

Japanese Popular Culture in English: Discussions and Critical Thinking
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by
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Preface

We are delighted to share with you our textbook: *Japanese Popular Culture in English: Discussions and Critical Thinking*. We created it with careful consideration of the needs and interests of students studying in Japan as well as students who are curious about Japanese culture and its place in the world. In the following pages, we aim not only to improve your English skills but also to help you think more critically about Japanese contemporary culture and global society.

Popular culture is something that surrounds us every day. It is something we share with our friends and families. This textbook takes popular culture as a starting point to introduce topics for English discussion. After all, language learning is not just about speaking or reading. It is also about sharing culture. When you learn English, you may learn about different cultures through your language study, but you may also share Japanese culture with people living in other countries by using the English language.

We hope you will use this text as a way to think comparatively and critically about the different cultures you study. How do cultures relate to each other? What do we gain from thinking about global studies in Japan today? Keeping such questions in mind as you study will teach you something about yourself and your culture. Education can be an important journey, and we are excited to take it with you.

Finally, in conclusion, we need to thank many people. First of all, we would like to thank our expert authors, who contributed to this volume and believed in this project when it was just beginning. Their contributions inspired us and drove us to complete the textbook. Without them, and their hard work, this textbook would not have been possible. We would also like to thank the many students who have come before you and used the materials presented in this book before they were finalized. We are grateful for their engagement, feedback, and suggestions. Without the authors and our students, this book would not be in the form it is now. We know this book is better because of everyone who helped create it, and we give them our deepest thanks.

We hope that this textbook challenges you, helps you to develop some new perspectives, and is one of the first steps of your journey in cultural and global studies. We wish you the best of luck.

Robert, Kathryn, and Jeanette

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Useful Expressions for English Conversations

Questions to Improve Comprehension

It is important to always ask questions when you do not understand something completely. Here are some questions you could ask.

Could you say that again?	Could you please speak more slowly?
Could you please speak louder?	How do you spell that?
I'm sorry, but I don't understand.	What does this mean?
How do you say this in English/Japanese?	How do you say (pronounce) this word?

Rejoinders

We use rejoinders or short comments to show interest and to let the speaker know you are listening. Here are some rejoinders that you could use.

Happy	Interested
That's great!	I see.
Terrific!	That's nice.
Wonderful!	Oh, yeah?
Sad	Surprised
That's too bad.	You're kidding!
I'm sorry to hear that.	I can't believe it!
Oh, no!	Oh, really?!

Follow-up Questions

We use follow-up questions to talk more deeply about a topic. They are a great way to get more information and keep the conversation going. Here are some questions you could ask.

Who (did/do) you ____ with?	Have you ever ____?
Where (did/do) you ____?	Which do you like better ____ or ____?
Why (did/do) you ____?	(Did/Do) you ____?
How often do you ____?	How (did/do) you get there?
When (did/do) ____?	How many/much ____ (did/do) you ____?
How long (did/do) you ____?	Can you ____?
What (did/do) ____?	What kind of ____ (did/do) you ____?

Expressing Opinions

We express our opinions to show we are listening and actively engaged in the topic. We also do it so we can learn from each other and this helps form our own opinions more clearly. Here are some ways you could express your opinion.

Saying your opinion	Agreeing	Disagreeing
In my opinion, ...	I think so too.	I don't think so.
I think (that)...	That is a good point.	I'm not sure I agree.
I feel (that)...	That is true/right.	Maybe, but...
It seems to me (that)...	I agree.	I don't agree.

Asking for Someone's Opinion

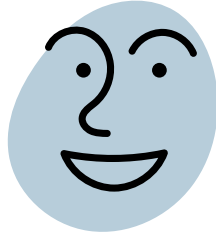
We ask for someone's opinion when we want to learn other perspectives, or consider other ideas. Here are some ways you can ask for someone else's opinion.

What do you think, (name)?	Do you agree, (name)?
What are your thoughts on this, (name)?	How do you feel about this, (name)?

Activation activities: Pre-reading

a Give some examples of ways people communicate non-verbally (without speaking).

b Draw three faces expressing emotion and explain what they mean. Look at number 1. as an example.

1. 	2.	3.	4.
--	----	----	----

1. This person feels happy because they got a high score on their test.

2. _____

3. _____

4. _____

c Trade worksheets with a partner. Look only at their pictures and write sentences to describe them below.

1. _____

2. _____

3. _____

d Compare your descriptions with your partner's.

While-reading activities

a While reading the passage on the next page, list five words from the reading that you don't know. After you finish reading, check the meanings, and write an example sentence from a dictionary for each word so you can explain them to your classmates.

English word	Japanese meaning	Example sentence from the dictionary
Example: protagonist	主人公	The protagonist of my favorite manga is a pirate.
1.		
2.		
3.		
4.		
5.		

b In pairs or small groups, share your answers. Add any new words you learn from your classmates to the list below.

1.		
2.		
3.		

c Write a one-sentence summary of each paragraph. Look at number 1. as an example.

1. Some people wonder why the eyes of manga characters are unnaturally large.

2. _____

3. _____

4. _____

The Eyes of Manga Characters

Written by Yoshimi Kurata



While I was doing a lecture and workshop on Japanese manga at an American college, one of the participants asked me: “Why do Japanese manga characters have large eyes? I ask because I think eyes are not that big.” 5
Indeed, one of the hallmarks of manga is the disproportionately large eyes of the characters. Sometimes they occupy half the face. I doubt

any Japanese manga fans think about this as they read. As a reader, I never had. However, when I began to draw my own manga, I thought more about the size of the eyes and their significance. 10

So, why do manga characters have big eyes? Well, stories in manga are constructed to communicate emotion to the reader. While reading, the manga allows the reader to put themselves in the place of the protagonist, or the main character. This sympathetically brings the reader into the world of the manga and should cause the reader to share the feelings of the protagonist. If the protagonist laughs, the reader laughs; and if the protagonist cries, the reader does as well. This feeling of sympathy is an important part of readers enjoying the story. Therefore, the artists must think not only about the words they use to tell the story but also about how the images add to the emotion they want to communicate to the reader. 15 20

There are set phrases or images that are often used to express emotions of anger and sadness when creating manga, and typically the story in the manga develops through rises and falls in emotion. But again, the manga artist expresses many of the emotions in the manga not through words, but with images. This is what communicates the feelings of the protagonist to the reader. And in this, the expression of the eyes carries the greatest weight. 25

There is a saying (*kotowaza*) that, “sometimes, the eyes speak much louder than the mouth ever could.” If you look into the eyes of another person, you often know what they are trying to communicate without that person saying a word. If you look at the eyes, you can tell whether a person is happy, sad, furious, or overjoyed. In manga, I greatly exaggerate the eyes to make the emotions of my characters easier to understand. Moreover, just by looking at the eyes of the manga character, you can understand a great deal about the author of that manga. The eyes in manga are one of the important expressions of the personality of not only the characters but also of the manga artists. 30

Post-reading activities

1

a What is the saying (*kotowaza*) from the reading? Do you agree or disagree with it? Why?

b What are two more sayings (*kotowaza*) about communication?

Example The eyes are the window to the soul. (目は口ほどに物を言う)

1. _____

2. _____

c Interview two classmates and add their sayings about communication below.

1. _____

2. _____

d Choose two out of the four sayings above. Do you agree or disagree with them? Why?

2



a Think of other ways that we use body language in Japan to express nonverbal communication. In the table below, write the body part and how it is commonly used to express an emotion. Look at number 1. as an example.

Body Part	How the body part is commonly used to express emotion
1. Eyebrows	We often raise our <u>eyebrows</u> to show we are interested in something or someone.
2.	
3.	
4.	

b Share your answers with a partner or in a small group. Listen to your partner(s) and add any new answers below.

Body Part	How the body part is commonly used to express emotion
1.	
2.	
3.	

c Body language can have different meanings in different countries. What do you think the following gestures mean? Compare your answers with the class.

Gesture	Country	Meaning
	America, UK:	"Everything is A-OK." This means everything is fine/great.
	France:	_____.
	Japan:	Money.
	America, UK:	Good work. Good luck.
	Iran, Greece:	_____.
	Japan:	_____.

d Do an internet search to try to find other examples of body language that can have different meanings in different countries?

Gesture	Country	Meaning

e Share your answers from **d** with a small group or partner.

Extension activities for The Eyes of Manga Characters

1 This article focused on the eyes in manga. Use the internet to research some other unique features of manga to show how the art or style is different from comic books. Summarize your findings in at least seven sentences to share with your classmates. Remember to cite your source.

OR

2 Pick a country other than Japan and research which Japanese manga is popular in that country. According to your research, why is it popular there? Summarize your findings in at least seven sentences to share with your classmates. Remember to cite your source.

Global Context

Outside of Japan, French readers are the biggest consumers of manga. In fact, more than half of the comic books sold in France are manga! Beginning in the 1970s, anime, and manga started to be sold in France, and by 1978 the cartoon *Goldorak* (Japanese: *UFO Robot Grendizer*) was popular. This led French artists to partner with Japanese artists and create new series. French people love the creativity, humor, and freedom in manga such as the time-traveling Doraemon, and adventures that range from romance to fighting. Even French politicians admit to enjoying manga and anime like *Dragon Ball* or *One Piece*. French-themed manga like *Rose of Versailles* also has many fans. Today, France has a diverse manga market of Japanese and international artists, covering many genres. Manga popularity in France shows no signs of slowing.