



LESSON 5:

BUILDING BRIDGES THROUGH LANGUAGE

Introduction:

In this lesson, students use both the Deai photos and the accompanying narratives to find references to languages and language education. Through this process of searching, they start building their own image of the Japanese language as it is used today. Students become familiar with a few Japanese words and the ways they are written. They also note the incorporation of words from other languages and the existence of dialects within Japanese.

The lesson next moves to a focus on the teaching of other languages in Japan. The concept of global connectedness is exemplified via a description of the Japan Exchange and Teaching Program (JET), a Japanese government program that hires people from around the world to teach in Japan. Finally, students form personal opinions and debate the value of second-language learning in Japan and the United States.

Organizing Questions:

What can we learn about tradition and change?
What can we learn about global connectedness?

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

1. Describe some key aspects of the Japanese language.
2. Use language-related evidence to illustrate the concept of global connectedness.
3. Analyze the importance of second-language learning in Japan and the United States.

Time Required: 2 class periods plus possible homework

Materials:

1. Class set of Deai photo sheets or access to Deai photographs in CD format
2. Overhead Masters 5-1 and 5-2 reproduced as transparencies
3. Overhead projector

Procedure:

Day 1

1. Organize students into small groups and give each group a random assortment of the Deai photo sheets. (It is not necessary to use all of the photo sheets.) Explain that students are to list as many examples as they can find of visual or written evidence about Japanese or other languages in Japan. They can draw their evidence from the pictures or from the English or Japanese language descriptions on the backs of the photo sheets.
2. Ask members of each group to report to the class what they found out about language. (*Key points to note include the fact that Japanese is not written with the English alphabet. It is written with some symbols that appear to be very complicated and others that appear less so. Some of these symbols are used frequently. From the pictures and English text, students may notice the use of English words such as McDonald's and Tokyo Disneyland. There are references to dialects in cards about Sakai Michi, who goes to school on Hokkaido in the far north, and Tanaki Shun'ichi, who lives in Okinawa Prefecture to the south. Most of the Japanese students refer to taking English class, something that virtually all students in Japan do from grade 7 on. Students may notice some Japanese words that have entered the English language, such as manga or yakitori.*)
3. If students are interested and class time permits, explain the basic Japanese writing systems, using the material in the **Teacher Background Information**. Show the transparency of Overhead Master 5-1 and briefly explain how the writing systems are used. Students should then be able to pick up a Deai photo sheet, find some examples of *katakana*, and sound out those words. Warn them that they may not recognize the words even after saying them out loud, since the words may be drastically shortened, derived from a language other than English, or have pronunciations that depend on additional symbols that aren't explained in the simple chart given with this lesson.
4. Show the transparency of Overhead Master 5-2, which displays a few sample words drawn from Deai lessons. Point out that the words are written in *kanji*, *hiragana*, *katakana*, and *romaji*.
5. Ask students to identify some ways in which foreign words can enter a language. For example, a new technology might always be known by the name under which it was imported. Words may be introduced during a time period when two countries have close contact and then remain in the language for centuries, even if the contacts end. Imported sports, music, and popular culture may continue to be known under their original names. Even though baseball has become Japan's most popular spectator sport, English continues to be used for key terms. The English terms have, in effect, become Japanese; they are pronounced in ways that work within Japan's syllable system.
6. The Japanese language makes use of many words adopted from other languages. One example is *konbini*, meaning convenience store. Point out that the meaning and pronunciation of words adopted from English may change so much from the original English that the word is unrecognizable to English-speakers. There are whole dictionaries dedicated to these words. Remind the

students that all languages incorporate imported words, but to varying extents. American English is full of these words.

7. Ask students to generate reasons why learning English might be particularly important in Japan, so important that it is a required subject for most students from grade 7 on. (*Possible answers include: much of the world's scientific writing is in English, much international business is conducted in English, or other factors.*)
8. Introduce information about the JET Program, using the **Teacher Background Information** for data on the scope of this major initiative of the Japanese government. Because learning English is considered to be so important, the government of Japan has spent vast sums to hire foreigners to assist in teaching English in schools all across the country. Point out to students that the program has other purposes in addition to improving language instruction, including grass-roots exchange, cross-cultural communication, and the internationalization of Japan.
9. Pose the following question to your students: Is second-language learning important in all countries in the 21st century? Why or why not? Ask students to spend a few minutes writing a brief list of pros and cons in response to this question. This can be done in class or as a homework assignment. It is not necessary to arrive at a conclusion.

Day 2

1. Divide the class into small groups with four students in each group. (One way to do this is to count off by one-quarter of the class size, putting all the ones in the first group, all the twos in another, etc. For example, a class of 32 would count off by 8.) Ask each group of four to simultaneously carry out an informal debate on the question of whether second-language learning is important in all countries. Tell the students that those with odd numbers are assigned the pro side and must explain why second-language learning is important, while evens must support the opposing position, that second-language learning is not important. (Being assigned their positions just before the debates forces students to consider information supporting both points of view.)
2. Debrief the lesson by asking each group which side had the most convincing argument, and why. Point out that this is not a question that has one right answer and that opinions on this topic may change over time.
3. Ask students to speculate about whether they would like to apply to the JET Program or a similar program. What could they offer to Japanese students? What could they gain from this experience?

Extension and Enrichment:

1. Ask students to collect information about various exchange and teaching programs in Japan or in other countries. Put brochures or print-outs of web pages on the board to inspire the students to think about seeking international experiences when they are older.

2. Many resources are available to introduce Japanese language to English speakers. A quick web search will lead to *kana* charts, interactive teaching sites, and explanatory materials. Because the pronunciations of *kana* are quite consistent, students can rapidly write reasonable *kana* approximations for Japanese words like *samurai* or English words used in Japan like *tennis* or *supermarket*. Many students think of this as a fun game, so it can lead to an interest in more serious study of the language.
3. To establish students' frame of reference for making comparisons, send them to dictionaries to research the language roots of words commonly used in English. Ten words that would illustrate the many languages from which English words are taken are: convenience (Latin), store (Middle English, Old French, and Latin), burrito (Spanish), pecan (Algonquian), bayou (Choctaw), ketchup (Chinese), mustard (Old French and Latin), school (Middle English, Old English, Latin, and Greek), teacher (Middle English and Old English), blitz (German). Groups of students could also analyze one page of the dictionary to determine from which languages most English words were derived.

Teacher Background Information:

A Brief Introduction to Written Japanese

The Deai materials were originally designed for use in teaching the Japanese language in countries outside of Japan. The fact that they include both Japanese and English text on the back of the pictures makes them valuable for introducing a few basic concepts about the Japanese language to students using the pictures in such other subjects as social studies. Although the paragraphs below are just a brief overview of a few aspects of the language, they provide background that will be helpful in responding to points that are likely to arise in the class discussion.

The people living in the islands now called Japan have always had ways of speaking to each other. Linguists debate the original sources of this oral language because it is not clearly part of one family of major languages. Japanese may be related to Altaic languages, a family that includes Turkish and Korean, but it also has some influences from the Austronesian languages of the South Pacific. English belongs to the Indo-European family of languages. Students often think that Japanese is closely related to Chinese, but this is not true for the spoken forms of the languages. Japanese and Chinese have different grammatical structures, and Chinese is a tonal language, meaning that a single sound will have very different meanings when it is spoken in different tones. This is not the case in Japanese.

The Chinese writing system was introduced into Japan starting about 1,500 years ago, at a time when Japan was strongly influenced by China. Ultimately, tens of thousands of Chinese characters were in use in Japan. Students will be able to pick out examples of these characters, called *kanji*, from the backs of the cards. In most cases, the *kanji* are more complex than the other characters. They are comprised of more strokes than the rest of the writing, ranging from one stroke to as many as 23. Charts in Japanese schools and textbooks illustrate the number of strokes necessary to write the characters and the order in which the strokes should be written. Originally the strokes would have been brushstrokes, but students are expected to use the correct order even when practicing with pencils.

In the 1940s, the Japanese government identified some of the many characters as “*Kanji for Daily Use*.” In elementary and secondary schools, students must memorize the 1,945 *kanji* on the current version of this list. The *kanji* are not phonetic. Instead, they have a meaning such as “sun” or “moon,” but the word may be pronounced in different ways depending on its usage. These pronunciations derive from two main sources: the Chinese pronunciation that arrived in Japan with the writing system, or the pronunciation the Japanese were already using to express the same concept.

Students will notice the smaller, lighter writing above some of the characters on the backs of the Deai photo sheets. These are pronunciation tips, since people trying to read the cards might know the sound of a word but not the way it is written in *kanji*.

The need for another way of writing Japanese became evident fairly quickly after *kanji* were introduced into Japan. The need resulted from the fact that the *kanji* simply did not serve all the functions necessary to write Japanese. One problem was how to indicate the number and tense of verbs, such as would be done in English by writing “he sings” vs. “they sing,” or “will walk,” “walks,” and “walked.” The Japanese and Chinese languages differ in the way these distinctions are indicated.

As a result, the Japanese developed a second writing system starting about 1,000 years ago. Called *kana*, it is a system of syllabaries. Unlike an alphabet, in which each letter conveys a sound, each *kana* unit indicates the sound of a whole syllable, such as “ka,” “ki,” or “ku.” Two types of *kana* are in use today, *hiragana* and *katakana*. The two kinds of *kana* represent the same sounds, but *hiragana* is generally used in combination with the *kanji* while *katakana* is used to write foreign words. All three typically appear in the same sentences.

Finally, Japanese also learn *romaji*, the alphabet used to write English and some other languages. It often appears in advertising or signs in major cities.

When students look at the English text accompanying the pictures, they will find some references to dialects. Standard Japanese is based on the dialect spoken around Tokyo. Despite the influence of television, radio, and school textbooks, dialects continue to be used. Okinawa, where Tamaki Shun’ichi lives, is a notable example.

The Japanese language actively incorporates words from other languages. For example, the Japanese word for part-time work is derived from the German word *arbeit*. Sometimes the original meaning remains unchanged while other times it becomes hard to decipher how the Japanese are using this new word. It is clear that *anime* is based on the English word animation, but the word for a personal computer (PC) is less obvious. Personal computer becomes *pasocan* when shortened and pronounced using the syllables available in the Japanese language.

An Introduction to the JET Program

The JET Program was established by the government of Japan in 1987 to serve multiple purposes. Official descriptions refer to “promoting grass-roots international exchange between Japan and other nations.” Young college and university graduates from other countries are invited to “participate in international exchange and foreign language education throughout Japan.” Most JETs work in secondary schools, assisting in the teaching of English language. They are called ALTs, for “assistant

language teachers.” They can be particularly helpful in modeling contemporary oral communication, since English classes in Japan have traditionally emphasized writing and grammar. Most ALTs work as JETs for one or two years. Some JETs with Japanese language skills are assigned to work in government offices, and a few others hold sports-related positions. The government of Japan pays their salaries.

The JET Program has grown significantly, evidencing the Japanese government’s commitment to the goals of the program. The first group in 1987 totaled 848 people from four countries, including 592 from the United States. In 2003, there were 2,729 American participants out of a total of 6,226 from 40 different countries.

Official websites of the Japanese government and its embassy in Washington, D.C., offer complete descriptions of the JET Program. (Government publications spell the word as “Programme,” the spelling used in many English-speaking countries.) People who are interested in participating submit a written application in the fall. Oral interviews in February in consulates across the country are the next step of the application process. Notification follows in the spring; successful candidates depart for Japan in late summer.

The JET Program has had a significant impact, both on Japan and on the United States. In communities across the United States, you can find individuals who are among the 18,534 American alumni of the program, people who return from Japan with a deeper understanding of another culture, language, and worldview. Many of them are eager to share their knowledge with students. They can be found by contacting the nearest Japanese consulate or doing a web search for a nearby chapter of the JET Alumni Association (www.jet.org/).



Overhead Master 5-1

Written Japanese

Hiragana

わ	ら	や	ま	は	な	た	さ	か	あ
	り		み	ひ	に	ち	し	き	い
ん	る	ゆ	む	ふ	ぬ	つ	す	く	う
	れ		め	へ	ね	て	せ	け	え
を	ろ	よ	も	ほ	の	と	そ	こ	お

Katakana

ワ	ラ	ヤ	マ	ハ	ナ	タ	サ	カ	ア
	リ		ミ	ヒ	ニ	チ	シ	キ	イ
ン	ル	ユ	ム	フ	ヌ	ツ	ス	ク	ウ
	レ		メ	ヘ	ネ	テ	セ	ケ	エ
ヲ	ロ	ヨ	モ	ホ	ノ	ト	ソ	コ	オ

Romaji

wa	ra	ya	ma	ha	na	ta	sa	ka	a
	ri		mi	hi	ni	chi	shi	ki	i
n	ru	yu	mu	fu	nu	tsu	su	ku	u
	re		me	he	ne	te	se	ke	e
o	ro	yo	mo	ho	no	to	so	ko	o

All three charts are written from top to bottom and right to left. The *romaji* chart shows the pronunciation of the *kana* that are in the corresponding boxes on the top two charts.



Overhead Master 5-2

Japanese Words from the Deai Materials

The basic vowel sounds are

a	as in aloud
i	long e, as in bee
u	as in rude
e	as in pet
o	as in old

In the examples below, the marks that look like apostrophes make the sound of the *kana* harder. In these examples, “to” becomes “do” and “hi” becomes “bi.” The dash after the “ka” in the ID card example is not a number one; in *katakana* it is used to indicate that the previous letter is doubled in length.

Japanese	Writing System	Romaji	English
一	kanji	ichi	one
二	kanji	ni	two
三	kanji	san	three
四	kanji	shi	four
五	kanji	go	five
月	kanji	tsuki	moon
人	kanji	hito	person
男	kanji	otoko	man
女	kanji	onna	woman
かわいい	hiragana	kawaii	cute
明るい	kanji and hiragana	akarui	bright, cheerful
アメリカ村	katakana and kanji	amerika mura	American Village
IDカード	romaji and katakana	aidii kaado	ID card
アラスカ	katakana	arasuka	Alaska
コンビニ	katakana	konbini	convenience store
マクドナルド	katakana	makudonarudo	McDonald's