

# Primary Advice

By Helene J. Uchida

**Q:** I tell the students all the time to NOT speak Japanese, but they continue to speak it. Why don't they listen to me?

S.P., new teacher  
Kobe

## A: Make 'no Japanese' rule clear in lesson

We had two brothers observe a class at Little America last week. At the end, the teacher invited them to play an English card game with the other students. The younger brother kept speaking Japanese during the game. The teacher asked him several times to refrain from speaking Japanese, but he didn't. The purpose of the game being played was to discard all of one's cards. The next time the boy spoke Japanese, the teacher gave him an extra card, which shocked the boy. He was really focused on winning the game. Being handed the extra card as "punishment" for speaking Japanese served two purposes: It sent a signal that the teacher meant what he said, and it was a fair consequence. I was pleased to learn that both brothers joined our school even though the teacher had been strict with the younger brother.

There are four concepts to focus on:

First, explain why the students should not speak Japanese in English class. Most English conversation classes occur once a week for about one hour. There are 168 hours in a week. If the child gets a minimum of 8 hours sleep a night, it leaves 126 hours of activity time, which means the student is operating in their Japanese mode for about 126 hours a week. One hour of English exposure is really minuscule. We explain that to our students, stressing that their hour with us is a precious chance to explore and try out their English. This makes sense to the majority of our students, no matter what their age or level.

Second, make sure "English only" is a part of your class rules. I usually tell students that if and when they speak Japanese, they are literally robbing the other students of a chance to understand English. I tell them, "Don't be an English robber."

Third, there has to be a consequence for students who speak Japanese. If there is no consequence, then the child will interpret the teacher's request as meaningless. Poss-

ible consequences, after three requests, might be: telling the student to leave the room and watch a DVD in the lobby, the student losing their turn in a game, or telling the student to separate from the group and sit at another table to do some writing work.

Lastly, to discourage them from speaking Japanese, your request or order for them to not speak Japanese should be accompanied by a clear signal. Your signal could be your hand gesturing "no," your forefinger in front of your lips or just a simple frown on your face. Smiling and saying, "English only" or, "No Japanese" would confuse them. I smile when my students speak English and frown when they speak Japanese. Since most students want to win my approval, they do their best to stay in English mode. I find it adorable when a new student joins the class and the veteran student puts her forefinger in front of her lips and tells the newcomer, "No Japanese."

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Readers are encouraged to send questions to Helene J. Uchida on any themes related to teaching English — particularly those at the elementary and junior high school level — to [jn-edu@yomiuri.com](mailto:jn-edu@yomiuri.com) with "Primary Advice" in the subject line. Questions to Uchida are also accepted via postcard at "Primary Advice," The Japan News, 1-7-1 Otemachi, Chiyoda Ward, Tokyo 100-8055. Questions should preferably be written in English, accompanied by your name, occupation and the area in which you live.



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*The next installment will appear on Sept. 1.*