

# ***Explain It!***

Discussing Japanese Culture  
in English



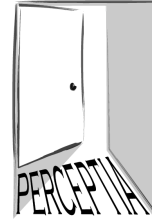
by Robert Long



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## **Discussing Japanese Culture in English**

**by Robert Long**

Sample

PERCEPTIA PRESS  
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# Contents

| Themes                             | Topics   |     |
|------------------------------------|--|-----|
| <b>1: SPORTS</b>                   | Sumo, Kendo, Kyudo, Soccer, Baseball, Aikido                           | 5   |
| <b>2: MUSIC</b>                    | J-pop, Enka, Jazz, Ayumi Hamasaki, Koda Kumi                           | 13  |
| <b>3: FOOD</b>                     | Sushi, Okonomiyaki, Yakitori, Natto, Soba, Udon, Tea                   | 21  |
| <b>4: HANDICRAFTS</b>              | Dolls, Toys, Sculptures, Koinobori, Japanese masks, Origami            | 29  |
| <b>5: HOLIDAYS</b>                 | Foundation Day, Coming of Age Day, New Year, Bon-Odori                 | 37  |
| <b>6: GAMES</b>                    | Shogi, Naginatado, Wii, Playstation, GameCube, Gameboy                 | 46  |
| <b>7: CITIES &amp; PLACES</b>      | Mt. Fuji, Sapporo, Kanmon Straits, Kumamoto Castle, Kyoto and Nara     | 55  |
| <b>8: RELAXATION</b>               | Pachinko, Onsen, Johrei, Card games (Menko and Utagaruta)              | 64  |
| <b>9: FAMOUS PEOPLE</b>            | Baseball Stars, Ken Watanabe, Yukichi Fukuzawa, Japanese Emperor       | 73  |
| <b>10: SUPERSTITIONS</b>           | Maneki Neko, Taboos, Yakidoshi, Kitsune, Butsumetsu Days, Omikuji      | 82  |
| <b>11: ANIMATION</b>               | Astro Boy, Kamon Rider, Anpanman, Naruto, Doraemon                     | 91  |
| <b>12: THE ARTS &amp; THEATER</b>  | Kabuki & Noh Theater, Bunraku, Sado, Ukiyoe, Ikebana                   | 100 |
| <b>13: ETIQUETTE &amp; CUSTOMS</b> | Bathing, Bowing, Eating, Gift-giving, Greetings, Hospitality, Weddings | 109 |
| <b>14: BUILDINGS &amp; GARDENS</b> | Kyoto Imperial Palace, Suizen-ji Joju-en Garden, Shachihoko            | 118 |
| <b>EXAM</b>                        | Main Cultural Issues   | 127 |

# Unit 1: Sports

## Starting Out

### 1. LIKES AND DISLIKES

Add Japanese and international sports to the table. Give a reason why you like or dislike each one.

|                     |              | Reason |
|---------------------|--------------|--------|
| Sports I like       | <i>kendo</i> |        |
| Sports I don't like |              |        |

Talk about your favorites with a partner.

Example:

A: What sport do you like?

B: I really like *kendo*.

A: Why do you like it?

B: Because it is fast and exciting.

### 2. SURVEY

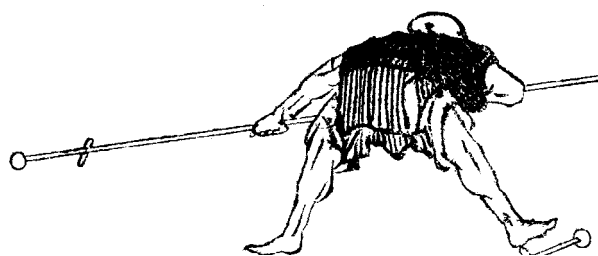
Answer these questions and then interview other students.

| Survey   | Me | Partner 1 | Partner 2 |
|--|----|-----------|-----------|
| Do you enjoy watching <i>sumo</i> ?                                    |    |           |           |
| Should people learn <i>aikido</i> to protect themselves?               |    |           |           |
| Should Japanese people spend more time on traditional Japanese sports? |    |           |           |
| Do you prefer soccer or baseball?                                      |    |           |           |
| What is your favorite Japanese traditional sport?                      |    |           |           |
| Which would you rather do: <i>karate</i> or <i>judo</i> ?              |    |           |           |
| Which is more interesting: <i>kyudo</i> or <i>kendo</i> ?              |    |           |           |
| Do you think soccer is now more popular than baseball?                 |    |           |           |

### 3. THE JAPAN QUIZ

Do you know the answers to these questions? You will learn the answers in this unit.

1. Who was the developer of *aikido*?
2. When did Daisuke Matsuzaka make his major league debut?
3. When was Little League started?



# Topic 1: *Aikido*

## Learn About It

*Aikido* can be translated as the way of unifying one's life energy or as the "way of harmonious spirit." *Aikido* was started in 1942 in Tokyo by Morihei Ueshiba. He was trying to create an art that people could use to defend themselves.

In *aikido*, people learn how to neutralize an attack by blending the attackers' momentum and then redirecting the force of the attack. This is achieved by using special throws and joint locks. Today, there are many new styles of *aikido*.



### COMPREHENSION CHECK

Answer these questions. Then check with a partner.

1. Who started *aikido*?
2. What do people learn?
3. How can *aikido* be translated?

## Explain It

Close your book. Try to remember the topic in your head. Now explain the topic to another student.

## Talking Points

Ask the following questions to your partner. Draw or find pictures to help explain it.

1. Do you think *aikido* is exciting?
2. What is the most interesting traditional Japanese sport?
3. Have you ever done any traditional Japanese sports?

## On Your Own

Write an explanation of another Japanese sport.

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Explain it to your partner.



# Topic 2: *Famous Japanese Athletes*

## Learn About It

In the spring of 2006, Daisuke Matsuzaka was one of the best pitchers in the World Baseball Classic. Matsuzaka made his major league debut on April 5, 2007 for the Red Sox. He throws a 91 to 96 mile per hour fastball, slider, and forkball.

Takahashi Naoko is well known as Japan's marathon runner. In the 2000 Olympic Games in Sydney, she won the gold medal. She finished the marathon in a new Olympic record time of 2:23:14 (2 hours, 23 minutes, and 14 seconds). This was a new world record. However, recently, she has been performing poorly.

Kosuke Kitajima won gold medals in the 100 and 200 meter breaststroke races in the 2004 Olympic games in Athens in 2004. In the 2008 Olympic Games in Beijing, he repeated this amazing achievement. He has won a total of four gold medals and two bronze medals.



### COMPREHENSION CHECK

Answer these questions. Then check with a partner.

1. Who is Daisuke Matsuzaka?
2. What did Takahashi Naoko do?
3. What did Kosuke Kitajima win?

## Explain It

Close your book. Try to remember the topic in your head. Now explain the topic to another student.

## Talking Points

Ask the following questions to your partner.

1. Did you watch the 2008 Summer Olympics in China?
2. Did you follow any of the swimming events?
3. Should Japan hold the Olympics in 2016?

## On Your Own

Write a description of another Japanese athlete.

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Explain it to your partner.

# Topic 3: *Little League*

## Learn About It

The Little League was started by Carl Stotz in Pennsylvania in 1939. Little league baseball is now popular throughout the world and especially in Japan. Many children join baseball to make new friends, learn teamwork, and get some exercise. Here are just some of the rules to Little League.

1. Every player on the team roster must have at least one plate appearance and play one inning on defense in each game.
2. The distance between the bases is 60 feet, 46 feet from the pitcher's mount to home plate.
3. The maximum length of a bat is 33 inches.



### COMPREHENSION CHECK

Answer these questions. Then check with a partner.

1. When was Little League started?
2. Who started Little League?
3. What are some of the rules?

## Explain It

Close your book. Try to remember the topic in your head. Now explain the topic to another student.

## Talking Points

Ask the following questions to your partner.

1. Have you ever played Little League baseball?
2. Are Japanese people becoming more interested in baseball now?
3. What are some of the rules of baseball?

## On Your Own

Write a description of the rules to another sport. What are the rules? How do you win?

.....

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.....

.....

Explain it to your partner.

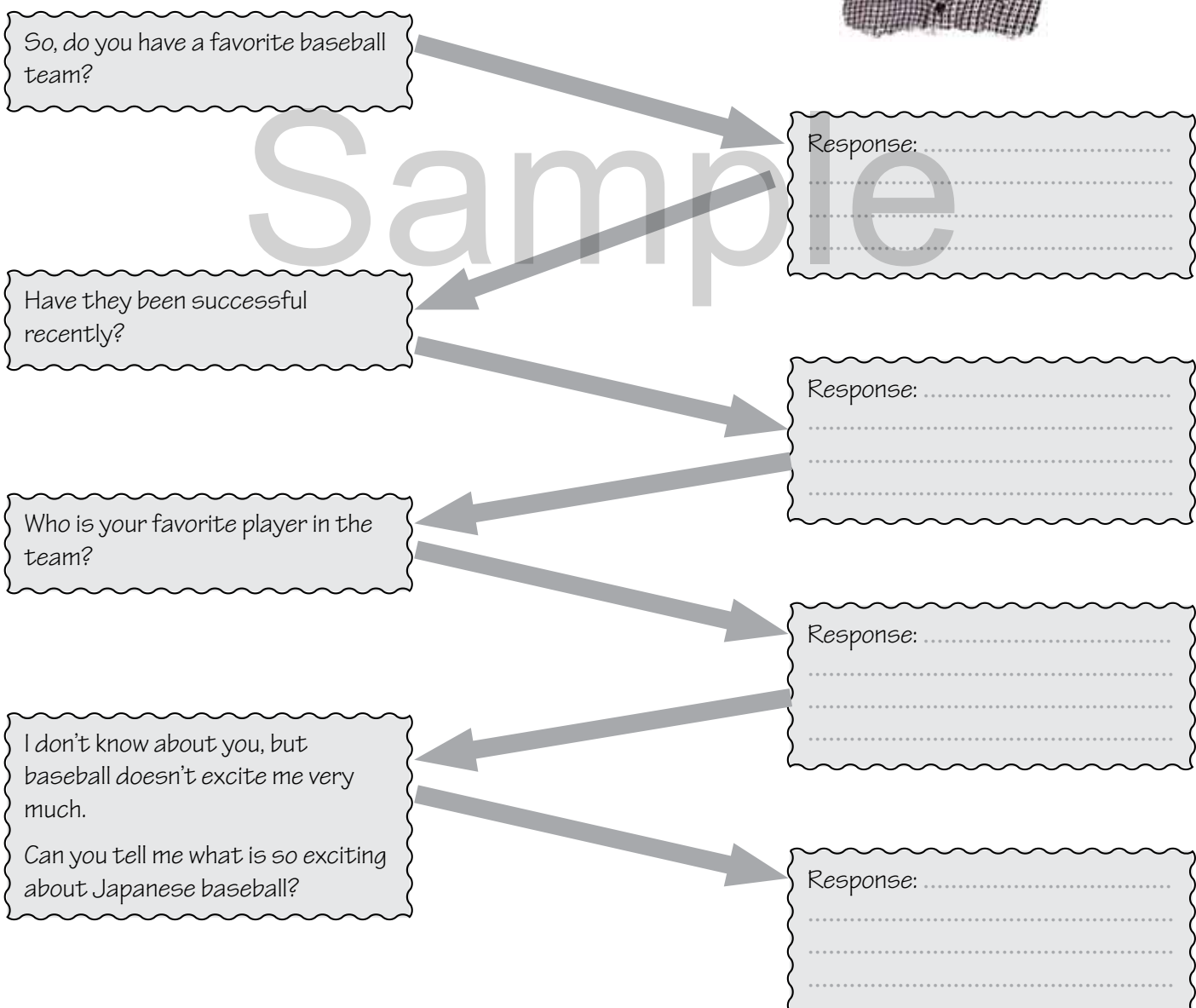


# Roleplay

## Explaining Japanese baseball

Fill in the missing words in this conversation.

| Role A: You  | Role B: An American man   |
|--|---|
| Context: You are sitting in the city international center watching a baseball game. An American asks you about your favorite team. | Context: You are watching TV in the city international center. You ask the Japanese person next to you about his/her favorite team. |



Add other ideas to the conversation to make it more interesting. Then, perform your roleplay for your class.

# Language Support

## Key Sentences

1. [Japanese word] can be translated as [translation]

Example:

*Aikido* can be translated as “the way of harmonious spirit.”

Create sentences using these prompts.

- a) *Karate* .....
- b) *Kendo* .....
- c) *Kenjutsu* .....
- d) *Kyudo* .....
- e) .....

2. [Famous person] is well known as [reason they are well known]

Example:

Takahashi Naoko is well known as the winner of the marathon in the Olympics.

Create sentences using these prompts.

- a) Daisuke Matsutaka is .....
- b) Asashoryu is .....
- c) Nakata Hidetoshi is .....
- d) Ietaka Kaneko is .....
- e) .....

3. [Something] was started by [person] in [year/place].

Example:

The Little League was started by Carl Stotz in 1939 in Pennsylvania.

Create sentences using these prompts.

- a) *Aikido* .....
- b) The Yomiuri Giants .....
- c) *Kemari* .....
- d) *Judo* .....
- e) .....

## Tip for Good Explanations

It is a good idea to have some facts when giving an explanation about a sport, for example, who is important, what events are held yearly, what changes have happened recently, which teams are popular now, and so on. You can easily get these facts from newspapers and from the Internet.

# Unit 2: Music

## Starting Out

### 1. LIKES AND DISLIKES

Add some of your favorite musicians or bands to the table.

| Japanese music | Foreign music |
|----------------|---------------|
|                |               |

Explain your choices to a partner.

Example:

A: I really like Glay. How about you?

B: Hmm, I don't know them so well, but I didn't like their song *Kuchibiru* so much.

A: Oh really! I loved it.

### 2. RATE IT!

Give each of these Japanese songs a score from 0 - 5 (5 is the best!). Then compare with other students.

| Song  | Me | Partner 1 | Partner 2 | Partner 3 |
|---|----|-----------|-----------|-----------|
| 1. I'll Kill You (X-Japan)                    |    |           |           |           |
| 2. However (Glay)                             |    |           |           |           |
| 3. You Are the One (TK Presents Konet)        |    |           |           |           |
| 4. <i>ARA SHI</i> ( <i>Arashi</i> )           |    |           |           |           |
| 5. Glass (Ryuichi Kawamura)                   |    |           |           |           |
| 6. <i>Kuchibiru</i> (Glay)                    |    |           |           |           |
| 7. Love Across the Ocean (Kumi Koda)          |    |           |           |           |
| 8. <i>Shiroi Kumo no Yuni</i> (Saruganseki)   |    |           |           |           |
| 9. <i>Umi</i> (Ketsumeishi)                   |    |           |           |           |
| 10. The Other Side of Love (Ryuichi Sakamoto) |    |           |           |           |
| 11. High Pressure (TM Revolution)             |    |           |           |           |
| 12. Yell (Kobukuro)                           |    |           |           |           |

Which songs are the most popular in your group?

### 3. THE JAPAN QUIZ

Do you know the answers to these questions? You will learn the answers in this unit.

1. When did people start using the word J-pop?
2. What are *hyoshigi*?
3. How old is Ayumi Hamasaki?



# Topic 1: J-Pop

## Learn About It

The term J-pop is an abbreviation of “Japanese Pop Music.” It was influenced by Western music including jazz, rock, and blues. The name J-pop began to be used widely from the 1990s. Popular musicians included Kazumasa Oda, SMAP, and the duo Chage and Aska. Female pop idols included Yoko Oginome and Chisato Moritaka. More recently, the top 3 selling albums in 2007 were Mr. Children’s album ‘Home’ with 1,125,017 in sales, Koda Kumi’s ‘Black Cherry’ with 998,230 in sales, and Ayumi Hamasaki’s best of album A Best 2 -White- selling 720,120 copies. J-pop is most popular in Japan, but some artists such as Utada Hikaru have achieved success overseas.



### COMPREHENSION CHECK

Answer these questions. Then check with a partner.

1. Who are some Japanese pop singers?
2. How many albums did Mr. Children sell in 2007?
3. Who is a J-pop artist who has achieved success overseas?

## Explain It

Close your book. Try to remember the topic in your head. Now explain the topic to another student.

## Talking Points

Ask the following questions to your partner.

1. Do you like any of these artists listed above?
2. Are there any other singers better than these?
3. Is Japanese pop music getting better or worse?

## On Your Own

Write about a popular J-Pop artist.

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Explain it to your partner.

# Topic 2: *Traditional Instruments*

## Learn About It

Japan has many traditional musical instruments. For example, there are many kinds of Japanese flutes. The *ryuteki* or “dragon flute” is used for *gagaku*. A bamboo flute called a *kagurabue* is used for shinto ritual music. A *nohkan* is used for noh theater. The *shakuhachi* is used for Zen meditation. There is also a flute known as *hotchiku* which is capable of two octaves.

Taiko drums are also used in almost all Japanese festivals. *Hyoshigi*, two pieces of wood held together by a thin rope, are important too. They are used to make a clapping sound.

Other traditional instruments include stringed instruments such as the *biwa*, the *shamisen*, and the *koto*.



### COMPREHENSION CHECK

Answer these questions. Then check with a partner.

1. What kinds of flutes are used in Japanese traditional music?
2. What is a *hyoshigi*?
3. What kind of drums are used in festivals?

### Explain It

Close your book. Try to remember the topic in your head. Now explain the topic to another student.

### Talking Points

Ask the following questions to your partner.

1. Have you ever played any of these instruments? Why or why not?
2. Have you listened to many concerts with traditional instruments?
3. Which Japanese instrument would you most like to learn?

### On Your Own

Write about a traditional Japanese musical instrument.

.....

.....

.....

.....

Explain it to your partner.

# Topic 3: Pop Divas

## Learn About It

Ayumi Hamasaki, born October 2, 1978, is known as “Ayu” to her fans. Hamasaki is called the “Empress of Pop” due to her popularity. Hamasaki’s album, “A Best 2,” was released in 2007. It held the number-one and number-two positions on the Oricon and the United World Chart. It is said that her music is getting better every year.

Kumi Koda was born Kumiko Kōda on November 13, 1982. She is a Japanese pop singer from Kyoto who debuted in 2000 with “Take Back.” Koda achieved major success with her seventh single, “Real Emotion / 1000 no Kotoba.” Koda also made news when she said, “When a woman reaches the age of 35, her amniotic fluid begins to sour.” Because many women were deeply outraged by this, Koda gave a public apology on Fuji TV.



### COMPREHENSION CHECK

Answer these questions. Then check with a partner.

1. What is another name for Ayumi Hamasaki?
2. How old is Kumi Koda?
3. Why did Kumi Koda have to apologize?

## Explain It

Close your book. Try to remember the topic in your head. Now explain the topic to another student.

## Talking Points

Ask the following questions to your partner.

1. Do you ever listen to these musicians? Why or why not?
2. Are there any new and exciting”pop singers now?
3. What is the difference between pop singers now and in the past?

## On Your Own

Write about another singer or music group that you like.

.....

.....

.....

.....

Explain it to your partner.



# Roleplay

## Explaining Japanese music

Fill in the missing words in this conversation.

### Role A: Australian Student

Context: You are on a homestay with a Japanese family. The father likes *enka* music so you want to buy him a CD of a current and popular *enka* singer. You also want to buy a CD of pop music for his son. Ask a Japanese acquaintance about it.

### Role B: You

Context: An Australian friend that you know at school is asking you about current popular *enka* and Japanese pop rock singers who are now popular. He wants to buy a CD for his homestay father and his son. Give some advice.



Hi, how's it going?

Response: .....

I was wondering if you know anything about *enka* music. I would like to buy a good CD for my homestay father.

Response: .....

How about pop music? What kind of music would you recommend for a teenager?

Response: .....

Where is the best place to buy it?

Response: .....

Add other ideas to the conversation to make it more interesting. Then, perform your roleplay for your class.

# Language Support

## Key Sentences

1. [A] is very similar to [B] because [reason]

Example:

Rock and roll is very similar to blues because they both use the same scales.

Complete these sentences.

- a) Mr. Children is very similar to \_\_\_\_\_ because \_\_\_\_\_.
- b) Ayumi Hamasaki is very similar to \_\_\_\_\_ because \_\_\_\_\_.
- c) B'z is very similar to \_\_\_\_\_ because \_\_\_\_\_.
- d) Kumi Koda is very similar to \_\_\_\_\_ because \_\_\_\_\_.
- e) \_\_\_\_\_.

2. [Something] is getting [better / worse] because [reason]

Example:

DJ Honda's music is getting better every year because he plays with so many different people.

Complete these sentences.

- a) In my opinion, I think \_\_\_\_\_'s music is getting \_\_\_\_\_ every year because \_\_\_\_\_.
- b) However, when it comes to Ayumi Hamasaki, her music is getting \_\_\_\_\_ every year because \_\_\_\_\_.
- c) You know, I think that the group Morning Musume is getting \_\_\_\_\_ every year because \_\_\_\_\_.

3. What is the difference between [A] and [B]?

Example:

What is the difference between Mr. Children and B'z?

Write two questions you could ask about Japanese music.

- a) What is the difference between \_\_\_\_\_?
- b) What is the difference between \_\_\_\_\_?

Ask the questions to a partner.

## Tip for Good Explanations

When talking about music, it is a good idea to talk about specific groups and artists. Always try to differentiate one group from another. For example, you might say that there is a big difference between Morning Musume and Ayumi Hamasaki.

To make a comparison in order to show how things are similar, you can use these expressions:

|            |         |              |      |
|------------|---------|--------------|------|
| similar to | just as | identical to | like |
|------------|---------|--------------|------|

However, if you want to show how two or more groups or artists are different, you can use expressions like:

|                |                |             |                |
|----------------|----------------|-------------|----------------|
| different from | in contrast to | compared to | in contrast to |
|----------------|----------------|-------------|----------------|

# Unit 3: Food

## Starting Out

### 1. LIKES AND DISLIKES

Write your favorite and least favorite Japanese foods in the table.

| I like... | I don't like... |
|-----------|-----------------|
|           |                 |

Talk about your favorites with a partner.

Example:

A: What Japanese food do you like?

B: I really like *sushi*.

A: How often do you eat it?

B: About once or twice a month.



### 2. RATE IT

Give each of these Japanese foods a score from 0 - 5 (5 is the best!). Then compare with other students.

|                       | Me | Partner 1 | Partner 2 | Partner 3 |
|-----------------------|----|-----------|-----------|-----------|
| 1. <i>Udon</i>        |    |           |           |           |
| 2. <i>Okonomiyaki</i> |    |           |           |           |
| 3. <i>Tempura</i>     |    |           |           |           |
| 4. <i>Omuraisu</i>    |    |           |           |           |
| 5. <i>Nabe</i>        |    |           |           |           |
| 6. <i>Oden</i>        |    |           |           |           |
| 7. <i>Yakitori</i>    |    |           |           |           |
| 8. <i>Yakisoba</i>    |    |           |           |           |
| 9. <i>Ramen</i>       |    |           |           |           |
| 10. <i>Yakizakana</i> |    |           |           |           |
| 11. <i>Natto</i>      |    |           |           |           |
| 12. <i>Tonkatsu</i>   |    |           |           |           |

Which foods are the most popular in your group?

Challenge: Can you explain these foods to your partner in English?

### 3. THE JAPAN QUIZ

Do you know the answers to these questions? You will learn the answers in this unit.

1. What are *soba* noodles made from?
2. What are the ingredients of the *tare* sauce used in *yakitori*?
3. How long should *okonomiyaki* be cooked?