

# THE MAKING OF A JAPANESE: TEACHER'S GUIDE

Developed by Waka Takahashi Brown

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Dear Educators and Students,

*The Making of a Japanese* began as a personal inquiry into how education shapes identity. Having grown up in Japan within the public school system and later studied and lived abroad, I became aware that many aspects of Japanese social behavior—cooperation, punctuality, self-discipline, and a sense of collective responsibility—are not heredity but carefully cultivated through schooling. This realization prompted me to turn my lens toward the classroom, the first structured environment where children learn what it means to be part of Japanese society.

The film follows first- and sixth-grade students in a Tokyo public elementary school across a full academic year. By observing daily rituals—morning greetings, lunch service, cleaning duties, assemblies—I sought to document the subtle mechanisms of socialization that operate beneath the surface of formal education. These routines are pedagogical in the broadest sense: they teach values, habits, and modes of interaction that extend far beyond academics.

In this way, the school becomes a microcosm of society. Students learn early that belonging involves both privilege and responsibility; that independence must coexist with interdependence. The tension between individual expression and collective harmony—so central to Japanese life—plays out in miniature each day in the classroom. For educators, this raises important questions: How do institutional routines shape moral development? Which aspects of schooling cultivate empathy, resilience, and cooperation—and at what point might these same mechanisms risk suppressing creativity or difference?

My aim was not to prescribe answers. Rather, I wanted to hold a mirror: to show how this system shapes us—what it gives, what it asks, and what it leaves behind. For international viewers, the discipline and harmony may appear remarkable; for Japanese viewers, these routines may seem mundane. But I hope the film invites all audiences to question: which of these habits serve us today? What do we want to keep? What might we change? How do we balance the strength of the many with the voice of the individual?

Ultimately, *The Making of a Japanese* is a study of formation—of character, community, and identity—told through the lens of everyday school life. In a world where raising responsible and empathetic members of a community feels increasingly important yet difficult, I hope the film offers a chance to reflect on what education truly teaches, and what kind of citizens it hopes to create.

— **Ema Ryan Yamazaki**

Director / Editor, *The Making of a Japanese*

# THE MAKING OF A JAPANESE

**Introduction** *The Making of a Japanese* is a documentary film that chronicles life at a large Japanese elementary school in suburban Tokyo. Filmmaker Ema Ryan Yamazaki distilled over 700 hours of footage taken during the height of the Covid-19 pandemic, into a compelling examination of how Japanese educational institutions cultivate culturally distinct characteristics in young students. Historically, many Westerners have viewed Japanese approaches to teaching discipline and responsibility in elementary education with both curiosity and skepticism. However, in recent years, these methodologies have garnered increasing recognition, and are now considered exportable models of educational excellence. The film explores the transformative processes that shape unsuspecting six-year-olds into disciplined twelve-year-olds, while thoughtfully examining both the advantages and potential drawbacks of Japan’s educational system.<sup>1</sup>

**Connections to Curriculum Standards** This teacher’s guide has been designed to meet certain national history, social studies, and geography standards as defined by the [National Center for History in the Schools](#) and the [National Council for the Social Studies](#). The standards for the lesson are listed below.

## **National History Standards (from the National Center for History in the Schools)**

### [World History](#)

Era 9, Standard 2C, Grades 9–12: Assess the strengths of democratic institutions and civic culture in countries such as Britain, France, Germany, Canada, the United States, Japan, India, and Mexico and analyze potential challenges to civil society in democratic states. [[Interrogate historical data](#)]

Era 9, Standard 3A, Grades 9–12: Analyze connections between globalizing trends in economy, technology, and culture in the late 20th century and dynamic assertions of traditional cultural identity and distinctiveness. [[Analyze cause-and-effect relationships](#)]

World History Across the Eras, Standard 1, Grades 5–12: Analyze how ideals and institutions of freedom, equality, justice, and citizenship have changed over time and from one society to another.

### [National Social Studies Standards](#) (from the National Council for the Social Studies)

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<sup>1</sup> *A Window into Japanese Education: The Making of a Japanese – Film Screening and Director Discussion*, Walter H. Shorenstein Asia-Pacific Research Center..

- **Culture; Thematic Strand I:** *Through the study of culture and cultural diversity, learners understand how human beings create, learn, share, and adapt to culture, and appreciate the role of culture in shaping their lives and society, as well as the lives and societies of others. In schools, this theme typically appears in units and courses dealing with geography, history, sociology, and anthropology, as well as multicultural topics across the curriculum.*
- **Time, Continuity, and Change; Thematic Strand II:** *Through the study of the past and its legacy, learners examine the institutions, values, and beliefs of people in the past, acquire skills in historical inquiry and interpretation, and gain an understanding of how important historical events and developments have shaped the modern world. This theme appears in courses in history, as well as in other social studies courses for which knowledge of the past is important.*
- **People, Places, and Environments; Thematic Strand III:** *This theme helps learners to develop their spatial views and perspectives of the world, to understand where people, places, and resources are located and why they are there, and to explore the relationship between human beings and the environment. In schools, this theme typically appears in courses dealing with geography and area studies, but it is also important for the study of the geographical dimension of other social studies subjects.*
- **Individual Development and Identity; Thematic Strand IV:** *Personal identity is shaped by family, peers, culture, and institutional influences. Through this theme, students examine the factors that influence an individual's personal identity, development, and actions. This theme typically appears in courses and units dealing with psychology, anthropology, and sociology.*
- **Individuals, Groups, and Institutions; Thematic Strand V:** *Institutions such as families and civic, educational, governmental, and religious organizations, exert a major influence on people's lives. This theme allows students to understand how institutions are formed, maintained, and changed, and to examine their influence. In schools, this theme typically appears in units and courses dealing with sociology, anthropology, psychology, political science, and history.*
- **Global Connections; Thematic Strand IX:** *The realities of global interdependence require an understanding of the increasingly important and diverse global connections among world societies. This theme prepares students to study issues arising from globalization. It typically appears in units or courses dealing with geography, culture, economics, history, political science, government, and technology.*
- **Civic Ideals and Practices; Thematic Strand X:** *An understanding of civic ideals and practices is critical to full participation in society and is an essential component of education for citizenship. This theme enables students to learn about the rights and responsibilities of citizens of a democracy, and to appreciate the importance of active citizenship. In schools, the theme typically appears in units or courses dealing with civics, history, political*

*science, cultural anthropology, and fields such as global studies, law-related education, and the humanities.*

Equipment	<p>Computer with Internet access</p> <p>Computer projector and screen</p> <p>Computer speakers</p> <p>Whiteboard and markers</p>
Teacher Preparation	<p>Instructions and materials are based on a class size of 30 students. Adjust accordingly for different class sizes.</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Familiarize yourself with handouts, activities, and the documentary film, <i>The Making of a Japanese</i>. Links to Amazon Prime and Kanopy are provided in the Materials list. However, the documentary can also be accessed through a search within these services.</li> <li>2. Set up and test the computer, projector, and speakers. Confirm ability to play video and project sound audibly to students.</li> <li>3. Make the appropriate number of copies of handouts and activity directions.</li> <li>4. If choosing to do Activity 2, <i>Images A–J</i>, either download or print images from the <a href="#">SPICE drive</a>.</li> <li>5. Gather art supplies for activities.</li> </ol>
Time	<p><i>The Making of a Japanese</i> is 1 hour and 39 minutes in length. At least three class periods are recommended to view the film and complete activities in this guide.</p>
Objectives	<p>In this guide, students will</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• analyze similarities and differences between U.S. and Japanese educational practices;</li> <li>• assess the strengths of civic culture in the United States and Japan;</li> <li>• analyze different societies' ideals and institutions of freedom, equality, justice, and citizenship;</li> <li>• appreciate the role of culture in shaping societies;</li> <li>• examine the factors that influence an individual's personal identity, development, and actions;</li> <li>• examine the influence of institutions, and how they are formed, maintained, and changed;</li> <li>• work effectively in small groups;</li> <li>• view films and documentaries critically;</li> <li>• compare and contrast different points of view; and</li> <li>• appreciate multiple perspectives.</li> </ul>

**Materials** Documentary, *The Making of a Japanese*, 1 hour 39 minutes; this film can be accessed through Amazon Prime: <https://www.primevideo.com/detail/The-Making-of-a-Japanese/0OOG3RX0RA0HRIMTI4XVAA230K> or Kanopy: <https://www.kanopy.com/en/product/15952473>  
*Letter to Educators and Students*, by Ema Ryan Yamazaki, p. iv, 30 copies  
 Handout 1, *Initial Questions*, p. 9, 15 copies  
 Handout 2, *Note-taking Sheet*, pp. 10–11, 30 copies  
 Handout 3, *Debriefing*, p. 12, 15 copies  
 Activity 1, *Excerpts A–F*, pp. 13–18, 5 copies each  
 Activity 2, *Images A–J*, pp. 19–28, 3 copies each  
 Answer Key, *Note-taking Sheet*, p. 29  
 Art supplies for activities (butcher paper, poster board, magazines for collage activity, blank sheets of 8.5" x 11" paper for cartoon activity, crayons, markers, colored pencils)

- Procedures**
1. Set the context for *The Making of a Japanese* by informing students that they will learn about the Japanese educational system through viewing a documentary film by Ema Ryan Yamazaki. Ask students to share their impressions about what they think schools in Japan are like. Record their answers on a sheet of butcher paper.
  2. Distribute one copy of the *Letter to Educators and Students* by filmmaker Ema Ryan Yamazaki to each student. Ask volunteers to take turns reading the letter aloud to the class.
  3. Divide the class into partner pairs. Distribute one copy of Handout 1, *Initial Questions*, to each pair. Review the questions as a class.
  4. Direct the partner pairs to write their names on one separate sheet of blank paper. Allow students time to discuss and complete the questions with their partner.
  5. Ask student volunteers to share their answers. The questions are included below for your reference.
    - Yamazaki describes how “cooperation, punctuality, self-discipline, and a sense of collective responsibility” are traits carefully cultivated through Japan’s school system. What traits do you think your education has cultivated? What are some activities or routines that emphasize these traits?
    - Yamazaki describes how daily rituals, such as “morning greetings, lunch service, cleaning duties, assemblies... teach values, habits, and modes of interaction.” What are some of your school’s daily rituals? What do you think these rituals are meant to teach students?
    - Yamazaki poses the question, “which aspects of schooling cultivate empathy, resilience, and cooperation—and at what point might these same mechanisms risk suppressing creativity or difference?” In your experience, what aspects of your schooling cultivate empathy, resilience, and cooperation?

- *Do you feel that any aspect of your schooling actually suppresses creativity or differences? Or, do you feel that your education encourages creativity and differences? Explain your answer and provide examples to illustrate your points.*
6. Collect the partner pairs' answers to Handout 1. Inform the class that they will revisit their answers after viewing the documentary film.
  7. Distribute one copy of Handout 2, *Note-taking Sheet*, to each student. Review the directions as a class. Inform students that they will focus on how students and teachers demonstrate acts of **empathy**, **resilience**, and **cooperation** throughout the year. Review the definitions of these terms, listed below:
    - **Empathy:** The ability to understand and appreciate another person's feelings, experience, etc.<sup>2</sup>
    - **Resilience:** The quality or fact of being able to recover quickly or easily from, or resist being affected by, a misfortune, shock, illness, etc.; robustness; adaptability.<sup>3</sup>
    - **Cooperation:** The action or practice of working together, or with another or others, towards the same end, purpose, or effect; collaboration; joint operation. Also: compliance with an authority, order, request, etc.<sup>4</sup>
  8. Inform students that you will pause the film for a few minutes after each trimester to allow them time to complete their notes for each section. Preface the viewing of the film by pointing out how this documentary was filmed during the pandemic, and that many of the precautions taken by the school are no longer in place. However, throughout Japanese society, wearing masks was common beforehand, and many people continue to do so, especially when not feeling well.
  9. Show *The Making of a Japanese* to the class. The film may need to be shown over two class periods. Stop the film after each trimester to allow students time to record their responses to the handout. For your reference, Trimester 1 (Spring) finishes at approximately 39:46; Trimester 2 (Fall) finishes at approximately 1:02:14; and Trimester 3 (Winter) lasts until the end of the film.
  10. After the class has finished viewing the film, discuss student responses to Handout 2, *Note-taking Sheet*. Use the Answer Key, *Note-taking Sheet*, as a guide.

<sup>2</sup> "Empathy." *Oxford English Dictionary*, [www.oed.com/dictionary/empathy\\_n?tab=meaning\\_and\\_use](http://www.oed.com/dictionary/empathy_n?tab=meaning_and_use). Accessed 9 Dec. 2025.

<sup>3</sup> "Resilience." *Oxford English Dictionary*, [www.oed.com/dictionary/resilience\\_n?tab=meaning\\_and\\_use#25634109](http://www.oed.com/dictionary/resilience_n?tab=meaning_and_use#25634109). Accessed 9 Dec. 2025.

<sup>4</sup> "Cooperation." *Oxford English Dictionary*, [www.oed.com/dictionary/cooperation\\_n?tab=meaning\\_and\\_use#8321561](http://www.oed.com/dictionary/cooperation_n?tab=meaning_and_use#8321561). Accessed 9 Dec. 2025.

**Extension Activities**

If time allows, you may want to engage students in your choice of the following two extension activities. If class time is limited, skip to the debriefing section of the lesson.

**Activity 1, Excerpts**

1. Inform the class that they will engage in small-group activities pertaining to excerpts from the film.
2. Divide the class into six small groups, and assign each group a letter, A–F.
3. Distribute five copies each of Activity 1, *Excerpts A–F*, to the appropriate groups, and direct students to review the activity guidelines with their group members.
4. Allow students time to work on their group’s activity. If they cannot finish during class, they should complete it as homework.
5. When groups have completed the activities pertaining to their excerpts, facilitate their class presentations. For your reference, the activities are listed below:

*A: Safety drills*

*B: Op-ed statements*

*C: Rules/expectations*

*D: Cartoons*

*E: Role play*

*F: Collage*

6. When finished, proceed to Activity 2, *Images A–J*, or directly to the debriefing section of this lesson.

**Activity 2, Images**

1. Prior to this activity, decide whether to print out physical copies of the images, or to distribute [digital versions](#) to the students.
2. Inform the class that they will engage in a small-group activity pertaining to images from the film.
3. Divide the class into ten small groups, and assign each group a letter, A–J.
4. Distribute three copies each of Activity 2, *Images A–J*, to the appropriate groups, and review directions for the activity as a class.
5. Distribute the images, A–J to the appropriate groups.
6. Allow students time to work on their group’s activity. If time is limited, allow them to search for their additional activity images online on classroom computers. If not, direct them to gather their own images as homework. Remind students that they must ask for permission from people they choose to photograph, or blur their faces before using the images.

7. If using digital images, gather and organize the groups' images into a digital slide presentation.
8. Facilitate groups' presentations of their images by asking each group to present in front of the class. If using a digital slide presentation, advance the slides as each group presents. If using physical images, instruct groups to display their images as they present in front of the class.

### Debriefing

1. Once students have finished viewing the documentary film and have completed the activities you chose for the class, return students' answers to Handout 1, *Initial Questions*.
2. Instruct students to sit with their partners with whom they completed Handout 1. Allow the partner pairs five minutes to review their answers based on what they have learned.
3. Distribute one copy of Handout 3, *Debriefing*, to each partner pair. Review the questions as a class.
4. Direct the partner pairs to write their names on one separate sheet of blank paper. Allow students time to discuss and answer the questions with their partner.
5. Engage in a class discussion based on the questions listed on the handout, included below for your reference:
  1. *Yamazaki describes how "cooperation, punctuality, self-discipline, and a sense of collective responsibility" are traits carefully cultivated through Japan's school system. In the film, what activities or routines do you think emphasized these traits?*
    - *Cooperation*
    - *Punctuality*
    - *Self-discipline*
    - *Sense of collective responsibility*
  2. *Yamazaki describes how daily rituals, such as "morning greetings, lunch service, cleaning duties, assemblies... teach values, habits, and modes of interaction." In the film, what values, habits, or modes of interaction did you observe being taught through the following?*
    - *Morning greetings*
    - *Lunch service*
    - *Cleaning duties*
    - *Assemblies*
  3. *Yamazaki poses the question, "which aspects of schooling cultivate empathy, resilience, and cooperation—and at what point might these same mechanisms risk suppressing creativity or difference?" In viewing the film, what aspects of Japanese education do you think cultivated empathy, resilience, and cooperation? Since this aspect of Japanese schools*

*was covered extensively in Handout 2, Note-taking Sheet, list only one example of each:*

- *Empathy*
- *Resilience*
- *Cooperation*

4. *Were there any instances where you thought creativity and differences were suppressed? If so, what were they?*

Suggestions for additional discussion questions are listed below:

- *What were some of the biggest differences between elements of Japanese education and the education you've experienced?*
- *Were there any elements of Japanese education that you feel could be adopted here? What are they?*
- *Were there any elements of Japanese education that you don't feel could be incorporated in your educational environment? Why?*

6. Collect students' work for assessment.
7. Display the sheet of butcher paper from the beginning of the lesson. Ask students to compare their initial impressions of what Japanese education is like to their impressions after viewing the film.
8. Ask students to add or modify their initial impressions on the sheet of butcher paper. Instruct them to explain their additions or modifications.

**Assessment** The following are suggestions for assessing student work in this lesson:

1. Informally assess student knowledge of Japanese education prior to the lesson as indicated by their answers to and discussion around Handout 1, *Initial Questions*.
2. Examine student responses to questions on Handout 2, *Note-taking Sheet*, using the Answer Key, *Note-taking Sheet*, as a guide.
3. Evaluate students' projects for Activity 1, *Excerpts A–F*, using the criteria given on the handouts as a guide.
4. Evaluate students' projects for Activity 2, *Images A–J*, using the criteria given on the handouts as a guide.
5. Assess student participation in group and class discussions, evaluating students' ability to:
  - clearly state their opinions, questions, and /or answers;
  - provide thoughtful answers;
  - exhibit sensitivity toward different cultures and ideas;
  - respect and acknowledge other students' comments; and
  - ask relevant and insightful questions.

## INITIAL QUESTIONS

In Ema Ryan Yamazaki's, *Letter to Educators and Students*, she describes her process and motivations for creating this documentary film. Discuss the following questions with your partner, write your names on a separate sheet of blank paper and record your answers on it. Be prepared to share your answers with the class.

1. Yamazaki describes how “cooperation, punctuality, self-discipline, and a sense of collective responsibility” are traits carefully cultivated through Japan’s school system. What traits do you think your education has cultivated? What are some activities or routines that emphasize these traits?
2. Yamazaki describes how daily rituals, such as “morning greetings, lunch service, cleaning duties, assemblies... teach values, habits, and modes of interaction.” What are some of your school’s daily rituals? What do you think these rituals are meant to teach students?
3. Yamazaki poses the question, “which aspects of schooling cultivate empathy, resilience, and cooperation—and at what point might these same mechanisms risk suppressing creativity or difference?” In your experience, what aspects of your schooling cultivate empathy, resilience, and cooperation?
4. Do you feel that any aspect of your schooling actually suppresses creativity or differences? Or, do you feel that your education encourages creativity and differences? Explain your answer and provide examples to illustrate your points.

**NOTE-TAKING SHEET**

Take notes while viewing the documentary film, *The Making of a Japanese*. The film will cover one year of school and is divided into three trimesters. Although there are many aspects of the film you should pay attention to, for this exercise, focus on acts of **empathy**, **resilience**, and **cooperation**. Your teacher will pause the film after each trimester to allow for time to complete your notes for each section.

**Trimester 1:**

What are some examples of empathy that the students/teachers demonstrate?

In what ways do the students/teachers show resilience?

What are some examples of cooperation depicted during the first trimester?

**Trimester 2:**

What are some examples of empathy that the students/teachers demonstrate?

In what ways do the students/teachers show resilience?

What are some examples of cooperation depicted during the second trimester?

**Trimester 3:**

What are some examples of empathy that the students/teachers demonstrate?

In what ways do the students/teachers show resilience?

What are some examples of cooperation depicted during the third trimester?

Describe three aspects of Japanese education that seem different from what you've experienced with your own education.

Describe three aspects of Japanese education that seem similar to what you've experienced with your own education.

## DEBRIEFING

In Ema Ryan Yamazaki's, *Letter to Educators and Students*, which you read prior to viewing *The Making of a Japanese*, she describes her process and motivations for creating this documentary film. Discuss the following questions with your partner, record your answers on a separate sheet of blank paper, compare these answers with the answers to Handout 1, *Initial Questions*, and be prepared to share your answers with the class.

1. Yamazaki describes how “cooperation, punctuality, self-discipline, and a sense of collective responsibility” are traits carefully cultivated through Japan’s school system. In the film, what activities or routines do you think emphasized these traits?
  - Cooperation
  - Punctuality
  - Self-discipline
  - Sense of collective responsibility
2. Yamazaki describes how daily rituals, such as “morning greetings, lunch service, cleaning duties, assemblies... teach values, habits, and modes of interaction.” In the film, what values, habits, or modes of interaction did you observe being taught through the following?
  - Morning greetings
  - Lunch service
  - Cleaning duties
  - Assemblies
3. Yamazaki poses the question, “which aspects of schooling cultivate empathy, resilience, and cooperation—and at what point might these same mechanisms risk suppressing creativity or difference?” In viewing the film, what aspects of Japanese education do you think cultivated empathy, resilience, and cooperation? Since this aspect of Japanese schools was covered extensively in Handout 2, *Note-taking Sheet*, list only one example of each:
  - Empathy
  - Resilience
  - Cooperation
4. Were there any instances where you thought creativity and differences were suppressed? If so, what were they?

## EXCERPT A

**Announcer:** There is an earthquake coming.

**Vice principal:** Testing, testing, this is a drill. The earthquake has stopped, but a fire has started in the kitchen. Follow the instructions and begin evacuating.

**Teacher Watanabe:** Put on your disaster prevention hoods. Quickly.

**Teacher Endo:** Too slow! Why are you so slow?

**Principal:** Here in Tokyo, in the near future a massive earthquake is expected to strike. In preparation, what can we do as elementary school students? Our class tasks and duties, daily cleaning and keeping things tidy around us. It's important to carry out the basics of life. That will be our strength when disaster strikes.

**Activity:**

With members in your group, discuss how safety drills are conducted in your own schools. How are they similar to what you observed in the documentary film? How are they different?

Review your school or classroom's current procedures for when a natural disaster strikes. Keeping in mind what you've observed of the Japanese system, make note of improvements that can be made, and then create exercises or steps that can assist with these improvements.

Be prepared to present your findings to the class.

On a separate sheet of paper, write your group members' names and a short description of what each group member contributed to the activity. Aim for equal participation and provide this information to your teacher after your group presents.

**EXCERPT B**

**Dr. Sugita:** The current curriculum was created to support democratization. However, the society in Japan right now is not a great one. If someone causes a problem, they get bashed on the internet. Some take their own lives. We educators share responsibility for this. Because that is how we've raised our people. Our schools follow a "marble system." If everyone brings their homework, everyone gets marbles. The group is responsible as a whole. Japan's collectivist strength and harmony are envied by other countries, but we must be aware that this is a double-edged sword. Students who follow this system can blame their friends for not receiving marbles. We teachers have created this environment for bullying. It's time to rethink the Japanese way.

**Activity:**

With members in your group, discuss your thoughts about group work. Which of Dr. Sugita's statements do you agree with? Which ones do you disagree with?

Write two op-ed statements of at least five paragraphs each. One should describe the **pros** of group work and the "marble system" described by Dr. Sugita. The other should describe the **cons** of group work and the "marble system" described by Dr. Sugita. Both should include examples from the film as well as comparisons with the educational system that you are part of.

Be prepared to present both op-ed statements to the class.

On a separate sheet of paper, write your group members' names and a short description of what each group member contributed to the activity. Aim for equal participation and provide this information to your teacher after your group presents.

## EXCERPT C

**Teacher Endo:** We're 2 months into the school year. Who believes they've been reliably turning in their assignments? Who believes that they've been slow? In middle school, you will be expected to do more. If you don't keep up now, it will get difficult for you in the future. Are you going to keep this up for a year? Or will you improve yourselves?.... If you are making the effort to improve, I will gladly help you. I'll take responsibility. But despite your shortcomings, if you're slacking off, playing on the tablet, I'll take your tablet away.

These days, they want you to go easy on kids. But when I was their age, I had a strict teacher. She would call us out on our weaknesses. I grew a lot from that experience. That's why I have to be strict too.

**Activity:**

With members in your group, discuss Teacher Endo's remarks. Do you agree with his statement that he's a "man behind the times"? Do you think he's too strict? Why or why not? Were there any instances in the film where you thought some of the school rules or routines were outdated? How about your own school? Are there rules or expectations that you think are outdated? If so, how would you update them?

Make a list of five rules/expectations that you observed in the film, and write one paragraph describing whether this rule/expectation should be maintained or updated.

Then, make a list of 5 rules/expectations from your own school, and write one paragraph describing whether this rule/expectation should be maintained or updated.

Be prepared to present both sets of rules/expectations to the class.

On a separate sheet of paper, write your group members' names and a short description of what each group member contributed to the activity. Aim for equal participation and provide this information to your teacher after your group presents.

**EXCERPT D**

**Teacher Endo:** Let me talk about the Sports Day performance. Some of you may not be working as hard as you want. You're waiting for an opportunity to grow. I believe that Sports Day could be the moment you break your shell. What's the reason you're practicing for Sports Day. Of course, you should aim to perfect your skills. But it's also to discover things that you can't do. You grow by finding ways to overcome obstacles. I know it's difficult, but as 6th graders I believe it's something you are capable of.

**Activity:**

With members in your group, discuss your impressions of Sports Day in Japan. Is there a similar event in your school? What event or activity have you participated in that forced you to overcome obstacles and grow?

Using an 8.5" x 11" sheet of paper for each panel, create a cartoon of at least four panels that depict Kihara (the 6th grader who initially had difficulty with jumping rope) and how he overcame obstacles through his Sports Day experience.

Using an 8.5" x 11" sheet of paper for each panel, create a second cartoon of at least four panels that depict an event based on your own experience through which obstacles are overcome. Please feel free to create a fictional, yet realistic, scenario for your second cartoon.

Be prepared to display and describe both cartoons to the class.

On a separate sheet of paper, write your group members' names and a short description of what each group member contributed to the activity. Aim for equal participation and provide this information to your teacher after your group presents.

## EXCERPT E

**Teacher Miyamoto:** Should we be more strict?

**Teacher Jan:** Depends on what we want them to learn. They might resent us if we scold them.

**Teacher Miyamoto:** Maybe.

**Teacher Jan:** When I was their age, I chiseled a hole in the wall of my house and was severely scolded. Which path to take? Either we prevent mistakes by not allowing the kids to make them, or it becomes a lesson they remember even when they're 40 years old.... As teachers we have to remember, our aim is for the kids to grow. We should be strict when necessary, but make sure they see the greater lesson at play. Explain that they're scolded not for being loud, but for causing trouble to others and for the group.

**Teacher Tago:** Instruct in a way that they understand our intention.

**Teacher Jan:** It's about connecting with the kids, so our words reach their hearts.

**Activity:**

With members in your group, discuss three instances in the film in which the students felt like the teachers/ rules were too strict.

Divide the group into two, with one side representing the teacher's point of view and the other side representing the students.' Engage in a role play in which the students explain their point of view, while the teachers explain why they support these rules or being strict with the students in these instances.

Be prepared to present your 3-minute role play to the class.

On a separate sheet of paper, write your group members' names and a short description of what each group member contributed to the activity. Aim for equal participation and provide this information to your teacher after your group presents.

**EXCERPT F**

**Teacher Enomoto:** You've been selected to play special instruments. You will be leaders of the new 2nd grade. Can someone who isn't a good listener be a leader? You must do more than play your instrument. If you can't do that, you should quit right now. Have a strong heart, and do your best....

**Ayame:** What do you think we are? Part of a beating heart?

**Second graders:** We're pieces of a heart. If everyone is together, this is our shape. If one of us is unbalanced, it falls apart. It's no longer a heart.

**Activity:**

With members in your group, discuss the process in which students were selected to play the instruments, and their rehearsal techniques. Did you agree with the process? Why or why not?

Using the magazines and poster board provided by your teacher, create a collage that depicts Ayame's journey, and the sentiment expressed in the above excerpt. In addition to images, feel free to use a maximum of three words (in large font so that they would be easily viewed from a distance) in your collage.

Be prepared to present your collage to the class, and describe why you chose to include the images and words that you did.

On a separate sheet of paper, write your group members' names and a short description of what each group member contributed to the activity. Aim for equal participation and provide this information to your teacher after your group presents.

## IMAGE A

## Broadcast Room



Write your group members' names at the top of this activity sheet.

Think about the events and interactions pertaining to this image from the film. In the space below, describe this picture in at least 3 complete sentences.

Does your school have something similar? How are announcements made to students in your school?

Take a photo of your school's broadcast room, or some place that you feel is similar. Be prepared to present both images to the class.

Depending on your teacher's preference, email them images in the form of a digital slide before your presentation, or print your images in color on 8.5" x 11" sheets of paper.

Turn this sheet in to your teacher after your presentation.

IMAGE B

**Classroom**



Write your group members' names at the top of this activity sheet.

Think about the events and interactions pertaining to this image from the film. In the space below, describe this picture in at least 3 complete sentences.

How are the classrooms in your school similar or different?

Take a photo of a classroom in your school. Be prepared to present both images to the class.

Depending on your teacher's preference, email them images in the form of a digital slide before your presentation, or print your images in color on 8.5" x 11" sheets of paper.

Turn this sheet in to your teacher after your presentation.

## IMAGE C

## Cleaning



Write your group members' names at the top of this activity sheet.

Think about the events and interactions pertaining to this image from the film. In the space below, describe this picture in at least 3 complete sentences.

How are the cleaning responsibilities handled in your school?

Take a photo of something pertaining to how your school is cleaned or maintained. Be prepared to present both images to the class.

Depending on your teacher's preference, email them images in the form of a digital slide before your presentation, or print your images in color on 8.5" x 11" sheets of paper.

Turn this sheet in to your teacher after your presentation.

IMAGE D

**Entryway Shoes**



Write your group members' names at the top of this sheet of paper.

Think about the events and interactions pertaining to this image in the film. In the space below, describe this picture in at least 3 complete sentences.

What is the entryway to your school like?

Take a photo of your school's entryway. Be prepared to present both images to the class.

Depending on your teacher's preference, email them images in the form of a digital slide before your presentation, or print your images in color on 8.5" x 11" sheets of paper.

Turn this sheet in to your teacher after your presentation.

## IMAGE E

## Graduation



Write your group members' names at the top of this activity sheet.

Think about the events and interactions pertaining to this image from the film. In the space below, describe this picture in at least 3 complete sentences.

Did the elementary school you attended have a graduation ceremony? If so, what was it like? How was it similar to the one in the film? How was it different?

Find a photo depicting your elementary school graduation, or take a photo of a formal all-school assembly at your school. Be prepared to present both images to the class.

Depending on your teacher's preference, email them images in the form of a digital slide before your presentation, or print your images in color on 8.5" x 11" sheets of paper.

Turn this sheet in to your teacher after your presentation.

IMAGE F

Lunch Service



Write your group members' names at the top of this sheet of paper.

Think about the events and interactions pertaining to this image in the film. In the space below, describe this picture in at least 3 complete sentences.

What is lunch service like at your school? How is it similar? How is it different?

Take a photo pertaining to lunchtime at your school. Be prepared to present both images to the class.

Depending on your teacher's preference, email them images in the form of a digital slide before your presentation, or print your images in color on 8.5" x 11" sheets of paper.

Turn this sheet in to your teacher after your presentation.

## IMAGE G

## School Grounds



Write your group members' names at the top of this sheet of paper.

In the space below, describe this picture in at least 3 complete sentences.

How are the school grounds of Tsukado Public Elementary School similar to the one you attended? How are they different?

Take a photo of your school and its surroundings. Be prepared to present both images to the class.

Depending on your teacher's preference, email them images in the form of a digital slide before your presentation, or print your images in color on 8.5" x 11" sheets of paper.

Turn this sheet in to your teacher after your presentation.

IMAGE H

**Sports Day**



Write your group members' names at the top of this sheet of paper.

Think about the events and interactions pertaining to this image in the film. In the space below, describe this picture in at least 3 complete sentences.

Think of an event at your school that might share some characteristics with the Sports Day celebration depicted in the film. How is the event at your school similar to Sports Day? How are they different?

Find a photo depicting this event. Be prepared to present both images to the class.

Depending on your teacher's preference, email them images in the form of a digital slide before your presentation, or print your images in color on 8.5" x 11" sheets of paper.

Turn this sheet in to your teacher after your presentation.

## IMAGE I

## Teachers' Lounge



Write your group members' names at the top of this sheet of paper.

Think about the events and interactions pertaining to this image in the film. In the space below, describe this picture in at least 3 complete sentences.

Is there a central space in your school where the teachers gather? If so, what is it like? If not, where do the teachers work when they aren't teaching?

With your teacher's permission, take a photograph of the place described above. Be prepared to present both images to the class.

Depending on your teacher's preference, email them images in the form of a digital slide before your presentation, or print your images in color on 8.5" x 11" sheets of paper.

Turn this sheet in to your teacher after your presentation.

IMAGE J

**Walk to School**



Write your group members' names at the top of this sheet of paper.

In the space below, describe this picture in at least 3 complete sentences.

How do students commute to your school? What do the students carry their school supplies in? How is this image similar to or different from what you have experienced when commuting to school?

Take a photograph of students commuting to school. Be prepared to present both images to the class.

Depending on your teacher's preference, email them images in the form of a digital slide before your presentation, or print your images in color on 8.5" x 11" sheets of paper.

Turn this sheet in to your teacher after your presentation.

## NOTE-TAKING SHEET

Use the following Answer Key to assess the quality of students' notes for Handout 2, *Note-taking Sheet*. Student answers will vary.

**Trimester 1 (Spring):**

What are some examples of empathy that the students/teachers demonstrate?

- *Yanagawa giving up his position in the Library Department so his classmate (Kato) could have it instead*
- *Students trying to help Mako find her missing "2+9" card*
- *Teachers understanding how frustrated the students must feel about their trips and activities being cancelled*

In what ways do the students/teachers show resilience?

- *Dealing with Covid restrictions*
- *Dealing with trip cancellations*
- *Learning technology necessary for remote learning*

What are some examples of cooperation depicted during the first trimester?

- *Everyone wearing masks to protect others from getting sick*
- *6th graders helping the new 1st graders when they arrive at school*
- *The election of different students to their departments*
- *The lunchtime process*
- *The orderly manner in which the earthquake emergency drill was conducted*
- *Students cleaning their classrooms and the school grounds together*
- *Students walk on the right side of the hall*
- *Students helping each other on the playground*

**Trimester 2 (Fall):**

What are some examples of empathy that the students/teachers demonstrate?

- *Classmates being kind to Ayame (giving her tissues because she is sad about her mother not feeling well)*
- *Ms. Watanabe talking to students and Yutaro about how to respond to his classmates' numerous requests to fold origami stars*
- *When going out to the park, reminding students to be quiet in case people are sleeping in nearby buildings*
- *During the school trip, teachers debating whether to scold the students*

In what ways do the students/ teachers show resilience?

- *The boy broadcaster (Kihara) learns to do the school broadcast on his own*
- *Students and teachers learn how to use technology to conduct remote learning*
- *The 6th-grade boy (Kihara) working hard to perfect his jump rope routine despite struggling with it in the beginning*

What are some examples of cooperation depicted during the second trimester?

- *Teachers working together to set up for Sports Day*
- *Teachers and students planning and working together to put on a successful Sports Day*

### **Trimester 3 (Winter):**

What are some examples of empathy that the students/ teachers demonstrate?

- *Ms. Watanabe comforting Ayame and telling her everything will be all right, that she doesn't have to be perfect, and that she just needs to do her best. Telling Ayame that if she is scolded again, she will be scolded along with her*
- *Students asking Ayame if she's okay when they see her crying, and letting her know, "I make mistakes, too!"*
- *Ms. Watanabe comforting her students at the end of the school year, and telling them she wished she could have another day with them.*

In what ways do the students/ teachers show resilience?

- *When Ayame doesn't succeed at her first audition for the drumming part, she tries again and is selected to play cymbals*
- *Despite often wondering whether he's cut out for his job, Mr. Endo works hard to engage his students with fun activities while also trying to prepare them for their future.*
- *After Ayame is scolded for not knowing her part, she regroups, and instead of giving up, she tries again and plays well*
- *The sixth grade teachers listen to their colleagues' feedback regarding the graduation rehearsal. Even though it's not all positive, they tell their colleagues that they will work with their students so they can rise to the occasion*
- *Ms. Watanabe learns that she is being transferred and won't be teaching at the same school the following school year*

What are some examples of cooperation depicted during the third trimester?

- *The student performance of "Ode to Joy" for the incoming first graders*
- *Although there were few student greeters outside the school in the morning, the numbers grew as more students joined in greeting each other*
- *A girl helps her classmate put on his lunch smock*
- *The students work together to clean the school*
- *The teachers work together by offering advice and encouragement to each other*

Describe three aspects of Japanese education that seem different from what you've experienced with your own education.

*Student answers will vary.*

Describe three aspects of Japanese education that seem similar to what you've experienced with your own education.

*Student answers will vary.*