Learn about Japanese writing and give it a try yourself!

1. Learn about Japanese Writing

In Japanese, there are three writing systems called Hiragana, Katakana, and Kanji. Hiragana and Katakana are both made up of 46 basic letters. Each of these letters represents one syllable. Hiragana is used to write Japanese words, and Katakana is often used to write words from foreign languages. Japanese children start learning to write with Hiragana and Katakana in first grade.

Kanji, originally from China, is the writing system made of thousands of characters. Each character represents specific meaning. By putting characters together, you get new words with new meanings. Once first grade students have mastered Hiragana and Katakana, they start learning Kanji, but that takes a lot longer. By sixth grade, students will have learned 1,000 characters; to read newspapers, it’s said you need to know 2,000 Kanji characters.

Besides these three writing systems, Romaji, the romanization of Japanese, is also commonly used.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Hiragana</th>
<th>Katakana</th>
<th>Romaji</th>
<th>Kanji</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>あ い う え お</td>
<td>ア イ ウ エ オ</td>
<td>a i u e o</td>
<td>一 + 人 = 一人</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

ichi (one)  hito (person)  hitori (one person or alone)

TIME: 25 minutes

MATERIALS:
- Video: Many Homes in Kyoto, Japan—Ran
- Kanji and Hiragana activity worksheets

PRONUNCIATION GUIDE:
Kanji: Kah-n-gee
Hiragana: Hee-rah-gah-nah
Katakana: Kah-tah-kah-nah
2. **Practice Writing in Japanese**

1. Watch the chapter "Ran" in the video "Many Homes in Kyoto, Japan" and find her calligraphy done in brush and ink.

2. Review stroke orders in the activity sheets.

   Stroke order is important: it often helps one to remember how to write letters and characters correctly, especially those with many strokes. In general, stroke order goes from top to bottom and from left to right.

3. Follow the stroke order and trace the dotted line.

4. Write on your own in the empty boxes. Remember to follow the stroke orders!
3. Things to Talk about

- If you want to learn more about Japanese writing, here are some books you might like!
  - Jimi’s Book of Japanese: A Motivating Method To Learn Japanese (Hiragana), by Peter X. Takahashi
  - Jimi’s Book of Japanese: A Motivating Method To Learn Japanese (Katakana), by Peter X. Takahashi

- To see more Hiragana, Katakana, and Romaji, check out the chart on page 4.

- Kanji developed from pictures of the words they represented. For example, below is how the Kanji character ki (tree) was developed. See more Kanji evolution on pages 5 and 6.

![Ki (tree)]
Kanji Evolution

**Kawa (river)**

**Tsuki (moon)**

**Yama (mountain)**

---

© 2013 Boston Children’s Museum
Kanji Evolution

hi (sun)

kuchi (mouth)

me (eye)

THE JAPANESE HOUSE

ACTIVITIES
<p>| | | | |</p>
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**ichi** (one)

<p>| | | | |</p>
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**ni** (two)

<p>| | | | |</p>
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**san** (three)
Writing Kanji Characters

The Japanese House Activities

kawa (river)
yama (mountain)
tsuki (moon)
Writing Kanji Characters

THE JAPANESE HOUSE
ACTIVITIES

1. hi (sun)

2. kuchi (mouth)

3. me (eye)