

Unit 1 Personal Space

Scene: *Two friends are talking about cultural differences.*

W1 Hello, Samantha. How are you doing?

W2 Hi there, Ai. I'm fine I guess.

W1 You don't sound fine. What's wrong?

W2 Well, remember how I was telling you about that cute guy I met last week? His name is Yoshi.

W1 I remember. You met at the bookstore. I thought you said he was nice.

W2 Well, he is. But it's very strange. He always stands so far away from me when we talk. I don't know why. I shower every day. I don't think I smell bad! And he never looks me in the eye!

W1 Ha, ha! Well, in Japan, people do not usually stand very close together. And looking at someone for a long time can be seen as aggressive.

W2 You and I stand close all the time! You always look at me when we talk.

W1 Yes, but we are good friends. We are also both women. Men and women in Japan don't stand very close, and we rarely touch in public. Maybe he doesn't want to offend you.

W2 Well, if you say so. Maybe I just need to spend more time with him so he can become more comfortable with me.

W1 I think you should ask him to go get coffee with you. He isn't being rude. It's just our culture. He is probably being respectful of your space.

Unit 2 Reviews and Reputations

Scene: *Two friends are discussing where they would like to eat.*

M Wow, I'm starving!

W Mm, me too. Let's find somewhere to eat.

M Yeah, the weather's not great, so let's find somewhere near the hotel. What do you feel like?

W Uhh... I'm not really in the mood for sushi, as we had that yesterday. How about something different? I don't know. Maybe an *izakaya*, or *okonomiyaki*?

M OK, sure. Let's see what's on the app then. OK, right ... I see a couple of options.

W Close by the hotel?

M There's an izakaya nearby. It's a five-minute walk. High rating, too: 4.5.

W OK, sounds good.

M Not many reviews, though, just fifty. Mm, why's that? Ah, looks like it's new. It only opened last month. They have a special offer today, though. There's 10% off drinks.

W Mm, OK, so what else is there?

M Okonomiyaki restaurant, but it's further out—fifteen-minute walk. Looks good, though.

W Can you see the menu?

M Yeah, and the prices are cheap. And, wow, look at this! The food looks great in the photos.

W Oh, yeah, it does.

M Ah, hold on. Yeah, look at the rating, 2.9. That's pretty low. And there are 200 reviews for this one.

W Well, you know, those people could be wrong ...

M Uh, you're right, I guess. We could give it a try. The photos do look good.

W OK, let's go for it. Okonomiyaki it is! Shall we leave in, say, ten minutes ...?

Unit 3 Group Culture in Japan

Scene: *A teacher is explaining a Japanese saying.*

Have any of you heard this saying before: “The nail that sticks up gets hammered down”? This is actually a saying from Japan. It means that a person who “sticks up or out” will be “hammered down” to be more like others. Someone who is different from others needs to be changed to be like all others. This change may hurt the one who is different, like being hit with a hammer. When all things are the same, we see the group as having collective harmony.

But I have a question for you. Is Japanese society really like this? People who don’t know much about Japan might see this as true when they visit Japan. But the more you learn about different parts of the country, the more you can see that all Japanese people are not the same! Maybe Japan does not have big differences like some places in China or the United States, but there are differences.

And then there are also some “nails” in Japan that never get hammered down. Take, for example, Miwa Mori. She designs buildings. She is also the president of her own company. That is very different in her line of work in Japan. In her own words, Mori said, “If a nail is sticking out enough, if you are different enough, nobody can hammer it down.”

Unit 4 Healthy vs. Unhealthy Snacks

Scene: *A reporter is interviewing a nutrition expert.*

W I'm interviewing Dr. Smith today. Dr. Smith is an expert in diet and food. Doctor, how is the diet of the average Japanese person? Is it good or bad?

M Well, it used to be very good. People ate a lot of fresh fruit and vegetables. There were many farms in the countryside, so it was all local. People ate a lot of rice and a bit of meat with fruit and vegetables.

W And now?

M Japanese diets have changed a lot in the last twenty years. Fast food is very popular. People want their food to be convenient and tasty. The biggest problem is with our children. Many children only eat unhealthy snacks. It's causing them to become fat, and it's difficult to convince them to eat foods that are good for them.

W What is your solution to this problem?

M I tell people to try and eat whole foods. As a rule of thumb, I say the more unprocessed, the better. Snack foods are filled with lots of chemicals that give no nutrients. We must teach our children to make the right choices about food. You are what you eat.

Unit 5 Japan's Mask Culture

Scene: *Two friends are discussing a news report about a research study.*

M Hey, this is interesting. Did you see this?

W What?

M A new study that's come out—it's in the news. Listen to this: "Wearing a mask can hurt support for female politicians, study says."

W Huh? What, like wearing a face mask?

M Yeah. It apparently affects how people view politicians.

W Mm, is this some fake news story?

M No, it seems real. Says the study was done by researchers at Kyushu University.

W Oh. So, what did they find?

M Well, they got some photos of four famous politicians in Japan—you know, people that everyone will recognize. They used one photo where that person is wearing a mask and one where they're not. Then they showed the photos to about 1,500 people. And they asked them how much they support each politician.

W And?

M Well, overall people gave less support to the female politicians when they were wearing a mask.

W Mm, OK... But what about the male politicians?

M It didn't matter if they wore a mask or not.

W What, really? It doesn't matter if they wear a mask or not?

M No, apparently it didn't make a difference.

W Well, that's strange. Why's that?

M They're not sure. "More research is needed to find out why there's a gender difference," it says.

W Mm ... Well, that's got to be tough for female politicians if there's some kind of outbreak, especially in an election.

M Yeah, it's a difficult choice. If they wear a mask, their support could go down ...

W ... and if they don't wear a mask, people will say they're not being careful!

Unit 6 Wellness in a Cup

Scene: *A podcaster is discussing types of green tea and their health benefits.*

OK, so let's move on to the next segment of the podcast ... Today, we're going to take a look at something you've likely seen in stores and maybe tried yourself. You find it in latte drinks, snacks, ice cream, even noodles. Yes, it's one of Japan's most popular exports—matcha!

What actually is matcha—and is it the same as green tea? Well, not exactly. There are different types of green tea, and in Japan the most common type is sencha. It accounts for about 70% of green tea produced in Japan. Both sencha and matcha come from the leaves of the same plant. The difference is in how the leaves are prepared and how the tea is made.

So how do they differ? Well, sencha uses tea plants grown in sunlight. When the leaves are picked, they're steamed and dried. Those dried leaves are packed and sold. We heat them in water to make sencha tea, which comes in different colors—often, it's a light green or yellowish green color.

But some tea plants are covered up as they grow. As they're kept in the shade, they don't get direct sunlight, so they keep more of their green color. After tea-picking takes place, farmers steam the leaves, dry them, and make them into a fine powder. And that's what we know as matcha: the green powder that we mix with water to make a bright green tea.

So, how about the health benefits? Well, both types of green tea are high in vitamin C, as well as healthy chemicals called catechins. But the key difference is how we drink them. Sencha is basically water flavored by tea leaves. But with matcha, you're also drinking the powder—you're actually drinking tea leaves along with the water. So you're getting all those healthy antioxidants that protect the cells in your body and it's a good source of fiber, too!

So, are both types of green tea good for you? Yes—but it's matcha that gives you the most benefits.

Unit 7 Youth Subcultures in Japan

Scene: *A guide is giving information about a walking tour of Tokyo.*

OK! Thanks, everyone, for joining our Tokyo Subcultures walking tour today. Before we set out, I just wanted to give some information about some of the places we'll be visiting.

First up, we'll visit Shibuya, which is the birthplace of *gyaru* subculture. The word *gyaru*, of course, comes from the English word "girl." The trend was at its peak in the 1990s and 2000s—that's when you would see a lot of young women in Shibuya with dark makeup and colored hair. The style's not so common now, but we might still see *gyarus*, especially around the Shibuya109 department store. Note that today some *gyaru*—called *shiro gyaru*—prefer lighter skin, but still with heavy eye makeup.

Next up, we'll visit a place that's famous across the world for its subcultures, Harajuku. It's probably most famous for its cute—or "kawaii"—subcultures. One is *Fairy Kei*, where people wear light colors, often with soft fabrics. You'll probably see a lot of childlike images—unicorns, toys, rainbows—especially on Takeshita Street.

Now, if you see people wearing a lot of really colorful accessories—heavy bracelets, necklaces, rings, hairclips—well, that's another style called *Decora Kei*. "Decora" is short for "decoration," and you'll see how its members see fashion as a way to decorate themselves.

Another subculture is *Visual Kei*, which is a streetwear fashion influenced by rock and punk music, often from the 1980s. You'll see people hanging out wearing dark clothing—like black jackets—and heavy makeup.

Finally, we'll also make a quick visit to Ikebukuro, which is famous for its *otaku* subculture—especially the wide range of anime and manga stores there.

OK, so I hope that gives you an idea of what we may see on the tour today ... [fade out]

Unit 8 *Juku* Culture

Scene: *Two friends are talking about cram schools.*

W Hi, Satoshi! How's it going? Where is little Hiro?

M Hi, Kate. Hiro is studying right now.

W But it's vacation! He's only nine years old! Why is he studying?

M We placed him in a cram school. We want him to get into a good university. It is very competitive. He needs to start early so that he can be successful.

W But children need to play and spend time with their friends! He needs time to be silly. He is missing out on his childhood!

M I know. I am concerned about that. But we really should have put him in *juku* before elementary school.

W Doesn't he miss his free time?

M Oh, no! He says he really likes his teacher! She is more fun than his teachers at school. Plus, some of his friends already go there. He is also making new friends.

W I don't know if I agree with you. I went to a short exam-preparation course before I took my university exams. It was only four weeks long, and it was also a year before I graduated from high school. I understand our cultures are different, but . . .

M Well, I attended a cram school for a couple years. In the end, though, my parents were upset that I didn't get into a better school. That is why I put Hiro into one so early. If he gets into a good university, he should be able to find a good job.

Unit 9 Studying Abroad

Scene: *A teacher is explaining a study abroad program.*

I'm glad to see that so many students came today to find out about our study abroad program. I hope that after you hear about our school's study abroad program, some of you will give it a shot.

First, let me explain something about our school's program. We have a sister school in Vancouver, Canada, that exchanges students with us. In the spring semester, our sister school in Canada will send ten students here to Japan. We also have the opportunity to send ten students over there. Last year, only seven students applied, so we didn't have to turn anyone down. If more than ten students apply this year, we will randomly select ten of you to go.

The thing that most students worry about is the cost. The program is a little expensive. Each student must pay ¥ 400,000 for school fees and housing. However, the government has agreed to support our program this year. They will award up to five students ¥ 100,000 each to help pay for the program. I have applications for those awards here on my desk.

Oh, and I should also let you know that the spring semester in Vancouver begins in late January. So students going abroad will be flying over there around January 15.

Unit 10 Technology and Trust

Scene: *A class is discussing ways to evaluate online information in a research skills seminar.*

T OK, so we've looked at some tips for finding information online—articles, news stories, and so on—that you can use when you're doing assignments. But let's consider an issue that—as we all know—has become an increasing cause for concern. Any ideas what that might be?

S1 Fake news?

T Yes, of course. False information, misinformation, fake news—it has a lot of names, but basically, it's information you come across, usually online, that seems real but is false or misleading. Let's look at an example. Imagine you're doing research online on medical discoveries, and you come across a web article that claims a new treatment for heart disease. Now, how do you know if this is a true story or not? What can you look for?

S2 Look for the source.

T Yes, good first step. Check where the information comes from. Who wrote the article? Is there an author listed for the story? Can you find that person if you search online? What else can you check?

S3: Who owns the website? Which organization published the story? Is it famous? Does it seem reliable?

T Sure. If it's a well-known news organization, there's probably a better chance it's accurate. But maybe you don't recognize it. What can you do?

S2 Find out more about it. Usually there's an "About Us" section, isn't there? That gives information about the website provider.

S1 Right. And it's worth checking other sources as well, though, isn't it? See if the information appears on other websites.

T OK, that's good. What else can you look for?

S3 Look at how the article is written. You know, the style of the writing ...

T Right. Can you give an example?

S2 Like how the headline is. Sometimes it's in big bold letters, exclamation points. It's like they're just designed to grab your attention.

T Exactly. And those articles are often less likely to be reliable. It's also good to ask yourself: why is this person telling me this information? Are they trying to sell me something? Are they trying to change my mind? Why?

S2 Yeah, maybe it's not balanced. They might be biased in favor of or against something.

T Mm, that's often the case. I'll give you one other tip. Look for quotes—they're often a good clue. Does the writer quote real people?

S1 Yeah, not just "According to experts ..." or "Researchers say ..."

T Right. Look for real people, facts, times—anything you can cross-check with other sources.
Final thing before we move on ... Be careful of stories you see in your own social media feed.
Often, it's just an opinion they think you want to hear, regardless of how true the information is.
And if the story seems too good to be true ... well, maybe it is!

Unit 11 Cell Phone Etiquette

Scene: *Two friends are talking about a morning commute.*

M What's wrong? You look upset!

W Well, you know I have a forty-five-minute train commute to get to school, right?

M Yeah. You usually study during that time, don't you?

W Exactly! But there was this rude guy on his cell phone the entire trip! He talked so loudly, I couldn't even think! Even worse, he was speaking in English and making tons of grammar mistakes.

M There are so many cool features on your cell phone! Why didn't you listen to music on your headphones? Then you wouldn't have heard the guy talking.

W I forgot my headphones at home! And now I don't feel prepared for today's test! He should have known better! They make an announcement when the train leaves the station!

M Maybe he isn't Japanese, and he didn't understand.

W That's no excuse! Don't people from other cultures know that it's rude to talk loudly on a train?

M Not all cultures are collective cultures like Japan. People here think about how their behavior affects others. Not all cultures are like that. Maybe he doesn't know cell phone etiquette in Japan.

W Somebody should teach him. I came very close to giving him a piece of my mind.

M Why didn't you?

W I didn't want to upset the other people on the train by yelling at the guy.

Unit 12 Robots in Our Lives

Scene: *Two friends are watching a TV show about robots.*

W What are you watching?

M I'm watching a TV show on the history of robots. It's really interesting! Things like robots have been around for hundreds of years!

W No way! I thought robots had only been around for forty years or so!

M Well, the first Japanese robots were mechanical dolls that were made for a puppet theater in the 1600s. Mechanical robots like we think of today have only been around since the 1960s. We've made a lot of great leaps in robotics in the past few years. Robots are mainly used in factories. However, Japanese inventors also developed robots to assist in homes.

W Really? I thought robots only wanted to take over the Earth! In America, all of the movies are about robots becoming smarter than humans! They usually take our jobs or kill us!

M Oh, no! Inventors are coming up with ways for robots to help in hospitals, assist the elderly, be pets for children, act as teachers, and clean homes! Some people believe that robots could help with the smaller workforce in Japan as well. Robots may be able to help with the jobs that no one wants to do.

W Look! That robot on the TV looks so life-like!

M Yes, scientists are working on humanoid robots that can change facial expressions and move around.

Unit 13 Manga

Scene: *Two friends are discussing different kinds of manga.*

M Why is your book bag so heavy?

W I have to go to the comic book store after class. All of the comics that I need to return are in there.

M How many comics did you rent? This bag weighs a ton.

W I try to limit myself to ten at a time. If I rent more than that at one time, then I can't get all of my homework done.

M You're just like my sister. She loves manga. Once she starts a series, she can't stop until she finishes the whole thing.

W But you can stop in the middle of a series with no problem?

M Yeah. I enjoy reading comics every now and then, but I don't get hooked on them like my sister. Well, let me take that back. There is one series that I have a hard time putting down.

W What's that?

M It's a series about a crazy pirate boy and his crew.

W You mean *One Piece*? That's what I've got in my bag!

M You're a fan of that series? I thought your bag was full of romance comics.

W Think again! I hardly ever read *shoujo* manga. I like the *shonen* titles a lot better.

Unit 14 Travel and Tourism

Scene: *A tourist is speaking with a ticket clerk at a Japanese temple.*

M Uh, hello, excuse me.

W Yes, can I help you?

M Is there an entry fee for the temple?

W Yes, it's ¥800.

M OK, could I get one ticket, please?

W Yes, of course ... Here's your ticket. And this is a guide to the temple in English.

M OK, thank you. And, uh, this is actually my first time visiting a Japanese temple. Are there any rules I need to keep in mind?

W Well, this is a place of worship. So, we ask visitors to show respect as they visit.

M Right, of course.

W So, please, no shoes inside the temple. You can leave your shoes over there, and there are slippers you can wear.

M OK, got it. How about photography? Can I take photos of the temple?

W Yes, photography is allowed, but no video.

M No video?

W No. And please only take photos of the temple gardens and the buildings. No photos of the statues are allowed—or the paintings.

M Ah, OK, so no photos of statues or paintings. Right ...

W And, excuse me, is that a tripod you're carrying?

M This? Uh, yes, can't I use it?

W I'm afraid not. You'll need to leave it here at the entrance. No tripods can be taken inside. It's to stop blocking the walkways.

M Oh, I see.

W Also, please do stay on the walkways. Don't walk on the grass or step on the rock gardens.

M Right. How about food or drink?

W I'm sorry. Eating, drinking, and smoking are prohibited on the temple grounds.

M Oh, I see. OK, thank you. So, the entrance is this way?

W Yes. Please enjoy your visit. Ah, excuse me!

M Yes?

W Your shoes! Please do remember to take them off first.

M Ah, of course, sorry, a basic mistake! Thank you for reminding me.

W And your tripod. You can ...

Unit 15 Culture and Personality

Scene: *Two podcasters are discussing a widely used personality test.*

M OK, so we're going to take a look today at something that's getting big here in Japan—you see it on social media profiles, dating apps, job searches, and that's ... the MBTI! OK, Wakana-san, you've been looking into this—so let's start with the basics. For people who don't know, what is MBTI?

W Well, it's basically a personality test. It stands for Myers-Briggs Type Indicator—so “T” for “Type” as in “personality type.” Myers and Briggs were the people who created it. It dates back to the 1940s, but only recently it's started taking off here in Japan.

M OK, so it's a personality test—but how does it work?

W It's a questionnaire—a lot of people take it online. There's a bunch of questions, and they ask you to choose between two things, like, “Do you like to plan things in detail, or do you prefer to adapt as you go?” That sort of thing.

M OK, and what happens after you answer the questions?

W Well, you get a personality profile. The test has four categories, so you get a personality type for each category, so that's four letters.

M And you've taken the test yourself, right? What was your profile?

W I'm an I-N-F-P. And that's the most common profile among Japanese, apparently. It's also called the “Mediator” type—so that's people who are sensitive, fairly quiet, open-minded ...

M OK, sounds like you! So MBTI has gotten popular not just here in Japan, but also in places like Korea and China. So why is that?

W Well, I think mainly because it's a fun thing to do. It's good for conversations, you know, when you're talking with friends—and for dating. There are even short videos online about “How to date an INFP” and so on. Interestingly, there was a survey in 2024 that showed that 60% of Gen Z people in Japan know their own MBTI—and know their friends' profiles, too!

M So I guess it's like how people talk about blood types and personality?

W Yeah. But while there are four main blood types, there are 16 different MBTI profiles. So it's more detailed. Maybe that's why people are interested in it now. It's also a chance to think about what you're good at, and what you can improve on.

M OK, but some people don't believe in MBTI, so why's that? What are the downsides?

W Well, it's not very scientific—there's not much evidence to support it. Also, there is a danger—like with blood types—that it puts people in categories. People may feel they're limited by their profile, and they'll never be anything else.

M Right, so it's like a form of stereotyping?

W Yeah. I mean, it's a useful tool, and interesting for conversations. But people shouldn't take it too seriously. Anyway, people change over time. Even if I'm one personality type now, it doesn't mean I'm always going to be that same person!