



LESSON 10:

***BENTO* OR BURGER? CHANGING DIETS IN JAPAN**

Introduction:

Today, food choices in Japan cover a vast array of traditional as well as international items. The Japanese young people profiled in this unit reflect this diversity in their eating habits. Photo prints show the students enjoying *bento* (box lunches), various traditional Japanese dishes, snacks purchased at *konbini* (convenience stores), fast food from McDonald's, and other favorites. Additionally, students are shown consuming their food choices in varied venues, including school cafeterias, outdoors, at home with family members, and elsewhere. Further, through the narratives accompanying the photos, we learn which items are or are not favorites with these students.

This lesson asks students to research all the food-related information presented in the photo cards, classify the data gathered, and make generalizations about their findings. Students then explore the role of the *konbini*. Next, students analyze challenges confronting McDonald's in Japan today. As a culminating activity, students analyze information about a particular Japanese teen through a poster presentation of a new menu item that they have designed specifically for that student.

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?

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

1. Classify the food choices and consumption habits of seven Japanese teens.
2. Explain the role of *konbini* in Japanese teens' lives.
3. Generalize about the contemporary eating habits of Japanese teens.
4. Analyze contemporary trends in food purchasing and fast food marketing.
5. Interpret information through a poster presentation.

Time Required: 2 class periods plus homework

Materials:

1. One complete set of photo sheets for the students to sort through or the following presorted photo sheets:
 - Mizushima Yu: P07, P09, D02, D05, D11, D15, D17
 - Oishi Kanta: P02, P13, D01, D06, D08, D10, D12
 - Sakai Michi: P04, P09, D01, D06, D08, D10
 - Tamaki Shun'ichi: P06, P09, P10, P12, D03, D06, D12
 - Yoshida Kojiro: P08, D02, D11, D15, D17
 - Yamamoto Takayuki: P02, P09, P10, D04
 - Yoo Yoo Jin: P02, P08, P10, D01, D04, D07, D08, D15
2. One copy of Handout 10-1, "Data Retrieval Chart," for each group
3. One copy of Handout 10-2, "Shopping at the Konbini," for each group
4. Materials for making posters

Procedure:

Day 1

1. Explain that students will be exploring food in Japan by looking at the seven Japanese students in the Deai kit. Divide the class into seven groups and give each group the photo sheets for a particular Japanese student (either all the sheets or the presorted ones). Tell the students that they are to conduct research on their students' food choices by sorting through the cards and identifying those that contain pictures or information about some aspect of food. Explain that the criteria include food items, places where food is consumed or purchased, and food customs. Caution students to read carefully through the text since, in a few cases, information about food is not accompanied by a photo (also, photos showing food are sometimes not explained by text).
2. Present each group with a copy of Handout 10-1, "Data Retrieval Chart," and ask the group to complete this form, working with the photo sheets they have selected (or that have been presorted for them).

Answer Key for Handout 10-1:

Examples of Japanese Food or Manners	Examples of Western Food	Food that Is Both Japanese and Western	Where Food Is Purchased/ Consumed
<i>Mizushima Yu:</i> obento, ramen, mochi, tonjiru (a kind of miso soup), miso soup with giant radish and egg, nikujaga (boiled meat and potato dish), rice flavored with millet	<i>Mizushima Yu:</i> toast, sunny-side up eggs, sandwiches	<i>Mizushima Yu:</i> sauteed green peppers, grapes, vegetable juice, fruit, tea, pastries, grilled salted salmon	<i>Mizushima Yu:</i> konbini, kitchen, dining room, school cafeteria

Examples of Japanese Food or Manners	Examples of Western Food	Food that Is Both Japanese and Western	Where Food Is Purchased/ Consumed
<p>Oishi Kanta: rice with grilled himono (dried, salted fish), curry and rice, ramen, natto (fermented soybeans), chicken curry, fried rice, onigiri (rice balls), grilled kashira (pork headmeat), grilled nankotsu (chicken breast cartilage), ramen with rich pork stock and chashu (roast pork)</p>	<p>Oishi Kanta: Sprite, Coca-Cola</p>	<p>Oishi Kanta: eggs, chicken curry, curry and rice</p>	<p>Oishi Kanta: konbini, yakitori grill, special cooking class, school cafeteria, sister's condo</p>
<p>Sakai Michi: hashed beef with rice, obento, Japanese style breakfast in the dorm; says itadakimasu before meals and gochisosama after meals, miso soup</p>	<p>Sakai Michi: butter, yogurt, canned coffee, pizza, sandwiches, milk, sauteed sausages with cabbage</p>	<p>Sakai Michi: hashed beef with rice</p>	<p>Sakai Michi: konbini, dormitory, food product manufacture class, outdoor barbecue</p>
<p>Tamaki Shun'ichi: bento with poku tomagu (sauteed slices of canned pork with scrambled egg cake and diced cabbage on the side), can of green tea, brother washing rice</p>	<p>Tamaki Shun'ichi: McDonald's food</p>	<p>Tamaki Shun'ichi: soft drink, pastry, watermelon</p>	<p>Tamaki Shun'ichi: coffee shop, vendor who comes to the school, konbini, Su-chan's bakery, McDonald's at school, student council meetings</p>
<p>Yoshida Kojiro: bento, eating salad at breakfast, curry rice, udon, soba</p>	<p>Yoshida Kojiro: McDonald's food, coffee, "Western-style" breakfast</p>	<p>Yoshida Kojiro: toast, egg, grapefruit, deep-fried chicken cutlet</p>	<p>Yoshida Kojiro: McDonald's, school dining hall, classroom, konbini</p>
<p>Yamamoto Takayuki: mochi, bento, miso-zuke (fillets of fish marinated in miso), kara-age (Japanese fried chicken), sashimi (sliced raw fish), onigiri (rice balls), curry</p>	<p>Yamamoto Takayuki: none mentioned or shown</p>	<p>Yamamoto Takayuki: sweet potato, curry</p>	<p>Yamamoto Takayuki: cafeteria, fish shop, konbini</p>

Examples of Japanese Food or Manners	Examples of Western Food	Food that Is Both Japanese and Western	Where Food Is Purchased/ Consumed
Yoo Yoo Jin: <i>misc. Japanese food pictured in late supper with sister, obento, udon (noodles)</i>	Yoo Yoo Jin: <i>Australian food and sweets pictured, pastry at school cafeteria</i>	Yoo Yoo Jin: <i>pastry, soybeans, bananas, oranges, apples, chicken</i>	Yoo Yoo Jin: <i>school cafeteria, school hallway</i>

- After each group has retrieved and recorded the data for its Japanese teen, ask the students to identify and discuss information that is similar to and different from food-related experiences in their lives. Ask the class to make some generalizations based upon information common for all seven students. Students should be able to identify *bento* (or *obento*), *konbini* (convenience store), rice, and other items. Ask students if they often (or ever) visit a convenience store for snacks or other items. Next, explain that they are going to learn more about Japanese *konbini*.
- Distribute Handout 10-2, “Shopping at the *Konbini*” to each group. Groups should write down similarities and differences compared to convenience stores they have visited. Ask students to explain why *konbini* might play a larger role in the lives of Japanese teens than American teens. Students should be able to point out the large array of services and items offered and the convenience of having so many stores within a short walking distance.

Day 2

- The next day, explain to students that *konbini* are not the only places where snacks and other foods are purchased. Popular Western-style fast food and snacks such as burgers, pizza, and doughnuts are often purchased at U.S. brand outlets such as McDonald’s, Mister Donut, and Domino’s Pizza. Share with students the fact that for decades McDonald’s has been a leader in Western-style fast food sales in Japan. Recently, however, the chain has come upon tough times. Through a short lecture, summarize for students the information in the **Teacher Background Information**. Alternatively, you might copy the **Teacher Background Information** for students, checking for understanding as they read. The information about the “New Tastes Menu” will be important to students’ ability to complete the next assignment successfully.
- Present students with the following challenge: Because of their newly acquired knowledge about food preferences among young people in Japan, they have been hired as marketing consultants for McDonald’s Japan. Their task is to analyze the food preferences of the Japanese student they have studied and create at least one “New Tastes Menu” item for him or her. Each group will create a poster to showcase their work; they should include a rationale for the culinary creation. Each group should pick a spokesperson for the presentation. Distribute drawing materials and allow students 30 minutes to create posters. Allow time for sharing.
- Explain that concern has recently grown in the United States, Japan, and other areas over the health implications of a high-fat diet. Fast food has been blamed

for this trend toward a high-fat diet. Although some traditional Japanese fast food items such as *onigiri* (rice balls) are relatively healthy choices, there is concern over Western-style fast food such as burgers and fries. Some Japanese have observed that these items are not eaten with chopsticks and have pointed out that those who use chopsticks tend to eat a more nutritious diet. Those favoring Western-style fast food have been called *hashi-nashi zoku* or the chopstick-less tribe or group. Ask the students if they would classify their Japanese student as having a chopstick-less diet? Why or why not?

4. Close the lesson by asking students to reflect upon the item they created for the “New Tastes Menu.” Is it a healthy item or a high-fat item? Does it require the use of chopsticks? Does it incorporate aspects of traditional Japanese cuisine or is it an entirely new or Western taste? Finally, as a homework writing task, ask the students to reflect upon their own food choices. To what extent is fast food a part of their diet, and what are the implications?

Extension and Enrichment:

If the class did not do the introductory lesson on the universals of culture (Lesson 1), brainstorm aspects of Japanese culture, such as religion, language, and so on, creating a web around the word *culture*. After this webbing exercise, remind students of how frequently rice surfaced in discussions of traditional foods, and ask them to consider the significance of this fact. Explain that rice has long played an important role not just in Japanese cuisine but also in the culture itself. Direct the students to the National Clearinghouse for U.S.-Japan Studies *Japan Digest* entitled *Rice: It's More than Food in Japan* (<http://www.indiana.edu/~japan/digest6.html>) or print a copy and duplicate for the class. After students have read the digest, ask students to find as many examples as possible for each of the aspects of culture noted in their webbing exercise. As a class, discuss the significance of their findings and ask each group to compose a summary sentence or paragraph on the importance of rice in Japanese culture.

Teacher Background Information:

Today, McDonald's is facing falling sales in Japan. After the first outlet opened in Japan in 1971 (inside the Mitsukoshi department store in Tokyo's Ginza district), McDonald's enjoyed three decades of rising sales. In 2001, however, numerous factors contributed to falling sales. In that year there was a mad-cow disease scare, as well as a continuing economic slump officially termed deflation by the government. Also, the continuing low birth rate has reduced the ranks of McDonald's core customers, families with children. Additionally, there is increasing competition from rival fast-food chains, including Japan's second-largest burger chain, Mos Food Services.

The McDonald's menu in Japan, as in other countries of the world, has offered changing items geared to the market. For example, over the years McDonald's restaurants have featured teriyaki burgers, seaweed toppings for fries, and Mac Chao, a kind of lunch box with fried rice. Today the roughly 3,800 restaurants are continuing to attract customers and improve sales through introduction of new menu items.

In light of the falling birth rate, McDonald's has recently targeted a new category of customers—working women in their 20s and 30s. Sometimes referred to as “parasite singles,” these white-collar workers continue to live at home with their parents. Since

most of their salary is available to them as disposable income, they often eat out. However, these women prefer trendy, sophisticated, and health-conscious dining choices, not fast food. Eager to appeal to this market segment, McDonald's has introduced its "New Tastes Menu." These items are somewhat more sophisticated. As a result, diners can now enjoy a cup of gourmet coffee, a salad with blue-cheese dressing, and a French-style hamburger (including a generous dose of ground pepper) with ratatouille sauce (including diced zucchini and onions simmered in tomato sauce). Trendy consumers who believe French food has a "cool image" now have French-related choices at McDonald's!

Also, keeping in mind that the parasite singles are big spenders, the prices on the New Tastes Menu are higher. For example, a smoked beef sandwich with tomatoes and onions costs 250 yen or about \$2.25. This is about three times the price of a standard hamburger.

Japan is McDonald's largest market after the United States, and the company is anxious to increase earnings. Therefore, plans call for each New Tastes Menu item to be replaced every six weeks. Some of the first items introduced included a tofu burger and a gourmet burger called the Premium Mac.

Sources:

- Fackler, Martin, "Bistro Burger," *Far Eastern Economic Review* (Aug. 21, 2003), pp. 43.
- Fukunaga, Kazuhiko, "At Our 'Konbini,'" *Look Japan* (March 2001), pp. 15-17.
- Sano, Shin'ichi, "The McDonald's Japan Story," *Japan Echo* (August 2001), pp 21-23.
- "Will Ratatouille Attract Japanese to McDonald's?" *Daily Herald* (August 15, 2003), Section 3, p. 3.
- Wojtan, Linda S., *Exploring Contemporary Japanese Society, Japan Digest* (Bloomington, IN: National Clearinghouse for U.S.-Japan Studies, Indiana University, November 2000), <http://www.indiana.edu/~japan/Digests/society.html>.
- Wojtan, Linda S., *Rice: It's More Than Food in Japan, Japan Digest* (Bloomington, IN: National Clearinghouse for U.S.-Japan Studies, Indiana University, November 1993), <http://www.indiana.edu/~japan/digest6.html>.

Supplemental Resources:

- Japanese Food, Internet Guide* (Bloomington, IN: National Clearinghouse for U.S.-Japan Studies, Indiana University, January 2004), <http://www.indiana.edu/~japan/iguide/food.html>.
- "Japanese Food: Traditions and Trends," *Tune-In Japan: Approaching Culture Through Television* (New York: The Asia Society, 1995), pp. 137-148.
- Parisi, Lynn, *Asia Video Reports Japan: Food, Teacher's Guide* (Urbana-Champaign, IL: Asian Educational Media Service, 2000).

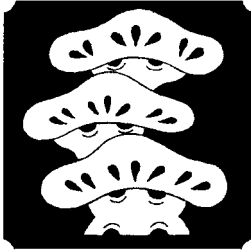


Handout 10-1

Data Retrieval Chart

Japanese Student: _____

Examples of Japanese Food or Manners	Examples of Western Food	Food that Is Both Japanese and Western	Where Food Is Purchased/ Consumed



Handout 10-2

Shopping at the Konbini

Konbini, as the Japanese call convenience stores, have existed in Japan for more than 30 years. They are convenient because they often are open 24 hours a day and stock many useful items. Also, since there are so many (about 50,000), there is usually a *konbini* nearby. The 7-11 chain is the largest; Lawson is second.

About two-thirds of the revenues of a *konbini* come from food products. Many of these are prepared foods, such as take-out meals called *bento*, which are packaged in small boxes. Also popular is a Japanese-style fast food called *onigiri*—meat, fish, pickles or other ingredients inside rice pressed into a ball the size of a fist. Side dishes, pastries, processed foods, and health drinks sell well also. Take-out foods are popular because they are cheap (300-500 yen) and also eliminate the need to cook. Some young people say that *konbini* take the place of refrigerators! If you order ahead, one *konbini* chain will deliver any of about 300 meals to your home, or you can pick them up.

Konbini are also handy spots to buy magazines, computer game software, music CDs, postage stamps, and prepaid passes for expressways. DHC, a popular cosmetics line, is only available by mail or at *konbini*. Almost all *konbini* have photocopiers, fax services, and ATMs. Cell phones are sold; some *konbini* offer a cell phone recharging service. At some stores, you can pay utility bills and make insurance payments.

Customers especially appreciate the convenience of ticket purchasing. All Lawson stores have information terminals nicknamed “Loppi.” These terminals feature color LCDs with touch screen menus. You are able to purchase tickets for sports events, concerts, plays, and travel. You can also send flowers, buy a newspaper subscription, view ads for new and used cars, or order a university application form.

Konbini also play a role in Internet purchases. If home delivery is not convenient, consumers can arrange to pick up their purchases at a local convenience store. Also, many *konbini* are in partnership with companies offering Internet shopping. Once items are “bought” online, they can be paid for and picked up at a *konbini*.

Konbini continue to evolve to attract customers. One convenience store, with an all-female staff, caters to women through fashionable products, special cosmetics, and food items. The small eat-in area is designed to encourage women to sit and chat. The specially designed restroom features a large make-up mirror and other conveniences.

Sources:

“Convenience Stores Are Changing Lifestyles in Japan,” *Nipponia*, No. 19 (December 15, 2001), pp. 5-18.

“Convenience Store Services,” *Japan Now* (February 2000), p.6.

Fukunaga, Kazuhiko, “At Our ‘Konbini,’” *Look Japan* (March 2001), pp. 15-17.