

Greetings through a Look at Comic Books

Sachiko Omoto

Burnaby North
Secondary School
British Columbia, Canada



Ages: 13–14 years old
Level: Beginning
Culture: Greetings, the variety available and factors affecting their usage as seen through cartoons and comic books
Japanese: Review of simple greetings in Japanese

Objectives

1. The lesson focuses on customary greetings in Japan, with an emphasis on their variety and differences in their usage. It allows beginning Japanese-language students to become aware of differences in language usage according to relationship, context (situation), intention, and cultural background. By looking at the wide array of language levels or uses, students will begin to think about how people's relationships determine language use and interaction in Japan.

Greetings form the basis of language learning. The often short structures are easier for beginner students to handle than starting with long sentence patterns. Moreover in the whole phrases, greetings convey a wealth of cultural ideas, people's ways of thinking, and ways in which the society functions. I believe it is a good starting point.

2. The students review the greetings they have learned and learn variations on the greetings as well. By discussing the context in which the variations of greetings are used and the relationships of the people saying the greetings, students begin to examine how language use can change. Note that the students are beginning students who have practiced simple greetings in previous classes. The lesson can be done early in the course, but the students should be able to read *hiragana*.

3. The students compare greetings that are similar in their own cultures and recognize that there are some common factors in all cultures. They can also look at the greetings which are different from those in their own culture and determine where the differences may have originated from.

4. The students will be motivated by the use of comics and cartoons in this lesson. Many of the stories will represent teenage life with depictions of Japanese culture as seen in everyday life. The use of text and cartoons intended for the Japanese people or realia will interest students in that they are not language texts used solely in the classroom. The fact that they interest and are read by Japanese teenagers should help students find curiosity and questions in the contents.

Materials

- picture flash cards: greetings
- clips of Japanese cartoons (video) and comic books that show a variety of greetings

Some suggested cartoons and comic books that may spark student interest are: *Chibi Maruko-chan*, *Doraemon*, *Dragon Ball*, *Majo no Takkyūbin*, *Sailor Moon*, *Sazae-san*, *Tonari no Totoro*, *What's Michael?* as well as the many resources available in *Mangajin*.

When selecting comics and cartoons to show the students, attention should be paid to the following:

- Insofar as possible, choose cartoons that are

familiar to the students or that Japanese students would be apt to read, such as *Doraemon*, *Dragon Ball*, *Crayon Shin-chan*, or *Sailor Moon*. *Sailor Moon* is shown on television here, so even students who are not studying Japanese are familiar with it.

- Avoid adult comics.
- Scenes that are as close as possible to the students' own lives, in which the similarities can be felt, are desirable.
- Comics and cartoons frequently use informal, spoken language, so when choosing materials, careful consideration should be given to what expressions you want the students to learn. For example, if the object is to show students how many different greetings are used when people meet, you might select the expressions *Yo!* and *Ossu!* If the students are going to use the expressions for creating sentences or skits, however, very informal expressions should not be chosen. If students pick up expressions that are in keeping with the Japanese they are learning in class, new expressions can be introduced smoothly and opportunities to use them come up frequently.

Procedure

1. Begin class with a review of simple greetings with the use of picture flash cards. For example, the teacher can show a picture of the sun coming out of the ground and have the students say "*ohayō gozaimasu.*"
2. Show a few video clips of cartoons depicting similar greetings. There may be various scenes where a person is given a gift and each responds in various ways, for example, *dōmo sumimasen*, *arigatō*, *arigatō gozaimasu*, etc. Discuss with the students what the differences signify—relationship, gender, politeness, way of thinking.
3. Have students break into groups of about 3–5 students each to look for other differences in greetings by looking at

popular comic books in Japan. To make the groups accountable, each group could have a facilitator, recorder, and presenter to organize their ideas during their discussion. Each group could focus on one particular form of greeting: showing gratitude, apologizing, introductions (meeting for the first time), daily greetings, greetings related to eating, visiting people's houses, leave taking, going in and out of the home, etc. The group work will be greatly facilitated if the comic books are classified and arranged by the teacher ahead of time.

In my class, the students discussed the following points while looking at the comics and cartoons I have prepared:

- a. the relationship between the two main characters
 - b. why they arrived at that conclusion
 - c. the situation depicted
 - d. the greetings used by the main characters
4. At the end of the allotted time (10–15 minutes), students could report back to the class about the factors that affected how the greetings were used, giving examples based on their reading. The teacher can summarize the discussion with the students, noting the key concepts that recurred in the discussions.

5. For homework, students can write a paragraph (in English) on the similarities and differences in the greetings used in their culture and the Japanese culture. They could review some of the ideas that





were generated in class and write about their views on the way greetings in Japan are used. For example, they could choose a greeting special to Japanese and think about whether it is effective to have the expression in the language. The students may also be asked to validate their views by citing reasons.

Some students became aware that there are many more expressions used in greeting than those they had learned in class. They had trouble picking up on the *Yo!* that *Crayon Shin-chan* uses to greet his friends. Many students were surprised to learn that even such a short expression was a greeting.

Student Response

The group of students who did not understand the situation depicted in the cartoon very well were given hints and told that the discussion process was more important than coming up with a correct answer. I was a little surprised, however, at how incisively some students figured out the situation and the interpersonal relationships depicted. These students were looking carefully at the pictures and seem to have based their judgments on detailed observation of the characters. I had taken a scene of an *omiai* (a meeting to introduce a couple with the intention of arranging a marriage) from *What's Michael?* in *Mangajin*; many students said that the prospective partners were introducing themselves.



Comments from the Feedback Committee

Educating for Cross-cultural Understanding

Manga will catch the interest of high school students, and it is certainly possible to use them as teaching tools. But this, too, is a form of intercultural contact, and, as Ms. Omoto states, choosing which *manga* to use is a delicate matter. *Manga* that are popular in Japan but that overly exaggerate how things really are there, for instance, should be avoided.

What struck me most about Ms. Omoto's lesson was the use of authentic literature. What is or isn't authentic literature is hotly debated among language teachers as well as just how it might be used, if it is indeed, authentic. One of the points most often made is that students, because they are not yet proficient in the language, will not be able to understand everything. But an equally valid point can be made that it is not important that students be able to understand everything. If a piece of literature, be it a magazine ad, poetry, or a comic book, can be used to teach students language, the use of certain grammatical structures, the use of vocabulary or formulaic language, then that is the part they need to thoroughly understand and if they can get the gist of the rest of it, that is enough.

It seems to me that the advantages of using materials written for the native speakers of a language far outweigh the disadvantages, the primary reason being all the cultural information that comes along with the grammar and vocabulary. By choosing to use comic books, which are a major part of literature here in Japan even if many teachers and parents would like to believe otherwise, Ms. Omoto has tapped a rich source of information. I have watched students and teachers struggle with the hierarchical nature of Japanese in a classroom, trying to act out different status positions in order to drill the use of different greetings, use of *ageru*, *kureru*,

morau or recognizing when *-masu* or *-te* forms are appropriate.

In Ms. Omoto's lesson, students can readily identify the status of the different comic book characters, especially with just a bare-bones summary of the story line, and note which forms of address are used by which characters when. A useful chart could be constructed to help students remember and, perhaps even more importantly, help students to realize that one person has many choices about which language forms he or she can choose from. In addition, students can look at what makes the situations funny, often connected with the language that has been used, providing further insights into how Japanese people view things.

Lesson Plan

What gives this lesson plan its vitality is that it allows students to take an active part in the lesson: it is learner centered and challenges students to think on their own. However, as intercultural education, it does not go beyond recognition and expansion of knowledge about one's own and others' countries. In Japanese language classes, unlike social studies, it is not really enough simply to acknowledge such information. We also need activities that have students use this knowledge and understanding to communicative ends. For instance:

- a. Have the learners pick a topic (a first meeting, thanking someone, etc.) and do role-plays, letting them decide on the roles they will take.
- b. Have the learners do the role-play above in a native-language version and a Japanese version.

Such activities allow students to move from acknowledgment of cultural understanding to its application.