



LESSON 3:

MILESTONES IN A LIFE

Introduction:

In this lesson, students use the entire collection of Deai photo sheets to start becoming acquainted with the lives of the featured students. The class explores the concept of milestones, an important aspect of the life of the individual in society. Students scan the photographs to find episodes the Japanese students identify as milestones or rites of passage in their lives. Some of these occasions will be new to American students, such as *Shichi-go-san*; others, such as obtaining a driver's license, appear to be more familiar, at least on the surface. The students then build their analytical skills by organizing the milestones into categories and by comparing them with milestones and categories with which they are familiar in the United States.

Organizing Questions:

What can we learn about society and the individual?
What can we learn about tradition and change?

Objectives: At the conclusion of this lesson, students will be better able to:

1. Identify milestones and significant annual events in the lives of the Japanese students.
2. Separate milestones into categories they find useful.
3. Differentiate among the experiences of the seven Japanese students.
4. Compare the milestones to milestones they observe in the United States.

Time Required: 2 class periods plus homework

Materials:

Entire set of Deai photo sheets or access to Deai photographs on CD-ROMs 1 and 2

Procedure:

Day 1

1. Introduce the lesson by telling students that they will become more familiar with Japan and with the lives of young people in Japan by studying photos of the seven Japanese students to find examples of milestones in the students' lives. Some of these milestones will be the kinds of events that take place once

in a lifetime, while others might be annual or periodic events. Both types of milestones will reveal aspects of Japanese culture.

2. Through discussion, define the terms *milestones* and *rites of passage*. A *milestone* is a significant event or stage in the life of a person. A *rite of passage* is any important act or event that marks the movement from one stage of life to another. Using these definitions, the terms can be used interchangeably. Both terms imply that these events would not be repeated.
3. To check comprehension, ask students to give examples of a milestone or rite of passage in the life of a young person in the United States. Record the examples. (*Possibilities include acquiring a driver's license, graduating from high school, or earning a scouting badge.*) Point out that people also experience recurring events that can be very important or special, such as annual holiday celebrations, arts festivals, or sports competitions. They will find examples of both milestones and recurring events in the pictures and captions.
4. Organize the students into seven groups, giving each group the photo sheets for one Japanese student. Direct students to examine each photo sheet and read the printed information on the back. One student in each group should record the information they find, making two lists: (1) milestones in the pictures and narratives and (2) special events that recur either annually or occasionally.
5. Once the students have completed gathering information, ask them to report to the whole class while you record the events each group has identified. Ask them how they identified these events. (*The Japanese students may have identified the events as important, or the photos provided such clues as a formal family photograph, a special location, or people wearing different clothing.*)
6. In cases where the milestone is unfamiliar, such as *Shichi-go-san*, assign a student to look up information about it in the Mini-Encyclopedia on the Japan Forum web site (http://www.tjf.or.jp/deai/contents/teacher/te_index.html). If students do not have Internet access, provide the information yourself from the web site or **Teacher Background Information**.
7. To delve a little deeper into the meaning of the events students have identified, ask the students to generate categories for the milestones and special events. (*Some possible categories could be school-related occasions, religious occasions, and civic occasions.*) Record the categories on the board. Encourage class discussion about whether the categories are useful organizing tools, and whether some milestones or events fit into more than one category.
8. Ask each group to discuss their Japanese student's milestones and special events and assign them to the class-generated categories.
9. Ask students to identify similarities or differences among the events highlighted by the seven students. For example, do they all cite the first day of elementary school as important? Point out that just as U.S. students would identify a variety of events as important in their lives, Japanese students vary, too.
10. For homework, ask students to list milestones and special events teenagers experience in their community, building on the examples identified in Step 3.

Day 2

1. Ask students to read their homework lists, putting each new item on the board. If time permits, ask students to categorize them. Point out that an occasion could fall into more than one category. For example, Christmas originated as a religious holiday, but for many people it has little or no religious content. Take the opportunity to point out that it is important to avoid making assumptions when observing another culture. A Japanese Christmas celebration might have many familiar aspects, such as Santa Claus and public light displays, but may not carry the same meaning to a Japanese person celebrating the holiday.
2. Ask students whether the identified U.S. milestones would be typical all across the country. Guide the discussion to point out that students in both countries may experience milestones common within their country as well as ones more specific to their own family or affinity group.
3. Compare the milestones and events the students have identified in both countries. Are there any important events in one country that are conspicuously absent or different in the other? (*Getting a driver's license is one example of a milestone that young people encounter at a different time in Japan, if they get one at all.*) Are there milestones or events that have a different content or emphasis in the two countries? (*Provide examples from the **Teacher Background Information** about first birthday celebrations.*) Is it possible to form any general statement about Japanese culture based on the milestones found in the information about the seven students? (*Suggest caution. This evidence is just a starting point.*)
4. Ask students to write two sentences. One is to assess what they have learned; the second is to assess whether they understand the limits of what they have learned. The first should be a specific factual statement about a milestone or event. For example, "Many Japanese students remember the first day of elementary school as an important milestone." The second should be a generalization they can defend with evidence. Students may make broad statements such as "Christmas is a really important holiday in Japan." Debrief by pointing out that they only have enough evidence to make a less-sweeping generalization, such as "Many families celebrate Christmas in Japan."
5. Summarize the lesson by pointing out that students have used one kind of evidence, pictures and captions about Japanese teenagers, to start learning about Japanese culture. This evidence offers glimpses of life in Japan, but must be combined with additional evidence before many generalizations can be drawn. The students have found that different people within a country mark milestones in a life and events in the year in a variety of ways.

Extension and Enrichment:

1. Because the Deai materials are about high school students, they focus on events that take place before adulthood. Using other sources about Japan, from fiction or films to encyclopedias, have students identify milestones that take place in adult life. For example, Coming of Age Day is a milestone in the seven Japanese high school students' future.

2. Assign students to research and write a brief paragraph on any of the holidays or milestones they have uncovered. If many students write about holidays, assemble the paragraphs into a calendar that can be compared with the calendar of U.S. holidays. A source for this activity is The Japan Forum's Mini-Encyclopedia (http://www.tjf.or.jp/deai/contents/teacher/te_index.html).

Teacher Background Information:

Christmas

After Spanish and Portuguese missionaries introduced Christianity into Japan, some Japanese Christians celebrated Christmas as early as the mid-16th century. Christmas gradually evolved into a secular family celebration in the late 19th and early 20th centuries. Today it is a popular year-end celebration. As Christmas day approaches, stores and shopping arcades assume a festive atmosphere with Christmas trees and other decorations. Christmas music further heightens the mood.

Sharing a Christmas cake on Christmas Eve and exchanging presents among family and friends are the most popular ways of celebrating the holiday in Japan. A recent survey of children from kindergarten to junior high found that the most popular presents were computer game consoles and game software, followed by cash, personal computers, and clothes. The order of the wish list varied according to age. Sixty percent of junior high school students said they preferred cash to anything else.

Shichi-go-san

Shichi-go-san literally means "Seven-Five-Three." This custom is observed on November 15. On that day, five-year-old boys and seven- or three-year-old girls are taken to a *Shinto* shrine to pray for their safe and healthy future. In some parts of the country, boys are taken to the shrine at three.

Traditionally, this was the occasion when parents took their children to the local shrine to announce that the child had survived infancy. More recently, parents have tended to take their children to large and well-known shrines, rather than to the local one. After the visit, they may buy special candy called "thousand-year-candy" to distribute to relatives and neighbors. Families usually dress the child in traditional clothing and have a formal picture taken. The clothing can be rented. A professional dresser may be hired to help dress the child because the clothing is often elaborate.

First Birthday Celebration

A child's first birthday is a special time in Japan; different customs are practiced from one region to another. One common custom is to have the toddler carry piggyback a large *mochi* (rice cake) weighing 1 *sho*. The word for one *sho* is a homophone for another word meaning "a whole lifetime." The custom represents the parents' hope that the child will never go hungry throughout his or her lifetime. In some places, a one-year-old receives a sword or a pair of scissors. In others, the child is given a selection of items to choose from: rice, money, an abacus, a ruler, and a calligraphy brush. The object chosen is thought to determine the child's future.

Source: This background information was excerpted from the Japan Forum Mini-Encyclopedia.