CULTURAL RESEARCH ACTIVITIES USING DISCUSSION BOARD

MY APPROACH

KAZUE
Integrating culture research in Japanese language curriculum (1st - 4th year)

Research topics/themes

1st year Japanese

2nd year Japanese

3rd year Japanese

4th year Japanese
“Practical Inquiry Model”
“Blended Learning in Higher Education” (Garrison, 2007)

**TRIGGER** (Pre-activities)
- Share the best posting from previous semester
- KWL Survey
- Pair & group activities
- Discussion
- Self-assessment

**EXPLORE** (Research)
- OUTSIDE CLASS TIME
  - With 5 guiding questions

**INTEGRATE** to in-class activities
- Reading
- Role plays
- Oral presentation • Letter
- Poster
- Essay

**ASSESS**
- Student-developed test question
- Choose the most intriguing posting
- Synthesize their learning through case study or writing
CULTURE RESEARCH EXAMPLE: Technology and inventions

TRIGGER: Pre-research activities

• To show visual material (e.g., videos, photos.) that may trigger their interest in the research topic.

• To have class/group discussions on technology and innovation.

Japan’s hologram Pop Idol Hatsune Miku’s Concert ➔

http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=FoTd918zhZc
EXPLORE: Research

< Instruction for Part I>

Part I. Begin your research on "Japanese product and invention": Use a search engine to find something of interest to you about Japanese product and inventions (robot, traditional products, etc.) Report back to the class via DISCUSSION using the Japanese Product “Topic”. The “Subject” (in Japanese) is what you are writing about and the message will contain:

1) your search word(s),

2) the URL address you eventually landed on,

3) what information you learned in 2-3 paragraphs (English),

4) why this information was interesting to you, and

5) a question for Test 3 in a multiple-choice or true-false format, with the correct answer indicated. Make sure to use Japanese for key words, and words that your classmates know.
INTEGRATE

• Facilitate the reading of authentic material (e.g., *katakana* learning)
• Renew/maintain their motivation for learning via the learning of latest technology & innovation
• Encourage students to incorporate their learning in their final skit.
ASSESS

**CURIOSITY Questions**
- Ask simple or surface questions about Japan.
- Student-made Test questions (examples)

Q. くるくるなべ was invented by
a. a surgeon  
b. an engineer

c. a dentist  
d. veterinarian

Q. The product “Bilk” is a combination of ビール & ミルク.
[ TRUE / FALSE ]

Use their questions for TEST 3 (Final).

**OPENNESS Questions**
- Choose one or two postings that you like and state reason(s). Two paragraphs.

**KNOWLEDGE Questions**
- List characteristics of Japanese products, inventions, or creativities, and provide YOUR explanation(s)/interpretation(s) why Japanese products and inventions have those characteristics. More than two paragraphs.
Example 2: Dos and Don’ts in Japan

**TRIGGER:** Pre-research activities

- To show visual material (e.g., videos, photos.) that may trigger their interest in the research topic.
- To have class/group discussions
  - Students share what they know or what they had experienced
  - Students discuss “Why” and begin to examine Japanese behaviors and communication styles critically.
Student Research Posting 1: Sterilized face mask in Japan

1) "sterilized face mask in japan"

2) http://matadornetwork.com/abroad/10-japanese-customs-you-must-know-before-a-trip-to-japan/


3) Since this was something that I have noticed in Japan (and on occasion in the States as well), I decided to look into the use of surgical face masks in public. It is interesting to note that wearing a face mask has a very different meaning than we might assume in the United States. We tend to think that since it is a huge inconvenience to wear something that uncomfortable in public, the person must be suffering from some highly contagious disease or they are chronically afraid of germs. However, this is not the case at all. For the most part, Japanese people will wear surgical face masks in public to protect others from germs when they have a cold or other illness which may be contagious. It does not mean that their sickness is chronic or very serious, but that it is widely accepted as a considerate practice to conceal your own germs from the public. Sometimes people may wear a mask if they know that their particular environment will be high in germs or pollen. This may be seen in places like schools, workplaces, or at times of the year that people are most susceptible to allergies. In summary, it is a common and considerate practice and should not cause you any alarm as a traveler. In fact, people will consider you a little inconsiderate if you are coughing and sneezing and not wearing a mask.

4) This is an interesting culturally phenomenon because at first sight it seems like such a drastic measure for a common cold. However, if we stopped to think about how prevalent the cold virus and flu is in high contact spaces like schools and public food service spaces, it is a very simple and clever deterrent to contagion. I think that the practice also says something about the collaborative nature of Japanese society as opposed to the individualized approach that American society retains. In America, you would be seen as an outsider for going so far as to wear a mask in public to prevent the spread of disease because we recognize the inconvenience that the practice necessitates. This inconvenience shows a little too much effort on the part of an individual and it would seem that you are doing too much to protect others. Also, there may be something inherently negative in our culture associated with showing one’s weakness or illness publicly. Many times in American culture, children and adults alike are urged to continue their normal lives and practices even when they fall sick.

5) Japanese people will only wear sterilized face masks in public when they have a chronic, life-threatening contagious illness.
Student Research Posting 2: Sleeping on a train
Search Words: Sleeping on train, Sleeping on shoulder in Japan.


http://www.qooljan.com/newsandreport/sleeping-on-the-trains/


Sleeping on a train in motion in the U.S. is pretty uncommon. We simply don’t sleep on trains mainly because we don’t feel safe doing so. However in Japan, many if not most people sleep on the train until they have reached their destination. In Japan, crimes and robberies are at a low level. Only about 1.3 robberies occurred within a sample of 100,000 people. This is not the only reason why they sleep on trains but also, Japanese people go through lack of sleep due to the fact they work extended hours and commute from far places. They work extended hours because they have guilt and solidarity towards their teams’ workers and wouldn’t want to leave anyone behind even their boss. They also commute from far locations due to the high prices for lands in areas such as Tokyo and central Osaka, so they live far away to avoid these high expenses.

Another thing that can be noticed is people sleeping on other’s shoulder. If someone falls asleep on another’s shoulder, he or she must not wake up the person sleeping until he or she reaches her station. When they need to get up because they reached their destination, they can gently shrug off or wake up the person by saying “すみません”. And sometimes in other cases, two people fall asleep on each other.

Most Japanese people who sleep on trains know when they have reached their destination although they are asleep. Some wake up moments before they reach their stop because they might know the turns and distance for that trip because it has become a daily routine. Some wake up at their stop because they can hear and feel the train brake. Some wake up because of the train’s special chimes and jingles that point out each stop.

I was interested in this topic simply because it was something different and unheard of. I was surprised to learn about this. I never been on a train before, but I know I wouldn’t sleep on it if I felt unsafe. But now since I learned that Japan is mostly safe, I can rest assure I will try to do so when I visit Japan! Now you know to sit right by a beautiful Japanese woman or man when you ride a train in Japan :).

**QUESTION:** TRUE or FALSE

The jingles and chimes that can be heard in a Japanese train are used to make people fall asleep?

**Answer:** FALSE
Kuuki Yomenai/Saving Face - Done by former students, Used for TEST 5

1) Kuuki Yomenai; Reading the atmosphere in Japan; Saving face; Losing Face


3) In Japan, *kuuki yomenai* is a term commonly used by the younger generation, to reference those who cannot read and adjust to a given atmosphere. In other words, they are people classified as unable to "read the air" of a social situation. The name is commonly abbreviated as *KY* and literally means "can't read the air" (*kuuki* = *air; yomenai* = *not able to read*). This phrase is typically given to gaigokujins (gaijins for short) whom are not quite accustomed to Japanese customs, though this does not exclude some native Japanese speakers with this same problem. To further explain KY, there are 3 components that defines the phrase, which are the following:
- **Lack of Common Sense:** Acting out in public and usage of bad mannerisms around others is just a few from this subcategory. It is common for foreigners to inhibit such actions indirectly. However, if one was to do this intentionally, surely knowing the outcome would be detrimental to both themself and those potentially associated with him/her, then this would be considered KY. Lacking common sense, such as not following proper etiquette, using bad mannerism (i.e. wearing your bathroom slippers OUTSIDE the bathroom), and getting on "Women's-Only Reserved" train cart when you are a male are prime examples of not being aware of one's environment. More so, this can be very embarrassing to not only the KY victim but those who are related to them - friends or family members - as this can potentially hurt their public image, depending on the severity of the situation.

-Cannot Take a Hint: Reading and paying attention to subtle, almost unnoticeable hints is just as important as watching what stammers out of one's mouth. As stated by John in "KY and Ambiguity in Japanese: It's Difficult" that "People in Japan do their best to avoid direct confrontation with others." With that said, they will subtly give out hints that may seem vague and misleading, but is sincere and polite way of rejecting a request. For example, a foreigner and a native become somewhat close and the foreigner proposes the idea of having a date sometime the following day. The other person would respond that "they would consider" taking up that option. Yet, when the next day comes around, they are nowhere to be found nor displays any signs of showing, which upset the foreigner and thus forces them to throw their frustration and confusion on to the other person. The behavior of the foreigner might seem typical to us westerners, as we tend to deal with our problems directly. However, this would be considered KY, as, although ambiguous as the phrasing was put, the other person was sincerely but indirectly saying "no" to their foreign friend's suggestion.

- **Cannot Read Body Language:** One of the most important foundations in not only Japanese communication but general communication, as this is what is the basis of reading the flow of an entire social setting. Body language and any form of nonverbal communication - hand gestures, facial expressions, etc - conveys one's feelings and attitude in a given environment. Like watching subtle hints, it is essential to be mindful of one's body language, as well as others, for it reflects one's feelings on a topic. To demonstrate, the following links provides different gestures that are appropriate and do and don't's when in a given social setting. Exhibiting some of these attributes is deemed worthy of KY status!

http://www.tofugu.com/guides/japanese-body-language/

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=t9wrp4W1O_w
Why may this all be important to follow in Japan? There is a common Asian belief called "saving/losing face" in which is highly evident in the Japanese Society. Meaning that people in Japan will go out of their way to avoid "losing face" or damaging their and the other person's self image in public. This is enrooted within their code of ethics and honorifics, as they would never try to do anything that would dismantle their honor. Overall, in order to respect such honorifics and prevent one from being a KY, simply be more aware of one's surroundings and mindful of the people immersed in it. That being, following proper mannerisms, possessing common sense, and being more aware of the social atmosphere. Otherwise, face the wrath of being deemed a Kuuki Yomenai.

4) I came across this topic as I was researching the Suicide Rates in Japan, when also doing research on the active volcano, Mt Midori - the once suicide hotspot. Since then, I became more inclined into learning this correlation of some behaviors and standards followed in Japan. Some researchers claimed that many suicide rates there occur because of the norm of trying to uphold one's image and not being able to express themselves fully, unlike westerners whom directly approach their problems. Therefore, I wonder if the amount of stress of balancing their public image, anger and emotions, along with economical standings, could all be a cause to such a fluctuation in suicide attempts. Though not obviously true for all citizens, it seems very difficult to uphold an image that many will enjoy their presence, while holding back what they feel. That seems to be the problem I, as well as many others, face as we grow older.

5) What is KY and the various components that defines it?

a) Kookie Yummi; sugar, flour, chocolate chips

b) Kuuki Yomi; Demon, Wind, Lacking Goodness

c) Kuuki Yomenai; Lacking Common Sense, Can't Take a Hint, Can't Read Body Language

d) Kuruma Yokanai: Lack of Engine, Can't Tank a Dent, Cant Read The Road

Answer: d.............................................................................................................................................................................Just Playing: C
INTEGRATE:

• Their research facilitates some understanding Japanese behaviors
• They apply what they learn to interpret some “mysterious” behaviors
• Encourage students to incorporate their learning in their final skit.
• Practice culturally appropriate behaviors at events.
① Student-made Test questions (examples)
Approximately 30-35 questions were compiled and do a quick test=> those who did not contribute the development of test question received 0.

In Japan, you are eating in a Japanese restaurant. You want to put down your chopsticks. How should you do it?

A) leave the chopsticks on the table
B) lay the chopsticks across the bowl
C) stick the chopsticks directly into the bowl of rice in a vertical way
D) use the chopstick rest or fold the chopsticks' wrapper into a rest -> answer

② Essay Qs for Japanese Case study
Choose ONE of the following situations.

< Situation 1 > Your friend, Emily, emailed you that she would go to Japan next month. She will be visiting her Japanese boy friend’s parents for the first time. Your friend does not know anything about “dos and don’ts” in Japan. List 5 most important things that Emily needs to know and explain why they are so important.

< Situation 2 > Your friend, John, will go on a business trip to Japan next week. He said that he was invited for a formal dinner. John also plans to stay over a hot spring one night. Your friend does not know anything about “dos and don’ts” in Japan. List 5 most important things that John needs to know and explain why they are so important.

< Situation 3 > You plan to travel Japan with your friend. Your friend does not know anything about “dos and don’ts” in Japan. So in this trip you will act as a Japan expert. To be proactive, your will create 5 lists of dos and don’ts for this Japan trip and explain why they are important.
Additional Reading Assignment

• As an optional (extra credit), I encouraged students to read a case study of an American business man, who experienced culture shock when he lived and worked in Japan. The reading and its analysis will help students deepen their knowledge on Japanese customs and manners. This will be conducted in English.

“On Track with the Japanese” by Patricia Gercik
“Japanese Mind” by Roger Davies