

# Japan: Land of the Rising Sun

Topic: Overview of Japan - geography, history, and culture

Purpose: This unit is designed to give students a new set of "glasses" through which to view the Japanese nation and its people.

- Objectives:
1. Students will be able to locate Japan on a globe, name the major physical features, and describe the physical environment.
  2. Students will gain a "big picture" understanding of the history of Japan.
  3. Students will gain an understanding of and appreciation for the differences and similarities between the life and culture of Japanese young people and American young people.

Target Age: Late elementary and middle school

Unit length: 5 forty-five minute periods

- Materials:
1. Teacher-made worksheets and handouts
  2. Atlases
  3. Computers with internet access
  4. Visual Presenter (also called Document Camera)
  5. Miscellaneous library books about Japan displayed in the room
  6. Japan garden materials:
    - lids from heavy envelope boxes
    - sand
    - a variety of rocks
    - tools (forks, combs, etc.)
  7. Large poster-size blank map of Japan

# Day-By-Day Plans

## Day 1

Set-up: Each table of four students will have a globe and four atlases.

Procedure: **A. Group discussion**

1. Introduction: "Why is Japan called the Land of the Rising Sun?"
2. Ask students what they know about Japan.
3. Learn a Japanese phrase: "konnichiwa" (good day)
4. Look at globes and ask:
  - What is the approximate longitude and latitude of Japan?
  - What other nations of the world are at a similar latitude?
  - What other nations of the world are a similar size?
  - What part of the U.S. compares in size to Japan?
5. Look at individual atlases and ask students to make observations about the topography of Japan.
6. Using large blank Japan map on chalkboard, learn the names of the main islands of Japan, and surrounding seas.

**B. Teacher overview**

Teacher will present an overview of the topography and climate using the book Japan: Enchantment of the World, by Ann Heinrichs. (pages 13-25).

**C. Independent in-class assignment**

Students will be given a blank map of Japan and list features and places to label. They will use their individual atlases to complete this assignment.

## Day 2

- Procedure:
- A. Use poster map to review the places and physical features learned on day one.
  - B. Review geography learned on day one by asking students questions.
  - C. Review Japanese phrase, and learn new one: "hai" (yes), "iie" (no)
  - D. Make large magnetic timeline (posterboard with magnetic strip on back). Have major events in Japanese history on posterboard strips (also with magnetic strips on back).
  - E. Teacher will share overview of history, using the book Lands and Peoples by Grolier, Inc. (pages 443-448). As major events are introduced, corresponding posterboard strips are put on the timeline.

Evaluation: At the end of class, teacher takes down strips of major historical events. Students try to identify the events, describe their significance, and place them in the proper place on timeline.

## Day 3 and Day 4

New Japanese phrase for day 3: Domo arigato (thank you)  
New Japanese phrase for day 4: Sumimasen (excuse me)

Divide class in half. On day 3, half the class will do the computer activity, the other half will do the craft activity. On day 4, the two groups will switch.

Computer Activity: **Kid's Web: Japan**

Students will go to computers and find the Kid's Web site (<http://jinjapan.org/kidsweb/>). They will be given a sheet of questions. Using the resources on this web site, they are

to find answers to the questions. As they read the material, they will also be compiling a list of ways Japanese kids are like American kids. They will list differences as well, but the focus is on similarities.

**Craft Activity: Japanese Gardens**

Teacher will show pictures of various Japanese gardens and will discuss why the gardens are designed a they are. Different types of Japanese gardens will be discussed. Each student will be given a heavy-duty box top, some sand, a variety of racks, and some sculpting tools. Soft music will be played in the background as each student attempts to create a meditative Zen garden.

## Day 5

This will be a review and recap day.

1. Review the large map. Call students to the board and have them name features on the map.
2. Review Japanese phrases.
3. Review major historical events on timeline.
4. Each student will present his garden and explain why he designed it the way he did.
5. Make chart together of similarities and differences between Japanese and American young people.

# Kid's Web

Directions: Go to Kid's Web (<http://jinjapan.org/kidsweb/>) and answer the following questions. Take time to read the information - don't just look for the answers!

1. What are the two biggest differences between houses in Japan and the U.S.?
2. What kinds of clothing do Japanese children like to wear?
3. What is the purpose of Japanese baths?
4. How does life expectancy in Japan compare with other nations?
5. Who cleans Japanese schools?
6. How many years are Japanese children required to go to school?
7. What do kids in Japan do for fun?
8. What is the title of the World's oldest novel? When was it written?
9. What are the most popular sports in Japan?
10. What is Japan's population density?
11. What kind of natural disasters does Japan experience?
12. What is the purpose of the tea ceremony?
13. Who were "Ninja" and what did they do?
14. Who were "Samurai" and what did they do?

15. Who were "Shoguns" and what did they do?
16. How old must a person be to vote in Japan?
17. What role does the emperor play in Japan today?
18. What major natural resources does Japan have?
19. What is Japan's military force called?
20. Tell one important thing about each of the following Japanese:
  - Prince Shotoku
  - Toyotomi Hideyoshi
  - Tokugawa Ieyasu
21. Read one of the Japanese folk legends and write a brief summary:
22. List five things the Japanese have invented:
23. Go to "Quick Japanese" and listen to the phrases. Try to say they!

## Terms to Know

Ring of Fire

archipelago

tsunami

origami

samurai

shogun

shogunate

diet

Nippon

Tale of *Genji*

bonsai

origami

kamikazi

dynasty

kimono

tatami

## Sources

Heinrichs, Ann, Japan - Enchantment of the World, Children's Press, Inc., 1998.

Lands and Peoples, Volume 2, Grolier, Inc., Danbury, Connecticut, 1997.

Macdonald, Fiona, Step into Ancient Japan, Anness Publishing Limited, London, 1999.