



Teaching about Japan's Environmental Impact

by Tamatha Roman (Kanda University of International Studies)



Introduction

Students at Kanda University of International Studies (KUIS) in Makuhari, Chiba dedicate a lot of their studies to the pursuit of understanding global issues. They use that knowledge in both their study abroad experiences as well as in careers beyond their university life. However, many students at KUIS, as well as Japanese university students in general, are unaware of the issues that face their own country, especially those which have a significant impact on the world as a whole. Specifically, these include environmental issues such as overfishing, food waste, and nuclear power.

Course Description

Japan's Environmental Impact is a content elective course that I designed which focuses on developing students' understanding of environmental issues that affect the university, Japan, and beyond. During the course, students discuss ways to reduce, reuse, recycle, and respect elements in the environment, and learn ways to improve their environmental footprint through interactive lessons, blog challenges, and action projects.

The topics at hand were chosen based on current hot topics in the global media, as well as on extensive needs assessment of KUIS students successfully completing the course. Although there are an infinite number of environmental issues that Japan faces today, this year-long course focuses on the six following units:

1. disposable waste
2. sharks and the impact of overfishing
3. food waste
4. water waste
5. fast food
6. clothing and cosmetics

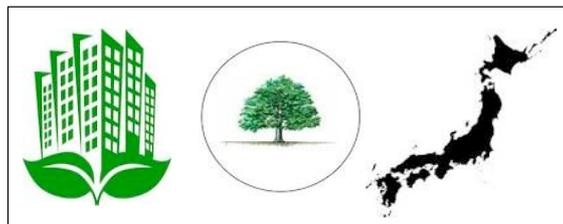
Each unit is covered for approximately eight lessons, culminating in a unit action project. In addition, over the course of each unit, students are asked to complete two blog challenges.

Example Unit

As an example, the first unit in the course is "disposable waste," focusing on the issues of plastic bottles and disposable chopsticks, both of which are pervasive in Japanese culture, as well as destructive to the environment. Many Japanese students use

plastic bottles and disposable chopsticks on a daily basis, unaware of the damage that these conveniences are causing.

For this unit, students analyze the many factors behind their popularity and overuse. They discuss why they prefer bottled water over tap water, and conduct a blind taste test of several sources of bottled water and tap water. In another lesson, students watch an episode of "How Stuff Works" to learn about the bottled water industry. For disposable chopsticks, they examine the life of a disposable chopstick through jigsaw reading, learning about the trees that are cut down, as well as the chemicals that are used to dye the chopsticks. Throughout the unit, students study important vocabulary, engage in debate, and evaluate their own impact on the environment.



Blog Challenges

As a supplement to the class activities, students are assigned an environmental challenge bi-weekly based on the material covered in class. These challenges are to be completed on their own time as a way to bridge the lessons with real world experiences. Additionally, students are required to reflect on their experience by posting on a class blog on *Tumblr*, considering the difficulty of the challenge, what they have learned, and its environmental impact. Over the course of the disposable waste unit, students are asked to do the following two challenges:

- 1) carry around the garbage that they accumulate for 24 hours and photograph the evidence
- 2) not use plastic bottles, plastic bags, or disposable chopsticks for one week

The challenges are not meant to be easy, but students have generally enjoyed completing them. As they reflected on whether their challenge was successful or not, students have used class material (vocabulary, documentary clips, jigsaw readings) and critical

thinking skills to support and contrast the ideas in their entries. Furthermore, English discussions have been sparked in and outside of the classroom as to what was learned through completing the challenges.

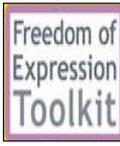
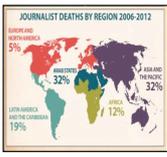
Action Project

At the end of the unit, students are asked to complete an action project, a project meant to somehow teach the local community about the issue. For the disposable waste unit, students create “disposable art,” made from a chosen recycled material such as plastic bottle caps, toilet paper rolls, disposable chopsticks and so on. In groups, students collect their material and create a piece of art that is displayed on campus for the KUIS community. Each piece of art is accompanied by a message which includes the number of products used, where the products were found, and explains how the design is connected to the environment, along with a translation in Japanese. In the past, some projects have included a plastic bottle flower garden, a bottle cap KUIS tower, and a disposable chopstick trash bin.

Conclusion

The other units in the course follow similar suit. Students engage in a wide range of activities, meant to both increase their own knowledge of environmental issues in Japan and well as share their newfound knowledge with the community. They participate in activities that range from analyzing shark stereotypes in YouTube movie trailers, to working one-on-one with *Second Harvest Japan*, to picking up trash at the local beach, to putting together a vegan bake sale for the student community. As KUIS strives to be an international institute, this course aims to teach English through content-based material, and to push students to become more savvy global citizens with an understanding of local and global environmental issues. If you’d like to know more about this course or its units, please contact me.

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<p>Shin-Eiken Association <www.shin-eiken.com ></p> <p>新英語教育研究会</p> <p><i>Shin-Eiken</i> is a dynamic high school EFL teachers group in Japan that works to promote global education. Check out its Japanese website, subscribe to its magazine or attend its August 2013 conference in Hokkaido.</p>	<p>“Shin Eigo Kyoiku” (New English Classroom) Magazine Sanyusha Press <www.sanyusha-shuppan.com></p> <p>Shin-Eiken’s monthly magazine “The New English Classroom” (in Japanese) features a wide variety of articles on global themes.</p> <p>Sample articles from magazine issue # 524 (April 2013)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ <i>Let’s Learn Korean!</i> ▪ <i>Interactive Learning via Projects: The US Civil Rights Movement</i> ▪ <i>To End the Misery of War Forever: Allen Nelson</i> ▪ <i>Teaching How to Say “Hello!” in Languages around the World</i> ▪ <i>English Songs for Teaching Peace, Human Rights, Environment</i> ▪ <i>English Friendship Speeches: “We Love Korean People!”</i> 												
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