



# Breakfast in Japan

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**Ages:** 14–18 years old  
**Level:** Beginning (students have had 30 to 50 hours of Japanese)  
**Culture:** Japanese breakfast and polite manners  
**Japanese:** Dramatized scene introducing mealtime expressions; review of *Nan desu ka*, ...*wa suki desu ka*, etc.



## Objectives

This lesson introduces Japanese eating patterns. The specific focus is the large Japanese breakfast that does not differ from the other daily meals. Chopsticks are also a point of cultural interest in this lesson. Japanese politeness is further explored through the mealtime expressions *itadakimasu* and *gochisōsama*.

Food is a great motivator. Students usually have some prior knowledge of chopsticks and Japanese food. They come to class with a natural curiosity about these two things. Also, food and chopsticks offer an experimental learning opportunity. Student involvement means experiential learning. Learning through experience increases the chances of retaining what has been taught.

Canadians can learn from the Japanese way of eating. Today, Western society is concerned with healthy eating choices. Our typical eating patterns have changed over the last decade. A look at the Japanese approach to mealtimes offers an interesting comparison and may open one's eyes to the healthy possibilities that exist.

Cultural understanding is deepened further by the exploration of the Japanese need to be polite. Students will appreciate the politeness of *itadaki-masu* and *gochisōsama*.

Drama is a powerful medium through which to teach a language. This is especially true when students themselves become involved in the theater.

## Materials

- a table and two chairs or a low table only
- typical Japanese breakfast food items (rice, *miso*, fish, vegetables)
- typical Japanese table setting
- chopsticks (a pair for each student)

## Procedure

### A. Short Overview

1. Review
2. The students watch a scene performed by the teacher and the Japanese language assistant.
3. Student volunteers walk through a simplified version of the scene with the teachers whispering their lines to them.
4. Discussion of cultural points in English.
5. Students are drilled orally on new vocabulary.
6. Students are given written copies of the scene and practice in pairs.
7. Chopsticks are introduced and students have a chance to try using them.
8. Next day: Students present their own version of breakfast time.

### B. Step-by-step Procedure

1. Oral Warm-up (5 minutes)  
Students repeat and practice familiar structures.  
Teacher: *Nan desu ka?*  
Student: ...*desu*.



Teacher: *...wa suki desu ka?*

Student: *Hai, daisuki desu. / Hai, suki desu.*

2. Teacher Presentation (8 minutes)

Students observe and listen to the breakfast scene as performed by the teacher and the Japanese language assistant. Repeat the scene two or three times.

The teachers may wish to ad-lib. Using props and actions to help communicate the meaning is helpful. At this stage, teachers needn't be concerned that all language used will not be modeled by the students. It is important to expose the students to conversation beyond their bounds in order to gradually help them develop an ear for the language. Though this lesson is designed for a teacher and an intern from Japan, the presentation could equally well be done by the teacher and a strong student with some preparation beforehand. A video presentation of the scene is a viable option as well.

3. Imitation (5 minutes)

Two student volunteers, preferably relatively strong in Japanese, now become the actors, taking on the roles of host student and Western guest. The teacher and assistant stand immediately behind the students whispering the lines for the students to repeat. Note that the "student dialogue" is a simplified version of the original teacher presentation.

4. Cultural Discussion (10 minutes)

Students are given a chance to ask questions and make comments in English about what they have seen. The teacher may wish to draw attention to

types of food eaten, types of dishes used, comparison to Canada's breakfast, polite eating habits, etc. Of course, cultural discussion in English should be allowed at any time if promoted by the students.

5. Vocabulary Discussion (5 minutes)

Students isolate new vocabulary. They may offer a new Japanese word or they may offer the English meaning. The teacher may wish to present the scene again to help the students further deduce meaning or recall certain new vocabulary.

6. Oral Repetition and Paired Practice (12 minutes)

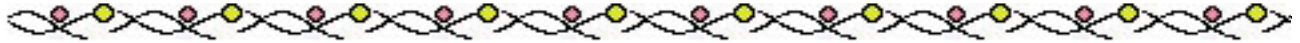
Vocabulary is drilled orally through repetition and questioning. Students choose partners. Each student is given a written script. Students rehearse the scene in pairs. Generally listening is easier than speaking. While listening, students are able to guess the meaning of complicated sentences through props, actions, and key words. However, in speaking, the student is completely responsible and has no opportunity to guess. Too much new vocabulary can be frustrating if students are required to produce without proper preparation.

7. Chopsticks (10 minutes)

Students watch a demonstration on how to use chopsticks. Then each student is given a pair to practice.

8. Homework and Follow-up

Students work on the memorization of the scene for homework. As a challenge, advanced students may modify the dialogue somewhat to include their own choices of food. Students will perform the scene in pairs in front of the class.



## Script for Teachers' Presentation

(HS=Japanese host student, WG=Western guest)

HS: *Asagohan desu!*  
 WG: *Hai.*  
 HS: *Suwatte kudasai.*  
 WG: *Hai.*  
 Both: *Itadakimasu.*  
 HS: *Hai, dōzo*  
 (Host motions for guest to begin eating.)  
 WG: *Arigatō.*  
 HS: *Ninjin wa suki desu ka?*  
 WG: *Hai, suki desu.*  
 HS: *Sakana wa suki desu ka?*  
 WG: *Hai, daisuki desu.*  
 HS: *Kyabetsu wa suki desu ka?*  
 WG: *Hai. Kore wa nan desu ka?*  
 HS: *Omiso-shiru desu.*  
 (Host shows the guest how to eat soup by drinking from the *owan*. Guest follows the host's action.)  
 HS: *Oishii desu ka?*  
 WG: *Oishii desu... Nan desu ka?*  
 HS: *Tsukemono desu.*  
 (Guest tastes *tsukemono*.)  
 HS: *Oishii desu ka?*  
 WG: *Anmari oishikunai desu ne... Kore wa gohan desu ne?*  
 HS: *Hai, sō desu.*  
 WG: *Nan desu ka?*  
 HS: *Oshōyu desu.*  
 (Guest begins to pour soy sauce on his rice.)  
 HS: *Oshōyu o kakenai de. Kyabetsu ni kakete kudasai.*  
 WG: *Sumimasen...*  
 (Both eat.)  
 WG: *Asagohan wa ōi desu ne.*  
 HS: *Ōi ? Nihon de wa, kono asagohan wa sonnani ōkunai no yo. Kanada de wa nani o tabemasu ka?*  
 WG: *Kanada de wa, tatoeba, Corn Flakes dake desu. Ato, pan ka kudamono.*  
 HS: *Ah sō? Sonnani ōkunai no ne.*  
 (Both finish eating.)  
 Both: *Gochisōsama.*

## Student Dialogue

(HS=Japanese host student, WG=Western guest)

Both: *Itadakimasu.*  
 HS: *Sakana wa suki desu ka?*  
 WG: *Hai, daisuki desu. Kore wa nan desu ka?*  
 HS: *Omiso-shiru desu.*  
 (Host shows the guest how to eat soup by drinking from the *owan*. Guest follows the host's action.)  
 HS: *Oishii desu ka?*  
 WG: *Oishii desu. Nan desu ka?*  
 HS: *Tsukemono desu.*  
 (Guest tastes *tsukemono*.)  
 HS: *Oishii desu ka?*  
 WG: *Anmari oishikunai desu ne.\* Kore wa gohan desu ne.*  
 HS: *Hai, sō desu.*  
 WG: *Zenbu oishii desu.*  
 Both: *Gochisōsama.*

\*[Responding to "Is it delicious?" (*Oishii desu ka*) with "It is not delicious" (*Oishikunai desu*) is rather unnatural. Instead, Japanese would tend to say why it was not delicious: "It's salty, isn't it" (*Shoppai desu ne*), "It's sweet" (*Amari desu*), "It's spicy" (*Karai desu*). Since the students are actually tasting the foods, this is a good opportunity to introduce some typical tastes of Japanese foods such as "spicy" and "sweet."]





## Comments from the Feedback Committee

### **Educating for Cross-cultural Understanding**

A meal is a cogent way of introducing young people to Japan's culture and people, because meals are integral to the culture of everyday Japan. As Ms. Thayer points out, people eat meals every day the world over, making them an exceedingly apt tool for learning about another culture. And, as she also says, meals are good because the entire class can have the experience of eating and touching the food.

This important experience should not simply end in superficial appreciation of how "fun" or "delicious" the meal was. It should instead be an entree into reflection on the students' own culture, and a chance to understand Japanese culture through its eating customs. Having experienced what is different about a Japanese meal in the classroom, students who find themselves in the real situation will not be flustered. For those students who may visit Japan in the near future and perhaps eat at someone's home, this is a useful experience. But for other students, who may not have that opportunity, the class may mean nothing more than having had a fun experience, drinking *miso* soup and picking up food with chopsticks.

The goal should, therefore, go beyond the experience itself; we should encourage students to look a little deeper into the culture and think about the people of that culture. The class needs to develop into a class on intercultural understanding. The meal could be a way to stimulate the interest of students in Japanese culture and deepen their understanding of it. For instance, they could research the history of chopsticks, finding out when they first came into use and why; consider the rationality of using chopsticks as opposed to forks and spoons; or figure out what influence chopsticks might have had on the development of Japanese cuisine and other aspects of culture.

### **Lesson Plan**

The lesson is well structured in terms of activities, use of whole group/small group/individual configurations, variety of forms and vocabulary and overall pacing. I also appreciated Ms. Thayer's attempt to connect it with the students' own breakfast experiences.

To emphasize the different foods which are served, I would suggest a comparative study approach. Have students conduct a survey of typical breakfast foods. This would allow students to realize that there is not a stereotypical Canadian or American breakfast per se, but rather a continuum of acceptable breakfast meals. We could also approach it from a nutrition perspective, asking students to produce a nutritional analysis of the typical breakfasts.

These could then be used as the basis of comparison for a range of typical Japanese breakfasts. It is vital that students begin to cultivate an understanding that within any culture there is a full range of responses to a limited set of basic human problems. Within any given culture there will be clustering of responses which form the typical but this is not monolithic in nature. Without this level of understanding, we run the risk of creating a superficial impression of Japanese food as exotic and not quite normal, thereby reinforcing stereotypes rather than expanding images.