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Arts & Culture, Lifestyle, Language, Travel & Community

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Grammar Rules and Grammar Reasons



Mc Donald's uses the slogan 'I'm lovin it'. Don't they realise that you can't use a stative verb like 'love' in the continuous tense? Or is it that they have deliberately used 'I'm lovin it' instead of 'I love it'?

The English which surrounds us contains many examples where the rule has either been ignored or deliberately broken.

Or could it be that the experienced users of English are unaware of the rules and simply have their own reasons for using English in the way they do?

May be we are teaching too many rules and not encouraging our learners to understand more about the reasons behind these 'exceptions' to the rule.

Come along and find out more.



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University of Birmingham

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LETTER FROM THE EDITOR

Welcome everyone to the first new issue of **CONNECT** brought to you by our new 2021-2022 team! We have a really interesting and diverse group of talent joining **CONNECT** this year, and I'm thrilled to get to share their amazing articles and hard work with you all. I'm very proud of the whole team and looking forward to seeing what they accomplish throughout the year.

I'd also like to thank **CONNECT's** former Head Designer Megan Leudtke, who—although stepping down from the head designer role this year—was absolutely instrumental in hiring and training the new team. The October Issue would not be happening without her.

So, now on to the issue itself! I'm a big fan of autumn in general and October in particular, so I'd like to highlight a few seasonal delights in this issue.

My horror-loving heart beats only for Halloween, so I was stoked to see a number of articles embrace the spooky spirit of the holidays. In particular the Language section brought us **Halloween Lesson Plans**, which is, you know, exactly what it says on the tin, and hopefully a great teaching resource for many an ALT.

The Entertainment section also did an awesome feature on **Nightmare Japan**. It gives some fascinating insight into Japan's horror cinema and highlights a few great flicks to haunt your dreams this Halloween.

The Wellness section brought out the less-terrifying side of autumn with the wonderful **Fall Flavors: Going Nuts for Chestnuts**. I learned a ton about how to prepare these delicious autumn morsels and am excited to try out a couple recipes.

Finally, I'd like to highlight **The Three C's of Flying**, an in-depth guide to entering Japan and navigating the quarantine process during the pandemic. This article provides a lot of great resources for incoming JET's and those of us already in the country who are preparing to make trips home over the winter break. Getting back into Japan can seem like an overwhelming process (I know, I traveled to The States and back this summer), with a lot of paperwork and intense-sounding restrictions, but hopefully this guide will help make your journeys easier and your quarantines more comfortable.

These are just a few of the many wonderful articles we have for you this month! I hope you enjoy our October issue!
Cheers,

Rachel Spain Fagundes

Head Editor

P.S

If you have an interesting story you'd like to contribute, please get in touch! You can send article pitches directly to me at connect.editor@ajet.net, or join **CONNECT Magazine Contributor's Circle** on Facebook to get updates from our editors when they're on the hunt for a story!

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Rachel Fagundes

"Fairy tales are more than true: not because they tell us that dragons exist, but because they tell us that dragons can be beaten." — Neil Gaiman (paraphrasing G. K. Chesterton)

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"The world is big, and I want to have a good look at it before it gets dark." — John Muir

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"One one cocoa full basket" (A Jamaican proverb that means: Accomplishments are achieved one step at a time and not overnight) — Unknown

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"That is how I learned that if I didn't define myself for myself, I would be crunched into other people's fantasies for me and eaten alive." — Audre Lorde

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"Even now, here. I feel it. The stares, the judgment, and there's nothing I can do to change it. And I'm still here. No super serum. No blonde hair or blue eyes. The only power I have is that I believe we can do better." — Sam Wilson, Captain America

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"There's a million things you think you can't do. All you need is a chance to try." — Giulia Marcavaldo - Luca

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ARTS AND CULTURE

ART EDITOR

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Jessica Craven

"Since the age of six I have had the habit of sketching forms of objects. Although from about fifty I have often published my pictorial works, before the seventieth year none were worthy."

— Katsushika Hokusai

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"I think we ought to read only the kind of books that wound or stab us. If the book we're reading doesn't wake us up with a blow to the head, what are we reading for?"

— Franz Kafka

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"In the beginning there was nothing, which exploded." — Terry Prachett

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"An artist's duty as far as I'm concerned is to reflect the times." — Nina Simone

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"Everyone should believe in something. I believe I will have another coffee."

— Unknown

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Natalie Andrews

"Life is not perfect, individuals will always be flawed, but empathy – the sheer inability to see those around them as anything other than people too – conquers all, in the end."

— Adrian Tchaikovsky, *Children of Time*



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Cameron Peagler + 上野凜音

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DOCUMENTING
THE ESSENTIAL
WORKERS OF
COVID-ERA JAPAN

風の時代の通り道

風の通り道



INTERVIEW
WITH
CAMERON
PEAGLER





Cameron Peagler (Yamaguchi) interviewed by Jessica Craven (Saitama)

The working class has been a subject of portrait and street photographers since the first camera was invented. In the U.S., [Lewis Hine](#) captured the heart of the working-class Americans of the early twentieth century. In the U.K., one of the key figures of this practice was [Chris Killip](#). During the pandemic, the importance of the working class is once again at the forefront, and photographer Cameron Peagler is helping to capture the stories of Japan's essential workers. He has an upcoming exhibition of this body of work at The Wind Passage Gallery in Yamaguchi prefecture, so I thought I would ask him some questions about his background and his work. I hope you enjoy reading our interview!

J: WHAT BROUGHT YOU TO JAPAN?

C: I came here because I aspired to be a foreign service officer, but first I thought I should get some international experience outside of my former nursing career.



J: WHAT IS YOUR INTEREST IN PHOTOGRAPHY? WHAT GOT YOU INTO IT?

C: I've always been interested in photography since high school. I went to an art school in Ohio, so I had the chance to take my first class there.

J: HOW OFTEN DO YOU TAKE PHOTOS, AND WHAT IS YOUR PROCESS LIKE?

C: Outside of fencing for my team in Japan, teaching English, and volunteering, I try to shoot as much as possible.



“WHEN SHOOTING FOR BUSINESSES, I LIKE TO TAKE TIME TO GET TO KNOW THE OWNER. IN DOING SO, I HELP THEM RELAX FOR THE SHOOT, OPEN UP AN OPPORTUNITY TO EXCHANGE CULTURES, AND LEARN WHAT QUALITIES THEY HAVE THAT I WANT TO SHOW THROUGH MY PHOTOS.”

Of course, I will help them pose for the portrait shots but I like getting a natural picture by shooting candid shots while they are working.

J: WHAT INSPIRES YOU AS A PHOTOGRAPHER?

C: There are two things I love about photography that inspire me. It's somewhat cheesy, but I just love taking a good shot. In regards to shooting business owners, I like exposing the effort they put into their work. Like, these businesses are their babies and the blood and sweat they put into them often goes unnoticed.

“PHOTOGRAPHY ALSO GIVES ME THE OPPORTUNITY TO EXPLORE DIFFERENT ENVIRONMENTS AND SOCIETIES THAT I WOULDN'T OTHERWISE HAVE ACCESS TO. BEING ABLE TO GET A GLIMPSE INTO THESE DIFFERENT WORLDS IS EXCITING FOR ME AND BRINGS OUT MY CHILDLIKE SENSE OF WONDER.”

J: WHAT HAVE YOUR EXPERIENCES IN JAPAN BEEN LIKE DURING THE PANDEMIC?

C: In regards to photography, the pandemic has limited how far I can travel and required me to consider precautions when shooting.

J: WHAT ARE YOUR THOUGHTS ON ESSENTIAL WORKERS AND WHY DID YOU CHOOSE TO DOCUMENT THEM?

C: Taking pictures of workers started off as an opportunity to photograph my friend, who is a barber, for practice. After that shoot, I developed an interest in taking these kinds of pictures with others around town. I became interested in hearing their stories and enjoyed providing pictures of their work. Eventually, I saw an opportunity to help do good for these owners by introducing their businesses

through photography. This is how my body of work for my upcoming art exhibition was created.

Cameron's upcoming exhibition will be displayed alongside the work of photographer Rion Ueno from September 20 to October 2, at The Wind Passage Gallery in Hofu, Yamaguchi. Most of his photos have a timeless feel, but other portraits capture a vibrant sense of the life of the worker, in spite of the difficulties they are facing today. Their stories are inspiring moments of dedication and perseverance! Rion Ueno's work leaves a different impression and is made up of black-and-white photographs that “express emotions in a world without color or sound.” While quite different, together I think both of their bodies of work provide different ways of humanizing and coping with the pandemic world. Please check out the exhibition if you are in the area!





*Cameron Peagler was the Community Section Editor for **CONNECT** during the 2020-2021 JET Programme year. He is a third-year JET in Yamaguchi. Prior to this, he worked as a Registered Nurse, traveled as a Gilman Ambassador, and was a national saber fencer in America (2018-2019). When he's not exploring Japan, you can find him brewing pour over coffee and experimenting with different beans, teaching fencing in his community, and taking photographs. You can follow his adventures on Instagram [@truhiro](#).*

Jessica is a fifth-year America JET living in Saitama. On weekends she enjoys hiking in remote areas of Saitama or taking day-trips to Tokyo. When not adventuring, she can be found reading or creating her own artwork, which can be seen on her instagram [@jessica_craven_art](#)





YUREI-ZU

A HISTORY OF THE HORROR AESTHETIC IN JAPAN

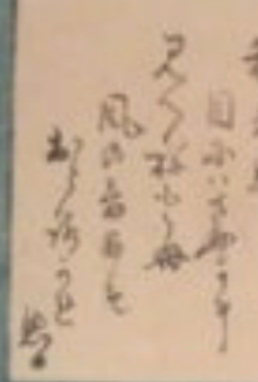
Jessica Craven (Saitama)

Most people from abroad probably got their first taste of Japanese horror from the smash-hit horror movie *The Ring*, or the spine-chilling manga of Junji Ito.

These works are just the tip of the iceberg. Japan has a long and vibrant history of supernatural folklore and classic horror. Although Japan's spooky season is actually in the middle of August, when the Obon festival is held, October is the perfect time for Western audiences to dive into the history of Japan's haunting images.

Visual depictions of supernatural beings and horrifying, bloody scenes first emerged in Japanese painted scrolls during the medieval period. During the Edo period, such pictures eventually developed into the *yurei-zu*: a genre of painted or woodblock print (*ukiyo-e*) images depicting vengeful ghosts, demon spiders, and other supernatural creatures (1).

Japanese folklore and the related *yurei-zu* are so packed with various supernatural creatures: *yurei*, *yokai*, *bakemono*, and *mononoke*, to name a few. To make things even more





A depiction of a yurei by Utagawa Kunisada (Toyokuni III). "Parody of Thirty-six Poems: Ghost of Kasane with the Poem of Fujiwara no Toshiyuki Ason" c. 1852. (Ota Memorial Museum of Art).



“Ghost of Oyuki” by Maruyama Okyo c. 1950. Widely considered one of the most hauntingly beautiful yurei-zu that Maruyama painted of his lover that died young.

confusing, there are no clear agreed-upon definitions for what counts as a yokai or what counts as a yurei. Almost all of the great folklore researchers disagree on the exact classification of these creatures, and it ultimately boils down to personal opinion (2). However, all Japanese art of the Edo period that depicts *any* type of supernatural creature can be classified as yurei-zu.

To keep things simple, let's look at some general definitions of the ethereal creatures that inhabit Japanese folklore:

YUREI

Yurei are the spirits of the deceased, similar to ghosts in Western folklore. According to Shinto and Japanese Buddhism, all humans have a soul called the *reikon*. When a person dies, their reikon leaves their body and enters a form of purgatory until they receive proper funeral rights. Once the burial ceremony is held, the reikon will rejoin the individual's ancestors in the afterlife and only return to the living world every August for the Obon festival (3).

However, a reikon can become corrupted. When a person dies in an unexpected, violent, or traumatic way, or the individual is consumed by powerful emotions such as a desire for revenge, their reikon remains amongst the living as a yurei, who cannot rest until it completes its unfinished duty amongst the living.

YOKAI

Yokai can basically be described as earthly creatures, like goblins or other mythic demons. They are not always malevolent, but simply supernatural beings that can sometimes even bring good luck.

“Yokai can either be legendary figures from Japanese folklore, or purely fictional creations with little or no history. There are many yokai that come from outside Japan, including strange creatures and phenomena from outer space. Anything that can not readily be understood or explained, anything mysterious and unconfirmed, can be a yokai.” -Shigeru Mizuki, *Secrets of the Yokai—Types of Yokai*



Katsushika Hokusai's "A woman ghost appeared from a well" c. 1831. A depiction of the yokai with a neck made of plates from the horror story *Bancho Sarayashiki*.

BAKEMONO

A bakemono is a type of shapeshifting monster that is still alive. The idea stems from the Shinto belief that all things in nature possess a soul, so bakemono can take the form of other animals and plants. While many yokai can also shapeshift, Japanese mythology draws a line between a type of animal that actually exists in the physical world, and can shapeshift, and a supernatural creature that can (4). For example, nine-tailed *kitsune* foxes which can transform into people would be considered a yokai because nine-tailed foxes do not exist on the earth as we know it. However, *bakeneko*—intelligent shapeshifting cats that can transform into people—are classified as bakemono because house cats are otherwise ordinary creatures.

FEARS OF THE EDO PERIOD

The popularity of the yurei-zu and other graphic pictures, such as the *chimido-e* (“bloody pictures”) during the Edo period was likely because the savagery of society during the age of the samurai was not such a distant memory (1). The literature of the era, such as the *Ugetsu Monogatari* was similarly dark and grotesque. While the period was generally a time of prosperity and peace, stability must have seemed fragile due to rapid change, government oppression, and several natural disasters. The yurei-zu were a form of catharsis for the people of the Edo period to make light of their fears.

The yurei-zu were also a humorous means of subverting censorship during the *Tempo* Reforms of the Tokugawa regime (5). Artists would often substitute mythical creatures and demons for the political or elite figures they wanted to depict in scathing social satire that was not lost on anyone.

Perhaps the instability of a pandemic society and the political uncertainty currently being experienced in many countries is why contemporary Japanese horror manga, such as the work of Junji Ito, is so fascinating to many people today. The artwork of many manga artists who deal with the supernatural—such as Shigeru Mizuki and Shibashi Hiroshi—is undeniably influenced by the yurei-zu.

Matsui Fuyuko, and artist couple Maruki Iri and Maruki Toshi, are other contemporary visual artists who use the influence of



“Bakeneko (demon cat) of Okabe,”
by Utagawa Kuniyoshi c. 1830.



yurei-zu to comment on their experiences of today's society. You can view the Marukis' "Hiroshima Panels," which include a depiction of the ghosts of the victims of the atomic bombing in Hiroshima [here](#). Fuyoko Matsui's works, such as "Keeping up the Pureness," incorporate the haunting elements of yurei-zu to explore themes of trauma and repression, and can be viewed [here](#). If you can still stomach more horror, I would suggest checking out their work!

Jessica is a fifth-year American JET living in Saitama. On weekends she enjoys hiking in remote areas of Saitama or taking day-trips to Tokyo. When not adventuring, she can be found reading or creating her own artwork, which can be seen on her Instagram [@jessica_craven_art](#).

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A chimidoro-e (bloody picture). "The Suicide of Shirai Gonpachi" by Utagawa Kunisada c. 1847. (Waseda University Theatre Museum).

J-Horror Spotlight:

NIGHTMARE JAPAN

Fergus Gregg (Kobe)

Since the first campfire was created aeons ago, humans have been trying their best to scare the hell out of each other.

Whether it was cautionary tales about going into the woods alone or simple moral myths about being nice to strangers, the horror genre has been a universal staple in storytelling.

As it is Halloween and my thoughts drift inexorably towards the paranormal, supernatural, and horrific, I've decided to put my love of the horror genre to good use and tell you all about the wonderful world of J-horror and three films that are sure to make you think twice about going into the dark without a light.

Japanese horror culture started with the oral tradition of *kaidan* (strange stories) which came to form the early basis of Japanese ghost stories in the Heian period and thereafter increased in reach thanks to the advent of printing technologies. Similarly, kabuki theatre would depict horrific tales of demons, vengeful spirits, death, and other tragedies. The framework of some contemporary J-horror plotlines can be found in kabuki theatre, the character Sadako's design from the 1998 film *Ringu* being a primary example of this.

While horror cinema would find its place in the cultural zeitgeist of Japan in the form of *kaiju* films and anti-war themed cinema during the post-war decades, it wouldn't be until the end of Japan's economic miracle and the economic stagnation of the 90's/2000's that J-horror would undergo a profound evolution.

Welcome to the era of "Nightmare Japan." An era epitomised by loneliness, uncertainty and existentialist thinking; the perfect breeding ground for Horror Stories.

So, let's talk about three essential films from this era: *Kairo*, *Noroi*, and *Audition*.

Just so you're not completely helpless, I will be advising you of three new rules of horror to keep in mind if you ever find yourself in these situations. Now let's start with *Kairo*.

Kairo, or *Pulse*, as it's known to Western audiences, belongs to the special niche of J-horror known as "tech horror." These films were often fuelled by fear of the new interconnectivity that had arrived with the dawn of the internet age, also by the uncertainty that came with the lost decade of the Japanese '90s. *Kairo* reflects these fears and anxieties by presenting a world suffocated with an atmosphere of oppressive loneliness.

Kairo's plot primarily centres around ghosts invading the world of the living via the internet, which I promise is significantly creepier than it sounds.

The storyline splits into two halves, one following Kudo Michi, a plant shop employee and the other following Ryosuke, a university student. The two become aware of the spirits attempting to invade the world of the living through the internet. Once a person is attacked, they disappear leaving nothing behind but the black, ashen outline

怪談 かいだん kaidan



of the person they used to be stained onto a wall. While the story does make a strong effort to explain the motive and energies behind these malevolent ghosts in their quest to “trap humans in their own loneliness,” it doesn’t make this the focal point behind the drama. The focal point would be the atmosphere.

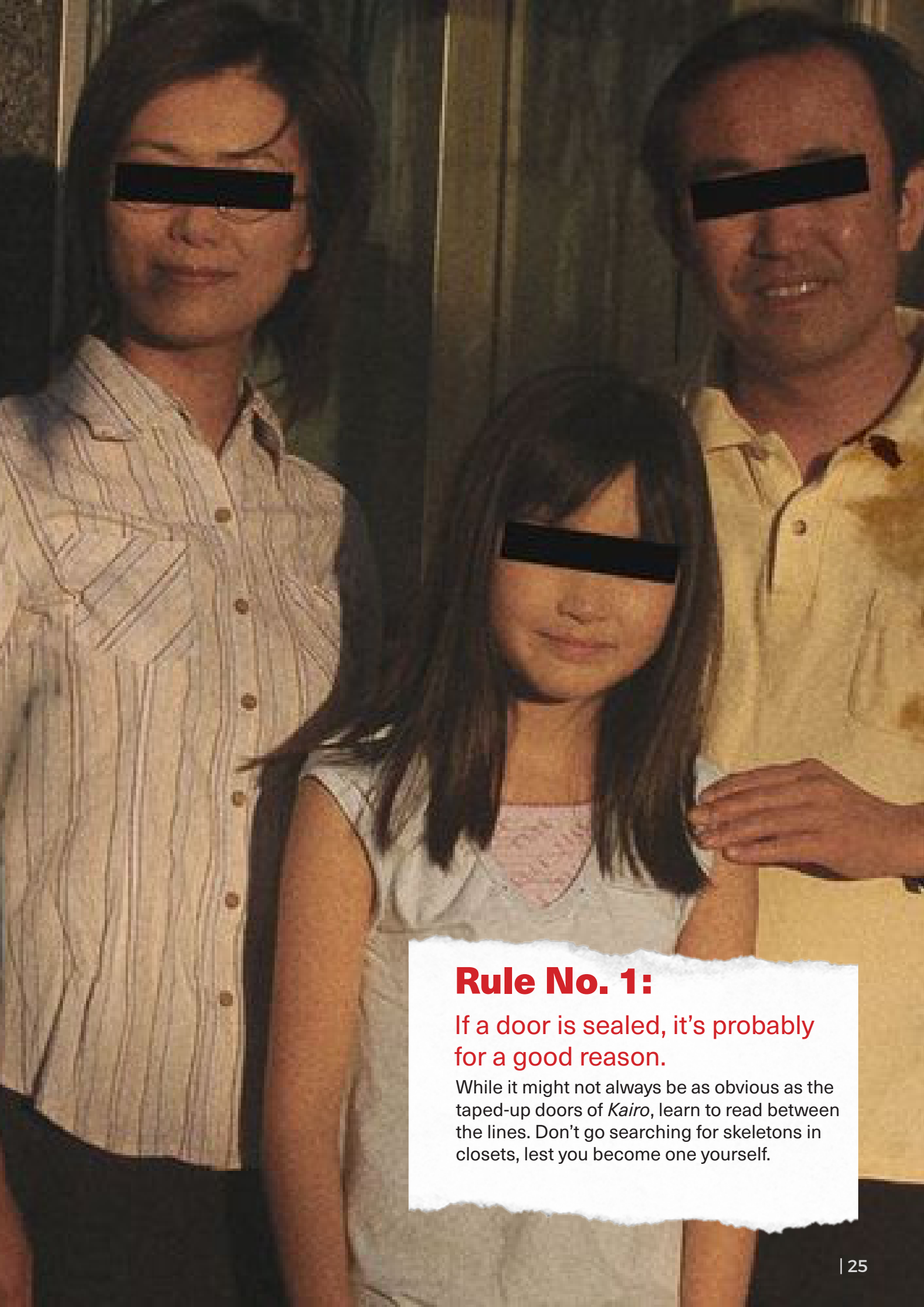
The Tokyo that *Kairo* portrays is one of pervasive loneliness, where a stark coldness seems to divide each character. The cinematography reflects this through the use of wide shots, making clear the distance between characters and the desolation the film’s *mise-en-scène* creates. The colour palette focuses on greys and blues, with the most vibrant locations being the single representation of nature in the film: the greenhouse that Michi works at.

Kairo came at an interesting time in the history of horror, where new ideas concerning technology were unexplored and the concept of internet ghosts was experimental and perturbing to audiences. With a strong atmosphere and chilling scares, *Kairo* is a must-see of Japanese cinema.

Shiraishi Koji’s film *Noroi* is the found footage of a documentary created by the fictional Kobayashi Masafumi. It begins with Kobayashi’s disappearance, while he was working on a documentary entitled “The Curse” which sought to uncover and record evidence of supernatural activity in Japan. What is a seemingly disconnected series of events gradually starts to come together over the 2-hour runtime as it reaches the conclusion that we were told was coming.

Noroi’s tension and creepiness are derived from the realism of the subject matter. Typical documentary wide shots and interviews are utilised in the cinematography as the crew travel from location to location. While they travel, you’ll find yourself compelled by the story to search each frame for clues on the mystery, but be warned, this is where *Noroi* seeks to catch you unaware. Its scares are weaved expertly into the background in this manner.

Joining Kobayashi at intervals is the eccentric, psychic Hori, who plays an interesting role in the dynamic of the film. The clearly unhinged, tin foil hat wearing medium is erratic at best and violent at



Rule No. 1:

If a door is sealed, it's probably for a good reason.

While it might not always be as obvious as the taped-up doors of *Kairo*, learn to read between the lines. Don't go searching for skeletons in closets, lest you become one yourself.

worst. His poorly communicated warnings and premonitions often leave the viewer wondering whose side he is on.

Noroi is a fascinating exploration of common kaidan tropes and vengeful spirits in the context of local Japanese mythology, and excels at immersing you into the mystery of the general plot, even though the viewer is warned from the beginning that this will not end well. Despite that, it's hard not to be invested in the intrepid tale of woe that befalls *Noroi*'s Kobayashi Masafumi.

Finally, we've come to *Audition*. *Audition* opens with the heartbreaking death of Aoyama Shigeru's wife, who has the excellent timing to die as their son enters the room, excited to show his mother his prize-winning diorama. From there we jump ahead, and Aoyama's

settled into his role as a single dad living a contented, albeit lonely, life. It isn't until speaking with his film producer friend that he's convinced to get back into the dating scene. Naturally, the first step in finding a new life partner is to get your film producer buddy to organise a fake audition for a fake movie so you can find a compatible person in no time at all. This goes about as well as you would expect, and Aoyama meets the enchanting Yamazaki Asami.

Rule No. 2:

DON'T. MESS. WITH. SHRINES!

Really, this is just general common sense. It's important to respect other cultures' places of worship; this is doubly true when that culture has well-documented mythology revolving around vengeful spirits. If you go to a shrine, cleanse your hands, speak softly and tread lightly. Otherwise, you may very well find yourself followed home.





Rule No. 3:

If something seems too good to be true, It is.

It's a tale as old as time. Two kids get lost in the forest and cannot believe their luck when they find a gingerbread house. When it comes to a kaidan situation, you're not safe until there's been a reckoning; whether you've woken up from a terrible dream to the safety of your home or made it out of danger in the nick of time, chances are you've escaped from the fire just in time to feel the frying pan start to heat up. Don't trust the easy resolution and don't let your guard down! Remember, there's always one last scare.

The film isn't what you'd expect if you're an experienced viewer of horror. For all intents and purposes, the first hour plays out like a romantic comedy. From the almost Tinder-esque audition sequence to the intimate dates the couple go on, and even the heart-warming interactions Aoyama has with his son, you'd be forgiven for thinking you've gotten your DVDs mixed. This is further enforced by the closer camera angles that regard Yamazaki as a focal point, establishing the growing influence she's having on Aoyama. This is contrasted when, in scenes without her, the colour palette is toned down. To Aoyama, a world without Yamazaki is literally less colourful.

Yet, beneath it all, there is something unsettling about Yamazaki and Aoyama's growing infatuation.

Yamazaki's heartfelt request that he "love no one but her" seems at first charming, yet becomes immensely controlling and

prohibitive. Her enchanting beauty becomes almost otherworldly as the film progresses and she becomes a contemporary example of the "vengeful spirit" archetype of Japanese cinema, and BOY does she exact her revenge.

Overall, *Audition* is not a film for the faint-hearted and is a terrifying reminder that "hell hath no fury as a woman scorned."

So those are my picks for a spooky night of J-horror entertainment this Halloween. Check them out! That is, unless you're chicken?

Fergus is a youthful first-year JET who has stepped into Japan bright-eyed and looking for adventure. More likely he'll meet the business end of some sort of kaidan event himself before the year is done, but he remains optimistic. For now . . .

OCTOBER RELEASES

Fergus Gregg (Kobe)

MOVIES

October 1

- No Time to Die (2021)
- The Conjuring: The Devil Made me Do It (2021)
- Sound of Metal (2019)
- Fatman (2020)
- Tove (2020)
- Mamoranakatta monotachi e (2021)

October 2

- Collective (2019)

October 8

- Prisoners of the Ghostland (2021)
- Wrath of Man (2021)
- Mainstream (2020)
- Stardust (2020)
- Onoda: 10,000 Nights in the Jungle (2021)
- Pity (2018)

October 9

- The Cordillera of Dreams (2019)

October 15

- Dune (2021)
- Candyman (2021)
- Venom: Let There Be Carnage (2021)
- The Last Duel (2021)
- Wrong Turn (2021)

- Our Friend (2019)

- The Amusement Park (1975)
- The Mole: Undercover in North Korea (2020)
- The Beast (2019)

October 22

- Snake Eyes (2021)
- Ron's Gone Wrong (2021)
- How to Build a Girl (2019)
- Cube (2021)
- I am Greta (2020)

October 25

- Realm of Terracotta (2021)

October 29

- Halloween Kills (2021)
- The Mauritanian (2021)
- Sweet Thing (2020)
- Josée (2020)
- Iron Mask (2019)

October 30

- Monos (2019)
- Sword Art Online: Progressive - Aria of a Starless Night

October 31

- Sleepless Beauty (2020)

GAMES

October 1

- FIFA 22 (PC, PS4, PS5, Xbox One, Xbox Series X/S, Switch)

October 5

- Exophobia (PC, PS4, PS5, Xbox One, Xbox Series X/S, Switch)
- Jett: The Far Shore (PC, PS4, PS5)
- Vagrus: The Riven Realms (PC)
- Hell Let Loose (PS5, Xbox Series X/S)
- BPM: Bullets Per Minute (PS4, Xbox One)
- Alan Wake Remastered (PC, PS4, PS5, Xbox One, Xbox Series X/S)
- Super Monkey Ball Banana Mania (PC, PS4, PS5, Xbox One, Xbox Series X/S, Switch)

October 7

- Far Cry 6 (PC, PS4, PS5, Xbox One, Xbox Series X/S, Stadia, Luna)

October 8

- Metroid Dread (Switch)
- Tetris Effect: Connected (Switch)
- Nintendo Switch OLED console launch

October 11

- Book of Travels - Steam Early Access (PC)

October 12

- Back 4 Blood (PC, PS4, PS5, Xbox One, Xbox Series X/S)

October 14

- The Riftbreaker (PC, PS5, Xbox Series X/S)
- Dungeon Encounters (PC, PS4, Switch)
- Aeon Must Die (PC, PS4, Xbox One, Switch) (RF)

October 15

- The Good Life (PC, PS4, Xbox One, Switch)
- Demon Slayer -Kimetsu no Yaiba- The Hinokami Chronicles (PC, PS4, PS5, Xbox One, Xbox Series X/S)
- NHL 2022 (PS4, PS5, Xbox One, Xbox Series X/S)
- Crysis Remastered Trilogy (PC, PS4, PS5, Xbox One, Xbox Series X/S, Switch)

October 19

- Into The Pit (PC, Xbox One)
- Inscription (PC)

October 20

- They Always Run (PC)

October 21

- Sands of Aura - Early Access (PC)
- Tandem: A Tale of Shadows (PC, PS4, Xbox One, Switch)
- Sands of Aura - Early Access (PC)
- Echo Generation (PC, Xbox One, Xbox Series X/S)

October 22

- The Dark Pictures Anthology: House of Ashes (PC, PS4, PS5, Xbox One, Xbox Series X/S)

October 26

- Guardians of the Galaxy (PC, PS4, PS5, Xbox One, Xbox Series X/S)
- Darkest Dungeon 2 - Early Access (PC)
- Solar Ash (PC, PS4, PS5)
- The Unliving - Steam Early Access (PC)

October 28

- Riders Republic (PC, PS4, PS5, Xbox One, Xbox Series X/S, Stadia)
- Age of Empires 4 (PC)
- Voice of Cards: The Isle Dragon Roars (PC, PS4, Switch)
- Fatal Frame: Maiden of Black Water (PC, PS4, PS5, Xbox One, Xbox Series X/S, Switch)
- Mario Party Superstars (Switch)

Sources:

<https://www.imdb.com/calendar/?region=jp>

<https://www.vg247.com/2021/01/22/video-game-release-dates-2021/>



OCTOBER REVIEWS & RECOMMENDATIONS

Recommended Album:
Genie Star (ジェニースター)

Ryon Morrin (Hokkaido) | Release Date: September 1, 2021

Enon Kawatani is relentless. An endlessly creative musician and songwriter, he's frequently forming new musical projects and composes almost all of the songs himself; an impressive feat for someone with five different bands. Kawatani is most well known for his work with romantic rockers Indigo la End and genre-bending masters Gesu no Kiwami Otome. He's also in the studio writing and producing Dadaray's brand of piano-pop. Add to that Ichikoro, his collaboration with Japan's living guitar god Ichika Nito, and he shows no signs of slowing down.

Genie High, another one of Kawatani's many projects, just released their new album, *Genie Star* (ジェニースター). It's a unique supergroup featuring Ikkyu Nakajima



of tricot on vocals, famed comedians Cookie (クッキー) and Toya Kazutoyo on bass and drums respectively, and accomplished composer and pianist Niigaki Takashi on keys. Kawatani writes all the music and lyrics for Genie High. He also plays guitar on the album, and his unique playing style shines through the dense, busy mix. His voice, however, is mostly absent from this record, with most songs entirely sung by Nakajima.

Upon hearing the first few tracks on *Genie Star*, Kawatani's songwriting flair is immediately evident. Many of the songs feel like they would fit well on a Gesu No Kiwami Otome album. For those unfamiliar, Kawatani's most accomplished group to date ambitiously pulls influences from a wide variety of genres like hip hop, J-rock, classical, and even jazz and funk. High energy, dance-worthy pop songs; a shred guitar, dirty and distorted rock epic; a somber, emotionally driven ballad; a salsa-inspired spoken word jam. All a part of the band's catalogue. For *Genie Star*, Kawatani borrows some of the elements present in Gesu No Kiwami Otome's music while maintaining a separate identity. Robust string arrangements, tastefully technical guitars, beautiful sprawling piano—layers that add depth without sounding overplayed or distracting. The music's pop formula allows anyone to follow along easily, but there's enough variety to keep you on the edge of your seat. It's tremendously catchy music, but the complexity exceeds what you would expect to hear, steering clear of monotony.

Genie Star weaves numerous genres together. The string section and piano blend for moments that feel grandly classical. Things get funky, too, with some slick drum grooves and wah guitar.

There's plenty of crunchy rock and roll riffage, too. Surprisingly, there's even a trap beat wedged in here featuring all five members on vocals; its bizarreness makes it an interesting listen. The one major misstep is the inclusion of a Christmas song which even features jingling sleigh bells. It feels painfully out of place alongside the rest of the tracks on *Genie Star*, and considering it's September, it's quite early for holiday music. Thankfully, this minor disruption doesn't detract from the album's successes.

As a whole, *Genie Star* stays within the boundaries of pop music but also steps over them into new territory. An example is 卓球モンキー, an aggressive rock song that opens with gritty guitar and bass accompanied by sweeping classical piano. Genie High crafts a sound that is simultaneously reckless and elegant. Two-thirds in, there's a brief moment where they slam the brakes for a deeply emotional spoken word segment by Nakajima accompanied by Takashi's fleet fingers, only to put the gas pedal back into the floor until the very end. At just under four minutes, it keeps you bobbing your head and tapping your foot while your ear is captivated by each carefully composed detail woven into the backdrop behind Nakajima as she wields the power in her voice. *Genie Star* bends the rules, adhering to genre conventions while adding a heavy dose of experimentation to the mix.

You can stream *Genie Star* now on Spotify.

Ryon Morrin is a third-year ALT based in Shintotsukawa, Hokkaido. In his free time, he enjoys discovering new music, hiking in the mountains, and playing rhythm games at the arcade.

Recommended Video Game: Neo: The World Ends With You

Nathan Post (Saitama)

A Sequel 14 Years in the Making

As a sequel to a cult classic Nintendo DS game from 2007, you'd be forgiven for overlooking the release of *Neo: The World Ends With You* earlier this year. But for those of us in the know, for those of us who have spent the past 14 years waiting—praying—for the long-teased sequel . . . well, it's been a long time coming.

Neo: The World Ends With You (or *Neo TWEWY*, for short) is an action RPG from Square Enix, directed by Tetsuya Nomura of *Kingdom Hearts* and *Final Fantasy* zipper-design fame. It's a game with that signature Nomura vibe that pulls elements from those titles, but in a world drenched in modern Japanese culture and dripping with punky, J-rock style and charm.

New Faces to Meet

You take on the role of new protagonist Rindo Kanade, a Japanese high schooler who has been transported to an alternate version of Tokyo's Shibuya ward and forced to play "The Reapers' Game." Rindo's got a week to put together a team to fight off the invading threat of The Noise and earn enough points to win his ticket back to the real world. His friends Fret and Nagi join the fray early on, but there are more faces to discover later as well.

Losers of the game face "Erasure" (like, from existence), so the stakes for these three are already pretty high, but as you progress through the game, a larger mystery begins to unfold. Soon, the nature of the Reapers, the fate of characters from the first game, and the existence of Shibuya itself—and even Shinjuku—are thrown into the mix.

J-Rockin' Beats

Neo TWEWY is all about style, and nowhere is that more apparent than in its music. Like the original, it features a huge selection of original J-rock beats by composer Takeharu Ishimoto to accompany you on your journey through Shibuya. Note that he actually left Square Enix in the 14 years since the last title, but made a special return just for this game.

And this isn't just subtle background music. They're full-on vocal tracks pumping rebellious riffs and lyrics at full volume as you traverse the world and fight The Noise. There are a lot of head bangers in the lineup, to the point that I've already got the soundtrack loaded on my phone to listen to on the go.

Battles in the Street

Combat also takes cues from the original, but has been reworked to no longer rely on the touch controls and 2D visuals of the Nintendo DS (may it rest in peace). Here, the game has gone full 3D and uses more standard button controls for combat. Fortunately it manages this overhaul while still maintaining the Pin system that made the original game such a blast.

Each attack, or "Psyche," is tied to an equippable Pin—like, the kind you'd stick on your bag or wherever. There are more than 300 Pins to collect, with Psyches ranging from laser slashes, to energy blasts, to tornados of flame, and so many more. Pins all level up as you use them, and some even evolve into more powerful Pins upon meeting certain conditions.

Every character in your party can be assigned one Pin, and combat unfolds in real time across the streets of Shibuya, shifting player control between the characters as you unleash their Psychs. As you get more characters, you can equip more Pins, until eventually you have a whole roster of characters working together to defeat The Noise.



Does This Clown Wig Make Me Look Fat?

While most of this game is about bashing enemies around in flashy combat sequences, there are some great quirks that make it stand out from the crowd. Equipment is handled through an insane fashion system that would put Zoolander to shame and stat increases are performed by eating at restaurants and managing your characters' calorie intake.

Plus, anyone who's actually been to Shibuya will immediately recognize many of the real-life stores and landmarks that feature in the game, like the 109 building, Tower Records, and the statue of Hachiko.

Reap What You Sow

That said, *Neo TWEWY* isn't perfect. The new characters tend to get pushed aside to make room for old favorites without giving the new ones enough time to shine, and some of the in-game days can drag on for too much time with too little payoff, but overall it's a worthy followup to the original cult classic.



At the end of the day, what sets *Neo TWEWY* apart from the crowd are all the little things that come together to deliver an experience that is full of charm and, above all, head-banging style. Here's hoping it won't be another 14 years before we see what's next for Rindo and his crew.

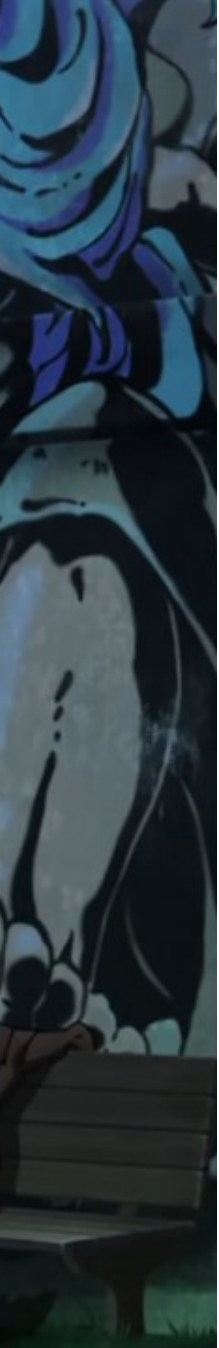
Nathan Post is a former JET who now works as a game translator for Gumi Inc. in Tokyo. He is currently anticipating the end of the pandemic and return to normalcy that will allow him to once again, finally . . . continue to hole up at home playing games.



The Republic of San Magnolia stands, the only survivor perhaps, against the robotic hordes of a fallen autocratic empire attempting to breach its white walls. Behind those pasty walls, however, you would struggle to recognize its phenotypically silver-haired, silver-eyed Alba citizens as survivors. They are thriving, and they are democratic. They are proud, and they are civilized. Where other countries have failed or dearly sacrificed to defend themselves, the Republic came up with a seemingly civilized solution: sacrificing its non-silvery minorities.

For at the start of the war against the robot menace, the Alba-majority Republic of San Magnolia rounded up all of its non-Alba denizens and concentrated them in the ghettos of its 86th district. Stripped of their citizenship and reduced to a number, the “86” are forcibly enlisted to fight and die in the Republic’s battles. So the story of *86-Eighty Six*- begins, with battle-hardened 86 child soldiers fighting now that all the adults have died, and a pushy anti-racist Alba girl who believes she can help the 86 and return the Republic back to its liberal roots.





Since the end of WWII, Japan has had a rich tradition of storytelling with anti-war themes, the giant robot mecha *Gundam* franchise being one of the most noteworthy of such franchises in anime. Japan's own history with racial relations and oppression has been less than idyllic. This is in part because the country is, for the most part, racially homogenized, in part because the country focused on its own suffering during WWII over the suffering it inflicted on the non-Japanese it once subjugated.

Animated by A-1 Pictures, mecha anime *86* is thus a remarkable anti-war *and* anti-racism story. Where the show could have packed its runtime with giant robot action, it lets its characters breathe, smile, and laugh before cutting their lives short in shocking, tragic, and anticlimactic ways. Where the show could have stuck with obvious depictions of racism, it goes deeper by illustrating that racism is not just individual acts, but a system—a system that includes those who style themselves anti-racists but hold unexamined assumptions, and those who dislike racism but are too afraid or resigned to take any inaction.

First-time full series director Ishii Toshimasa makes copious use of symbolism and scene juxtapositions to disturbing effect. Smiling faces and fireworks contrast starkly and immediately with scenes of loss following an artillery-shattering defeat. Discomfitingly detailed animations of Alba civilians cutting rare steak and sipping red wine are paired with revelations of the Republic of San Magnolia throwing the 86 into the gore-soaked battlefield meat grinder. Music by Sawano Hiroyuki of *Attack on Titan* and *Gundam* fame couples wonderfully with the show's few awesome and numerous mournful moments.

For a great story with anti-war themes and one of the best depictions in anime of how racism comprehensively works, look no further than *86 -Eighty Six-*. The first season has already aired in spring of this year, and the second will air on October 3. Glory to the Spearhead Squadron.

Recommended Anime: *86 -Eighty Six-*

Marco Oliveros (Tokushima)

Marco Oliveros is a fourth-year ALT and the current Culture Section Editor for CONNECT. He likes history. He's also a freelance writer who writes about anime a lot. You can see a list of his published work [here](#).

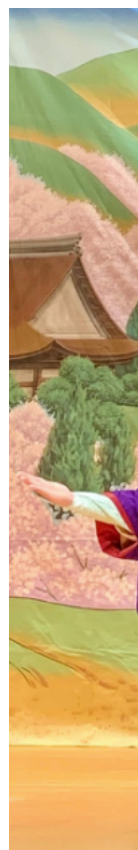
A Foreigner Performing Yokozen Kabuki:

Getting involved in the community

Jake Davis (Okayama)

Before coming to my current town of Nagi, I hadn't the faintest idea of kabuki, let alone its history or appeal. I'd imagine that many foreigners residing in Japan or overseas may have briefly seen kabuki on television, in a picture somewhere, or perhaps heard iconic kabuki sounds from Japanese anime and video games. Apart from these sources, I had no idea what it actually was, and if I'm being honest, I wasn't deeply interested in finding out more, especially when it seemed like such a niche area of Japanese culture, similar to Shakespeare. However, I was placed by JET in a town that prides itself on its preservation of kabuki traditions since the Edo period (1603-1867). After being asked by a local kabuki expert if I would like to give *Yokozen Kabuki* a go, I knew it would have been a big mistake to turn it down.

Yokozen Kabuki is Nagi's amateur kabuki theatre tradition. It differs from other kabuki in that it is performed entirely by locals, of whom anyone can take part. Kabuki historically became restricted to grown men due to the Edo shogunate, as it was believed that the use of female performers could corrupt public morals. To this day, professional kabuki continues to be





male restricted out of custom. More on kabuki in general can be read in this **CONNECT** article [here](#). However, due in part to local actor shortages, for the majority of its existence,

EVERYONE, INCLUDING WOMEN AND CHILDREN, HAS BEEN ALLOWED TO PERFORM IN YOKOZEN KABUKI.

Yokozen Kabuki was a pastime for Nagi's local farmers and flourished during the twentieth century. To preserve their local tradition, in 1996, the local Nagi government established





the Children's Kabuki Workshop. Supported today by the Yokozen Kabuki Preservation Society, local children at the Workshop not only learn acting, but also become familiar with the instruments, props, and makeup used in kabuki. These children then perform before a discerning crowd during the annual two-day show in late November. Videos on Yokozen Kabuki can be watched [here](#).

I was asked to join a small group of five other locals, including a mother and her three primary school aged children, in a series of short skits between scenes in one of the main performances. I went to Yokozen Kabuki rehearsals, known as *keiko*, which at first involved our small group sitting down on the stage with one of the local kabuki experts, going through a vertically-written script and discussing the characters. Despite being able to grasp everyday

Japanese, the script language was completely different to what I was used to—not to mention the unique way one's character lines are performed. We got together to practice once a week for roughly two months. I realized quite quickly that, especially as a non-native Japanese speaker, I would be better off using my phone to record an expert reading my lines and using that audio to practice at home by shadowing it.

When the day of the performance came in late November, we had to be there a couple of hours before our performance in order to get ready. During that time, I bumped into some familiar faces who were excited to hear that I would be performing and gave me some last-minute encouragement. Upon entering the costume room, I saw performers having their makeup applied by hand by local elders, being dressed, and getting wigs placed firmly on their



heads, all according to their roles. The make-up doesn't come off easily due to the horse oil used, and I remember it taking about twenty minutes to remove it afterwards. It was definitely worth it for the experience though—plus it made for some cool photos to show the family and friends back home in Australia.

Prior to walking on stage, our small group was waiting in a side room next to the stage, visible only to a few people in the front of the audience. I could hear whispers from some local elders, curious about me performing their local Yokozen Kabuki. As we walked on stage, I felt nervous because I wanted to do my best to respect the local traditions while hopefully impressing people. Because of all of the practice that I had done though, and because I was performing in a group that I had become quite close to during rehearsals, I also felt confident. I can't say that my acting was great by any standard, but I was thrilled that I was able to remember all of my lines, including the long ones.

The skits I performed were bits of comic relief, and the audience seemed to enjoy them. At the end, we bowed on the main stage as *ohineri* (small paper-wrapped money offerings, often coins) were hurled onto it by the audience. After we exited the stage, we made our way back to the costume room, though not before getting some quick photos in the lobby and chatting to some locals who had watched the show.

Originally, when I heard about the strictness of professional kabuki, such as only men being allowed to perform, I was





surprised that Nagi's local Yokozen Kabuki was so open to having a foreigner perform. I remember several elderly people coming up to me, smiling while telling me that I did a good job. That, along with the shock of almost getting hit with coin bags on stage, calmed my nerves completely, and I felt proud of myself for having decided to take part. I think it must have also been a memorable experience for the locals to have a foreigner involved in the process. I bumped into one of the kids from my group a few months later when visiting the school. She was really excited to see me again.

Shortly after, I was asked to check the script of an English kabuki performance that a local Saturday English club, mostly of elderly women, was going to rehearse and perform for the winter show in February. As you could probably guess, the script's English would be considered quite unnatural even after multiple checks, similar



to trying to translate a Shakespearean play into Japanese. However, I felt that despite the impossible nature of translating a kabuki script perfectly into English, after some checks with an expert, we felt that the English club's final script was acceptable for what it was—something aimed at bringing the wonders of Japanese culture to a wider audience. By having a native speaker check the script and



I sincerely believe that, when looking back on your time in Japan, it is unexpected opportunities like these that help to make it all worthwhile. Of course, with all of the odd requests and invitations that you may receive, you shouldn't take on more than you can handle. It's definitely important to say no sometimes, and it's fine to say that you need time to think something over. However, by getting involved and saying yes to opportunities, including things that may take you out of your comfort zone, you will not only have a memorable experience and strengthen your connection to Japan, but also have a very real and significant impact on your local community.

give feedback, the members of the English club were much more motivated to give it their best, without taking it so seriously that they couldn't enjoy themselves.

I ultimately ended up participating in the English club's play, performing as the famous Lady Shizuka in a condensed version of *Yoshitsune and the Thousand Cherry Blossom Trees*. I had fewer lines, and the English was definitely easier to remember. However, learning to walk elegantly with one giant foot in front of the other, while being squeezed into a kimono for over an hour and also wearing the heaviest wig that they had available, was a challenge. Despite being far too tall for the role, with a bit of practice, I was able to walk without tripping over my own feet, and thanks to the makeup artists and costume staff, my mum was pleased to see how pretty her hypothetical daughter could have been.

Jake Davis is a fourth-year Coordinator for International Relations (CIR) from Perth, Australia, based in Nagi, Okayama. He spends his time studying Japanese, traveling (when possible), and is working towards becoming a primary school teacher in Australia.

LIFESTYLE



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Kimberly Fitzgerald

Most people are shocked when they find out how bad I am as an electrician. — Unknown

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Kayla Francis

"But part of getting to know yourself is to unknow yourself—to let go of the limiting stories you've told yourself about who you are so that you aren't trapped by them, so you can live your life and not the story you've been telling yourself about your life." — Lori Gottlieb, Maybe You Should Talk to Someone

WELLNESS DESIGNER

Muriah Ellis

"Everyone should believe in something. I believe I will have another coffee." — Unknown

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Lloyd Crickshank

"One one cocoa full basket" (A Jamaican proverb that means: Accomplishments are achieved one step at a time and not overnight) — Unknown

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Jon Solmundson

"Many of the normal motives of civilised life—snobbishness, money-grubbing, fear of the boss etc.—had simply ceased to exist. . . It was simply a temporary and local phase in an enormous game that is being played over the whole surface of the earth. But it lasted long enough to have its effect upon anyone who experienced it." — George Orwell, Homage to Catalonia



Pregnancy in Japan

Lindsay Hagihara (Okayama)

Statistics show that babies born in Japan have the greatest chance of surviving, with only a 1 in 1,111 risk of death for newborns. (1) With such an impressive statistic, it's natural to wonder if pregnancy in Japan is as great an experience as the statistic leads you to believe. So, I would like to share with you my personal experience of being pregnant in Japan, not just once, but twice!

Though it was stressful at times, all-in-all, I feel that the knowledgeable doctors, friendly nurses, and clean hospital allowed me to feel well taken care of. But pregnancy is an exciting and nerve-wracking journey in and of itself, let alone experiencing it in a foreign country! When you add in language barriers, differences in customs, and lack of knowledge of the procedures or the resources around you, that feeling of comfort and trust in your healthcare providers becomes even more important.

So, let's discuss
What Happens After You
Find Out You're Pregnant.





Confirm your pregnancy with a doctor and register it at city hall.

Because pregnancy is not considered an illness and may require various levels of care, it is not covered under general health insurance. To counter this, the government has created a voucher booklet that you can receive as soon as you register your pregnancy at city hall. However, in order to register, you must receive a pregnancy confirmation from your doctor.

This is an important step as the vouchers make appointments generously discounted. A physical exam is done during each checkup and costs around 5,000 to 8,000 yen per exam. The vouchers will completely cover this expense. If you require any extra testing or medication, you must pay for them.

Receive your maternity handbook.

When you register your pregnancy at city hall, you will also receive a maternity and childhood handbook for free. This handbook is where all the information for you and your baby will be recorded, and an English version is available as well.

In the back are listed common useful phrases; for example, “due date” is 分娩予定日 (*bunbenyoteibi*) and “natural birth” is 自然分娩 (*shizenbunben*). There are many categories in the handbook to help communicate with your doctor, from medical history to terms related to birth and delivery—even practical conversation at the hospital.

Do your own research.

While the handbook was very handy, I did have a few hiccups with the growth chart. The measurements are very Asian-oriented, and my doctor was very textbook and traditional. During my first pregnancy, my weight was considered “within limits.” But in my second pregnancy, by Japanese standards, I was considered “almost obese.” However, if I had been back home in the US, I would have been considered “slightly overweight.” This weight did not include either of my babies, whose weight was considered perfectly fine for both.

STEP 1:

STEP 2:

STEP 3:

Because of this, during my second pregnancy, my doctor was constantly concerned about what I was eating and how much, saying things like, *"You gained too much weight since your last appointment."* Which caused quite a bit of stress for me as, according to a growth chart from the US, I was within my limits. This was not only stressful but was also very confusing for me. I had to do my own research about the officially recommended guidelines from my own country and follow those to assure myself that my measurements were considered normal overseas.

STEP 4: Proceed with prenatal checkups as normal.

As far as general prenatal checkups go, how often you go is very similar to overseas. Once per month until the 23rd week, twice per month until the 35th week, and from there, weekly until birth. Also similar to overseas, each checkup includes checking blood pressure, weight, the baby's heart rate, and abdominal measurements to track the baby's growth. It is also common to receive an ultrasound at each checkup. At my hospital, they recorded each ultrasound from the computer screen onto a DVD-R!

However, sometimes it can be hard to talk to the doctor if you have a concern or are curious about something for more reasons than just the language barrier. In Japan, doctors are regarded in high esteem and are rarely questioned about their methods or



opinions. Because of this, it may be hard to ask about alternative methods or to talk theoretically. Even though my doctor was very strict, he was always willing to listen to my questions. It was easier for me to ask about something if I had researched the topic beforehand and translated the terms I wanted to use. I don't think I ever persuaded him to trust the foreign statistics, but he did seem to be appreciative that I had been doing my research.

STEP 5: Reserve your hospital room.

One thing that surprised me about giving birth in Japan is that you are required to choose in advance the hospital in which you would like to give birth and then make a reservation. This happens once the delivery date is estimated, usually between weeks 8-10 of pregnancy. You can reserve the hospital of your choice.



When choosing a hospital, consider things such as whether or not you need English assistance, whether or not you would like an epidural, and if you want to try alternative labor methods such as using a birthing ball, giving birth in a bath, etc. Some hospitals are very strict and will not allow the mother to move around as she pleases. This is for monitoring purposes.

Reservations need to be made quickly because popular places fill up fast. Interestingly, many women choose to give birth at a place different from where their checkups are because it is customary to travel back home for the birth so the new mom can receive help from her family and be able to relax for a while. I would have loved to experience that!

You can also register your pregnancy with a taxi service. There are special taxis designed for expecting mothers. When the mother goes into labor, she is guaranteed to be picked up by the taxi at any time. It is equipped with the materials needed during birth, and also, there is no cleaning fee.



STEP 7:

Give birth.

Something that may come as a shock to many is that epidurals for birth are not commonly found in Japan. If you are determined to have one, you must find a hospital that offers them (which may be far away). Epidurals are performed by the anesthesiologist at the hospital, and usually, you must be induced on a scheduled day in order to fit into his schedule. If you begin to deliver outside of his business hours, then you will be out of luck. Epidurals are also quite expensive, being about 100,000 yen out of pocket.

Rest and recover.

Another interesting part of Japanese culture is that new mothers typically stay in the hospital 5-7 days after giving birth. There are many reasons for this. Doctors want to monitor the health of both the baby and the mother, and it is easier to do so if both stay at the hospital. Should medical issues arise, they can be taken care of immediately. Also, the nurses and midwives are there to help 24/7 with any questions or concerns the mom might have. They also give new mothers lessons on things such as how to bathe the baby, how to change diapers, how much formula or breastmilk the baby should be getting, etc.



I was very grateful for this. I will never forget the compassion and kindness I felt during my hospital stay, but I felt almost panicked once I was discharged with my bundle of new life to take care of. Once home, there is no button on the wall to press, no reassuring professional with seemingly infinite knowledge of baby care.

There are other small differences between cultures that could be addressed, but what do you think? Would you prefer to go through such a tremendous experience in Japan or in your home country? It may be less stressful to be in your home country, speaking your mother tongue to the doctors and nurses around you, but for me personally, despite not always understanding everything 100%, I felt very well taken care of.



If you are expecting or are curious about pregnancy in Japan, here are some helpful resources to get you started.

- [Pregnancy In Japan](#)
- [Having a Baby in Japan: \(Almost\) Everything You Need to Know](#)
- [Giving Birth In Japan: How Much Does Childbirth And Childcare Cost?](#)
- [Pregnant In Japan? Here's What You Should Know](#)

References

1. [World Health Organization](#)

Lindsay Hagihara is an ALT and mother of two. She enjoys traveling and learning about foreign culture.

COVID-19

Update

States of Emergency*

The Japanese government has lifted the State of Emergency across all prefectures. This is the first time since April that all emergency measures have been lifted.

Local authorities may still impose restrictions, especially on dining and entertainment establishments. Please check with your local authority regarding specific restrictions in your region.

*All information is accurate as of September 30th. For an up-to-date list of all prefectures under States of Emergency, please refer to the [Cabinet Secretariat Office's Website](#)

The following recommendations remain in effect

- Please avoid the “3 C’s” (closed places, crowded places, and close-contact settings).
- Wear a mask in public places.
- Keep social gatherings small and short.
- Exercise proper social distancing.
- Clean and disinfect common facilities, thoroughly wash hands, and disinfect with alcohol.

Vaccinations

The Japanese government recommends that all people over the age of 12 get vaccinated. COVID-19 vaccinations are available to everyone, including foreign residents, free of charge. After a second dose, vaccines provide significant protection against contracting COVID-19 and greatly reduce the risk of developing severe symptoms in those who do contract the virus. Getting fully vaccinated remains the best protection against severe illness, hospitalization, and death.

For information regarding *how to get vaccinated* or how to receive your vaccination certificate for overseas travel, please visit the Ministry of Health, Labor, and Welfare's [website](#).



PCR Testing

PCR tests are covered by medical insurance (as of March 6, 2021).

If you believe you may have contracted the COVID-19 virus, please contact your prefecture's COVID call center to find the testing facility nearest you. *Do not go to the hospital.*

For information on your prefecture's call center and other COVID resources, please visit the [Ministry of Health, Labor, and Welfare's website](#).



Questions?

Japan Visitor Hotline: 050-3816-2787

The Japan Visitor Hotline, operated by the Japan National Tourism Organization (JNTO), is available 24 hours a day to answer COVID-related questions or direct you to appropriate mental health resources in English, Chinese, Korean, and Japanese.



Resources

- For medically accurate, up-to-date information check: [World Health Organization](#)
- For medical resources in your community check the [JNTO Medical Institution Guide](#)
- For up-to-date news about COVID in Japan check: [NHK WORLD](#)
- For information regarding international travel check: [Immigration Services of Japan](#)



MENTAL HEALTH SUPPORT FOR JET PROGRAMME PARTICIPANTS

With the aim of enhancing mental health support for JET Programme participants, CLAIR offers the JET Programme Mental Health Counselling Assistance Programme. This programme provides a partial subsidy (50%, up to 30,000 yen per year) for counselling costs not covered by health insurance.

As of April 2021, you can use this subsidy to pay for mental health services in Japan or those received online from providers in your home country. If you wish to use a service overseas, please consult with your contracting organisation supervisor for more information. If you wish to apply for the subsidy, you must do so through your contracting organisation.

CLAIR offers a toll-free telephone counselling service which does not require any advance reservation to use. The service generally operates twice per month, on the 10th and 20th (counselling days which would fall on a Sunday or holiday are instead held on the Saturday prior to that day). Operating times are from 17:30-21:00 on weekdays and 13:00-16:30 on Saturdays.

Counselling via Telephone*
Phone number: 0120-810-803
(No advance reservation required.
Calls are free of charge.)
*Limited to one call per person per day (no annual limit)
*CLAIR has prepared three telephone lines for this service; however, there may be times when the lines become congested.



MENTAL HEALTH MATTERS

In addition to the telephone service, CLAIR also offers free Web-Mail and Skype counselling.

[Web-Mail Counselling](#)

Login Password: jet2021mental

[Skype Counselling](#)

Login Password: jet2021mental



Kimberly Fitzgerald (Wellness Editor)

Japanese Chestnuts,

or *Castanea crenata*, are found naturally all across Japan in forests ranging from Hokkaido to Kyushu. The trees have been cultivated for nuts and timber throughout Japanese history. Surveys of Jomon sites have found that the nuts were an important food source for some of Japan's earliest residents. In fact, researchers believe that they have found evidence at a Jomon dig site in Aomori prefecture that indicates Jomon communities planted and harvested chestnut trees on a large scale not only for lumber but also for food. (1)

Looking at the nutritional benefits of chestnuts, it's easy to see why the pre-rice-dependent culture utilized chestnuts as a primary food source in the fall. High in carbohydrates and low in fat with virtually no cholesterol,

chestnuts resemble a fruit more than a nut.

With 53 grams of carbohydrates and 5.1 grams of fiber per 100 grams (or about 5 chestnuts), chestnuts certainly make for an energy-rich food that sustains for a long time—perfect for people looking for a hearty meal like the Jomon. (2) And with such a significant percentage of fiber, it also makes for a good fuel source for those managing their blood sugar levels.

Chestnuts contain significant concentrations of many other health-promoting compounds as well, including vitamins B6, C, and E, as well as thiamin, folate, potassium, and one of the highest amounts of antioxidants found in any nut. (4) They are a true superfood and an ideal addition to the diet of anyone watching their cardiovascular health. And since chestnuts are naturally gluten-free, pure chestnut flour is a great alternative for celiacs and those who suffer from gluten intolerance. (5)

Today, chestnuts are an important ingredient in an *osechi* (New Year's holiday cuisine) dish, *kuri no kanroni*, a sweet concoction of mashed sweet potatoes and chestnuts cooked in sugar syrup. This dish is believed to bring good financial fortune for the new year.

Here in Japan, you've also most likely seen chestnuts in the form of Mont Blanc, a most delectable dessert made of chestnut puree. This puree is piped into thin, noodle-like strands that are piled up to resemble a mountain which is then topped with whipped cream and adorned with a sugared chestnut. This dessert is so popular in Japan that it's actually far more common here than in France, where it originates. (3) It is even the fall season's specialty Kit Kat flavor for 2021.

So whether you are hoping to introduce some heart-healthy ingredients to your diet or are just looking to satisfy your sweet tooth, try picking up a bag of chestnuts on your next trip to the grocery store this fall.



Anatomy of a Chestnut:

Chestnuts are a “true nut” in both a botanical and culinary sense.

Chestnuts offer more polyphenols per gram than almost any other food, which help to prevent blood clots and may even improve brain function! (2)

Chestnuts have a low glycemic index (GI 54). (5)

Boiled and roasted chestnuts can be good sources of vitamin C, representing about 20% of the recommended dietary intake for an adult. (4)

The antioxidants in chestnuts may provide a protective effect against degenerative diseases, such as cancer and cardiovascular diseases. (4)

A 100-gram (3.5 oz) serving of roasted chestnuts contains about 25% of your daily value of copper, which is important for your nervous system. (2)



How to Prepare Chestnuts:

Since chestnuts are hard to peel, the easiest way to remove their skins is either by boiling them or by roasting them. While boiling chestnuts in salted water is the most common method in Japan, nothing beats the smell and taste of roasted chestnuts, so we'll include both methods for you.

Boiled Chestnuts

Soak the chestnuts for a few hours (or overnight) in water. Drain and place the chestnuts in a stove-pot (or pan) with just enough water to cover them. Add half a tablespoon of salt per liter of water. Bring the pot to a boil, let the chestnuts cook for 10 minutes, then lower the heat and simmer for an additional 20-30 minutes. A shorter boil is recommended if you are cooking the chestnuts again in a subsequent recipe (like our Chestnut-Sweet Potato Rice recipe). But if you are just planning to snack on the chestnuts, then boiling them for 30 or even 40 minutes is recommended depending on your preferred level of softness. Leave the chestnuts to cool in the water until they can be handled. Once cool to the touch, the chestnuts can then be cut in half easily, and the insides can be scooped out with a spoon.



Boiled chestnuts

Roasted Chestnuts

Soak the chestnuts in water for about 30 minutes. This will soften the shell and help prepare the nuts to steam while roasting. Remove the chestnuts from the water and pat the shells dry. The next step is perhaps the most important: Score the shells by slicing two thin slits into an X on the flat side of each chestnut. Be sure to cut through the shell but not into the meat of each nut. This will allow the steam to be released and prevent any chestnuts from exploding while roasting. Next, heat a cooking pan on medium heat. Though you can put oil in the pan, it is not necessary. Once hot, place your chestnuts on the pan sliced-side upward.

Roast the chestnuts, making sure to shake your pan once in a while to move the chestnuts around. You will know that your chestnuts are cooked when the shell peels backward and your kitchen smells nutty. This may take about 15 minutes. Remove your chestnuts from the pan and allow them to cool a bit. Chestnuts are easiest to peel while warm, so it's recommended to start peeling them as soon as they are easy to handle.



Roasted chestnuts



References:

1. [Genetic Diversity of Castanea crenata in Northern Japan Assessed by SSR Markers](#)
2. [U.S. Dept. of Agriculture FoodData Search](#)
3. ['Kuri': The nutty staple of ancient Japan](#)
4. [Effect of cooking on total vitamin C contents and antioxidant activity of sweet chestnuts \(Castanea sativa Mill.\)](#)
5. [Chestnuts, a "Comfort" Healthy Food?](#)



Gluten-Free Chestnut Crusted Salmon Fillet

Kaity Hamill (Niigata)

(Adaptation of an original recipe by Emily Leary)

This recipe pairs chestnuts with another fall favorite ingredient: salmon!

This easy, weeknight dinner can either be cooked in an oven or your fish grill (with smaller cuts of fish). Please note that this recipe calls for a 750-gram salmon fillet. You most certainly can make it with the smaller cuts of salmon that are common at Japanese grocery stores; just please adjust your cooking times accordingly.

There are many different ways to adapt this recipe

—*perfect for people with food allergies*—so feel free to make changes to best fit your taste and equipment.



Ingredients:

- 80 grams/2.75 ounces chestnuts
- 4 tablespoons gluten-free breadcrumbs*
- 1 tablespoon black peppercorns
- mustard seeds (Optional)
- 10 grams/0.35 ounces fresh parsley (plus more to garnish)
- 1 teaspoon olive oil (plus extra for greasing)
- juice of half a lemon
- one 750-gram/1.65-pound salmon fillet, defrosted
- 2 lemons, quartered
- a pinch of salt

Instructions:

For the crust:

1. Preheat the oven to 220 C/430 F.
2. Prepare the roasted (shelled) chestnuts as described in the previous recipe, or open up your package of store-bought cooked chestnuts.
3. Pop the breadcrumbs and peppercorns into a plastic bag and smash the mixture into fine crumbs. (You can use a peppercorn grinder so you don't have to smash as much!)
4. Chop the parsley and peeled chestnuts finely, add them to the breadcrumb bag, and shake the ingredients together until they are well combined.
5. Add 1 tablespoon of olive oil and the juice of half a lemon to the bag and massage the ingredients together until you have a coarse paste. Set aside.

For the salmon:

1. Before you begin cooking with your salmon, make sure that it is fully deboned. Run your finger along the edge of the salmon and use needle-nose pliers or strong tweezers to carefully pull each bone out at the same angle it is pointing.
2. Place the salmon skin side down on a well-oiled and salted baking sheet (this will help to stop it from sticking). Oil and salt the flesh side of the salmon.
3. Crumble the crust mixture on top of the salmon to cover evenly.
4. Arrange the lemon wedges around the tin. These will help provide a bit of extra moisture as well as flavor.
5. Roast for around 20 minutes or until the salmon is cooked all the way through. You can check if your salmon is done by poking a knife into it—the salmon should flake easily. If using a meat thermometer, you can also check that the thickest part of the fish reaches 50 C/125 F.

* Contrary to popular belief, panko crumbs aren't always gluten free, but the good news is that you can buy gluten-free bread crumbs on Amazon! Any other breadcrumb alternative (like GF cornflakes, potato chips, shredded coconut, shredded parmesan cheese, etc.) should work for this recipe as well.

Tips:

- Not a fish person? Try the crust on a chicken breast! Just make sure to adjust the time and temperature so that the thickest part of the chicken reaches 74 C/165 F.
- Don't eat meat? Add 1-2 teaspoons of nutritional yeast to the crust mix, pile it onto portobello mushrooms, and bake on an oiled tray for 15-20 minutes until the mushrooms are soft and cooked.
- No oven? Try out your toaster oven! Just make sure to look up the wattage and adjust the timing/temperature. As mentioned above, your fish grill will also work well for smaller cuts of salmon. Just be sure to keep an eye on it so the crust doesn't burn.
- What should I make with this salmon? Green vegetables pair well with salmon, and so do roasted potatoes, rice, or orzo pasta!
- Not enough flavor? Try adding some capers or chili flakes!
- Love gluten? Use regular bread crumbs!

Source:

[Chestnut and pepper crusted salmon fillet](#)

Kaity Hamill is a third-year ALT in Niigata, Japan. She is known for her many food allergies. Personally, she is not a salmon lover, but she knows that it is a popular fish here, so she wanted to show a recipe that can be pretty easily-adapted to fit the needs of those with allergies.

Chestnut and Sweet Potato Rice!

Kuri to Satsumaimo no Takikomi Gohan

Valerie Spreeman (Niigata)

A simple variation on the traditional *Kuri Gohan* (Chestnut Rice) this dish is a flavorful and filling side to any fall meal. Best of all, it requires very little prep, and is cooked in the rice cooker! If you want to turn this side into a true one-pot meal, you can experiment by adding other ingredients like shiitake mushrooms or shredded chicken. You can also top the rice with a little bit of honey and cinnamon if you're looking for a hearty yet sweet dish!

Ingredients:

- 2 scoops (about 300 grams) rice
- 200 grams sweet potatoes
- 70 grams cooked chestnuts**
- 2 tablespoons white dashi
- 1/2 tbsp salt
- water (enough to fill your rice cooker pot)
- black sesame seeds (as you like)

Steps:

1. Leaving the skin on, chop the sweet potatoes into small cubes (about 1 cm).
2. Add the rice (rinsed), dashi, and salt into the rice cooker pot. Add water to the appropriate fill-line* and mix well.
3. Add the chopped sweet potatoes and the chestnuts to the rice cooker pot and mix until things are distributed evenly.
4. Turn on the rice cooker and cook as per your usual settings.
5. After it has finished cooking, fluff/mix the rice and put into serveware. Add the black sesame seeds if desired.
6. Ready to eat!

*If you don't have water measuring lines for your rice cooker, a good rule of thumb is to fill up to the first knuckle of your pointer finger with your finger resting on top of the rice.

**You can substitute the store-bought chestnuts for roasted chestnuts as described previously for a slightly earthier flavor profile. Or try adding sweet chestnuts known as "*mugi*" (甘栗) for a sweeter dish.

Valerie Spreeman is a third-year ALT in Tsubame, Niigata. She is from the “Land of Cheese”—the state of Wisconsin, USA. She is not very skilled at cooking, so she feels very happy when finding a new, delicious dish that even she can make.





This interview was conducted prior to the Tokyo 2020 Olympics postponement.

Monica Abbott has represented the United States in softball in two Olympic Games: 2008 and 2020, winning silver medals on both occasions. The Tokyo Olympics definitely did not represent her only significant softball experience in Japan, having played several seasons for the Toyota Red Terriers in Aichi Prefecture. Abbott made history in 2016 when she signed a \$1 million contract with the Scrap Yard Dawgs in the National Pro Fastpitch League, becoming the first woman on a team sport in the U.S. to ink such a deal.





“... every game
holds so much
more weight!! That
competitiveness is
a challenge I love!”

Connected to Two Countries by

SOFTBALL

An Interview with Olympian Monica Abbott

Interviewed by Rashaad Jordan
(Yamagata 2008-2010, Kochi 2018-2020)





You've spent several seasons in Japan playing for Toyota. What attracted you to the country and what do you enjoy most about playing in Japan?



Japan had the best professional opportunity for me in softball post the 2008 Olympics. I wanted to continue my playing career, and Japan was the best way to do it. I love how passionate the Japanese (and Toyota) fans are! They are super loyal, consistent, and they make the atmosphere of the games very fun!



You've been able to win championships with Toyota. Aside from those titles, are there any other memorable experiences that come to mind when you think of your time on the diamond in Japan?



Obviously winning championships come with a lot of happy memories, but I have also loved getting to know the language through sport! Charades, gestures, and acting got me a long way in the very beginning, and those are some fun memories!



What have been the most challenging aspects of playing softball professionally in Japan?



I think just getting used to the different demands and culture (such as scheduling, practice, time constraints, and lifestyle). The league is very competitive, and there aren't a ton of games, so every game holds so much more weight!! That competitiveness is a challenge I love!





How do you think your 2020 Olympic experience will be different from your 2008 Olympic experience?



In 2008, I was the youngest player on Team USA, but in 2020, that story has changed. I'm also in a country that I have lived and played in for over 10 years! I think it will be really cool for me as a Team USA player to have supporters from both Japan and America!



Finally, what excites you the most about being able to participate in the Tokyo Olympics?



Being able to compete in front of and for the world as a representative of my communities, and of the sport of softball for the USA is really exciting!

Monica Abbott is a native of Northern California. After graduating from North Salinas High School, she starred at the University of Tennessee before embarking on an enormously successful professional career. Off the field, she has helped several outstanding athletes attend college through the [MA14 Scholarship Fund](#) she established.

*Rashaad Jorden was a two-time JET Program participant—first in Yamagata Prefecture from 2008 to 2010 and in Kochi Prefecture from 2018 to 2020. During his JET experiences, he completed the Tokyo Marathon in 2010 and the Kochi Ryoma Marathon twice in 2019 and 2020. He also served as the Sports Editor for **CONNECT** from September 2019 to July 2020.*






hooping

The Quest for Acceptance & Inclusion

“My personal experience playing
basketball in Japan”

Lloyd Cruickshank (Okayama)



Yay! You're moving to Japan. You've done your research, and you have somewhat of an understanding of what day-to-day life may be like there. Your anxiety begins to subside as the amount of reading you have done to that point seems adequate, and you're satisfied. Expectations begin to form in your mind as you think about the transition of your life to another country.

For some, the most important thing is the food; for others, it's the comfort of their living space; however, for a rare few, we think about extracurricular activities. We think about exercise equipment, gym memberships, availability of athletic apparel—you know, the important stuff. The sedentary lifestyle is not for us, neither are walks in the park nor hiking up mountainous terrains. No, we embrace the grueling fatigue of an intense workout and gauntlet of high-level competition to satisfy our appetite for relaxation.

Most participants on the JET Program would agree that back in their home country (especially in the Western world) the sporting scene is very active and that little effort is needed to find a decent gathering. Unfortunately, this is not the case everywhere in the world.

Expectation vs Reality

Leaving Western civilization, the comforts of your home, friends, family and all you know to come to a foreign land can be a nerve-wracking experience, so

“*hobbies are what we rely on to bring some form of normalcy to the day to day adjustment.*”

I remember thinking to myself, “I don't know when I'll come back, and there must be a wide variety of gear there, so I'll just gift all my basketball stuff to friends.” Noble gesture, right? After all, I can always get new stuff (I'm six feet three inches tall wearing a whopping 31 cm in shoe size by the way). I'm gonna be fresh and shiny throwing all those lobs at the park. It's gonna be awesome. Ha! Looking back, these thoughts are nothing short of laughable.

I wouldn't say that I'm a well-travelled person, but in the few countries I have visited, all that was required for me to play pickup basketball at the park was just having the courage to ask. However, this is Japan, and culture shock comes in all shapes and sizes. Never in my wildest dreams would I have thought that getting a quick run of basketball on a Sunday afternoon would turn out to be me being treated like a banned patron on the hip strip trying to sneak into clubs and being rejected by security. There's nothing more humbling than finding a park where people are actually playing—a bit mediocre but hey man, at this point I'll take what I can get—only to have my request denied and players standing around as if contemplating whether to leave or just wait until I do. Being the introspect that I am, I thought maybe it's just intimidating to see someone of a different ethnicity just pop up and ask to play? The plot thickens.

Having an *inside acquaintance* is more important than your *skill level*

In the prefecture where I live, not many people play basketball outdoors despite there being a plethora of quality infrastructures scattered across a number of parks. If shooting around and dabbling is all you're interested in, then these are perfect conditions for you. However, if you're anything like myself and desire some semblance of team play or basic competition, then this is far from ideal. At first it was like searching for that one senior's party in high school that you weren't invited to but decided you were still going to crash because YOLO.

When did something as simple as finding a park to play basketball become so difficult? After much disappointment and asking around and thinking, I'll just have to settle for playing with the students from the basketball club at my job. Then the coworker tasked with handling my paperwork in Japan approached me. "Do you play basketball?" he asked, "I heard you play basketball." From whom? *You little Facebook stalker*, I thought to myself. But I was itching for anything basketball-related, so I entertained the conversation, which luckily for me blossomed into an invite (which I thought very little of at the time). But I later realized that's how you get into sporting activities outside of the high school clubs here.

Getting in may be difficult but once in, you're basically planted

Great. I had something to look forward to in a couple of days. *I'm so excited*, I thought. I just had to get a pair of sneakers. This was a whole story in and of itself, but let's table that for another day. After a few hours calling every known sporting goods store around the city, we found one pair of 32 cm sneakers; a little loose around the toes but I'll take it. We picked up the shoes and headed to the court. Finally! After weeks of searching, I got to play some basketball. Some obvious differences aside, the aim was still the same: put the ball in the hoop more times than the other team. I was euphoric but in the back of my mind yearning for more, so I asked when was the next day. Next week, same place, same time . . . maybe. Maybe? One week? Did I jump the gun? What's with the maybe?

During the car ride home, in conversation with my coworker, I mentioned my desire to play more often and that I've been searching for a while for places to play. He used whatever little command of English he had to ask me to wait a couple of days for him to call around and ask "permission," yes! He used Google translate and everything.

Permission if he could take me to these other venues to play. The wait, while daunting, didn't bother me as much, for at the very least I now had one place where I could play on a weekly basis . . . maybe? While waiting and hoping for a favorable response, unbeknownst to me, the basketball network was buzzing about a Jamaican basketball player who was decent at playing.

Then, just like those little kids walking through that magical closet door, it was like I was ingratiated into *The Chronicles of Narnia*. Every night was a different venue, some with the same players but a never ending surplus of competitive basketball. I was invited to join a few teams but chose to join the team my coworker played for because who bites the hand that feeds them? That's a no-brainer. Now I was happy; I had something to look forward to in the evenings. I felt overjoyed and satisfied, but everything has a price. Everything.



Be prepared to do things
outside of just playing

Group inclusion is deeply entrenched in Japanese culture. A part of this is the *enkai* (eating and drinking together), something that I find very unique and fascinating at times, but never would I have thought it would extend to basketball. I've only ever been used to showing up, hooping, talking with friends for a bit after playing, then leaving. Not here. The first few invites to join them for food and drinks seemed harmless, and I was in a honeymoon state of mind from finally playing meaningful basketball, so I obliged. After a while, it began to feel overwhelming as I was playing with a number of groups on different days of the week. Was being greedy and wanting to play as much as possible coming back to haunt me? Did I bite off more than I could chew? Was I the token foreigner and everyone wanted their pound of flesh?

I soon found out that declining an invite to attend can be offensive, and not having my own mode of transportation made it all the more difficult to do so. There wasn't a rule that one must hang out; it was more implied. With my designated driver being such a cool guy and coming to the realization that accommodating me was a whole experience for him as well, he too was in a honeymoon phase of our basketball version of club hopping or concert touring. So with all this in mind, I felt pressure to attend. After some delicate questioning, it was revealed that a person not being interested in joining these small somewhat intimate gatherings may be perceived as not liking the group of players who tendered the invitation. This was fast becoming a hands-on course in public relations and Japanese basketball etiquette; and with the frequency of daily play for one group of players as low as "maybe next week," should my approach be adjusting to this as the new normal? I could always return to the outdoor park and settle for mediocrity with hopes of them seeing me enough times that they become comfortable with me playing. At least then I wouldn't have to see them at work after turning down an invitation to eat afterwards.

Japanese style and structure of playing will differ from what you know and are accustomed to. I can't quite explain it, but simple things such as trash-talking, individual competition or 1 vs 1 match ups within a game, taking three shots in a row (even though two of these shots scored), and "over celebrating" after making a shot are all discouraged. Just like the enkai invite, these are part of the unwritten rules that must be adhered to or you risk being "frozen out" of a game. Ultimately due to these differences and some personal reasons, I quit the team, and it was like I fell off a cliff and didn't exist anymore. I can still go to courts and play; that was not retracted, however, the friendly texts, teaching me Japanese phrases, invites to enkai, and the basic "how're you doing?" messages have all stopped, everything. Now I maintain a somewhat good enough relationship with at least one person from each venue, so should I feel the urge to play, I can text and ask if it's okay to swing by. However, now that we're experiencing a global pandemic, I haven't been playing as much, so I haven't visited a number of these gyms as I'm doing my part to "flatten the curve."

Through my experiences I've more or less ironed out a guide on how to get ingratiated into your hobby of choice.

Here are

Ask a lot of questions: Most times, it is best to ask the teachers in charge of the sports clubs at your school. Some may have no clue, but quite a number of them either do or know where you can get involved.

Have an inside man: It is easier to be accepted and re-invited when you have a direct connection with at least one person once you've found a group that shares your hobby.

Lower your expectations: Chances are the frequency of the group gathering is pretty low so adjust your expectations to once or twice per week . . . maybe.

A full-page background image featuring a basketball hoop and ball. The entire image is overlaid with a semi-transparent red filter. A dark, curved shape, resembling a basketball, is positioned in the upper left, partially obscuring the text.

some tips :

Don't over-commit: I learned this the hard way. Most clubs/teams/groups engage in gatherings outside of their hobbies/activities, so committing to more than one group can become physically and mentally taxing.

Be open to adjustments: Figure out their way of doing things. Observe to see if you can identify any “unwritten rules” or norms, and assess if these are things you’re comfortable with. No one wants an inadvertent conflict of opinions, especially in an environment geared toward relaxation.

*Lloyd Cruickshank is an Okayama JET Program participant from Kingston, Jamaica. He is also the current Head of Design for **CONNECT** Magazine. On his days off, if he's not dabbling in art-related material, you can find him deep in a book or on the court working out and helping the next generation of players.*

LANGUAGE

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Sarah Baughn

"Remember this in the darkest moments, when the work doesn't seem worth it, and change seems just out of reach: out of our willingness to push through comes a tremendous power . . . Use it."

— Stacey Abrams

LANGUAGE DESIGNER

Phoebe Jin

"There is virtue in work and there is virtue in rest. Use both and overlook neither."

— Alan Cohen

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Day Bulger

"When captured birds grow wiser, they try to open the cage with their beaks. They don't give up because they want to fly again." — Genma Shiranui, Naruto





Halloween Lesson Plans

The Halloween lesson is a hallowed tradition for ALTs in Japan, so it's not a bad idea to keep a few unique lesson plans in your back pocket. As Halloween approaches, please enjoy some of these fun lesson plans put together by our community and let us know if you use any of them!

Future Tense: Halloween Fortune Tellers

Rachel Fagundes (Okayama)

I'm a *fiend* for Halloween, so from the first of October—it's ON. Students love anything to do with witches and ghosts, but most JHS teachers are busy enough getting through the textbook and don't have time to spend just talking about the holiday. So instead, I incorporate Halloween into every grammar lesson and activity that I do throughout the month. Are we practicing "I know how to" phrases? Great! It's time for the students to learn *how to kill vampires*, and so on and so forth.

The point is to get students engaged and excited to use the language they have been learning in class by putting a Halloween spin on your English activities.

Here is one of my lesson plans from the merry month of October.

Grade Level: JHS 2nd Year

Goal: Speaking, Listening, Writing.

Future tense questions and answers.

My students learn the future tense in October, so instead of having them ask each other the usual dull questions ("Will you study English tomorrow?" / "Yes, I will."), we use Halloween themed "cootie catchers" (the folded paper fortune tellers of your middle school slumber parties) to peer into the mysteries of the future.

What you need:

1. [Halloween Cootie Catcher printout](#)
2. [Worksheet](#)

Prep:

Print out worksheets and the cootie catchers. Cut the extra paper away from the cootie catchers. This will make it easy for the kids to fold them quickly in class.

Also, talk to your JTE about how cootie catchers work and practice the demonstration with them.

In class:

Hand out the worksheets and walk the kids through the grammar of asking spooky questions. "Will I see a ghost tomorrow?", "Will I marry a vampire?", and "Will I become a werewolf on Halloween?" are examples I like to use since they give students the grammar they need for the ever-popular questions: "Will I marry [insert crush's name here]?" and "Will I become a [insert dream job here]?"

Have the students brainstorm and write their own questions on their worksheets. They can be spooky Halloween-themed or not, whatever the students want to ask, they just can't be identical to the examples provided.

Demonstrate with the JTE using the cootie catchers to ask and answer questions. Instructions are a bit complicated for those unfamiliar, so they are also written in Japanese on the worksheet.

Hand out the cootie catchers and show the students how to fold them.

Have the students make pairs and ask one another questions using their cootie catchers to answer.

Students then write down responses on their worksheets.

*Rachel Fagundes is an unstoppable Halloween machine who spends the other 11 months of the year waiting for October. She is also the Head Editor of **CONNECT**.*



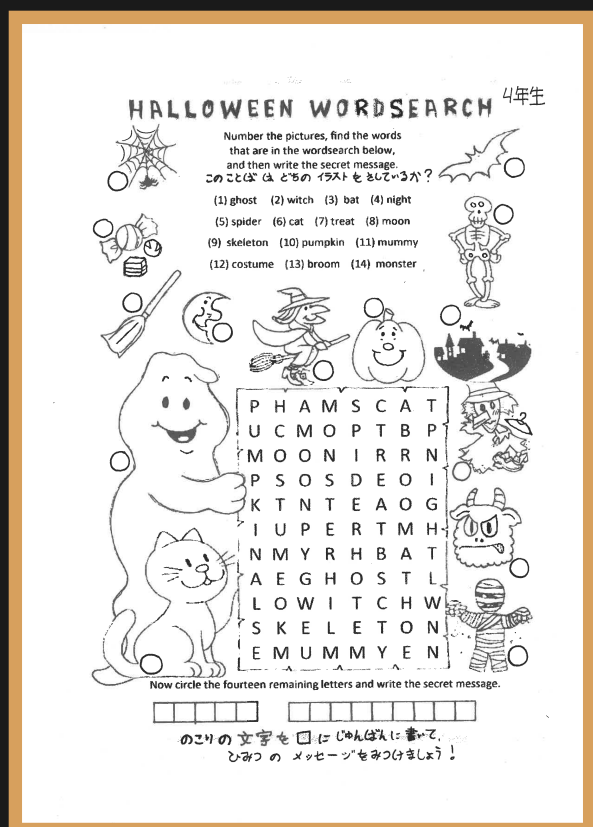
Spooky Scary Study

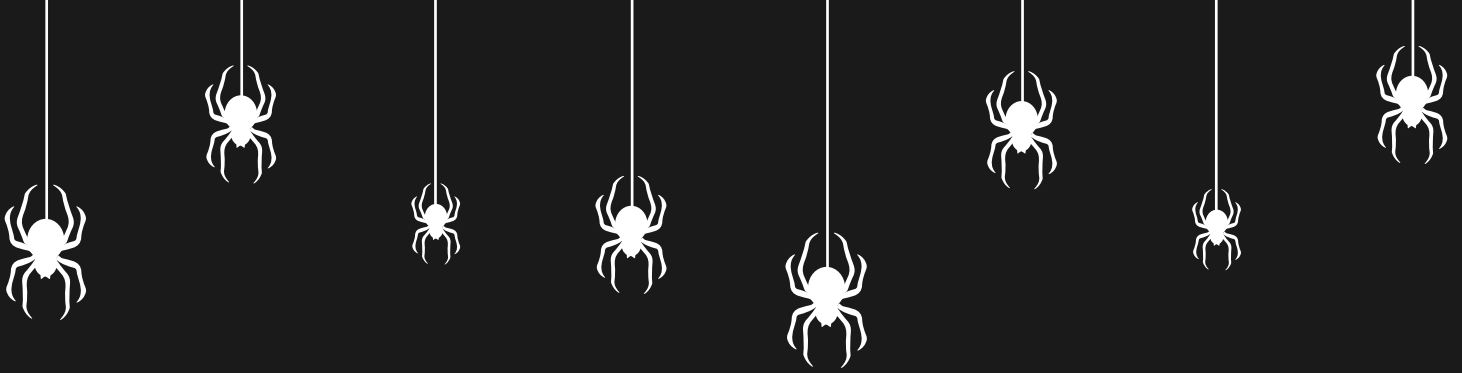
Dahlia Lamelin (Gunma)

For elementary school children who don't yet know how to read or write, teachers need to get a little creative with activities that are both fun and educational. For holidays, I always make sure to include some level of review and plan lessons accordingly. For third and fourth grade, I use a lot of resources from [islCollective](https://www.islcollective.com/), which I modify to suit my students and their level, adding a sprinkle of fun on top.

Halloween comes around at the same time as the alphabet unit in the *Let's Try* textbook, so I focus on making them see and recognize letters with a themed word search. With some vocabulary picture cards as a warm-up practice, we focus on repeating along with scary gestures related to the theme. The focus being on matching upper and lowercase letters in a word search activity for fourth-grade vocabulary words. This is a good introduction to the variations of the alphabet. For lower-level students or even special needs classes, simply deciphering the words and matching the pictures is a possible alternative. The children who finish first can color the images while waiting for the next activity, and no one feels left behind.

As for third grade, October arrives after lessons presenting colors, numbers, and feelings, so it comes as a perfect opportunity to review while making it entertaining. With this worksheet, they have to match the emotional pumpkins with the

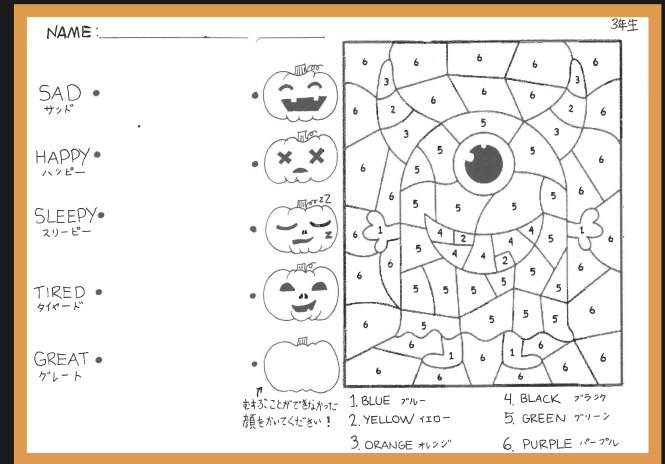




vocabulary and draw the one remaining unmatched expression on the last blank gourd.

As a last review, the color-by-number picture familiarizes them with the colors and their spelling as well as their pronunciation via katakana. These activities go well for most levels and are a delight with a spooky playlist or a Halloween-themed video played in class while they finish their worksheets. Spooky Scary Study!

Dahlia is a fourth-year JET that likes getting lost in the countryside and promoting the spooky lifestyle.



Monster Mash

Meg Lue (Fukui)

One of my favorite Halloween activities to do with my kids is a drawing game I call Monster Mash! This game is really easy, requires very little prep time, and is extremely flexible. It can be as short as 10 minutes and take up to as much as 30 or more. All you will need is a monster you created (before class), some whiteboard and whiteboard markers, and your best Halloween mask (last item optional for kicks and giggles). For reference, I teach junior high, though this activity could easily be adapted for all learner levels!

To start, I draw a couple simple monsters on the board, ask my students what they are, then review their names in English as a little warm-up. After the warm-up, I tell my kids that I saw a monster the other day, but I need their help to draw it so I

can see it again! I have them break up into teams while I pass out whiteboards and tell the kids that I will describe the monster I saw to them. How easy or difficult each of these descriptors can depend on what grade level you're teaching. You can use something as simple as "It had three arms" or something as complex as "It had two long arms on the right side and one short arm on the left." If you do this activity with paper and markers, you can also throw color descriptors into the mix too.

After each description, have the students pass the whiteboard to the next student to make sure that everyone in the group gets at least one chance to draw and add something to the creature.

Once you have finished describing your monster, have the kids bring their whiteboards to the front so that the class can see the monster

Tip 1: It's best to start with describing the body and head of the monster so the students know where to place everything else!

Tip 2: Before the game, you might need to teach the English for less humanistic descriptions that wouldn't normally be in their vocabulary, like tails, horns, wings, etc.



that each team drew, and there are definitely some chaotic drawings that happen. Now you can reveal the monster you drew before class, and the team with the monster most similar to your own is the prize winner!



This was the monster I made for last year's game!

Meg Luedtke is a third-year JET living the small town life who enjoys all things travel, art, and Japan-related. Halloween is her favorite holiday so she often has a great deal of fun teaching the kids how to "trick-or-treat," a trick her students often end up using to pester their other teachers.



The Pumpkin Face Game

Dianne Yett (Gunma)

This is a game that a friend of mine shared with me which I've used with my third-year elementary school students before, but the game is perfect for any grade level. I created 15-17 large playmats out of discarded poster paper, each roughly A3-sized or bigger (big enough to have a large playing field but small enough to fit on a student's desk). Each playmat has a large pumpkin drawn and colored with markers (or the mats can be giant cut-outs of pumpkins). Then, I made an equal number of envelopes containing construction paper cut-outs of all the face pieces needed: two eyes, a nose, and a mouth. You can make

the pieces look any way you want, but basic triangles for the eyes and nose work. I cut out the mouths in the shapes of classic jack-o'-lantern mouths with block teeth.

For demonstrating the game, I made extra face pieces backed with magnets to stick to the blackboard and hung one of the playmats up with magnets. Students play the game in pairs, with one student blindfolded (or closing their eyes) while the other student directs the blindfolded student with any of the following commands: "Up!" "Down!" "Left!" "Right!" and "Stop!" The blindfolded student will take a face piece, start anywhere on the playmat, and move the piece in the direction of their partner's commands until they hear "STOP." Then, the blindfolded student will let go without looking and take the next face piece.

The process continues until all face pieces have been placed, at which point, the blindfolded student may look at the resultant jack-o'-lantern face and laugh at the absurdity. After the first try, the students can switch roles as often as time allows, and that's the game!



Dianne is an Assistant Language Teacher in Gunma Prefecture and Copy Editor for CONNECT. Halloween is her second favorite holiday because she likes using it as an excuse to cosplay outside of anime conventions. It is second only to Christmas, which is also her birthday.

Spooky Fly Swatter Vocabulary Race

Sami Marks (Ishikawa)

Grade Level: Elementary School, first and second grade

Materials: Halloween-themed vocabulary cards, fly swatters (1 for each team), stickers as prizes

Time: ~15 minutes

Lesson Plan:

1. (5 minutes) First, introduce the students to the target vocabulary. Show the vocabulary card, say the word aloud, and have the students repeat after you at least two times. Go through all the cards, then run through once more at the end to ensure comprehension.

Now it's time for the fun to begin.

2. Divide the class into teams, then have the students make lines behind their team leader (or whoever's at the front of the column).

3. Give the first person in the line a fly swatter (or whatever other soft pointer-type thing you have. I once used fluffy cat toys.)

4. Display the cards on the board. Make sure none of them are too high that the smaller children can't reach them with the fly swatter. Repeat the vocabulary words one more time for review.

Go!

5. And the game begins. When you say a word, the first students must run to the board and touch the correct card with the fly swatter. If they get it right, their team gets a point.

6. The first student then returns to their team and hands the fly swatter to the next student in line as they move to the back.

7. Repeat. The team with the most points wins! Give stickers out generously.

Sami is an ALT in Ishikawa favoring the brutally honest yet cute ES students over the feisty JHS students any day.



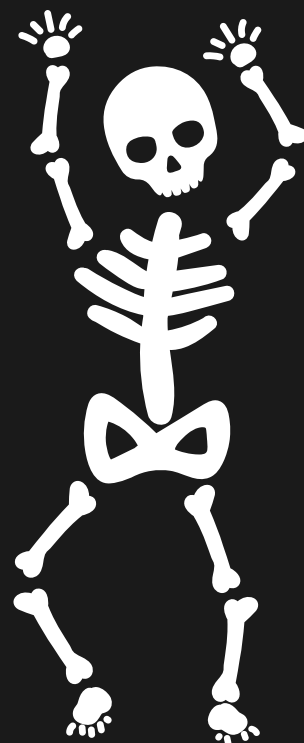
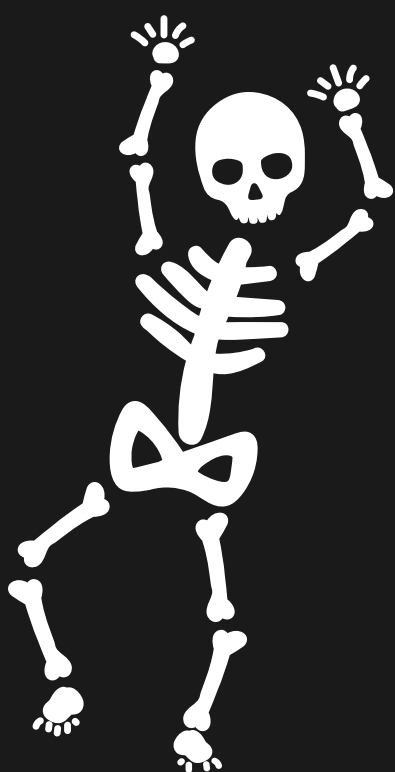
language corner

Halloween (ハロウィン) Monthly Vocabulary (月の単語)

- ◆ Vampire 吸血鬼 (きゅうけつき) ((kyuuketsuki))
- ◆ Ghost お化け (おばけ) ((obake))
- ◆ Witch 魔女 (まじょ) ((majo))
- ◆ Mummy 木乃伊 (ミイラ) ((miira))
- ◆ Skeleton 骸骨 (がいこつ) ((gaikotsu))
- ◆ Bat 蝙蝠 (こうもり) ((koumori))
- ◆ Pumpkin 南瓜 (かぼちゃ) ((kabocha))
- ◆ Spider 蜘蛛 (くも) ((kumo))
- ◆ Orange オレンジ ((orenji))
- ◆ Black 黒 (くろ) ((kuro))

Pun of the Month (月の親父ギャグ)

- ◆ ニューヨークで入浴。 (nyuu yoku de nyuuyoku.)
"Take a bath in New York."





TEACHING TO THE OVERVIEW OF ENGLISH PROFICIENCY TESTS

Sarah Baughn (Ishikawa)

As the world's most studied language, the English language has a multitude of tests available to test your skills. Though most people in Japan default to the Eiken, there are three other popular English proficiency test options that deserve consideration when coaching students on what exams will help them reach their goals: TOEFL, TOEIC, and IELTS. This article will begin by offering a brief overview of the Eiken test. However, as a result of the Eiken test's lack of validity among many foreign institutions, it's important to at least understand the basics of some of the many different test options available.

Eiken

The *Nihon Eigo Kentei Kyokai* (commonly referred to as Eiken) proficiency test is the most commonly-known exam in Japan and is the test English teachers and ALTs will most often be asked to assist with.

It's run by a public-interest foundation and is supported by the Ministry of Education in Japan. The exam has been around for over 50 years and is likely the one you'll see most advertised in Japanese academic institutions because of that existing foundation. A plus for English learners who would like to see their studies line up with some sort of official standard is that the Eiken exam offers a structure that is congruent with the current Japanese curriculum for learning English. In terms of the exam timeline and payment, it's also offered more frequently and at around half the price of other English exams in Japan.

There's a total of seven levels, from Grade 5 to Grade 1, including Grade Pre-2 and Grade Pre-1.

Grades 5 and 4 are aimed towards Japanese junior high schoolers in their first and second years and only require them to pass a listening test, though they're given the option to take a speaking test as well.

Grade 3 is aimed for graduating junior high schoolers and adds in a required interview-format speaking test. Grade Pre-2, aimed for high school students, ups the difficulty by adding a reading and writing section and is followed by

E TEST: AN GLISH STS IN JAPAN

Grade 2, a level aimed towards high school graduates. Grades Pre-1 and 1 are intended for university students and others aiming for a high level of fluency.

Though the test is set up differently depending on the level taken, an interesting quality for a Japanese test (as opposed to, for example, the JLPT) is that the Eiken's speaking test is required from Grade 3 and on. The speaking tests for each level vary in content and what's required, but they follow a similar, strict script in how the student enters the room and engages with the interviewer. All teachers interested in preparing their students for the Eiken should look into the guidelines of their specific grade to help students become used to the exact speech format. There are interactive videos on the Eiken website that can help demonstrate the format. Unlike the other English proficiency tests I'll be listing, the Eiken is a pass or fail test.

However, it's worth mentioning that the speaking section is graded kindly, with points given to students who speak any amount of English even if it's not entirely relevant to the question. Therefore, the focus is mostly on the listening and reading portions of the test.

It's also important to note that for students aiming to get into a competitive college abroad in an English-speaking country, it's unlikely to be considered an acceptable alternative to the TOEFL, TOEIC, or IELTS exams. As it's an exam made in Japan for Japanese nationals, its primary usage is as a benchmark in Japan for businesses and schools that require English. That being said, the highest level of Eiken (Grade 1) uses difficult vocabulary, and the listening section uses some difficult, though short, college-level English material and requires a two-minute-long impromptu speech on difficult topics; meaning

it's still a decent indicator of English fluency. Japanese teachers of English are also required to pass the test at differing grades depending on their school level of choice (i.e. Junior High School versus High School).

Overall, Eiken is cheaper, more well-known, and more widely available compared to the other English proficiency exams in Japan. It's a great option for students that want to test their English to get certified or test out certain entrance exam requirements in Japan.

TOEFL

The TOEFL (Test of English as a Foreign Language) is an exam created and given by ETS (Educational Testing Service, the same organization that gives the GRE) to test English language proficiency. This is the test often required for English-language schools abroad, particularly in the United States. Many college admissions departments require either this exam or the TOEIC, an English exam also given by the ETS. The TOEFL actually does have different levels to test proficiency as well, titled TOEFL Primary, TOEFL Junior, TOEFL iTP, and TOEFL iBT.

The top level of TOEFL, the TOEFL iBT is the hardest of the available English language exams as it's meant for more difficult academic English on a college or graduate school level. It requires test takers to listen to five-minute-long college lectures and answer questions relating to them, with some of the English being very difficult. The TOEFL is scored by section, where reading and listening is on a scaled score from 0-30, with 30 being the highest. The speaking and writing are scored between 0-4 and 0-5, respectively.

As opposed to the Eiken, the TOEFL is created and provided by English-language speakers in the United States and is focused on testing academic English ability. In terms of test preparation, the TOEFL will require a significantly larger amount of effort because it isn't based on the Japanese English-language curriculum.

TOEIC

The TOEIC (Test of English for International Communications) is another exam created by the ETS and is referred to as the “global standard” for assessing business English. It’s more aimed towards adults in the business world, but the nature of the test (answering 200 questions within two hours) makes it less difficult than the TOEFL. This test is a great option for those who want to show proficiency to get a job of some sort that doesn’t require the academic rigor of the TOEFL.

The TOEIC is scored on a scale from 10-990, with a score over 905 being considered desirable to work comfortably in an international business setting.

What makes the TOEIC so simple is that test takers can actually choose to take just the listening and reading sections or the writing sections separately. The reading passages are more based on business documents, such as invoices, credit memos, and purchase orders, as opposed to the more academic documents and reading excerpts on the TOEFL and higher levels of the Eiken.

Overall, the test is oriented towards business professionals—it’s a bit easier than other options, and it’s a shorter exam than those previously mentioned. However, because it’s more specific and people can choose how they take the exam, it’s not as reliable as the others.



IELTS

The IELTS (International English Language Testing System) is an exam given by the British Council that’s used in Australia, Canada, New Zealand, the United Kingdom, and occasionally, the United States. The IELTS is used to test for universities, workplaces, and immigration into English-speaking countries. It tests speaking, writing, reading, and listening on a scale from 0-9, with 0 being a complete fail and 9 being an “expert user.”

The IELTS is a shorter exam compared to the competing TOEFL, but a bit more expensive. It's also seen to be slightly easier than TOEFL due to the IELTS having a broader range that focuses on more real-world communication as opposed to TOEFL's academic focus. It's not as business-focused as the TOEIC, focusing more on students studying abroad or aspiring emigrants.

In short, the IELTS is the comparative exam to the TOEFL for those considering colleges or more difficult English opportunities in English-speaking countries that are not the United States. For those emigrating or wanting to go to the United Kingdom or Australia in particular, the IELTS is the best, most widely accepted option.

In summary, there are a large variety of English proficiency tests, all with different strategies, formats, and uses. Though the Japanese default is the Eiken, it's important to keep in mind the other tests that might better serve students with different long-term goals. So it's not a bad idea to promote the awareness of these other existing tests. Though knowledge of the subject material is, of course, the most important requisite to passing an exam, knowledge of the format and specific rules will help students feel more

comfortable and confident in themselves come test day.

*Sarah Baughn is a former Ishikawa JET and the Language Section Editor for **CONNECT**. She spends perhaps too much time studying Japanese and language learning strategies, but also enjoys collecting goshuin, playing video games, and learning koto.*



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"I've been to almost as many places as my luggage." — Bob Hope

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"Some people feel the rain, others just get wet." — Bob Marley

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"An artist's duty as far as I'm concerned is to reflect the times." — Nina Simone

COMMUNITY DESIGNER

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*"There is virtue in work and there is virtue in rest. Use both and overlook neither."
— Alan Cohen*

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Dianne Yett

"Monday for me is like waking up and stumbling very quickly down a flight of stairs only to land perfectly on your feet at the bottom and wondering how in the actual hell you managed that." — Self

TY



The Three C's of Flying

Customs, Confinement, and Cold Bento

Lauren Bertolino (Gifu)

So you want to fly to Japan! That's the easy part. Although COVID-era travel restrictions have made the process of entering Japan much more difficult than it once was, being prepared and knowing what to expect can help make the process smoother. I stressed out about this way more than I needed to, so I hope that this guide can help you navigate the process of entering Japan and make the entire experience less daunting.

BEFORE DEPARTURE

The process of returning starts before you've even boarded the plane. Like most countries right now, Japan requires a negative COVID test to enter the country. This isn't as simple as a take-home COVID test or rapid antigen test from the drug store. The Japanese government requires a specific type of test within 72 hours of departure, plus a form from the [Ministry of Foreign Affairs \(MOFA\)](#) to be signed by a medical professional. Having the incorrect type of COVID test, being outside the 72-hour window, or having the form incorrectly filled out, can all be grounds to reject your entry into the country. Everyone you are travelling with, including young children, must have a negative test and the form filled out.

Note the acceptable sample types and test types. You can ask your testing facility about them if you aren't sure you are getting an acceptable test.

This is what the form looks like:

採取材料
Sample
(下記)
/Check
below
☐ 鼻
Nas

☐ 唾

☐ 鼻
ぬぐい
Nasoph
oroph



Quarantine Station,
Ministry of Health, Labour and Welfare, Japanese Government

COVID-19 に関する検査証明
Certificate of Testing for COVID-19

交付年月日
Date of issue _____

氏名 _____ パスポート番号 _____
Name _____, Passport No. _____
国籍 _____ 生年月日 _____ 性別 _____
Nationality _____, Date of Birth _____, Sex _____

上記の者の COVID-19 に関する検査を行った結果、その結果は下記のとおりである。
よって、この証明を交付する。
This is to certify the following results which have been confirmed by testing
for COVID-19 conducted with the sample taken from the above-mentioned person.

検体 Specimen (いずれかをチェック Check one of the boxes)	検査法 Testing Method for COVID-19 (下記いずれかをチェック/Check one of the boxes below)	結果 Result	①結果判明日 Test Result Date ②検体採取日時 Specimen Collection Date and Time	備考 Remarks
咽頭ぬぐい液 Soparyngeal Swab	<input type="checkbox"/> 核酸増幅検査 (RT-PCR 法) Nucleic acid amplification test (RT-PCR)	<input type="checkbox"/> 陰性 Negative	① Date (yyyy /mm /dd) ____/____/____	
唾液 Saliva	<input type="checkbox"/> 核酸増幅検査 (LAMP 法) Nucleic acid amplification test (LAMP)	<input type="checkbox"/> 陽性 Positive → 入国不可 No entry into Japan	② Date (yyyy /mm /dd) Time AM/PM : ____	
咽頭ぬぐい液と咽頭 ぬぐい液の混合 Soparyngeal and Soparyngeal swabs	<input type="checkbox"/> 核酸増幅検査 (TMA 法) Nucleic acid amplification test (TMA)			
	<input type="checkbox"/> 核酸増幅検査 (TRC 法) Nucleic acid amplification test (TRC)			
	<input type="checkbox"/> 核酸増幅検査 (Smart Amp 法) Nucleic acid amplification test (Smart Amp)			
	<input type="checkbox"/> 核酸増幅検査 (NEAR 法) Nucleic acid amplification test (NEAR)			
	<input type="checkbox"/> 次世代シーケンス法 Next generation sequence			
	<input type="checkbox"/> 抗原定量検査* Quantitative antigen test* (CLEIA/ECEIA)			

* 抗原定性検査ではない。
Not a qualitative antigen test.

医療機関名 Name of Medical institution _____
住所 Address of the institution _____
医師名 Signature by doctor _____

印影
An imprint of a
seal

Note that your
passport number,
nationality, date of
birth, etc. must be
filled in accurately.
Bring your passport
with you to the
testing facility.

Note your test date.
Sample must be
collected within the
72-hour window.
Make sure the
facility can return
your test results in
time for you to fly.

Note the place for a
doctor's signature
(many people have
had pharmacists or
lab techs sign off
with no problem. I
had mine signed by
a Registered
Nurse).

So, where do you get tested? Doctors' offices, urgent care facilities, hospitals, and pharmacies offer COVID tests, but you should always check in advance that they offer the correct type of test and can return results in time for your flight. **Be specific about the type of test you need and bring the paperwork with you!** There are also private companies or labs that offer tests specifically for travelers. In a pinch, some airports offer COVID testing, but last minute options tend to be pricier. Tests can range from around \$100-\$300 USD, so be prepared for that. Always double check that your paperwork is correctly filled out. The airline will check your test results before you are allowed to board the plane.

ON THE FLIGHT

The flight itself was very comfortable since it was nearly empty. I had an entire row to myself. On the flight, you are required to wear your mask at all times, even while sleeping. During the flight, they will hand out a pledge you have to sign, detailing the apps you must use and the rules of quarantine for Japan.

LANDING IN JAPAN

Once your flight lands in Japan, you will go through a series of entry procedures including getting tested again, setting up apps on your phone, making sure you understand the quarantine restrictions, and waiting for the results of your COVID test, as well as the usual customs, immigration, and luggage retrieval. Your paperwork will be checked every step of the way, so it may be handy to bring a folder or file to put your documents in. The entire process could take anywhere from one to five hours, so you might want to use the restroom before getting off the plane.

The airport COVID test is a saliva test. You are given a test tube that you spit into up to a certain mark. It can be a little difficult to do this if you are dehydrated, but drinking liquids immediately before can affect your results, so try to stay hydrated during the flight.

Next, airport staff will help you set up the apps for your phone, which the government will use to check in on your location and health during quarantine. There are three apps: *COVID-19 Contact App*, *MySOS*, and Google or Apple maps. They will walk you through the set-up and how to use each app.

Then you will wait for your COVID test results. For most people, this was the longest part of the process. If your test is positive, you will be escorted to a designated medical facility. If your test is negative, then you will be escorted to customs and immigration.

This may sound like a lot, but the entire process runs pretty smoothly. There are multiple signs and staff available to guide you through each step seamlessly. They provide English support when needed and thoroughly explain the apps and quarantine process. While it may be tedious, it should not be stressful.

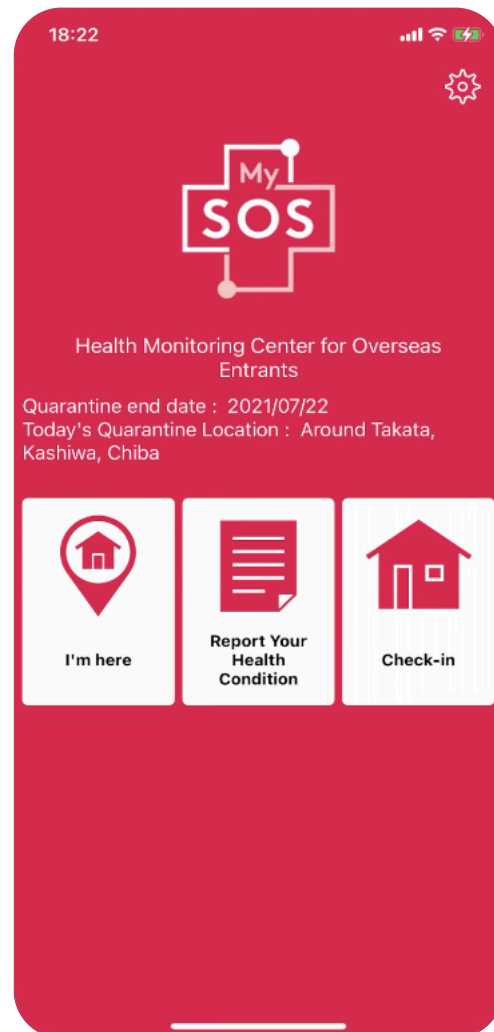
THE QUARANTINE HOTEL

Travelers entering Japan without valid vaccine passports are required to quarantine for 14 days. Depending on where you are flying in from, you may be allowed to go directly to your home or other quarantine location, or you may be required to stay in a designated government-run quarantine hotel for three, six or ten days before being allowed to continue on. The government of Japan pays for your stay. You can find the list of Japan's quarantine requirements by location on the Ministry of Foreign Affairs' [website](#).

Starting in October, travelers with a valid vaccine passport showing two doses of the Pfizer, Moderna, or AstraZeneca vaccines may be allowed to shorten their total 14-day quarantine down to 10 days, and/or shorten or skip the amount of time required in a quarantine hotel before being allowed to self-isolate at home.



At the hotel (and throughout your quarantine regardless of location) you are required to check in using the MySOS app. You will receive prompts twice a day to report your current location, a video call once a day to verify your whereabouts (usually in the morning), and also be asked to report your health condition every day at 11:00 a.m. If you miss a check in, just make sure to respond to the next one. The app also shows what day your quarantine ends.



On the third day, you take another saliva test. Samples were collected at 7:00 a.m. and results were delivered around 1:00 p.m. If your COVID test comes back negative, you can leave the hotel! Those who entered via Haneda or Narita will be taken back to the airport and must proceed to their quarantine destination from there. Those who came in from Nagoya, however, are allowed to leave directly from the hotel.

THE REMAINDER OF QUARANTINE

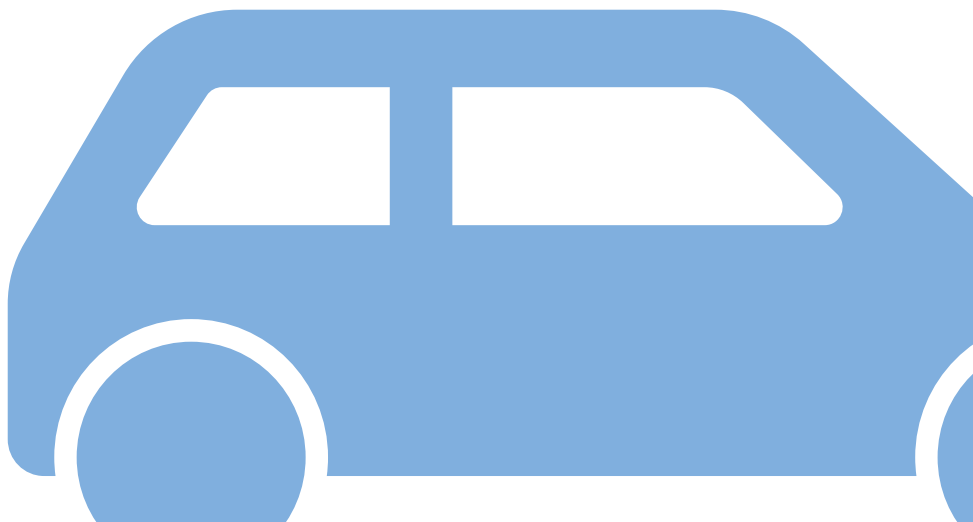
After you leave the quarantine hotel, you will still need to isolate somewhere for the remainder of the 14 days. You can do this at home, at a friend's or relative's home, or in a hotel or AirBnB. Unlike the government-run quarantine facility, you must reserve and pay for these accommodations yourself. If you are staying with friends or family, you are asked to stay in a separate part of the house. If you are travelling with someone, you are allowed to stay together.

Getting to your home or hotel can be tricky, so it's good to plan in advance. You are not allowed to use public transportation of any sort, so you may need to be picked up by a friend or rent a car. There are also private car services that you can hire. For people arriving in Narita, there is a [special quarantine train](#) service for international arrivals travelling to Ueno station.

After you arrive at your quarantine location, check in with the MySOS app. You are allowed to leave for necessary errands as long as you do not use public transportation and remain masked. They ask that you engage in countermeasures to prevent spreading the infection, including frequently washing your hands and avoiding the three C's: closed spaces, crowded places, and close-contact.

My final word of advice is that, while they are quite strict about getting your initial COVID test paperwork filled out correctly, the rest of the entry and quarantine process is not as scary as it seems. You will receive lots of help and clear instructions from the moment you land in Japan. Just do your best to follow the quarantine procedures explained to you at the airport, and you will be OK.

Good luck and have a safe flight!



The Quarantine Pledge

The [quarantine pledge](#) asks that you stay at an accommodation facility or at home and avoid contact with others for 14 days. You are not allowed to use public transportation (including trains, buses, taxis, and domestic flights) for the duration. Be sure to install the required applications on your smartphone as well as turn on your location history, respond to daily video calls and check-ins, and report your health. Following all the rules will help prevent legal troubles from befalling you or your residency status.

Note: This may sound really strict and scary, but you won't get deported for missing one video check-in while you are in the shower. The process is designed to accommodate real people, so just do your best to follow the rules and you will be fine.

Note: All Incoming JET Program participants will be put up in a hotel in Tokyo for the full 14-day quarantine period and do not need to worry about transitioning from a quarantine hotel to other accommodations.

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES:

[Return to Japan Support Group](#)
[Ministry of Foreign Affairs' Website](#)
[Quarantine Pledge](#)
[Special Quarantine Train](#)

*Lauren likes waking up to mountains everyday
and doesn't like writing biographies of herself.*

THE WRITERS OF “Elsewhere”

Creating a COVID-proof Writing Community

Dianne Yett (Gunma)



Finding Passion and Solace in the Pandemic

This pandemic has challenged many people around the globe to reassess their day-to-day lives. It's important now more than ever to find something that sparks joy in us. For me, that was the encouragement I received by joining the NaNoWriMo organization and community.

What is NaNoWriMo?

National Novel Writing Month, or “NaNoWriMo” for short, is to writers what “Artober” is to artists: it is one month out of the year that writers from around the world each set a personal goal to write 50,000 words in the month of November. While most writers (like myself) choose to write novels, other writers can write literally anything they want, be it fiction, nonfiction, a memoir, a journal, a blog, a comic book, or a computer program. Whatever project requires words—so

long as it reaches 50,000 of them by November 30—is perfectly acceptable. That's it! Seems easy enough, right?

But, of course, writing is rarely that simple. Have you ever written a 50,000-word novel in a month? If not, then it must seem incredibly daunting! That's where we fellow writers come into play. When you make a free account on NaNoWriMo.org, you can connect to a community of writers in your region, and around the world, who can provide you with support and encouragement. You can also find a wealth of tools and resources to help track your progress and improve your writing.

I should clarify that NaNoWriMo.org is NOT a word processor, nor is it a website for showcasing your work. NaNoWriMo is also not a contest. Every writer that participates could theoretically “win” provided that they individually achieve the goal of 50,000 words. The reward for winning is the personal satisfaction of completing your first draft of a *whole novel* in the span of a month. That's really impressive!

Why Participate in NaNoWriMo?

NaNoWriMo is a way for writers to help motivate each other. I know very well what it feels like to be stuck in a rut creatively, having nobody to bounce ideas off of or motivate me to *just keep writing*. Prior to joining NaNoWriMo.org in 2019, I wrote creatively off and on for years, my brain fogging over with all kinds of ideas that just seemed to go nowhere. But when the Municipal Liaison (ML) for my region invited me to in-person meetups called “write-ins” with fellow writers just like me, that was when my creativity absolutely exploded.

What started out as a half-baked fantasy romance story based on an old fanfiction I wrote in high school has since expanded into a massive series of stories, featuring an enormous cast of colorful characters that have been lovingly-crafted. It is through writing that I am able to explore and express myself creatively while managing my mental health. I might not have gotten this far with my writing if it weren't for the help of my writing community here in Japan.

Through NaNoWriMo, I have learned that, although writing 50,000 words is the ultimate goal, the words don't have to be good so long as they *exist*. Writing can always be edited, changed, added or deleted. Nobody is expecting you to pump out a Pulitzer Prize winner in a month. There were many times that I have written something akin to *actual gibberish* just to meet the word count goal, and that's half the fun! What kind of bonkers writing can you pump out in a month? I've written plenty!

Why Join Nanowrimo in Japan?

On NaNoWriMo.org you can get connected with other writers by joining a “region.” There are currently four NaNoWriMo regions in Japan: Kansai (with a whopping 2300 members), Greater Tokyo (275 members), Okinawa (40 members), and my region: “Elsewhere” (160 members), which spans as far north as Hokkaido and as far south as Kyushu. Basically every nook and cranny outside of Tokyo, Kansai, or Okinawa is lumped together into the “Elsewhere” region on NaNoWriMo.org. You are welcome to join any region regardless of where you specifically live, but do know that it's generally easier to participate in a region that at least shares your current timezone so that attending virtual events isn't a challenge.

And if writing isn't your jam, maybe you have other ways to express yourself? Well, guess what: we aren't just writers; we are graphic artists, programmers, musicians, crafters, hobbyists, all sorts of creative people. In the “Elsewhere” region Discord, some of us have taken the popular NaNoWriMo game of “word sprints” (a game to see who can write the most words within an allotted amount of time) and adapted it into “drawing sprints” instead for when we don't feel like writing but still want to engage with other members in our region. Really, we are a community first and writers second. Sometimes we get together to play games online, or we chat about food, or we vent about whatever frustrations we have about work.



Some Challenges Facing the Organization

Since the pandemic hit, all of our usual meet-ups have moved online, mainly to Discord or Zoom—which, incidentally, has helped the “Elsewhere” region quite a lot, considering how much landmass our region covers. Since I and my co-ML currently reside in Gunma, it would be difficult for us to organize in-person events that people from the northern prefectures can attend. I imagine arranging virtual meet-ups has actually made things easier for our members up in Hokkaido or Aomori.

That said, while the organization strives for diversity and inclusivity among its members, it is a primarily English-speaking organization, and the website is most easily accessible in English (unless you use Google Chrome to translate the web pages, which may not be ideal). That, combined with the use of tricky applications like Discord, potentially limits accessibility for non-native English speakers. Though NaNoWriMo participants can certainly write in any language they choose, taking full advantage of the communal aspect of NaNoWriMo probably requires at least conversational English ability.

I know the world is overflowing with aspiring writers that may not have access to even the most basic tools needed to write a novel. Many people don't have internet or computer access. Many have limited access to resources in their country and native language. Many have physical, mental, or emotional obstacles that hinder their writing

ability, even if they have the desire for it. Writing is really, *really* hard—impossible for some and exhausting for others. It's not for everyone.

But every day we find new ways to make writing more accessible to aspiring authors and bring stories to life. Writing can be accomplished with as little as a writing implement, a medium, and an idea. Pencil, charcoal, chalk, paint, speech-to-text, *blood*—it matters not how that writing materializes so long as it *exists*. Once it does, that's already an excellent start. It can be as personal or as public as you want it to be, so long as it provides you solace or uplifts others. Your words are meaningful no matter how banal, no matter how “cringe” you think they may be, because they can always change and grow into something truly magnificent.

At the End of the Day . . .

Even if you don't meet your writing goals, you can still benefit from participating in NaNoWriMo and building friendships with other artists. I know that this community has been a great help for me personally during the global pandemic. Just keep in mind that, come November, we are hitting the ground running with virtual write-ins, word-sprints, story building, outlining, and brainstorming sessions. We are going to write like there's no tomorrow! Please come join us if you can and are interested in participating in National Novel Writing Month, and absolutely bring your friends! We would love to meet and write with you (and watch our veteran writers absolutely smoke us in the word sprints).

[Japan: “Elsewhere” Region](#)

[Japan: Kansai Region](#)

[Japan: Greater Tokyo Region](#)

[Japan: Okinawa Region](#) (Currently looking for a new ML!)

Dianne is an Assistant Language Teacher in Gunma Prefecture and a copy-editor for [CONNECT]. She has recently become the new co-ML for the Japan: “Elsewhere” region on [NaNoWriMo.org](#) alongside her co-ML Maddie Chisum (also from Gunma). Dianne is an artist and avid writer who is absolutely bananas about animals, especially birds. She spends most of her time writing and worldbuilding a fantasy romance series about animal people purely for fun, and you can find art for her story on Instagram [@CraftiYetti](#)



image courtesy of NaNoWriMo

CONTRIBUTING TO CONNECT

CONNECT is a magazine for the community in Japan, by the community in Japan. Everyone is welcome to write, no matter your experience or style! If you have an idea you want to see in these pages, reach out to our Head Editor, or any of our awesome section editors. We'll work with you to make it the best it can be and share it with our audience of thousands. Not every article needs to be an essay! We feature interviews, infographics, top-ten lists, recipes, photo spreads, travelogues, and more.

Contact the Head Editor of CONNECT, Rachel Fagundes, at connect.editor@ajet.net with your submissions, comments, and questions.

ARTICLES

Write about something you're doing. Write about something you love. Tell us a story.

SPOTLIGHT

Tell us about someone in your community who's doing something neat and noteworthy. Cooks, collectors, calligraphers — we want to hear about the inspiring people around you.

PHOTOS

Members of the JET community contributed to the photos you see in this issue. If you're an aspiring photographer and want your work published, please get in contact with the lead designer, Lloyd Cruickshank, at visualmedia.connect@ajet.net.

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