

Language experts agree that language learning is most effective when language and culture are linked. *The Polyglots* apps aim to spark children's interest in both Japanese language and culture through play. This guide provides some general information about Japan and Japanese culture and language that may be of interest to you and may extend children's learning.

About Japan

Japan is made up of nearly 7000 islands with a population of around 126 million (in comparison, about 23 million people live in Australia).

Early childhood education in Japan

Japan has a high rate of participation in early childhood education. In 2012, 79 per cent of 3-year-olds and 98 per cent of 5-year-olds were enrolled in early childhood education.¹

Language

Around the world, about 125 million people speak Japanese as a first or additional language. In Japan, there are several regional dialects of Japanese. The language spoken in *The Polyglots* apps is Standard Japanese (Nihongo).

Japanese writing systems

Japanese has three different writing systems:

- kanji (Chinese characters), used to write words borrowed from Chinese or to write Japanese words with the same or similar meanings
- hiragana, used for words without kanji representation
- katakana, used mostly for loan words from other languages.

The support materials for the Early Learning Languages Australia (ELLA) trial use rōmaji to represent Japanese with a Roman alphabet. For correct pronunciation, please listen to the words as they are spoken in the app.

Culture

Japan has a rich culture with many traditional art forms such as flower arrangement, dance, painting and poetry. Japan's popular culture is also very rich; it includes anime (Japanese animated films), manga (Japanese comics), street fashion and music.

Politeness and customs

In general, politeness and respect for elders are important aspects of Japanese culture.

- In Japan, children can address their teachers as [Surname]-‘sensei’. For example, Suzuki-sensei.
- An educator can address young children as [Given name]-‘chan’. For example Yuka-chan.
- In Japan, children can greet their teachers by bowing and saying ‘Sensei, konnichiwa’.
- Before eating a meal in Japan, people say ‘itadakimasu’ (I receive).

CULTURE IN THE POLYGLOTS APPS

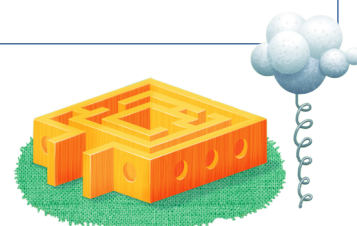
As children play with the apps, they can discover some fun and intriguing Japanese cultural references such as a sushi roll, ninja, kokeshi doll and cherry blossom. You can learn more about the cultural references in each app's overview support document (for example, *App 1: The Polyglots: Playroom – Japanese*).



¹ Taguma M, Litjens I and Makowiecki K, ‘Quality matters in early childhood education and care: Japan’, OECD, 2012, <http://www.oecd.org/japan/JAPAN%20policy%20profile%20-%20published%2028-09-2012.pdf>

Interesting topics

Animals	The animals of Japan include: • brown bears • Japanese macaques, also known as snow monkeys because they live in snowy climates: in some parts of Japan, you can find macaques bathing in the hot springs • raccoon dogs (an animal with a raccoon-like appearance in the same family as dogs and wolves) • sea otters • serows (furry animals in the same family as sheep and goats).
Arts	• Ikebana flower arrangement is minimalist and often small in scale. Leaves and stems are treated as features as well as flowers. • Kabuki is traditional Japanese theatre with music and dance. • Painting. • Calligraphy: in Japan, there is a long tradition of writing beautifully using an ink-and-wash technique. • Origami is the art of paper folding. • Haiku is a form of short poetry. In traditional haiku, the first line has five syllables, the second seven and the third five. Children may like 'What am I?' haikus. For example: 'I live on a farm / eating grass in the pastures / snug in my white wool'. • Kimonos are traditional clothes worn by Japanese women and sometimes men. They are robes that are wrapped around the body. The fabric for women's kimonos is often highly decorated with painting or embroidery.
Food	• Bento boxes are usually eaten at lunchtime. The boxes often have several compartments, each containing a small dish (eg rice, beef or chicken, pickles, salad and fruit). Some people put a lot of effort into making their bento boxes look cute (eg by making rice balls look like animals). • Onigiri is a ball of plain or salted rice with a stuffing such as fish or vegetables. It is wrapped in nori (seaweed). It is often shaped into a triangle, and is designed to be easily portable. • Sushi is vinegared rice with raw or cooked fish, vegetables or meat. It is often presented as a roll wrapped in nori. It may come with pickled ginger, soy sauce and wasabi. • Tempura is battered and deep fried vegetables or seafood.
Games	Traditional games include: • otedama – a game traditionally played by girls. It involves throwing small beanbags (traditionally made from kimono scraps) • kendama – a traditional wooden toy that has a ball attached to a handle by string. The aim is to toss the ball and then catch it with the handle.



Places	- Mt Fuji is the highest mountain in Japan, and is an active volcano. The top of Mt Fuji is often covered in snow. - In Nara, wild deer (shika) wander Nara Park and sometimes even the city streets. - The Imperial Palace in Tokyo is home to Japan's emperor, the country's symbolic head of state. - Kinkaku-ji is a golden Buddhist temple located in a beautiful garden in Kyoto. - Osaka's aquarium is one of the largest in the world. Each section has sea creatures from a different part of the world.
Seasons	Japan has four seasons. Japanese people celebrate the different seasons with festivals such as the cherry blossom festival in spring.
Traditions	These are just a small selection of Japan's many rich traditions. - In Japan, March 3 is 'Doll's Day' or 'Girls' Day'. Families display dolls on platforms covered in a red cloth. The dolls represent the emperor, empress and their court. - Children's day is May 5. Families fly 'koinobori' streamers with fish-shaped windsocks to celebrate.

Note: This document contains content that has been gathered through independent research and consultation with subject matter experts. The figures and information included in this document should be reviewed for accuracy over time.