

# Countries Around the World™

## Japan

### Program Summary

Meet 11-year-old Yuriko. She and her family live near Tokyo, the capital of Japan, on the island of Honshu. Join Yuriko and her friend Mio as they celebrate *Tori-no-Ichi*, a Shinto festival, by presenting an offering at a temple, making wishes by writing *kanji* on wooden boards and buying small, ornate, bamboo rakes that are symbols of good luck. Next, Yuriko and her cousin take a ride on Japan's high-speed rail system. They pass Mount Fuji on their way to the town of Kamakura. Experience some of Japan's religious traditions and customs when Yuriko and her cousin purify themselves with incense before they make an offering at a Buddhist temple in Kamakura. Then, Yuriko meets up with her mother in Tokyo. They visit the Imperial Palace before heading over to the Shibuya district. Finally, Yuriko and her father and brother play some video games in one of Tokyo's many arcades and ride the elevator to the top of the Tokyo Tower, a replica of the Eiffel Tower.

### Country Information

- **location:** Eastern Asia, an island chain between the North Pacific Ocean and the Sea of Japan, east of the Korean Peninsula
- **capital:** Tokyo
- **official language:** no official language, but Japanese is the national language
- **type of government:** constitutional monarchy with a parliamentary government
- **total area:** approximately 377,835 sq km
- **climate:** varies from tropical in the South to cool and temperate in the North
- **terrain:** mostly rugged and mountainous
- **natural resources:** includes mineral resources and fish
- **industries:** includes motor vehicles, electronic equipment, machine tools, steel and nonferrous metals, ships, chemicals, textiles and processed foods
- **agricultural products:** includes rice, sugar beets, vegetables, fruit, pork, poultry, dairy products, eggs and fish

### Vocabulary

**Honshu** — The largest of the four main islands of Japan. Honshu is located south of Hokkaido and north of Kyushu and Shikoku.

**Hokkaido** — The second largest and northernmost island of the four main islands of Japan.

**Kyushu** — The third largest and southernmost island of the four main islands of Japan.

**Shikoku** — The smallest of the four main islands of Japan. Shikoku is located northeast of Kyushu and south of Honshu and Hokkaido.

**Tori-no-Ichi** — A Shinto festival in which people pray for health and good fortune.

**Shinto** — A religion native to Japan that is characterized by worship of nature spirits and ancestors.

**kanji** — A Japanese system of writing that uses modified Chinese characters.

**Shinkansen** — Japan's high-speed rail system.

**Buddhism** — A religion based on the life and teachings of Siddhartha Gautama, the Buddha. This religion is practiced worldwide.

**shogun** — The hereditary military dictators of Japan who ruled Japan from the 8<sup>th</sup> century C.E. until the revolution of 1867-1868.

**sushi** — A type of Japanese food that features cold, cooked rice prepared with vinegar and shaped into bite-sized pieces and topped with raw or cooked fish, or formed into a roll with fish, egg or vegetables and wrapped in seaweed.

**nori** — A Japanese word that refers to several types of edible seaweed.

**yen** — The currency of Japan.

**binomaru** — A Japanese word translated as "disc of the sun." It refers to the design of the Japanese flag.

**kimono** — A long, wide-sleeved, Japanese robe that is often elaborately decorated.

### Pre-viewing Discussion

- Distribute outline maps of Japan to the class. Have them label the capital, the four main islands, the major cities on each island and the surrounding bodies of water. Questions to ask include: How many bodies of water surround Japan? How many islands are parts of Japan? Since there are so many islands, do you think there are differences among the people living on Japan's different islands? If so, what do you think some of those differences are?
- As a class, brainstorm a list of questions about Japan. Prompt students by asking them to share what they already know about Japan, with a focus on how Japan is portrayed in America, and what they would like to find out about the country. Students can make predictions about what they think they will see in the program. As they watch, have students keep track of how many of their questions were answered and if their preconceptions about Japan were correct or not.
- Discuss what makes places different from each other. Begin by having students brainstorm a list of things that they think make places unique. Follow up with questions, such as: How is climate a factor in defining an area? How are land formations or bodies of water factors? Are people a part of making a place unique? How? How would you characterize the place where you live? What makes it unique? As they prepare to watch the program, ask students to predict how Japan might be different from their communities. After the program, follow up by asking students to compare their predictions about Japan with what was shown. What are some of the things that are different? Is there anything that is similar to where you live?

### Follow-up Activities

- Every November, many Japanese celebrate *Tori-no-Ichi*, a Shinto festival that is dedicated to good health, good fortune and good business. Students can learn more about this festival by visiting [www.torinoichi.jp/english/index.htm](http://www.torinoichi.jp/english/index.htm). Then, lead a discussion about *Tori-no-Ichi*, comparing and contrasting it with other holidays and festivals that the students celebrate.
- Students will have fun learning all about Japan by creating their own question and answer books. Begin by dividing the class into small groups and assigning each group a topic to cover, such as climate, history, food or wildlife. Once they have finished creating their books, students can use the material from their question and answer books in a classroom trivia game about Japan. An interactive tool for making a question and answer book can be found at [www.readwritethink.org/materials/flipbook/](http://www.readwritethink.org/materials/flipbook/).

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- Fun with poetry?  
It's easy in the classroom...  
Write a few haiku!  
Haiku is a popular form of Japanese poetry that celebrates nature. Invite students to write and share haiku with their classmates. Begin by reviewing how to write haiku and providing students with examples. Students can make posters that feature their haiku and even adorn them with illustrations and *kanji*. For an introduction to writing haiku, visit [www.kidzone.ws/poetry/haiku.htm](http://www.kidzone.ws/poetry/haiku.htm). As an extension, students may enjoy reading the works of Matsuo Basho and Yosa Buson. Keep in mind that since these poems were originally written in Japanese, their translated versions may not follow the 5-7-5 syllable pattern.
- Japan is a land of rocky, mountainous terrain, and the biggest mountain on the island nation is Mount Fuji. But how does Mount Fuji compare with other mountains around the world, like Mount Kilimanjaro or Mount Everest? Have students find out which are the tallest mountains on the seven continents and create charts that compare them to Mount Fuji. Students can use this data to express greater than/less than relationships and convert one unit of measurement to another (feet-to-meters, meters-to-kilometers, etc.). As an extension, have students find the heights of mountains on other planets, like Mars and Venus, and compare them with the heights of mountains on Earth.
- Origami has been practiced by the Japanese for hundreds of years, and the intricate folded-paper sculptures produced by the masters of the craft are true works of art. Students can try their hands at origami by visiting [web-japan.org/kidsweb/virtual/origami2/exploring01.html](http://web-japan.org/kidsweb/virtual/origami2/exploring01.html) for some easy-to-follow sample patterns and designs in addition to some more challenging ones. Students can make origami sculptures for display in the classroom. And if they're feeling adventurous and creative, students can even experiment with their own original origami designs.
- All throughout Japan, there are numerous gardens that are places of beauty and tranquility. Students can design their own Japanese gardens, without ever getting their hands dirty, by using graph paper and colored pencils, crayons or markers. Begin by showing students pictures of different styles of Japanese gardens for reference. In planning their gardens, students can use their knowledge of scale and measurement to calculate the area of their gardens, find distances between the objects and plants in their gardens and determine the design layout. After students have finished their designs on paper, they can use various craft materials to build models of their gardens for display in the classroom. For a classroom with the available means, students can plant and maintain a Japanese-inspired garden either outside or inside the classroom. Students can even include bonsai trees or use flowers from their gardens to practice *ikebana*, the Japanese art of flower arrangement.
- Comic books are a popular form of entertainment all over the world, and in Japan, comics are known as *manga*. Students can read some manga comic strips that highlight aspects of Japanese culture by visiting [web-japan.org/kidsweb/manga/index.html](http://web-japan.org/kidsweb/manga/index.html). Then, have students write and illustrate their own manga-style comic strips that teach little lessons about Japan. As a supplement to their strips, students can write short paragraphs that provide facts about Japan. Collect the students' *manga* strips for inclusion in a class book.
- Students may enjoy practicing a Japanese form of storytelling called *kamishibai*, meaning "paper drama." *Kamishibai* stories are told in a picture card format. The illustrations are on the front of each card and the text is on the back of the cards for the storyteller to read. Visit [www.kamishibai.com/howtouse.html](http://www.kamishibai.com/howtouse.html) to learn more about this format and how it can be used in the classroom. To see a story retold by students in this format, visit [library.thinkquest.org/CR0214080/arts/kamishibai.htm](http://library.thinkquest.org/CR0214080/arts/kamishibai.htm).
- As an archipelago formed by volcanic activity and located near the edge of tectonic plates, Japan is no stranger to volcanic eruptions, earthquakes and tsunamis. In fact, the word "tsunami" comes from the Japanese, meaning "harbor wave." Engage students in a study of earthquakes, volcanoes and tsunamis by having them build classroom displays devoted to these violent, geological phenomena. Divide the class into three groups and assign each group a topic. Displays can feature fact sheets, models, time lines, experiments, safety tips and pictures or illustrations. Each group can plan and give a presentation based on its findings. For information about earthquakes, visit [earthquake.usgs.gov/learning/kids.php](http://earthquake.usgs.gov/learning/kids.php), for information about volcanoes, visit [volcano.und.edu/](http://volcano.und.edu/) and for information about tsunamis, visit [ioc3.unesco.org/itic/categories.php?category\\_no=4](http://ioc3.unesco.org/itic/categories.php?category_no=4).
- *Kanji* is a system of writing in Japan that uses characters, borrowed from Chinese, also called *kanji*. When writing these characters, it is important to know the number of strokes in a character and the order in which they are drawn. Invite students to familiarize themselves with various *kanji* and what they mean by visiting [www.kanjisite.com/](http://www.kanjisite.com/). Then, students can pick their favorite *kanji* and practice writing them. Students can use brushes, black paint and long pieces of paper to paint wall scrolls that feature their chosen *kanji* and their English translations. Students can even add illustrations to their *kanji* wall scrolls. Display the students' *kanji* in the classroom.

### Suggested Internet Resources

- [web-japan.org/kidsweb/index.html](http://web-japan.org/kidsweb/index.html)  
Discover Japan and what it is like to live there! This fun children's site features information on the culture and people of Japan. Includes games and a quiz.
- [www.state.gov/r/pa/ei/bgn/4142.htm](http://www.state.gov/r/pa/ei/bgn/4142.htm)  
This site, assembled by the U.S. Department of State, presents information on the geography, history, people, culture, government and economy of Japan.
- [library.thinkquest.org/CR0212302/japan.html](http://library.thinkquest.org/CR0212302/japan.html)  
Learn about the culture and customs of Japan from the perspective of a child who lives there! The students of Roosevelt School in Wauwatosa, Wisconsin present this award-winning site to teach people about different cultures.
- [www.cia.gov](http://www.cia.gov)  
The CIA World Factbook web site presents detailed and up-to-date information on Japan and many other countries. Topics include geography, people, government, economy, transportation and communication. On the main page of the CIA site, click on the "World Factbook" link.

### Suggested Print Resources

- Iijima, Geneva Cobb. *The Way We Do It in Japan*. Albert Whitman & Co., Morton Grove, IL; 2002. This is a fictional text about a boy who moves to Japan and learns how to adapt to Japanese culture.
- Mok, Russel, Rex Shelley and Teo Chuu Yong. *Japan*. Marshall Cavendish, Tarrytown, NY; 2001.
- Nishimura, Shigeo. *An Illustrated History of Japan*. Tuttle Publishing, North Clarendon, VT; 2005.
- Sakade, Florence. *Japanese Children's Favorite Stories*. Tuttle Publishing, North Clarendon, VT; 2003. A collection of folktales from Japan.
- Takabayashi, Mari. *I Live in Tokyo*. Houghton Mifflin, Boston, MA; 2004.

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