



LESSON 9:

MY HOME: OKINAWA, JAPAN

Introduction:

In this lesson, students focus on the life of one student, Tamaki Shun'ichi, who serves as a guide to life in Okinawa. Okinawa's history differs from that of other parts of Japan, and its distinct culture continues today. While introducing Okinawa, the lesson explores two important concepts: multiple layers of culture and multiple perspectives on culture. After becoming acquainted with Shun'ichi's life in Okinawa, students reflect on their own perspectives about culture and how culture affects interpersonal relations.

This lesson will be most successful if students have some prior knowledge of Japanese history and culture; if they do not bring such knowledge to the lesson, it will take longer to complete because, as students do their analysis, you will need to help students distinguish details about Shun'ichi's life that are specifically Okinawan from information that applies throughout Japan.

Organizing Questions:

- What can we learn about society and the individual?
- What can we learn about tradition and change?
- What can we learn about global connectedness?
- What can we learn about place and the relationship between society and the environment?

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

1. Identify some distinct characteristics of Okinawa's history and culture.
2. Articulate ways in which Shun'ichi lives in more than one culture.
3. Understand that individuals have different perspectives that affect their perceptions, both of their own culture and of others' cultures.
4. Consider the impact of culture on interpersonal relations.

Time Required: 2 class periods

Materials:

1. Tamaki Shun'ichi photo sheets in the Deai kit or access to Deai photographs online

2. Copies of Handout 9-1, “My Story: Tamaki Shun’ichi,” for all students; as an alternative to the handout, the narrative can be accessed online at http://www.tjf.or.jp/deai/contents/chart/mystory/myst_ts.pdf
3. Copies of Handout 9-2, “Meeting People: Tamaki Shun’ichi,” for all students

Procedure:

Day 1

1. Remind the class that all seven students profiled in the Deai kit live in Japan. As in other countries, different parts of Japan have had different histories that continue to affect many aspects of contemporary life. For example, Okinawa did not become a prefecture of Japan until late in the 19th century, just as some territories did not become states of the United States until the 19th or 20th centuries. Point out that Hawaii and Alaska, our most recent states, have distinctly different histories than any of the thirteen original colonies. In addition to its history, Okinawa differs in other ways from the parts of Japan that Okinawa resident Tamaki Shun’ichi refers to as the “mainland.” In this lesson, students will learn more about Okinawa, using Shun’ichi as their guide.
2. Organize the class into five or six small groups and divide the 27 photo sheets about Tamaki Shun’ichi among the groups. Tell the class that their task is to study the photos and read the narrative on the back of each. They should search for images reflecting Okinawan history and culture in the photos and search for comments about Okinawan history and culture in the accompanying narratives. If they have not examined photos of the other Japanese students, they will need assistance in distinguishing details that are specifically about Okinawa from information that applies throughout Japan.
3. Ask one student from each group to report to the whole class. List the images and comments noted on the board. Students’ insights about Okinawa may range from climate and geography to specific art forms, pride in Okinawa, or historical events.
4. Introduce the important concepts outlined in the *Deai Text Booklet*, pp. 17-21. The four key concepts to convey to the class for this lesson are: culture is constantly changing; there is diversity within any culture; an individual is influenced by multiple layers of culture, including those of the family, region, nation, and globe; and each individual internalizes those layers of culture differently.
5. Check for student understanding of these concepts by asking for examples of each one drawn from their observations of U.S. culture.
6. Explain that the photos and narratives served as a first introduction to Shun’ichi, one individual who happens to be from Okinawa. Distribute copies of Handout 9-1, “My Story: Tamaki Shun’ichi,” and ask students to read Shun’ichi’s description of himself. While reading, they should continue their search for information that is specifically about the culture of Okinawa.
7. Debrief by asking students to report what they have found. Add these observations to the list you started in Step 3 above.

8. Distribute copies of Handout 9-2, “Meeting People: Tamaki Shun’ichi,” and tell the students that they will now carry their inquiry one step further as a homework assignment. This article, written after the original kit was produced, was published in a newsletter that is mailed to teachers in many countries who are using the Deai photos. The student task is the same: search for information specifically about the culture of Okinawa. Students should also ask themselves, while reading this handout, whether they are gathering any different impressions from this article compared to the other two sources they have used. Write this two-part assignment on the board as a homework assignment, either to be written and collected or to prepare for using the information orally in a class discussion.

Day 2

1. Ask students their impressions of the “Meeting People” handout they read as homework. Students will probably observe that this material is less introductory and more like a serious conversation with a good friend or with an older person who is explaining complicated concepts to someone who is not familiar with them.
2. Ask students to compare their impressions of Shun’ichi and Okinawa as presented in the three sources: the photo sheets with their narratives, Shun’ichi’s self-introduction in “My Story,” and the “Meeting People” newsletter article. While the “My Story” narrative was quite personal and centered on Shun’ichi himself, the “Meeting People” article provides Shun’ichi’s observations about cultural and political issues. Younger students may find it challenging to analyze their sources in this way. Suggest they compare this research about Shun’ichi with the process they go through when making a new friend. Ask students to describe and explain how Shun’ichi lives in more than one culture.
3. Once they have reflected on their sources of information, ask students to imagine that they are exchange students who are visiting Shun’ichi on Okinawa for a short homestay in Naha where he goes to school. Tell them to spend 15 minutes writing a letter home from this imaginary visit, identifying and explaining distinct aspects of Okinawa and life there. The time allowed for writing is deliberately brief so that students must focus on the details that formed the strongest impression on them.
4. Either as a whole class or in small groups, have students read their letters aloud. Debrief the assignment by discussing whether the letters are similar.
 - Did everyone write about the same topics? For example, did one person write about the arts, another the scenery, and another the history?
 - Did some students focus on traditional culture and others on contemporary life?
 - Do letters express opinions, pro or con, about Okinawa?
 - Do multiple perspectives about Okinawa and Shun’ichi’s life emerge?
5. Ask students the following question: If you actually had a chance to visit Okinawa, would your letters be more similar to each other’s letters? Why or why not? Guide the students to arrive at an understanding that an Okinawa

experience, real or imagined, will be filtered through the personal perspective of each student. For example, a student who loves hot weather might immediately feel comfortable in Okinawa, while a student who has particular beliefs about the military might focus on writing about the military situation there.

6. Conclude by inviting the students to consider the role culture plays in interpersonal relations. Is it necessary to know about the culture of Okinawa and the rest of Japan when trying to learn about Shun'ichi as an individual? Ask the students to form their own opinions about whether it is important to know about a person's cultural heritage when getting to know that person.

Extension and Enrichment:

1. Ask students to formulate questions they have about Okinawa that remain unanswered. Okinawa is a place with a proud heritage, rich diversity, complex history, and contentious contemporary issues. As homework or extra credit, students should do their own research and report back in written or oral form.
2. If one goal of your class is to emphasize multicultural awareness and skills, ask students to identify situations in the United States that are similar to Shun'ichi's story. Ask them to create a thesis and defend it, arguing why the situation they chose is similar.
3. The web site of the Prefectural Government of Okinawa (comparable to a state government in our system) includes a description of the culture of Okinawa (<http://www.pref.okinawa.jp/english/cultures/index.html>). As a crossroads of Asian trade, Okinawa once was a bridge among nations. This was reflected in the inscription on a bell that hung in the rulers' castle. On it was written *bankoku shinryo*, translated as "bridges among all the nations of the world." The author of the web site expresses the wish that it will become "a new bridge between the nations, a bridge to richer relationships in the future for the people of Okinawa, of Japan and of all the world." Ask students to brainstorm ways that a website could be designed for this purpose.
4. On another page (<http://www.pref.okinawa.jp/symbol/index-e.html>), the prefectural web site gives the text of a prefectural song. The last verse ends with the following lines:

The folk culture inherited for generations
Now brilliantly shines over our home islands
Let us create our own culture
For future Okinawa

Ask students what it would mean to create a culture. If your school or town were to create a culture, how might it differ from the rest of U.S. culture?

Supplemental Resources:

Useful teacher background information can be found in *Understanding Okinawa's Role in the U.S.-Japan Security Arrangement*, by Jacques Fuqua. This is one of a series of *Japan Digests* available through the National Clearinghouse for U.S.-Japan Studies (<http://www.indiana.edu/~japan>).



Handout 9-1

My Story: Tamaki Shun'ichi

Me in a Nutshell

I'm a cheerful guy; I laugh and smile a lot. I'm always busy with something, and feel I'm wasting time if I'm not constantly on the move. Once I've decided what I want to do, I get impatient if I can't act on my impulse right now! And when I do start something, I hate to do it halfway; whatever it is, I always give it my best. Still, I do try to remember to take it easy and enjoy what I'm doing. I want to enjoy life doing the things I like to do so I won't have any regrets later. I set specific goals in each thing I do and try my best to achieve them.

Although I might seem rather happy-go-lucky and not given to thinking too deeply about things, in some respects I'm a fairly high strung and timid person. I'm prone to agonizing over the littlest things! I worry about how other people see me. I'll come up against some problem, anguish about this and that, mull it all over in my mind, sort myself out again, and move on. It seems I'm always doing that over and over. I wish I could do things more cleverly, but it just doesn't turn out that way. I also tend to be self-centered and forgetful—I'll say something one day and by the next I'll have forgotten all about it.

Growing Up

Preschool Years

I was born in 1982 at a hospital in the city of Naha, Okinawa prefecture. On the island of Izenajima, where my home is, there is only a small out-patient clinic, so women on the island normally go to the main island of Okinawa to have their babies.

Apparently I was pretty rambunctious when I was little, and never paid attention to what my mother tried to tell me to do.

Elementary School

When I first started elementary school I was shy and not very good at acting on my own initiative or doing things in front of other people. I was self-conscious and lacking in confidence.

In fourth grade, someone offered me a cigarette and I gave in to the temptation. At first it was just for a bit of fun, but it turned out to be the first step to lots of other mischief. Before I knew it, I was hanging out with troublemaker-type older kids, shoplifting and stealing bikes and cars to go joyriding in. To tell you the truth, when I

Source: *Deai Text Booklet* (Tokyo: The Japan Forum, 2001), pp. 159-167.

was doing these bad things, part of me was scared. I think it was a kind of curiosity that made me want to try to be “bad.” And besides, even if I didn’t want to do such things, I couldn’t go against the wishes of the older kids. When my mother found out what I’d been up to, she bawled me out and did everything she could to get me to stop, even to the point of deliberately abandoning me to my own devices. But no matter what she said, all I did was snap back at her or ignore what she said. This went on until I was in my second year of junior high.

Junior High School

In my second year of junior high school I joined a *taiko* drum ensemble called Izena Shoendaiko. My initial motivation for joining the group was simply that the nighttime rehearsals meant that I could go out at night without having to sneak out of the house. But the other members were serious about music. Inspired by those people, I started to get serious myself, and pretty soon I realized how much fun music could be. Partly because of my mother’s influence, I had always liked singing. I formed a clear ambition to become a singer-songwriter.

Around that time, I decided I wanted to stop doing bad things, but somehow I wasn’t able to give it up completely. Then one night, with a friend egging me on, we stole a car and went for a drive. The car had a turbo engine, so it really took off when you stepped on the gas. We came into a corner doing about 120 kilometers an hour, couldn’t pull out of it, and ended up rolling the car. Luckily, neither of us was hurt, but it was very scary! I made up my mind to quit it all; I gave up smoking and stealing and all the other mischief I’d been into. Up till then I’d done nothing but rebel against my parents, but I began to realize that simply rebelling without being able to do anything worthwhile myself was just dumb, and I decided to knuckle down and do things the right way.

I tend to rush headlong in one direction, even if it’s the completely opposite direction from the way I’d been going the day before. That’s exactly what happened at that point in my life. I got totally absorbed in things like music and training on the school soccer team. In my third year of junior high, I was accepted into a high school by recommendation, which meant I wouldn’t have to take the entrance exam. I organized some of my other classmates who had also been accepted to high school by recommendation into a group called “Little Teachers.” With each “Little Teacher” taking a different subject, we tutored other classmates who had to take the high school entrance exams. We prepared carefully for the tutoring sessions, asking our teachers beforehand what points to teach and how to go about it.

High School Life

Entering Haeburu High School

Okinawa prefecture is made up of about 160 islands of various sizes. Most of the fifty or so that are inhabited don’t have high schools. Counting the main island of Okinawa, only three islands in the prefecture have high schools. Izenajima doesn’t have one, so after graduating from junior high, most kids from Izenajima go on to high schools on the main island of Okinawa. I go to Haeburu High School in the town of Haeburu, which is right next to the prefectural capital, Naha. Traveling by boat and then bus, it takes over four hours to get from Izenajima to Haeburu. Since that would be too far to commute every day, I live with an aunt (my father’s older sister) in Naha.

Haeburu High School offers courses in local culture, humanities and sciences, physical education, and liberal arts. The fact that it had a local culture course was why I wanted to enter this school. Apart from general subjects like math and English, we study things like *ryuka*, the Okinawan language, *sanshin*, Ryukyu dance, Ryukyu karate, and Okinawan history. I thought that studying the performing arts and history of Okinawa at high school would be useful to me in making my own music in the future.

Adjusting to a New Environment

Not long after I moved to Naha and entered Haeburu High, I started feeling really out of place in a way I'd never experienced before. On Izenajima, no matter who I was with, I could always speak openly and frankly with others, and I always felt close to those around me. I wasn't even really aware of it; we just took it for granted. After I moved to the city, though, I realized with a shock how people distance themselves from others and say things they don't really mean or believe. Maybe it has something to do with being a densely populated place.

The kids at Haeburu High were unresponsive and the whole atmosphere of the school was gloomy and lethargic. They could have enjoyed school if they wanted to, but nobody even tried. I wanted to have fun like I had back on the island, but the more I tried to change the atmosphere the more out of place I felt. What hurt me the most was finding out that the people I thought were my friends said one thing but thought another. I'd take what they said at face value and act accordingly, only to be told something completely different later. When things like that happen a few times, you really lose faith in people. I decided I didn't want to see the bad side, the mean side of people any more; I didn't want to have anything to do with people any more.

I may seem to be cheery and outgoing by nature, but I'm still pretty wary when talking with people for the first time. Now I stick to superficial conversation more than before. I realized that people can be pretty hard to deal with. Still, I have made some good friends whom I can trust and be myself with, such as the other members of my *sanshin* group.

President of the Student Council

By my second year of high school I was so fed up with the situation I was ready to drop out. I was agonizing over this and that, and then it occurred to me that giving up would get me nowhere. I changed my mind and came up with an idea: I'd become president of the student council and do what I could to make the school a cheerful, fun place to be! I ran for president of the student council and got voted in for one year beginning in the second term of my second year at the school.

The job of student president was hard. It's not easy to accommodate everyone's point of view and establish a firm course of action. I wanted to respect each person's ideas on any given matter, but when you want to actually get things done it's impossible to please everybody. When I would say what I thought, those who thought differently would become hostile. The more I fretted over such problems, the more timid I became, until I ended up not being able to accomplish anything at all. I'm getting by, though, thanks partly to the encouragement I get from friends who tell me to buck up. They remind me that if I really want to make a difference to the school then I have to accept being disliked by a few people along the way. I still agonize over problems

sometimes, but I tell myself that if I don't follow through, everything will go back to the way it was before. I have to think positively. From now on I'm going to be more resolute. I'll just do what I think is best for the whole school. I'm going to relax and just accept that some people aren't going to like me.

Music

My life revolves around music. I compose and sing songs on guitar and *sanshin*, I'm studying classical Okinawan music and traditional folk songs in class and in my afterschool club, and I'm active as a member of the Izena Shoendaiko drum ensemble. I love each of these activities and I give my best to them all. Although they are all different genres of music, I can't really think of them separately, as if traditional music were one thing, *taiko* drums another, and guitar music something different again. When you think about it, what I'm doing in each case is essentially the same thing: music. To me, they are all simply music.

My desire above all is to draw from my own experience in creating my own distinctive sound and rhythm. The mooing of cattle, for example, is different from one animal to the next. One might give a short "moo," another a long "mooooo." In the same way, I think people's sounds and rhythms differ from one person to the next. There are some aspects of classical Okinawan music and traditional folk songs that cannot be represented in musical notation. So the same song is rendered in subtly different ways depending on the person playing or singing it. Those differences represent the distinctive quality each performer brings to music that is not the result of theory or technical skill. I try to respect my own sensibilities and give free expression to my own message through music.

Music has also given me new opportunities. In the summer this year during the Izena Shoen Festival on Izenajima, I performed with the Shoen-daiko drum ensemble. I composed a new piece for the festival and was in charge of producing it for the stage. Even harder than creating the new musical piece is coordinating all the people involved. If I became too concerned about the wishes of individual members, I would not be able to make any decisions or accomplish anything. I decided that, in order for everyone to perform well together, I had to show leadership even if it meant being a bit pushy. As a result, I think we were able to do our best for the festival performance. I think my experience on the school student council and in the school's folk performing arts club stood me in good stead on that occasion. Although the process of preparing for the festival was really hard, and while I wasn't entirely satisfied with the final performance, on the whole I really learned a lot.

My Future

My ambition to become a singer-songwriter one day hasn't changed since I was in junior high. I've considered various options, such as trying to make it as a singer-songwriter after I graduate from high school, or going to college in the United States to study music in depth. Sometimes, though, my dreams have gotten ahead of me and I haven't been realistic enough about them. At those times, I think having such a definite goal made me overeager—I worried about having so much to do and not enough time to do it in. Now I think that, since I plan to make music my whole life, there's no need to rush. If I go to the local performing arts university, I can study Western classical music, continue studying Okinawan classical music, and even have

opportunities to perform overseas. I'm thinking of taking that university's entrance exam.

Family and Friends

My Family

We're such a natural part of each other's lives that it doesn't seem to make much difference whether we are actually together or not. I know my family provides the crucial support in my life. Especially since I moved away from home and my parents send me money for school fees and living expenses, I appreciate how lucky I am and how tough things are for them. I'm waking up to the fact that none of us goes through life completely alone. I think it's really amazing the way my parents work hard and manage to make ends meet while raising six children, and I know I owe them a lot. Although I'm the eldest of six brothers, I don't worry about my brothers much. There's not a bad egg among them, so I think they'll do all right without me hassling them.

My Friends

For me, it's absolutely essential to have friends I can relate to honestly and not just superficially. With these friends I can share both good times and bad. They are there for me when things go wrong, like when I break up with my girlfriend or whatever. In that respect, friends are precious. Then again, I think all the people in my life are valuable. In a sense, my life is sustained by all of them, and I think even the most ornery of the lot contributes to my life one way or another. I came to see things this way through experiences like performing on stage, because I learned that you can't do very much just by yourself—really valuable things can never be achieved by one person alone.

I think that when two people love each other they're bound to clash sometimes and see each other's bad sides. It would be great, though, to be able to love each other in a way that includes all those negative aspects as well. I'd like someone who'll make the effort to understand me but who'll also tell me what my faults are. My ideal is a relationship in which we bring out the best in each other and always feel at ease together.

My Island: Izenajima

Lying in the northern part of the archipelago of Okinawa prefecture, Izenajima is shaped like the territory of France. It's a small island, with a coastline about eighteen kilometers long and a population of around 2,000. People on the island take great pride in the fact that it is the birthplace of King Sho En, founder of the second Sho dynasty of the Ryukyu kingdom.

I go back to Izenajima about ten times a year, such as during long school holidays or when we have Shoen-daiko drum events. I can truly relax in the natural surroundings of Izenajima. Whereas the sky over Naha feels small, Izenajima's horizons seem to extend forever. When I'm alone on the beach, just gazing at the sky, I feel like I'm in a world all my own. The sound of the waves, the whistling of the wind, the twittering of the birds—sounds like these conjure up all sorts of images in my mind. Sometimes I turn those images into songs. Although Izenajima is only a small island, it seems like the embodiment of a vast world. Perhaps it is the beauty and abundance of

the island's landscape that makes me think so. Because I want to grasp things in the big picture and make music on a grand scale, I am fascinated by the "big world" of Izenajima.

At the moment I can't say whether or not I'll ever come back to live on Izenajima some day. My parents say I should do what I want. If I'm going to continue with my *taiko* playing, I'd like to do it with my fellow Shoen-daiko drummers.



Handout 9-2

Meeting People: Tamaki Shun'ichi

Pride in Okinawa

I am proud to call Okinawa my home. Okinawa has had its own unique styles of music and dance since long ago, and it has a friendly atmosphere that makes people peaceful and relaxed. Maybe it has something to do with the fertile landscape and warm climate. The people of Okinawa once acquired all sorts of goods through trade with China, which they then exchanged in trade with countries in Southeast Asia. Commerce among different countries led to exchange among people from diverse cultures. I think this is what made Okinawans so accepting of unfamiliar peoples. Even now, you can find that spirit among Okinawans; it shows up in Okinawan expressions like *ichariba chode* (“If we’ve met once, we’re brothers”). I wasn’t all that fond of Okinawa when I was younger. Okinawa, I thought, was a backwater and behind the times. I yearned for the life of the big city, where I imagined there would be all kinds of exciting toys to play with. I started to like Okinawa after I learned about its history and culture through the study of classical Okinawan music.

Okinawa and Japan

Okinawans call themselves *uchinanchu* (“Uchina (Okinawa) people”) and people from other parts of the country *naicha* (“mainland people”). Okinawa is the southernmost part of Japan, and is also distant from any other part of the country, so I think it naturally tends to differentiate itself from everywhere else. It probably also has to do with the fact that long ago it was an independent kingdom, separate from Japan, known as Ryukyu.

The expression *naicha* may sound somewhat derogatory and a degree of prejudice is undeniable. I am sure there are people who, recalling the historical events surrounding the incorporation of the Ryukyu kingdom into Japan and the fact that Okinawa became the scene of a land battle during World War II, harbor a dislike for “mainlanders” that is expressed in the word *naicha*. I’ve also heard that Okinawans who went to the mainland twenty or thirty years ago were subject to discrimination there. There are probably people who developed a dislike of mainland Japanese from hearing about such experiences from their parents. On the other hand, there are also many Okinawans who feel pride in their unique and rich culture, and use the terms *uchinanchu* and *naicha* to express that distinction. To me it seems narrow-minded to refuse to speak to people or categorically dislike them just because they are *naicha*. There are *uchinanchu* I can’t get along with and *naicha* I like very much.

Source: Permission to reproduce this article has been granted by The Japan Forum. The article is excerpted from *The Japan Forum Newsletter*, no. 26 (September 2002). The original article includes photographs, the text in both English and Japanese, and extensive historical notes. Back issues of *The Japan Forum Newsletters* are available online at <http://www.tjf.or.jp/newsletter/index.htm>.

U.S. Military Bases

U.S. military bases on Okinawa occupy about 20 percent of the land on the main island. Many people do not like the bases and there are various protest movements against them. Some people oppose the bases because memories of the war have left deep psychological scars that remain even today. I have heard that some of those who experienced the war become frightened even today by the sight of the airplanes at the bases. Even I found myself in tears while watching a television program documenting experiences of the war. I remember thinking that after all the hardship and suffering such people experienced, it is no wonder they so strongly resist having the bases here. During his visit to Okinawa for the G-8 Summit, Mr. Clinton said the bases were necessary for peace, but if he had thought about it from the standpoint of the *uchinanchu*, I doubt he would have said that. If the bases are truly for the purpose of protecting the safety of the world, I can understand, but there is no proof that the bases will not bring about another war in the future. There are weapons on the bases, and where there are weapons, there is the possibility that someday the tragedy of war will happen again. When I think about it that way, it makes me very nervous. On the other hand, the closing of the bases, upon which a large amount of local business depends, would deal a tremendous blow to the Okinawan economy. I think some people support the bases for this reason, therefore, even though they would really prefer not to have them. We might not want to have U.S. military bases on our soil, but what would we do if the economy suffered as a result? It is a very difficult issue. To be quite honest, I do not know what the best resolution to this problem might be.

Okinawa's Future

Many Americans associated with the military bases live on Okinawa. There are also many people from other countries. I think the variety of people is fascinating and a good thing for the islands. My hope for now is that Okinawa can become a place for exchange of some sort—economic, musical, or anything really—with many other countries. The term *bankoku shinryo*, chosen for the name of the Summit conference hall, carries the meaning of “bridge linking all nations.” With its history, geography, and other features, Okinawa can play a vital part in helping a variety of things to connect. I would really like to see Okinawa become a lively and flourishing place by fulfilling its potential as “a bridge linking all nations.”