

# Primary Advice

By Helene J. Uchida

Q:

The holidays are fast approaching and I am in need of some ideas for fun, educational activities for Christmas. I have been invited to teach about American holiday culture to small children.

T.J., professor  
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## A: Focusing on Christmas vocabulary, customs can pique children's interest

Almost all Japanese children like Christmas and have some notion of what it is about, namely Christmas cake, Santa Claus and presents. As a guest speaker, I suggest you expand their understanding by focusing on four components: Christmas vocabulary, fun activities, Western customs and songs.

Please consider preparing a Christmas kit filled with Christmas items for cultural understanding and vocabulary enhancement. Your kit could include a Christmas bag to carry the following small objects: a star, snowman, bell, candle, reindeer, sleigh, red ribbon, gift, stocking, Christmas card, snowflake and, of course, Santa. I would suggest you prepare a handout with visuals of the items in your bag with the English words underneath them. Say the words and ask students to repeat after you. Then take a red cloth and place it on a table or desk, after which you take one item out at a time and ask the children to name it as you place it on the red cloth. After all the objects have been placed and named, you can point to an item, and the child who names it first can place it back in the Christmas bag. Continue like this until all the items have been returned to the bag.

If time allows, you can ask the students to individually draw one of the Christmas items with the English word underneath on the blackboard or white board. They can use the Christmas handout you gave them earlier as a reference. An ample supply of color chalk or magic markers will be necessary, so be sure to get approval from the people who invited you. This activity is always fun with a Christmas CD playing in the background.

Children are interested in the following Western Christmas traditions:

- \* Christmas tree customs vary from country to country. For example, Americans used electric lights, and Danes use candles in special candleholders that sit on the tree branches. Germans decorate the tree on Christmas Eve.
- \* American men tend to spend a lot of time and money on illumination outside, often to the point of competing with their neighbors to have the most lights or the most

extravagant display. You can find examples online.

- \* Christmas cookies in the shapes of Christmas trees, Santa, angels and other Christmas images are popular treats in contrast to Japanese Christmas cakes.
- \* Christmas cards are sent to friends and family like Japanese send New Year's cards.

Young children can sing simple Christmas songs with a little practice by repeating after you and then singing together with you. The best songs to sing with them are "We Wish You a Merry Christmas," "Jingle Bells" and "Silent Night."

I always think it is important to share with children that it is nice to do something kind for others at Christmastime. A small, thoughtful surprise is always a delight for the receiver. It can be a card, a handmade gift, a home-baked treat or a favor. It's not the price but the thought that counts. Merry Christmas!

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Readers are encouraged to send questions to Helene J. Uchida on any themes related to teaching English to younger learners — particularly those at the elementary 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.



Uchida is the director of Little America, a Fukuoka-based company that trains teachers of English.

*The next installment will appear on Jan. 8.*