Japan
Series 1
Elementary (K–6)
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Respect permeates every aspect of the Japanese culture, including communication. At all times, one must be polite and respectful of others in the way one speaks. This is shown by the way Japanese children bow and address even their closest friends by proper titles.

Starting Points


2. Think about how you talk to your friends. Do you speak differently to your teachers? Your parents? Why? In Japan, people use many different words depending on with whom they are speaking because language is an important way that the Japanese show respect.

3. Learning a different language means learning more than just words. As you learn a few simple phrases in Japanese, think about the different aspects of communication that show respect. Why are these important parts of learning a language?

Information

Pronunciation—Vowels

- a as in father
- i as in machine
- u oo as in toot
- e e as in get and pen
- o o as in old or open

Pronunciation—Consonants

Japanese consonants are pronounced much like English consonants. However, the Japanese language does not use the sounds made by the letters l, q, v, or x. These letters are not included in the Japanese alphabet.

The Japanese Language

The Japanese language is spoken by more than 123 million people. Although Japanese uses the same writing system as Chinese, the two languages have different sentence structures and pronunciation. In addition to Chinese characters, Japanese also uses two types of alphabets.
In some ways, learning Japanese is easier than learning English. For example, the word for book, *hon*, may mean *a book*, *the book*, or *the books*. In English, we would change the spelling of *book* and then the articles for each phrase. Another example is the use of *san*. In English we use Mr., Mrs., Ms., or Miss to indicate whether the person we are talking to is male or female, married or single. However, in Japanese, the title *san* is used to address everyone.

**Showing Respect**

Showing respect by speaking in a polite style is important to the Japanese people. The Japanese people use humble tones and words when talking about themselves, but they use flattering, elevated speech when speaking about another person. Furthermore, single words such as nouns, adjectives, and verbs have several different forms. Each form expresses a different level of respect and is used when speaking to different people such as parents, teachers, and peers.

**Bowing**

In Japan, children are taught to be very well mannered. They are taught to bow and say “Konnichi wa” to their teachers, parents, and other adults. Bowing is a sign of respect. If the child and the person he or she is addressing both bow, the child is expected to bow slightly lower. This indicates to others that the person has a higher rank in society. Students also bow to their schoolmates. When bowing to a student in a lower grade, the older child allows the younger student to bow lower than himself. Bowing is not taken lightly by the Japanese, and it is always expected to be done properly. To bow, one must bend lightly at the waist and dip the head slightly. When greeting others, it is customary that both bow and simultaneously say, “Konnichi wa.” The Japanese also bow and say thank you, “Arigatoo.”

**Titles**

Japanese students also show respect to their friends and fellow schoolmates in using the title *san*. For example, you could greet your friend Matt by saying, “Konnichi wa Matt-san,” while bowing. It would be done the same way for a female classmate named Jennifer—*Jennifer-san*.

**Counting**

Unlike Europeans and Americans, the Japanese start with an open hand when counting from one to five. When they count the number one, they fold the thumb against the palm of their hand. For two, they close the index finger down over the thumb. The middle finger folds over the thumb for three, and so on until all the fingers are folded over the palm. The result is, of course, a closed fist. The Japanese count down to a closed fist because when fingers are extended, they are pointing at someone, which is considered impolite.
Numbers
The numbers from one to five are pronounced as *ichī, ni, san, shi, go*. To help you learn these words, remember this pneumonic device: *ichī* (one) and *ni* (two) sound like “itchy knee” (scratch your knee). *San* (three) is like sanding wood, after which we wipe off sweat from our forehead and say *shi* (four)! Then, point a finger and say “let’s go” (five).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>JAPANESE</th>
<th>PRONUNCIATION</th>
<th>ENGLISH</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>ichi</td>
<td>eech-ee</td>
<td>one</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ni</td>
<td>knee</td>
<td>two</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>san</td>
<td>sahn</td>
<td>three</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>shi</td>
<td>shee</td>
<td>four</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>go</td>
<td>go</td>
<td>five</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>roku</td>
<td>ROH-koo</td>
<td>six</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>shichi</td>
<td>shee-chee</td>
<td>seven</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>hachi</td>
<td>HAH-chee</td>
<td>eight</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>kuu</td>
<td>koo</td>
<td>nine</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>juu</td>
<td>joo</td>
<td>ten</td>
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Japanese Phrases

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>JAPANESE</th>
<th>PRONUNCIATION</th>
<th>ENGLISH</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Dewa, isshoo ni nihongo wo</td>
<td>Day-wah, ee-shew knee HONE-</td>
<td>Today, we are going to learn Japanese! nah-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>hanashimashoo!</td>
<td>go woe hah</td>
<td>shee-mah-shew!</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>san</td>
<td>sahn</td>
<td>Mr., Mrs., Miss, Ms.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Arigatoo</td>
<td>odd-ee-GAH-toe</td>
<td>Thank you, Thanks</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sayonara</td>
<td>sah-yoh-nah-rah</td>
<td>Good-bye</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Activities

1. Compose a short play using the Japanese words that you have just learned. You may want to use English for words that you have not learned in Japanese.

2. Practice speaking Japanese as you sing the songs “Sakura,” “Umi,” and “Mori No Kumasan” *(see Folklore & Language Visuals 1–3)*. Think about how these songs show respect and why.

3. Draft a set of rules that would require everyone in a society (or classroom) to show respect for one another. Prepare a skit showing how each of the rules is used. Spend an hour (or day) actually living by these rules.

4. Make up a song to help you remember how to count in Japanese. Practice counting objects around your house or classroom by singing your song.
Discussion Questions

1. Why is it important to show respect to others? Why do you think the Japanese have placed such a high value on showing respect in their speech?

2. How do we show respect to our teachers, parents, and friends? How is the way we show respect the same or different from students in Japan?

3. How do the words we use show respect for others?

4. Other than words, what things do you think Japanese children might learn about showing respect?
Sakura
(Cherry Blossoms)

Cherry blossoms bloom everywhere,
in the mountain and in the village.
They look like clouds.
The scent of the flower is there.
The ocean is so big that the moon rises from there and the sun goes down to the ocean.
The other day in the woods, I met a bear.
I met a bear in the woods.