

Ready Steady NihonGO! Language Awareness

Alongside teaching the children oral/ aural communication skills in Japanese, Ready Steady NihonGO! also raises various **language awareness points**. These are clearly marked within the lesson plans, but to summarise, by the end of the course, pupils should have a greater understanding of:

- **sounds and syllables in Japanese**

Children should be aware that each syllable in a word has the same value. Though the stress and intonation may vary, each syllable is the same length. With few exceptions, sounds are not elided or swallowed. Consonant and vowel sounds in Japanese are also consistent: they are pronounced in the same way regardless of where they appear in the word and what other sounds precede/ succeed them. This is unlike English where 'find' and 'fill' for example, despite both using the letter 'i', are pronounced completely differently.

- **script**

Children should understand that Japanese uses 3 writing systems and they should be able to distinguish the differences between kanji, hiragana and katakana:

- kanji (characters that represent a complete idea (e.g. object, action, concept etc))
- hiragana (phonetic alphabet used for words of Japanese origin and for grammatical inflexion)
- katakana (phonetic alphabet used for loan words or to create emphasis)

- **loan words**

Children should be aware of the impact that other languages have had/ are having on the Japanese language and should look at the origins of foreign words that have been adopted and absorbed into the language.

Within the constraints of Japanese, pupils should understand how loan words are modified to suit the language i.e. how some words are shortened, how sounds are changed and how in some cases the meaning of the loan word is different from the original.

- **phonemes**

Children should be aware that all languages have a phoneme system, but not all languages have the same one. Japanese for example does not have the l/r, b/v distinction that English does, so as a result, Japanese people find it nearly impossible to distinguish between those particular sounds. Conversely, the Japanese 'r' sound can seem to the ear of an English speaker to be a combination of 'r', 'l' and 'd' sounds.

- **how language shows respect**

Children should come to understand some of the ways that Japanese can be used to show respect, such as adding certain suffixes and altering/ adding word endings. Further, children should be made aware that body language can also be used to show respect in Japan, bowing perhaps being the most obvious example of this.