

# What's Japanese about Japan?

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## 1. Overview and Objectives

### Activity Overview

The way people perceive foreign cultures influences their ability to communicate with people from said culture. Thus, developing observation skills is key for intercultural communication. This activity encourages students to look for patterns in the culture they are observing, to triangulate, test hypotheses, and keep their minds open to other possible explanations for what they observe. In short, it is designed to help students to “see ourselves as others see us”.

### Learning Objectives

General Objectives	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>To develop discernment for identifying patterns in a "foreign" culture</li> </ul>
Specific Objectives	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>To inculcate an attitude of enquiry and an openness to data when generating ideas</li> <li>To encourage students to think beyond the observable</li> </ul>

Keywords	intercultural awareness, study abroad, observation skills
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## 2. Activity Context

I use this activity as a way of honing students' thinking skills before they leave Japan to study abroad (multiple destinations)...whenever we have some time set aside during orientation to work on attitudes and skills. In addition, I sometimes use this activity in conjunction with my other ICLE AI submission, titled "Making the Familiar Strange".

### Students

Number of students	2 Min.	15 Max.
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Do students need to use a second language?	Yes	<input checked="" type="radio"/> No
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## 3. Activity Materials & Prep

### Activity Duration

Total duration in minutes:	>60
How many sessions?	1
Any homework?	Yes

### Materials

Material # 1 Title:	Pictures provided by students
Material Type:	Digital or Printed Image
Material Access:	Students can look for them online or in printed media

Material #2 Title:	A word cloud maker (optional)
Material Type:	Webpage/website
Material Access:	<a href="https://www.wordclouds.com/">https://www.wordclouds.com/</a>

### Set-Up Instructions

1. Prior to class, assign the homework described in step #1 of the Activity Description.
2. It helps if the teacher also does this homework task, so she can provide an example of how to talk about the pictures.
Estimated Set Up Time (min.): 15

## 4. Activity Description

Suggested Time	Activity Instructions
Variable	Homework assignment: Find/take pictures of five things that are part of daily life in Japan (not special occasions) but you think are unlikely to be seen in other countries, and put them together in a PowerPoint slideshow or in Poster. The homework can be in groups or individual. Be ready to show the pictures to your classmates and tell them what we can learn about life in Japan from each of these things.
10m each	In class, have each student show their slides and talk about what they show about Japan. Help students to make their thinking explicit by asking provocative questions, for example: "Why did you choose to share this picture?", or "Do you see any similarities between what you've explained and what previous students have explained?" Open the discussion to other students (not only the one presenting her slides at this moment). When patterns begin to emerge from what students are saying, draw their attention to these patterns. For instance, there may be a number of mentions, in different contexts, of the importance of "cleanliness" in daily life in Japan.
10m	Provide feedback on the activity, eg. by making a word cloud of keywords students used in their explanations (like "cleanliness") and the frequency of each keyword.
5m	Focus attention on the process of the activity: observation, interpretation, looking for patterns, building up and modifying those patterns as more data points become available.



## 4. Additional Information

Post-activity suggestions:

Refer to the process of the activity as often as possible when interacting with the students.

Acknowledgements:

This is an activity that John Condon did with his students at ICU in the '70s. He published a book (<https://www.amazon.com/Whats-Japanese-About-Japan-Condon/dp/4079754639>) of the things his students discovered about Japan. His emphasis was on exploring Japan, whereas mine is on the process involved in observing and modifying patterns.