



Dear Teachers,

Thank you for inviting me to your school! Before my visit, please

1. Help your students identify Japan on a world map, and name surrounding countries such as China, Russia, North and South Korea, and Taiwan.
2. Read my self-introduction below to your students.
3. Remind your class about good audience behavior. Please do not allow them to bring cell phones and other electronic devices to my performance.

*Konnichiwa!* My name is Motoko (pronounced MO-toe-ko) and I am a storyteller. I will visit your school soon to tell you some folktales from Asia.

I was born and raised in Japan. I grew up in a big, crowded city named Osaka. My parents, brother and two sisters still live there. I lived in Osaka till I was 18. Then I went to Tokyo, the capital city, to go to college.

While in college, I decided to come to the U.S. as an exchange student to the University of Massachusetts. I came to the U.S. to get good education. I liked Massachusetts so much I decided to stay, get married, and raise a family. I have a grown-up son named Charlie.

I first became a storyteller when Charlie was in Kindergarten. I used to visit his school every year and told Japanese folktales to his class. When he was in 7<sup>th</sup> grade, however, he told me not to come to his school anymore. (I wonder why?) Now I visit schools and libraries across the U.S. and tell stories.

Storytelling allows me to combine three things I love the most: reading, writing, and acting. I read a lot of books, always looking for a good story to tell. I also write original stories. When I tell stories on stage, I get to act out all the characters. I also like singing. I will probably ask you to sing with me during my stories. You will also see me make gestures and movements to create images for the story. This is called mime. It is a lot of fun!

When I come to your school, you can ask me questions about me, my stories, and Japan. I look forward to meeting you all!



## **Some Basic Facts about Japan**

### **1. Geography and Population**

Japan is off the east coast of Asia. It consists of four major islands (Hokkaido, Honshu, Shikoku, and Kyushu) as well as thousands of small ones. Japan is roughly the size of California, but it has 125 million people, half the population of the U.S. Three-quarters of the land is mountains covered with forests. Most people live in cities, which are very crowded. The climates vary from the north to the south. The northern islands have dry summer and snowy winter. In the southern regions, summer is hot and humid, and it rarely snows in winter. There are considerable rainfalls, and frequent typhoons and earthquakes.

### **2. Food**

Rice is the staple of the Japanese diet. They also eat seafood, beef, pork, chicken, dairy, vegetables and fruits. They have Japanese-style noodles, as well as spaghetti and bread. Soy sauce and soybean paste are the primary flavorings in traditional Japanese cooking. In cities, there are restaurants from different countries, including American fast-food chains.

### **3. Clothing**

Most people ordinarily wear western-style clothes. Some schools have uniforms. The traditional clothing, called kimono ('kee-mo-no') is worn only on special occasions, such as New Year's Day, graduations, and tea ceremonies.

### **4. Housing**

Traditional Japanese homes are wooden buildings with tiled roofs. However, most of the contemporary houses and apartments are western style and made of concrete. Inside they have both western-style rooms with tables and chairs, and Japanese-style ones with straw mats and low tables. Traditional bedding is called futon ('foo-ton') quilts.



## 5. Language

In Japanese, vowels are pronounced similar to ones in Spanish. Some greeting words are:

Good morning --“Ohayo” (oh-ha-YO)

Good afternoon -- “Konnichiwa” (KON-nee-chee-wah)

Good bye -- “Sayonara” (sa-YO-na-ra)

Thank you -- “Arigato” (ah-REE-gah-toe)

In order to write, Japanese children learn two sets of phonetic alphabets (46 letters each,) as well as thousands of Chinese characters. *Hiragana*, the basic alphabet, allows them to write simple sentences. *Katakana*, the other alphabet, is to write words of foreign origin. (English words, for example, such as “sak-kah”= “soccer”.) Most of the other words are written in *Kanji*, Chinese characters. The finished writing is a mixture of all three kinds of letters. Despite this complicated system, the literacy rate in Japan is high. Students spend a major part of their school life learning how to read and write.

## 6. Schools

The kindergarten includes preschool, and is not a part of the elementary school. The compulsory education includes the elementary school (grades 1-6) and the junior high (grades 7-9). The senior high (grades 10-12) is not mandatory, although the enrollment rate is nearly 100%. A class usually consists of 35-40 students. The curriculums are in general more uniform and rigid. The school is open roughly 220 days a year. The school year begins in April and ends in March, with the month of August as the summer vacation.



## **Bibliography and Other Resources**

### **Classroom-ready Anthologies of Japanese Folktales**

- Sakade, Florence, ed. Japanese Children's Favorite Stories. Tuttle, 1958.  
\_\_\_\_\_. Kintaro's Adventure and Other Japanese Children's Stories. Tuttle.  
\_\_\_\_\_. The Little One-Inch & Other Japanese Children's Stories. Tuttle.  
\_\_\_\_\_. Urashima Taro and Other Japanese Children's Stories, Tuttle.  
\_\_\_\_\_. Peach Boy and Other Japanese Children's Stories. Tuttle.  
Uchida, Yoshiko. The Dancing Kettle. Berkley, Creative Arts Book Co.  
\_\_\_\_\_. The Magic Listening Cap. Berkley, Creative Arts Book Co., 1987.  
\_\_\_\_\_. The Sea of Gold. Berkley, Creative Arts Books.

### **Helpful Organizations for Teaching about Japan**

Five College Center for East Asian Studies  
<https://www.fivecolleges.edu/fcceas/>  
(413)585-3751

### **Important Authors for Children in Japanese/Japanese American Literature**

Kuroyanagi, Tetsuko (Totto-chan: The Little Girl at the Window)  
Mochizuki, Ken (Baseball Saved Us, Heroes, The Passage to Freedom)  
Namioka, Lensey (The Coming of the Bear, Island of Ogres)  
Patterson, Katherine (Master Puppeteer, Of Nightingales that Weep, Sign of Chrysanthemum)  
Say, Allen (Tree of Cranes, Grandfather's Journey, The Ink-keeper's Apprentice)  
Uchida, Yoshiko (Journey to Topaz, Jar of Dreams, The Best Bad Thing, Journey Home)  
Watkins, Yoko Kawashima (So Far from the Bamboo Grove, My Brother, My sister, and I)  
Wells, Ruth (A to Zen, The Farmer and the Poor God)  
Yumoto, Kazumi (The Friends)