

A Day in the Life of Akiko

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- Ages:** 15–16 years old
Level: Beginning (students have had three years of Japanese at Junior Secondary School)
Culture: A day in the life of a Japanese high school student; levels of politeness
Language: A review of sentence structures and vocabulary through the writing and performing of skits

Objectives

My lesson deals with everyday life in Japan through the eyes of Akiko, a female Japanese student, the same age as my language students. Students prepare resources, write scripts in Japanese and finally act out their scripts, demonstrating their Japanese ability and their knowledge of Japanese student life, from getting up in the morning, going to school, exercising, organizing transport, eating out and being entertained. Students are involved in a wide variety of activities, for example: making a dinner reservation over the telephone, cooking and consuming different Japanese meals, making greeting cards, using chopsticks, presenting speeches for school, organizing a holiday, booking tickets, filling out forms, paying for meals, communicating with other people, listening to music, keeping fit, making craft items. Students are involved in real life situations where they need to act and speak appropriately. All four macro-skills—listening, speaking, reading, writing—are practiced by students during this lesson, and students learn how levels of politeness are naturally expressed amongst Japanese people in everyday life. Although the lesson presented here is a double lesson, 1 1/2 hours, it can be shortened and modified accordingly.

My students' ultimate desire is to visit Japan. But financial constraints make this impossible for some students. St. Mary's College is presently organizing a school trip to Japan in 1996 but unfortunately not all students will be able to attend. Because all students are unable to go to Japan, I try my best as a

teacher to bring Japan to them. This lesson enables them to participate in one full day of life as experienced by a Japanese student. Students are naturally curious about what children in other countries are like. They love to pretend to be somewhere else, or be someone else. This is a fantastic opportunity for them to do this in an interesting, educational, inexpensive and authentic way, while experiencing the language and culture of Japan. The outcomes are enormous!

Procedure

- A. Divide class into six groups, each of which will be involved in the research, writing and performing a skit for one of the following activities:
 1. Breakfast at home with family (4 students)
 2. A day at school (4 students)
 3. A sports activity during lunch hour (4 students)
 4. Booking a mini-tour of Japan for an Australian friend (2 students)
 5. Going to a restaurant for dinner (4 students)
 6. Going to a *karaoke* club (3 or more students)
- B. Split the classroom into six sections and give each group the following directions:
[Note: Students make starred items (*) by hand.]
 1. Kitchen area in a Japanese home
 - a. Cast: father, mother, older brother, Akiko
 - b. Students must prepare and consume a simple Japanese breakfast, while being involved in a conversation about the family's individual



plans for the day which should be occupation-specific. It is Akiko's birthday, so her Mum must reserve a table at a Japanese restaurant over the telephone. Parents also give Akiko a birthday card.

- c. Time: 15 minutes
 - d. Materials: cooking ingredients for *miso* soup and rice; kitchen table and chairs; eating utensils (chopsticks); telephone; school uniform; decorated cardboard, plain paper and ribbon (birthday card)*
2. Classroom for a school lesson on Japanese geography
- a. Cast: Japanese *sensei*, Australian *sensei*, student, Akiko
 - b. Students must present a weather forecast for the school's daily radio show and present a spoken report on Japanese climate, leisure and recreation during the four seasons, e.g. cherry blossom viewing-*hanami*, ice festival in Hokkaido, to a visiting Australian teacher. Also, because May 5 (*Kodomo no hi*) is soon approaching, students will make *koi-nobori* in preparation and explain the relevance of this day according to Japanese history.
 - c. Time: 25 minutes
 - d. Materials: Akiko's school timetable; desk and chairs; blackboard; large map of Japan*; list of school rules on chart*
3. Open area outdoors or indoors
- a. Cast: instructor, two students, Akiko
 - b. Students must present a short lesson in Judo with an instructor
 - c. Time: 5 minutes
 - d. Materials: Judo outfits
4. Travel agency
- a. Cast: travel agent, Akiko
 - b. Akiko will book a 10-day holiday with a travel agency around Japan. Must discuss transport types, ticket types, fares, accommodation, sightseeing, and famous tourist attractions, distances, times. Must arrange holiday from information given by travel

agent, timetables and travel brochures. Must fill out a form of personal identification for a fitness club near Mt. Fuji where Akiko and her friend will spend two days.

- c. Time: 20 minutes
 - d. Materials: travel brochures*; map of Japan (with scale)*; pictures or posters of tourist attractions; train timetables; fitness club application form (personal data); table and chairs
5. Restaurant
- a. Cast: father, mother, Akiko, waitress
 - b. Akiko will eat out at a Japanese restaurant with mother and father. Must order food and drinks from menu. Waitress is to give a description of food and drinks on the menu. Japanese music and artwork in the background.
 - c. Time: 20 minutes
 - d. Materials: restaurant menu*; table and chairs; eating utensils (chopsticks); tape recorder and Japanese tapes; paintings and other artwork*; photos of food dishes on display*; *bentō*; *kimono* (for waitress); money (yen); *origami* decorations*; *Ikebana* flower arrangement*; formal clothing
6. Karaoke club
- a. Cast: Akiko, older brother, friend(s)
 - b. Akiko will meet her older brother at a *karaoke* club where they will celebrate her birthday with some of his friends from work.
 - c. Time: 5 minutes
 - d. Materials: tape recorder with *karaoke* function; contemporary Japanese music; music posters

C. Points to Remember

Students must express appropriate levels of politeness for the people with whom they communicate. Akiko would use a higher level of politeness when speaking to her teacher than to her friends, waitress must show her respect to guests by bowing, family must follow the traditional seating arrangements at the restaurant.



D. General Administration

1. Four students are assigned to groups 1, 2, 3, and 5, three students to group 6 and two students to group 4. Students must be involved in the preparation or collection of all props, the research of information pertaining to their topic, the writing of the script, and the final presentation.
2. This double lessons require approximately 1.5 to 2 weeks of preparation time. This will be good review for students preparing for their exams. The final presentation can be done in class and in front of the whole school. Props can be kept for display in the Japanese classroom.
3. The lesson may be used as an assessment item.

Culture and the Foreign Language Class

It is my strong belief that language and culture are inseparable in language teaching.

As a language teacher, I incorporate cultural understanding in every aspect of my teaching. Using my own knowledge and limited experience of my stay in Japan, I always refer to the way Japanese people would think, act or speak in the situation.

Language must always be taught in its social context and this must be presented as an authentic, real-life situation. Language is a means of communication. If students can grasp some language they should get something in return.

When establishing the context, one must have a thorough understanding of the cultures of the country. For example, you cannot teach students to order food in Japanese if they don't know what kind of food Japanese eat, what kind of restaurants they have, if the waitress expects a tip, etc. When teaching a grammar point, I will ask students to imagine they are, for example, at a congested railway station in Tokyo and they must ask for a ticket as quickly as possible. I try to create a picture of Japan for them, whether it be of ancient temples, modern high-rises, *karaoke*, electronics or farmers working in a field.

I make as much use of resources like videos, books and cassette tapes as possible. I encourage students to collect newspaper and magazine articles on Japan (for show and tell) to keep up with current affairs. Students may try new *origami* if they finish work early. And cooking lessons are a favorite. Students find they can actually eat raw fish and love it! Finances always limit what you can provide for students, unfortunately. I do not put aside a special day for "culture." Students experience it as a major part of their language learning. It allows them to use their language in a constructive and purposeful way.



Comments from the Feedback Committee

Educating for Cross-cultural Understanding

What an exciting topic and an excellent opportunity, for students to review three or four years of language study. The concept is interesting and thought provoking, the students really have to think about the life of a fellow student in Japan.

What follows are comments about the activities which students engage in throughout the course of the lesson or day.

The day begins with a simple breakfast. Be sure to also explain that many people eat toast and coffee, or cereal, just as in Australia. Sometimes as language teachers we focus on the differences and forget the similarities which are just as, if not more, important.

The geography lesson sounds very interesting. Be sure students realize that in Japan geography is usually studied, at least in school, as part of social studies. The *koi-nobori* explanation takes a historical perspective, which is again another element of social studies in Japan.

I am guessing that the Judo lesson is to give the students a feeling for Japanese club activities. In which case, perhaps it would be better placed after the day's classes. Very rarely do Japanese students engage in much activity other than eating, talking, and perhaps the odd bit of late homework or musical instrument practice (for band members) during lunch time.

Eating dinner at a restaurant to celebrate a family birthday is not typically Japanese. A special meal at home is more likely, or perhaps not even that. Father's work schedule and late return to the house, the student's *juku* or cram school classes which might last until 9 P.M., are perhaps a couple of reasons why dining out on a weeknight as a family is uncommon. On the other hand, it is easy to imagine a group of students going out to *karaoke* after their *juku* lesson.

The additional art and craftwork designed by the students gives them more ownership of the day and adds a distinctive flavor to the setting.

Language Learning

Conducting everything in Japanese throughout the day is to be commended. It would be ideal if all students had a chance to act out all the different scenes, not just the one they were specifically involved in creating. This would maximize the students' exposure to the language and provide them with more opportunities to interact in a variety of situations.

Lesson Plan

The materials and resources are clearly indicated, including those which the students must prepare themselves before the presentation day. Obviously the school uniform, *kimono* and *Judo* outfits might be more difficult to obtain for some people, but they would certainly add authenticity to the exercise.

Following is an additional suggestion:

Department store

- a. Cast: Father, Mother, Akiko, shop attendant
- b. Shopping for a new sweater for Akiko. Akiko asks her parents to buy her a new sweater as her birthday present at a department store before the dinner.
- c. Time: 20 minutes
- d. Materials: Fashion magazines for Japanese teenagers; display ad posters; directory of the department store; girls' sweaters (with price tags in Japanese); tables and chairs (for sales counter); a mirror; money (yen); sales receipt; wrapping paper; store bag.