Japanese Culture

**Purpose:**
This is a lesson that will introduce students to the cultural differences that make the Japanese culture unique.

**Rational:**
By using photographs and text student will explore Japanese and understand the rational behind cultural differences that at first seem strange.

**Materials:**
1) Photo Placards
2) Student information sheets
3) Student worksheets
4) Scrap wood with three nails in it, two low and one higher (Station A)
5) Hammer (Station A)
6) Goggles (Station A)
7) Japanese snacks and green tea (Station E)
8) Chopsticks (Station E)
9) Dried beans (Station E)

**Activities:**

**Preparation**
Move the desks or tables into separate stations for each cultural aspect to be explored. Each station needs to have one placard and the corresponding information sheet.

**Give Instruction**
Divide the students into mixed ability groups and have each group sit at station. Distribute “Student worksheets” and review your expectations with the students.

**Work**
Allow students enough time at each station to gather the information needed but not so much as to allow them to become restless.

**Regroup as a class**
Collect the Worksheets and debrief each station asking the students to review what they learned from each station.

**Assessment:**
The packets can be assessed for the quality of the responses.
**Grade Adaptation:**
This lesson is intended for students in the middle school but it is easily modified.

1) More students in a group can make the lesson easier for lower grades or special needs students.
2) Students can work alone to make the assignment more difficult
3) The quality of the student’s conclusions can be modified for grade level.
4) More sophisticated information can be presented
Student Worksheet

Station A  Conformity

Question #1 Which nail did you strike and Why?

Question #2 In America we claim to celebrate the individual. In your school how are students who dress and behave truly differently from the rest treated. Are they “celebrated” or “hammered?”-(Be specific in how they are rewarded or punished.)

Question # 3 Does you school have an unofficial school uniform?

Question #4 Does the population density of many large Japanese cities such as Tokyo necessitates more conformity than in the United States (explain)?

Station B  Uchi / Soto,

Question #1 Look at the pictures. What do you see?

Question # 2 What article of clothing are Americans expected to take off when inside? Why?
Question #3 As the disease SARS swept through Asian nations such as China and Taiwan it did not become a problem for the Japanese. Why?

Question #4 Do you have a ritual that you perform when entering your house that makes you feel at home? (I empty my pockets of keys cell phone etc.)

Station C  Education

Question #1 What do you already know about Japanese schools?

Question #2 How are Japanese schools different than you thought?

Question #3 How are American schools becoming more like Japanese schools?

Question #3 How has the Japanese investment in education paid off and what has it cost?

Station D  Women

Question #1 What issues and problems do American women and Japanese women have in common?

Question #2 Why don’t Japanese women want equality with Japanese men?
Questions #3 What “freedoms” do Japanese women have that men do not?

Station E  Food

Question #1 What did you think of the snacks?

Question #2 Pick up the chopstick and use them to try to pick up the beans? Were you successful? Ask for help. What was using chop sticks like?

Question #3 What Japanese foods would you like to try?

Station F  Language

Write your name in phonetic Japanese.

Name a sound in the English language the Japanese do not have.
Put on the safety goggles and hit the nail one time.

Turn the page over.
Conformity

Question #1 Which nail did you strike and Why?

The Japanese have a saying that “the tallest nail is struck first.” Now the Japanese are not talking about nails they are talking about people. They mean that if you stick out as an individual then society will strike you down.

The Japanese value conformity. They like for everyone to fit in and work to together as a community and one should sacrifice his or hers own personal needs for the better of the group as a whole.

In Japanese schools by the seventh grade students usually are required to where uniforms. This helps to teach young people that they themselves are not as important as the group as a whole. If a student misbehaves the teacher will likely not discipline the students but expects the rest of the students to help the child learn the proper way to behave.

If someone’s behavior is not “normal” the society ignores that behavior and rejects the individual until the offending behavior stops. Shame Culture or Haji is to have shame before the society and is a strong force in conditioning Japanese behavior.

How and individual behaves privately is not relevant to the Japanese as long as on its face society is not disrupted. Even if you are doing something that someone may consider poor behavior or even.

Some young people express their individuality in street performances but return to their school uniform during the week. (See placard)

Question #2 In America we claim to celebrate the individual. In your school how are students who dress and behave truly differently from the rest treated. Are they “celebrated” or “hammered?”-(Be specific in how they are rewarded or punished.)

Question # 3 Does you school have an unofficial school uniform?

Question #4 Does the population density of many large Japanese cities such as Tokyo necessitates more conformity than in the United States (explain)?
Question #1 Look at the pictures. What do you see?

It is well known to many Americans that the Japanese often remove their shoes when entering a home or even a school but most Americans have little understanding of why.

Japanese notions of dirt and cleanliness are deeply held. The Japanese have strong societal values about cleanliness and wash their hands often and even shower thoroughly before taking a bath, so as not to soak and relax in dirty water.

When using the Japanese style or “eastern” toilet one never actually touches the toilet but squats over it.

In school after lunch students brush their teeth and sanitized tooth brushes are made available to students who may have forgotten their tooth brush.

The Uchi and the Soto, translated as the “inside and the outside,” are an example of this Japanese ideals of cleanliness the inside being clean and the outside dirty. This idea can apply to people like family members who are inside and others who are outside or applied to school community or work.

Your home is inside, and clean and the rest of the world is outside and dirty. By taking your shoes off when entering a home you are leaving the “dirt” from the outside, both literal dirt and the figurative dirt of the outside, behind.

Question #2 What article of clothing are Americans expected to take off when inside? Why?

Question #3 As the disease SARS swept through Asian nations such as China and Taiwan it did not become a problem for the Japanese. Why?

Question #4 Do you have a ritual that you perform when entering your house that makes you feel at home? (I empty my pockets of keys cell phone etc.)
Question #1 What do you already know about Japanese schools?

The Japanese education is carefully regulated by the central government unlike the local control of the schools in America. This is intended to create a equal comprehensive education to all citizens, but also ensures that a national standard of language and culture is taught.

A student’s upbringing is a shared responsibility between a child and the school. A child who misbehaviors even outside of school reflect poorly on the school and the school and parents will both be informed. Schools offer activities for after school and even during breaks and holidays. (see placard)

Education is compulsory from ages 6-15 and the school year is 240 days compared to the American 180. There is a great deal of homework which begins in first grade. 92% of Japanese high school seniors spend more then five house a week on homework compared to only 45% of American seniors.

Japanese teachers are paid above the national average salary while American teacher earn below the national average wage. The Time and money dedicated to education shows the level the Japanese value it. The average family in Japan buys their preschool children three or four books a month.

In America one goes to the high school close to your home. In Japan after junior high students take a series of examinations that will determine what high school the child can attend. This puts incredible pressures in students to do well on these exams; students will study intensively and take extra classes on vacations after school to do well on the exams. Some schools offer rooms for students to stay in overnight if they have stayed too late studying. The process often referred to as “examination hell.” In Japanese society respect is earned by having the right job which comes from going to a prestigious collage, which one id accepted to by going to a good high school, which you can only get into if you do well on the exams. Your life status can be permanently altered by your performance on these exams.

Question #2 How are Japanese schools different then you thought?

Question #3 How are American schools becoming more like Japanese schools?

Question #3 How has the Japanese investment in education paid off and what has it cost?
Station D

Women

In many ways Japan is still a male dominated society and from the outside this may appear to be oppressive and unfair to the women who live there but on closer inspection Japanese women have established societal roles and lives that are in many ways superior to their male counterparts.

Older women who are traditionally housewives do not their husband workaholic lives. A successful business man in Japan may need to put in as many as 70 hours of work a week and women may trade economic dependence for the freedom of controlling their own sphere of influence. This long work week means that wives are independent and free to make all household and family decision.

Younger women looking for satisfying careers are putting off marriage beyond the tekireiki or optimal years. (before 25) Modern life in Japan like in America demands two income families. The extraordinarily low crime rates in Japan give women much more physical freedom then their American counter parts. Women feminist groups in Japan do not focus on violence against women as do American feminist groups but on sexual harassment.

For women in Japan there is still an employment curve that looks like an M. As women get older they enter the work place and there is a steady increase in female workers. As they get older and begin to have children they drop out of the work force only to return after the children get older and then decrease again near retirement. But a Japanese omen today is more likely to leave work to care for aging parents then a child.

A women’s willingness to leave the work place often makes her work experience more satisfying then that of men. Women are more likely to take their vacation, leave at the end of the work day, not work on her day off and voice her opinions about things she does not like because she does not feel tied to the job.

Japanese women in Japan are not looking for equality with men whose lives are difficult and often lack the joys of family and cultural involvement but a world where men can have some of the benefits and freedom that women now have and women can get fair pay and respect in the workplace.

Question #1 What issues and problems do American women and Japanese women have in common?

Question #2 Why don’t Japanese women want equality with Japanese men?
Questions #3 What “freedoms” do Japanese women have that men do not?
Station E

Food

Help yourself to one of each snack and some tea.

Question #1 What did you think of the snacks?

Japanese tastes in food have been historically driven by geography. Being a highly populated mountainous island Japan has traditionally looked to the see for food.

The Japanese frequently eat sea food. Even as a snack like the shrimp chips or when in American convenience stores they may have hotdogs roasting behind the counter in Japan the store may have octopus tentacles hot and ready to be eaten.

In schools the students eat in the classroom and one group of students serves that others and everyone cleans up. A typical school lunch may include whale stew, shrimp and rice or tofu.

The Japanese eat small portions of each dish but may eat a large number of dishes or courses. Americans traditionally eat large portions such as a large steak and baked potato. Japanese preparation usually involves serving the food in small bight size pieces as well as being a small portion. The food is already cut and ready to consume. This is not done to make the food easy to eat with chopsticks but more so to make it appealing to the eye and easy to arrange in an astatically pleasing way on the plate..

Important consideration is given to the color of foods selected such as pink sashimi, slices of raw fish, serves surrounded by white rice with light green wasabi, horseradish wrapped in dark green seaweed.

Consideration is also give to how the food is arranged on a plate and the texture of the food. Some flavorless foods are even added to give texture. Restaurants often display plastic copies of their dishes in the windows in front of the store.

Without the grazing space for large herds of cattle beef can be expensive but is growing in popularity. And the Japanese have a wider variety in taste then Americans. M&M/Mars the American candy manufacturer sells four different flavors of their Kitt Katt bar in Japan, but only one flavor in the United States. In Japan the bar comes in regular, double chocolate, strawberry and banana.

American fast food such as McDonald’s, Wendy’s and KFC are as common in Tokyo as Oriental restaurants are here. Though the food is served to Japanese taste, such as dark meat always outnumbers white meat as the Japanese prefer it, and you can get kare raisu, curry rice in McDonald’s.
Question #2 Pick up the chopstick and use them to try to pick up the beans? Were you successful? Ask for help. What was using chop sticks like?

Question #3 What Japanese foods would you like to try?
Station F Language

The Japanese have three different writing systems, Kanji, borrowed from China and uses symbols for words and two kana systems. The katakana system is a phonetic system and is used to write words not naive to the Japanese language.

Look at the chart on the following page. These symbols represent the fifty sounds made in the Japanese spoken language.

**Take one of each worksheet and complete the practice and add it to your student worksheet.**

**Write your name in phonetic Japanese.**

**Name a sound in the English language the Japanese do not have.**
Station B