(あめ)
ame
rain



雷(かみなり)
kaminari
thunder
and
lightning



くもりのち
雨(あめ)
kumori, nochi
ame/cloudy,
followed by rain



はれときどき
雨(あめ)
hare tokidoki
ame/clear,
sometimes rain



雪(ゆき)
yuki
snow

Simulation

Purpose: To make students aware of the way climate influences people's lives.

What would you do in the following situations:

* Times when you want it to be good weather tomorrow

* When it suddenly begins to rain

* When you want to know what the weather will be the following day

Q & A

1. Study the diagram on page 1 and answer the questions.

(1) In each city, during what month of the year is precipitation highest? What month is it lowest?

	雨や雪がおおい月 Month of highest precipitation	雨や雪がすくない月 Month of lowest precipitation
とうきょう	_____	_____
さっぽろ	_____	_____
シドニー	_____	_____
サンフランシスコ	_____	_____
ロンドン	_____	_____
カイロ	_____	_____
シンガポール	_____	_____
あなたのまち	_____	_____

(2) In Tokyo, it rains a great deal in June. どうしてですか。 Why is that? (see page 2).

2. Answer the following questions:

(1) What kind of umbrella do you use most often, a large umbrella or a folding umbrella? Why do you think folding umbrellas are used so often in Japan?

(2) What is a common color of umbrellas and raincoats for small children in Japan? What do you think is the reason for that?

(3) List some of the words used to express rain in English. List words used to describe other kinds of weather.

(4) List the names of some products/items of daily use that are related to the particular climate of your country or region. Why are such items used so often?

(5) Explain some of the customs related to the weather that are part of your daily life. What kind of customs are they? When are they practiced? Where? What do you think the reasons are for such customs?