

Some Suggestions for Exposing Students to Kanji

1. Create a kanji learning environment

You can teach some kanji before students master hiragana and katakana. Display kanji charts or posters containing kanji on the walls to expose students to kanji whenever possible, so that they will become aware of kanji figures and may notice them when they encounter them outside the classroom.

2. Noticing kanji around you

It is possible to find Japanese writing including kanji on Australian products such as T-shirts, tissue boxes, flyers, tattoos, a necklace etc. It can be fun for students to search for Australian products which have Japanese writing on them and to bring them to class to discuss the following:

- Are they Japanese or Chinese? (They could be both!)
- What is the purpose of using Japanese writing?
- What does the writing mean?
- How do you feel about Japanese writing on Australian products?

3. Using Realia

Realia are powerful resources for connecting students with a living language. Show students realia such as manga, Japanese advertisements or menus which have hiragana, katakana and kanji and ask students to indicate which script it is by circling letters in three different colours. You may ask students to think about why Japanese has three different writing systems.

The Three Writing Systems

The ancient Japanese language developed without a form of written expression and was first written down in kanji which were introduced from China more than 1500 years ago. Kanji developed from pictures, and there are many kanji that still look like the thing they represent.

However, Chinese was a different language to Japanese, so in order to write their own language, the Japanese used certain kanji to represent sounds, and simplified them into two different scripts (katakana and hiragana). Over time a hybrid written language developed incorporating kanji used semantically and kana used phonetically. Modern Japanese is written with a combination of kanji and hiragana, while katakana is used to write words of foreign origin such as 'フラットメイト' (flatmate), or foreign names. Theoretically, all Japanese could be written in kana, but in practice this would hamper communication due to the large number of words pronounced alike but different in meaning.

Advantages of Using Kanji

1. It is easier to remember or guess the meaning of a word as kanji has a meaning (whereas kana does not).

Eg. おんな 女 / あね 姉 / いもうと 妹

2. It is easier to distinguish words with the same pronunciation but different meanings.

Eg. はな → 花  or 鼻  ひ → 日  or 火 


3. It is easier to read a sentence with kanji than without kanji, as kanji have meaning but hiragana does not.

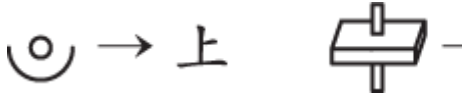
Eg. ははははなをかいました。 → 母は花を買いました。

4. You can save writing space by using kanji, so more information can be written in a limited space.

Forms of Kanji

Kanji can be divided into four main groups according to how they are formed.

1. ^{しょうけいもじ} 象形文字 (pictographs): kanji formed from a picture, eg. 

2. ^{しじもじ} 指示文字 (sign characters): kanji for positions and numbers which cannot be represented as a shape are formed by using lines and dots, eg. 

3. ^{かいいもじ} 会意文字 (combined meanings): kanji formed by two or more components to express a new meaning, eg.

日 (sun) + 月 (moon) → 明 (bright)

4. ^{けいせいもじ} 形声文字 (combined meaning and sound): kanji formed by two or more components, one representing the sound and another representing the meaning. The component which expresses the meaning of the kanji is called a ^{ぶしゅ} 部首 (radical).

Stroke Order Rules

Correct stroke order is essential to the formation of kanji characters.

General principle 1: Write from left to right



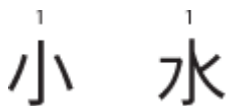
General principle 2: Write from top to bottom



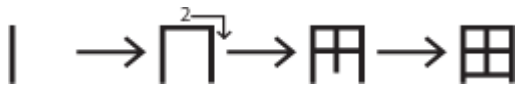
Rule 1: When two strokes cross, write the horizontal stroke first.



Rule 2: When there is a stroke in the centre and also on the sides, write the central stroke first.



Rule 3: When there is a figure in a square, the stroke which closes the square is written last.



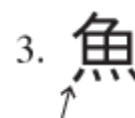
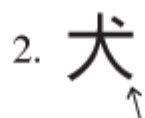
Rule 4: When a stroke passes through a square or some lines, write that stroke last.



Rule 5: When a stroke passes through the whole central figure horizontally, write that stroke last.



Task Idea: Give the stroke number of the stroke which is indicated with an arrow.



Answer: 1.(3) 2.(3) 3.(8)