

Japanese things that do and don't need translating

Listen to your teacher read out some Japanese names for things that English speakers often know about but don't always know the Japanese name for and try to guess the most common way for English speakers to describe that thing. You get two points if you can guess the most common way (the first option given), one point if what you think of is a less common way (such as the second or third option if they are given), and no points if what you say is something that English speakers are unlikely to say or understand.

Look at the list that you have been given. It shows things that English speakers tend to know about Japan, but with a mix of ones that they tend to know the Japanese name for and tend not to know the Japanese name for and so describe in another typical way. The game is to try to guess the name that English speakers usually use to describe that thing.

Choose one of the words that you have and read out just its name in Japanese (on the left). Give a hint like "It's a food" if your partner doesn't know what you are speaking about, but don't say any English words that are written next to it. Your partner will get two points if they can say the first (= left-hand side) word(s) or explanation, or one point if they say something else that an English speaker might say (e.g. the second option).

Japanese things with common English names and explanations in order Festivals and celebrations (for the teacher)

- hanami – (Japanese) cherry blossom viewing (party)
- hina matsuri – (Japanese) doll festival
- kakigori – shaved ice/ snow cone
- mikoshi – portable shrine
- natsu matsuri – (traditional) Japanese summer festival
- nengajo – New Year postcards
- nyugakushiki – school entrance ceremony
- sakura – cherry blossom
- seijin no hi – coming of age day
- setsubun – bean throwing festival
- taiko/ wadaiko – Japanese drum/ taiko
- yukata – yukata/ (light) summer kimono

Student A

1. (Chiyoda/ Meguro/...)-ku – ward
2. (Fukushima/ Kanagawa/...)-ken – prefecture
3. ajinomoto – MSG/ monosodium-glutamate
4. anime – anime/ Japanese animation/ Japanese cartoons
5. anko – red bean jam/ sweet red beans/ anko
6. bento – bento box/ bento/ Japanese(-style) lunch box
7. bonsai – bonsai/ miniature trees
8. butsudan/ kamidana – household shrine
9. cosplay – cosplay/ dressing up
10. cup ramen – pot noodle
11. daikon – daikon/ Japanese radish
12. dashi – dashi/ Japanese stock
13. dojo – dojo/ martial arts school
14. Doubutsu no Mori – Animal Crossing
15. edamame – edamame/ (fresh) (green) soy beans
16. fugu – pufferfish/ fugu
17. Fuji-san – Mount Fuji
18. fusuma – sliding screen/ sliding door
19. futon – futon
20. hakusai – Chinese cabbage/ Chinese lettuce/ bok choy/ pak choy
21. Hanshin Awaji daishinsai – Kobe earthquake/ Great Hanshin Earthquake
22. ikebana – ikebana/ Japanese-style flower arranging
23. izakaya – izakaya/ Japanese-style pub
24. jinja – Shinto shrine/ shrine
25. kakemono/ kakejiku – hanging scroll
26. kamikaze – kamikaze (often pronounced “kamikazi”)
27. karaage – Japanese-style fried chicken
28. karaoke box – karaoke booth
29. karate – karate (usually pronounced “karahti”/ “karahtee”)
30. kare-pan – curry donut
31. katana – katana/ Japanese sword
32. katsuobushi – bonito flakes/ katsuobushi
33. kawaii – kawaii/ (the culture of) Japanese cuteness
34. Kimetsu no Yaiba – Demon Slayer
35. kimono – kimono
36. koi nobori – carp streamer/ carp kite/ carp flag
37. koto – (Japanese) zither/ koto
38. manga – manga/ Japanese comic(s)
39. matcha – matcha/ powdered green tea
40. minshuku – (Japanese-style/ Japanese) B&B/ bed and breakfast
41. miso – miso
42. miso shiru – miso soup
43. mochi – chewy rice cake/ mochi
44. mochigome – sticky rice
45. momiji – Japanese maple
46. nabe – Japanese-stye hotpot

Student B

47. natto – fermented soybeans
48. nihonshu – sake (usually pronounced “sahkei”)/ (Japanese) rice wine
49. ninja – ninja
50. nori – nori/ dried seaweed
51. okonomiyaki – savoury pancake
52. onsen – hot springs
53. origami – origami/ paper folding
54. rikishi – sumo wrestler
55. ryokan – Japanese-style inn
56. sado – tea ceremony
57. samurai – samurai/ Japanese warrior
58. sashimi – sashimi/ raw fish
59. sembei – rice cracker
60. sempai – sempai/ senior
61. Sen to Chihiro no Kamikakushi – Spirited Away
62. sento – public baths
63. shakuhachi – shakuhachi
64. shiitake – shiitake/ shiitake mushroom
65. shinkansen – bullet train
66. shochu – Japanese spirits
67. shodo/ shuji – (Japanese) calligraphy
68. Showa Tenno – Emperor Hirohito
69. soba – buckwheat noodles/ soba noodles/ soba
70. sumo – sumo wrestling/ sumo
71. suppuku/ hara-kiri – hara-kiri
72. sushi – sushi
73. takoyaki – octopus balls
74. tanuki – racoon dog/ tanuki
75. tatami – tatami/ rush matting
76. Teikoku Hotel – The Imperial Hotel
77. tempura – tempura
78. teppanyaki – teppanyaki/ Japanese-style grill
79. tofu – tofu/ bean curd
80. tonkatsu – tonkatsu/ pork cutlet
81. torii – torii gates/ shrine gates
82. tsukemono – (Japanese) pickles
83. udon – udon/ (thick white) wheat noodles
84. ukiyo-e/ hanga – ukiyo-e/ (Japanese) woodcut prints
85. umami – umami/ the fifth taste
86. ume-shu – (Japanese) plum liqueur
87. wagyu – Kobe beef/ wagyu
88. wasabi – wasabi/ Japanese horseradish
89. washlet – combined toilet and bidet/ high-tech Japanese toilet
90. yakisoba – fried noodles
91. yakitori – Japanese-style grilled chicken