

LESSON 6:

EDUCATION IN JAPAN

Introduction:

Students begin this lesson by examining basic assumptions they have about education in Japan. They then work in stages on additional sources, including academic articles and the Japanese high school student photo essays, to test their assumptions and expand their knowledge.

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. Discuss the basic structure of education in Japan, as well as contemporary issues and challenges to the Japanese educational system.
2. Describe the variety of educational options for students in Japanese high schools and consider how Japanese education offers different high school formats for students with differing needs and interests.
3. Synthesize their study through the creation of a Japanese high school recruitment brochure.

Time Required: 2 class periods plus homework

Materials:

1. Two articles, printed and reproduced from web sites or read online:
 - “Daily Life in Japanese High Schools,” by Marcia L. Johnson and Jeffrey R. Johnson (Bloomington, IN: National Clearinghouse for U.S.-Japan Studies, 1996), <http://www.indiana.edu/~japan/digest9.html>
 - “Japanese Education,” by Lucien Ellington (Bloomington, IN: National Clearinghouse for U.S.-Japan Studies, 2001), <http://www.indiana.edu/~japan/digest5.html>
2. Copies of Handout 6-1, “Guide to Analyzing Articles on Japanese Education,” for all students
3. Copies of narratives of the seven Japanese high school students found in the *Deai Text Booklet*. Each small group will need copies of one student’s narrative.

The specific sections to copy and assign are the sections from “Me in a Nutshell” through “High School Life” for each Japanese student. Specifically:

- Mizushima Yu, pp. 57-61
- Oishi Kanta, pp. 93-99
- Sakai Michi, pp. 127-133
- Tamaki Shun'ichi, pp. 159-165
- Yoshida Kojiro, pp. 195-201
- Yamamoto Takayuki, pp. 229-235
- Yoo Yoo Jin, pp. 263-269

In lieu of photocopying, the narratives can be found on the Deai web site (http://www.tjf.or.jp/deai/contents/search/photo_top.html) by clicking on “My Story in English” below the appropriate student’s photo.

Procedure:

Day 1

1. Ask students what they know or think they know about the Japanese educational system and the school lives of students in Japan. Compile student comments on the board. When all students have spoken, ask about the sources of student knowledge. Where did they gain their information—television, pop culture, movies, readings, exchange students?
2. To gain background on Japanese education, students will be reading portions of two articles. Divide the class into four groups and assign students in each group to read one of the following reading selections, taken from the two web sites listed in the **Materials**:
 - Assignment 1: “Japanese Education”—sections on “Japanese Educational Achievements” and “Japanese K-12 Education.”
 - Assignment 2: “Japanese Education”—sections entitled “Japanese Higher Education” and “Educational Reform.”
 - Assignment 3: “Daily Life in Japanese High Schools”—sections on “Getting to School,” “At School,” and “Extracurricular Activities.”
 - Assignment 4: “Daily Life in Japanese High Schools”—sections on “Cram Schools,” “Entrance Examinations,” and “Free Time.”
3. When students have finished reading, reorganize them into groups of four; the four students in each group should have read different articles. Distribute Handout 6-1. Give groups about 20 minutes to compare the information they gleaned from their respective readings and to complete Handout 6-1. Let students know that, based on the article they read, they will be able to contribute answers to different questions on the handout; therefore they must work together to complete the assignment.
4. With students still in their small groups, convene the class and ask students to volunteer information from the articles that either supported or challenged their assumptions about Japanese education as listed on the board. On the board, make a separate list of data collected from the readings.

Answer Key for Handout Y-1: **1.** Possible strengths include the high level of achievement of Japanese students, the rigor of the high school curriculum, strong preparation of Japanese teachers, strong language programs; **2.** Possible differences include admission to Japanese high schools is through an exam process, longer school year in Japan than in the United States, greater attention to language instruction in Japanese schools than in U.S. schools, teaching is more prestigious and better paid in Japan, Japanese students and teachers clean the school, high schools are more specialized in Japan than in the United States, **3.** Possible similarities include the division into elementary, middle, and high school; compulsory attendance in both countries; government support for education in both countries; similar subjects studied in both countries; **4.** Students are required to take part in such tasks as cleaning the schools; Japanese teachers encourage students to practice strong character traits; **5.** Possible answers include Japanese students spend more time in school, may spend more time commuting to school, change into slippers at school, have more responsibility for maintaining the school, do not usually have access to a cafeteria at school; Japanese high schools have larger class sizes and fewer elective courses than American high schools; **6.** After school, Japanese students may take part in clubs, attend cram school, watch television or listen to music, read, or study; **7.** The exam system is too stressful, schools are too rigid, today's students don't study or behave as well as students used to, and the schools do not develop creative and flexible citizens; **8.** Curriculum is being changed to be more flexible and responsive to students' needs, compulsory weekend school attendance has been eliminated, mandatory community service is being considered; **9.** Because Japanese students achieve at high levels and are more likely to graduate from high school than U.S. students, U.S. educators may be able to borrow good ideas from Japanese education.

5. Have small groups combine to form seven new groups. Assign each group the narrative of one of the seven Japanese high school students. Each group's task is to read the narrative and record information about the educational experience of their assigned Japanese student. Have each group select a recorder who will compile all findings and a reporter whose job it will be to report to the class.

If students need guidance in deciding what information to record, conduct a class brainstorm of categories of information they might look for; possibilities are description of school student attends; special features of the school (if any); college prep or other; student's attitude about school; student's post-high school education plans; what student most likes about school; what student least likes about school; teacher-student relationships; student-student relationships.

Depending on time, the reading task may be assigned as individual homework, to be shared in small groups the following day.

Day 2

1. If students did Procedure 5 as homework, allow time at the beginning of class for the seven groups to meet and compile reports on their findings.
2. Explain to student groups that their task now is to create a recruitment brochure or poster for the school that their Japanese student attends. Whatever format they use, their recruitment piece should include words and images that will highlight the unique features and strengths of the school. Their

piece should also include basic information on the kind of school, courses offered, special requirements or situations for students, and so on.

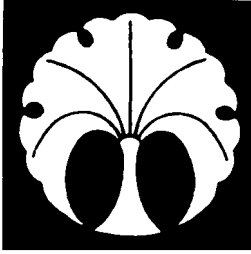
3. When groups have finished their work, reconvene the class. Have each group reporter present findings from the small group work and explain how the group turned these findings into its recruitment poster or brochure.
4. At the conclusion of the presentations, draw students' attention to the information that the class compiled about Japanese education at the beginning of this lesson. Discuss the following questions, helping students develop the understanding that generalizations must be based on information from many different individuals and, even then, will not apply to every individual:
 - How do the experiences of the seven Japanese high school students compare to the information that the class compiled at the outset of the lesson?
 - What, if any, data from the earlier sources has been challenged by the Japanese high school students' experiences? What has been reinforced?
 - Can the class come up with consensus on a typical high school student experience in Japan? If so, what is it? If not, why not?
 - How have the Japanese high school student case studies complicated your thinking about education and the school experience of students in Japan?
 - How have the seven case studies influenced your thinking about drawing generalizations about a broad topic such as a country's educational system?

Extension and Enrichment:

1. Create new groups with one student "expert" on each of the seven Japanese high school students in each new group. For a culmination of their study of education, have each group create a collage of words and images that convey the diversity of educational experiences in Japan. Students should use data from the seven Japanese high school students and the handout readings.
2. As a class, generate a list of topics or issues in Japanese high school student life that the class would like to know more about. These topics may be as large as school reform or gifted programs or as small as school uniforms. For each topic generated, come up with a key word or phrase that will help students research this topic on the Internet. Assign or allow each student to pick a topic. Allow students several nights, or library time, to conduct Internet research and to prepare a short report on their topic to be posted on the class bulletin board.

Supplemental Resources:

- Benjamin, Gail, *Japanese Lessons: A Year in a Japanese School through the Eyes of an American Anthropologist and Her Children* (New York: New York University Press, 1998).
- Benjamin, Gail, "Japan's Schools: Five Lessons," *Footnotes: The Newsletter of FPRI's Marvin Wachman Fund for International Education*, vol. 5, no. 3 (February 1998). *Education and Student Life in Japan, Internet Guide* (Bloomington, IN: National Clearinghouse for U.S.-Japan Studies). This web resource is updated regularly. <http://www.indiana.edu/~japan/iguides/edu.html>.
- Ellington, Lucien. *Education in the Japanese Life-Cycle: Implications for the United States* (Lewiston, NY: Edwin Mellen Press, 1992).



Handout 6-1

Guide to Analyzing Articles on Japanese Education

1. What do the authors of your articles see as strengths of the Japanese educational system? Identify a minimum of four strengths below.
 - a.
 - b.
 - c.
 - d.

2. Identify at least three ways that Japanese and U.S. education seem to be different.
 - a.
 - b.
 - c.

3. Identify at least three ways that Japanese and U.S. education seem to be similar.
 - a.
 - b.
 - c.

4. What are some ways that Japanese schools teach students desirable character traits?

5. Identify at least three ways that student life for junior high school and high school students in Japan is different from that of students in the United States.
 - a.
 - b.
 - c.

6. How do Japanese high school students spend after-school time?

7. Identify three criticisms that Japanese people have about education in their country.
 - a.
 - b.
 - c.

8. Identify two reforms that are underway in Japanese education and what each reform is designed to achieve.
 - a.
 - b.

9. Why might it be important or useful for Americans to know more about education in Japan?