

2025 Comprehensive Japanese Teaching Methods Program – Summer Course



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As my brief study-abroad life in Japan came to an end, I sat by the exit window on a Delta flight from Haneda to Atlanta, gazing outside for one last glimpse of Japan. As the plane taxied toward the runway, an American flight attendant suddenly came up to me and said, ‘Look outside. They usually have a line of people bowing to you, which I think is pretty cool.’

Yes, Japan is full of things that feel cool from an outsider’s perspective. But the real challenge is this: how can we bring those cool moments into a language classroom thousands of miles away from Japan?

Throughout the six-week Japanese teacher training program in Urawa, I experienced Japan firsthand, a country I had never lived in before. I had the chance to talk with many Japanese people from different walks of life. I also learned various teaching methods, as everyone expected me to. But for me, the most valuable takeaway was discovering how to engage students through activities that integrate both language and culture.

During our training, we participated in a furoshiki workshop, where the instructor demonstrated how to use the traditional Japanese square cloth to wrap different items. The workshop began with group discussions about what we already knew about furoshiki, whether there are similar practices in our own cultures, and what we thought Japanese people use furoshiki for. By practicing various wrapping techniques ourselves, we learned how the Japanese apply creativity to make everyday life easier, how their philosophy of environmental protection

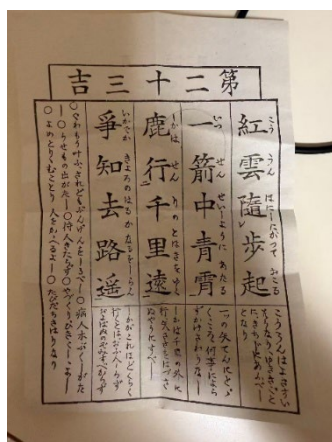


1. Participants of the furoshiki Workshop
creating furoshiki bags for dolls

influences their lifestyle, and how much attention they pay to detail.



2. Omikuj stand at Kitain, Kawagoe



3. A sample omikuj



4. Photo taken at Kitain, Kawagoe

Beyond learning about furoshiki, what stood out to me most was the importance of engaging students through cultural activities, where they can discover the deeper significance of Japanese culture. A few days later, we had a chance to have two-day one night homestay in a Japanese family. My host family kindly took me to *Kitain*, a renowned temple in Kawagoe, Saitama, where they showed me how to draw omikuj (fortune slips). This experience inspired me to incorporate this activity into my own Japanese classroom back in the USA: not only can students enjoy the fun of drawing omikuj to predict their fortunes, but they can also engage with kanshi (Chinese poems), classical Japanese through the accompanying words, and explanations written in modern Japanese.



5. Our team interviewing a native Japanese speaker about omikuj at Meiji Jingu

During the last two weeks of the training, I collaborated with three other teachers from Ireland, Vietnam, and Indonesia to design an omikuj session for our students. We visited Meiji Jingu for inspiration, interviewed native Japanese speakers, researched omikuj content online, and ultimately developed a complete teaching plan for this cultural activity.

Two weeks after returning to the U.S., I dedicated 30 minutes of my class time to the activity. I asked my students to discuss what omikuj is, whether there is something similar in their own countries, and whether such a practice is allowed in their

religion. Then, they drew omikujī, read the kanshi and explanations, and discussed the content with their partners.

The students' feedback was very positive: *'I didn't know Japan has this kind of tradition.'* *'This is such a cool thing we can't really learn from textbooks.'* *'This is my first time seeing classical Japanese used in real life, which showed me the importance of learning it.'*

This is just one example, perhaps the most representative, of the many experiences I am eager to share about how I grew as a language instructor through the Japan Foundation, Japanese-Language Institute, Urawa's program. I am deeply grateful to all the Japan Foundation, Japanese-Language Institute, Urawa's staff who gave me this opportunity to study in Japan, something I had dreamed of throughout my 20 years of learning Japanese, but never imagined would actually come true as I neared the age of 40.

I especially want to thank our teachers, Ms. Miaki Nagasaka, Ms. Kanako Ukai, Ms. Ayuko Suma, and Mr. Hisashi Nishimura, as well as our program coordinator, Ms. Asuka Takahashi, who supported me in countless ways, from the visa application process to even accompanying me when I needed to see a doctor.



6. *With my host family's three lovely daughters, Nana, Mimi, and Koko*

I am also very thankful to my host family. Although I was a complete stranger, they welcomed me warmly and did everything they could to make me feel at home. My stay with them was truly enjoyable. To close my report, I would like to share a picture with their three lovely daughters, Mimi, Koko, and Nana, who are currently attending Japanese-English bilingual kindergartens and, I am sure, will grow up to become wonderful cultural ambassadors in the future.