

Daily Life of an Elementary School Pupil in Japan

Forewords

This paper portrays a daily life of a Japanese pupil in elementary school, based on multiple sources and data¹.

Needless to say, this pupil described below is merely an example and a fictional figure. However, as stated in above, it is a portrayal based on various data that could be considered as some sort of total sum, if not an archetype.

The main character is a boy in 5th grade going to a middle-sized (about 450 pupils) elementary school. He lives in a suburban area with his corporate employee father and his housewife mother. As for Japanese elementary school, please refer to the paper in below as required.

Primary Schools in Japan

http://www.nier.go.jp/English/EducationInJapan/Education_in_Japan/Education_in_Japan_files/201109BE.pdf

Wake up and breakfast (6:30~)

An alarm clock starts ringing, which I set at 6:30 last night before going to bed. I quickly reach out to stop it. I'm still feeling sleepy and can't get out of bed. This is Thursday.²

While I'm lingering in the bed, mother comes to wake me up. "It's a good day. Get up quickly, have some breakfast." saying so, she pulls my blanket off. I change clothes, wash my face in the bathroom and head for dining table. Father is already eating breakfast, reading newspaper. Usually he leaves for work a little earlier, so I'm delighted to meet him today. I say good morning and sit at the table. Today's breakfast is my favorite, rolled egg and miso soup. Sometimes it is bread, salad with bacon and egg, but I rather prefer Japanese style rice.

I'm allowed to watch TV while eating, only at breakfast. It is because the time is shown on the left corner of TV screen and father wants to watch the news. He usually comes back late at night, often after I go to bed, so on weekdays it is only at breakfast that we could have a time to talk. We don't have any particular topic to talk about, but mostly it is about the news we watch at that time³.

Going to school (8:00~)

It's a little past 8 when I finish my breakfast. It's about time to go to school. I've already prepared what I bring to school today last night. I have to take my gym uniforms as we have physical education today.

I leave home with my school bag and a uniform bag. I also have to bring my personal alarm, hung from my neck⁴. Several friends join me on my way to school. We head for the school talking about TV program we watched last night or about video game strategies⁵.

At school (8:15~

We arrive at school around 8:15. We still have some time before the morning assembly⁶, so we usually play in the schoolyard or chat in the classroom. But today I'm on day duty⁷. I have a lot of jobs to do. It's a bit pity that I can't play with everyone else, but duty day comes around only once a month, it's a little exciting at the same time.

Bell rings 5 minutes before the assembly starts. At this bell we are all supposed to return to the classroom and take seats. Meanwhile our homeroom teacher comes to the classroom. When the teacher stands before the desk, it's a pupil on day duty, me today, to call for morning greetings. In a morning assembly, usually the teacher gives us some messages or cautions.

After the assembly, first period starts⁸. As the first period today is Arithmetic, we don't need to move classrooms. The homeroom teacher remains there to give a class. To be honest, I'm kind of good at Arithmetic, so I'm rather excited about Arithmetic classes⁹.

The second period is Social Studies. As a pupil on day duty, I have to bring maps or other materials from teaching material room.

The break between second and third period is a little longer, so we usually play outside if the weather permits. But since today's third period is PE, we change first in the changing room and then go out to play.

Physical education today is mat exercise in the gym. It is taught by the physical education teacher, not by homeroom teacher. Our physical education teacher is a newly appointed young teacher from this year and is very energetic. His vitality is rather contagious and we move our body to the fullest extent, ending up a little tired.

Fourth period is reading. We change quickly and go to the library. I'm going to finish the book I started last week. When we finish reading one book, we discuss with the librarian which book to read next. Those who like books will borrow books from the library, not only reading them in the class. Fifth grades can borrow up to 3 books at one time for a week.

After fourth period, we have a school lunch. The pupils on serving duty will go to the designated place and bring lunch to the classroom. Today's lunch is steamed rice with vegetables and meat, fried chicken, miso soup and milk¹⁰. Since our school has its own cookery, the school meal is very delicious. When my mother was going to elementary school, the lunch was made at centralized cookery and wasn't very nice, so she envies us.

It is also my job as a day duty to call for "*Itadaki-masu* (Let's eat)" greetings before start to eat.

After the lunch, it's cleaning time. We clean our classroom by ourselves. Our class is divided into four groups and 3 of them clean our own classroom. One group goes to help underclass with their cleaning.

After the cleaning comes lunch break. We all want to go out to play as soon as possible, so we usually finish cleaning in a hurry. But it is often not thorough when we rush, so our homeroom teacher joins us in cleaning, once in two weeks after lunch. At that time we clean the room very hard, trying not to rush out to play.

In lunch break we mostly play in the schoolyard, in the gym or on the rooftop when it's fine. Since our schoolyard is not very large, there is a fixed rotation of which grade plays where on which day, to avoid any trouble over the place. It's lucky if a rainy day falls on our gym day, but otherwise we play in our classroom chatting or drawing doodles on the blackboard. To be honest we want to play video games if possible, but it is forbidden to bring anything unrelated to classes, so it's a bit boring on a rainy days.

After the lunch break comes fifth period. Today we have science classes for two consecutive periods. Two-periods science class is fun, because we do experiments in the science laboratory. In other days, the class after lunch is hard to concentrate, as we tend to get sleepy. But it's fine today. Science is also taught by a specialized teacher as we are now in upper grades.

After sixth period is finished, we return to our homeroom. Our homeroom teacher is waiting for us for the end-of-the-day homeroom. The teacher tells us what to bring for tomorrow's class or confirms homework. A call for "Sayonara (good bye)" greeting is also a job of on-duty pupil. When you are on day duty you can't go home straightaway, as you have to record what happened on the day briefly in a class diary and show it to the teacher before leaving¹¹.

Going Home (15:00~

After finishing my task as a day duty pupil I hurry to the school gate, where my friends in neighborhood are waiting for me¹². We are going to play at the park nearby. We decide to meet at the park, after going back home once¹³.

Out-of-school activities (15:30~

I go back home, put my stuff and school bag down, and then head for the park with my mobile phone (*Kids Keitai*)¹⁴ hung from the neck. Some of my friends can't come today as they have tutoring schools or other lessons¹⁵. Since everyone was on bike¹⁶, we decided to go to a larger park in a short distance away.

It is about 15 minutes by bike to the large park. I like it because it has small stream and an athletic ground. While we run around the park on bicycles, try to catch some fish in the stream (which we fail), and the chime of 5 o'clock rang¹⁷. I want to stay and play more but we have to go back home as it is about time.

When I get back home, mother is preparing our dinner. I was going to play some game before dinner, but mother says, "Do your homework before the game", so I do homework first. Today's homework are some kanji writings and a page of Arithmetic drills, it won't take 30 minutes.

Dinner and going to bed (18:30~

Mother calls me for dinner when I'm playing game after doing my homework. I want to play a bit more but I have no choice. As Father is going to be late again tonight, we eat dinner by two of us¹⁸. It's hamburger curry with salad today. I love curry but don't like salad so much. I'm not keen on tomatoes in particular. But if I try to leave it out, mother tells me angrily "You can't grow up if you are picky and don't eat a lot", so I swallow it. I had a refill of hamburger curry because it was so good, and it made me really full.

After dinner I watch TV. Mother brought me some fruits as dessert. I actually want to continue playing the game, but I can't, as it is the rule to play only one hour per day.

Mother tells me to take bath just as the TV program is over. I used to take bath with mother or father when I was smaller, but I started to do it alone since last year when I became 4th grade.

After bath, it's about time to change into pajamas and go to bed¹⁹. Before going to bed I have to prepare the things I bring to school tomorrow. I change textbooks and notebooks and finish sharpening all my pencils. I feel tired after running about on my bicycle today. I'm going to bed now.

¹ Materials referred to writing this paper are below.

- (1) *National Assessment of Academic Ability 2013*, Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology (MEXT)/ National Institute for Educational Policy Research, Aug 2013
- (2) *White Paper on Children and Young People 2013*, Cabinet Office, June 2013
- (3) *Nationwide Survey on Families and Children 2009*, Ministry of Health, Labour and Welfare, December 2011
- (4) *Second Basic Survey of the Current Living Conditions of Children: from 4th grade to high school juniors*, Benesse Educational Research & Development Institute, May 2010
- (5) *Survey Report on Living Hours After School*, Benesse Educational Research & Development Institute, October
- (6) *White Paper on Elementary School Pupils Web edition*, Gakken Educational Research Institute <http://www.gakken.co.jp/kyouikusouken/whitepaper/201112/index.html>
- (7) *Fourth Basic Survey of Study and Field Survey of Academic Ability*, Benesse Educational Research & Development Center, January 2008

² Most elementary school pupils wake up from 6 to 7:30 in the morning. According to (2), the average wake-up time of elementary school pupils (10years and older) is 6:38. According to (3), the wake-up time of 4th, 5th and 6th grade pupils are: 5.8% wake up before 6, 47.5% about 6:30, 44.6% from 7 to 7:30 and 1.3% after 8, while 0.8% gave no response or stated unknown.

³ According to (2), the ratio of children between 7 and 14 skipping breakfast is 5.6%. Also according to (2), about 26% of children eat breakfast with family every day, while about 31% families eat breakfast together 2-4 days per week, 10% once a week, and about 32% don't have breakfast together at all. (3)

⁴ A personal alarm is a security device to emit a loud siren-like sound to attract attention of people around and to scare off an assailant using a criminal mind. Some local communities distribute or lend out the portable personal alarms to children.

⁵ With exceptional cases of long-distance commute of more than 4km, elementary school pupils commute on foot. In 62.7% of local communities, public elementary schools (and junior high schools) introduce school buses, but it is mainly in remote areas. Only 1.7% of elementary school and junior high school students use school buses, which means most of them are going to school on foot.

“*Shudan-Toko* (Going to school in groups)” or “*Kobetsu-Toko* (Going to school individually)” is designated by each school.

In the case of going to school in groups, small groups are organized according to the location of residence. Mostly school or PTA give instructions before admission on which group the pupil belongs to.

In “*Shudan-Toko*” the pupils meet at rendezvous points (park corner or in front of someone’s house, while in the case of apartments mostly at main entrance or in front of administration building), and then head to school at the designated departing time in groups led by the highest grade pupils (5th or 6th grade).

If it is “*Shudan-Toko*”, each pupil individually goes straight to school. In some cases friends living in neighborhood get together before going to school.

In both cases, school route (the route to and from school) is designated in advance due to security reasons.

In some schools, the members of section committee (local committee) are appointed to oversee the regional safety. They patrol school routes in the morning or watch over the safety of children at hazardous spots such as traffic lights.

- ⁶ Most elementary schools start at 8:30. In many cases morning assembly between children called “Morning Meeting” is held before the first period starts. Sometimes all-school assembly is held for once a week.

Morning meeting is hosted by pupils in charge of the meeting or by pupils on day duty of the day. Some schools have 10 minutes of “Morning study” when small exam of kanji or calculation, or “Morning reading” time to read books.

- ⁷ Task of the pupils on day duty:

In most cases a day duty is borne by a pair of pupils, in rotation based on the student number or seating arrangements.

Main tasks are:

Open the window. Turn on the light;

Call for greetings in the morning or at the end of the day;

Call for greetings at the start of each class and lunch;

Erase blackboard, clean blackboard erasers;

Write the date and the names of day duty pupils of next day on blackboard;

Close classroom, Turn off the light.

- ⁸ Below is an example of timetable for fifth grade pupil.

	Mon	Tue	Wed	Thu	Fri
1	Japanese	Social Studies	Japanese	Arithmetic	Class Activity
2	Arithmetic	Music	Science	Social Studies	Social Studies
3	Home Economics	Arithmetic	Arts and Handicrafts	Physical Education	Japanese (Calligraphy)
4	Home Economics	Foreign Language Activity	Arts and Handicrafts	Japanese (Reading)	Physical Education
5	Integrated Studies	Japanese	Arithmetic	Science	Arithmetic
6	Integrated Studies			Science	Moral Education

- ⁹ Below are the favorite subjects according to the survey in (6). New subject “Foreign Language” was not yet introduced in 2006 when this survey took place, so it is not included here.

	Boys	Girls
Japanese	45.7	61.8
Social Studies	50.2	46.0
Arithmetic	70.1	54.9
Science	73.9	62.7
Music	54.5	80.1
Arts and Handicrafts	77.6	80.5
Physical Educaiton	90.3	79.2
Home Economics	78.0	91.1
Integrated Studies	64.0	70.3

¹⁰ Below are examples of school lunch menu, announced in advance every month. In many cases, detailed information including allergic substances is published for parents.

2013 October	1 Tue Naan, Curried Meat, Cream Soup of Chinese Cabbage, Apple Jelly, Milk	2 Wed Rice, Grilled Salmon, Stir-fried gourd, tofu and vegetable chowder, Milk	3 Thu Honey Roll, Stewed Sweet Potato, Sautéed Sausage, Milk	4 Fri Germinated brown rice, Salt and Sesame, Nanban ni (Mixed Stew), Egg soup, Milk
7 Mon Sliced Brown Bread, Croquette, Cherry tomato, Meat ball soup, Milk	8 Tue Chinese Stir-fried vegetables & seafood on rice, Brown Seaweed and Corn Soup, Milk	9 Wed Ground Soybean Roll, Curry Stew, Boiled Vegetables, Sesame Dressing, Milk	10 Thu Boiled barley and rice, Radish leaves Seasoning, Stewed Fish, Pork Miso Soup, Yoghurt Drink	11 Fri Cheese Toast, Borscht (Russian Stew), Fruit Punch, Milk
14 Mon National Holiday	15 Tue Boiled Barley and Rice, Mushroom Stroganoff, Hijiki Seaweed Salad, Milk	16 Wed Rice Flour Roll, Ginger-stewed Chicken Wing Stick, Won ton Soup, Grape, Milk	17 Thu Steamed Rice with Vegetables and Meat, Fried Chicken, Miso Soup, Milk	18 Fri Sliced Bread, Strawberry Jam, Potato Gratin, Corn Sauté, Milk
21 Mon Boiled Barley and Rice, Small Fish boiled in Soy Sauce, Fried and stewed Pork and Fried Tofu, Miso Soup, Milk	22 Tue Teriyaki Hamburger, Minestrone Soup, Tangerine, Milk	23 Wed Boiled Barley and Rice, Bean Curry, Cucumber Salad Chinese, Milk	24 Thu Bread Roll. Fried Mackerel, Floury Potatoes. Consommé Soup, Milk	25 Fri Rice, Roasted Nori (laver), Simmered Pork and Konjac, Vegetable Soup, Milk
28 Mon Small Brown Rolls, Mushroom Spaghetti, Shredded Nori (Laver), Egg Soup, Tangerine, Milk	29 Tue Boiled Barley and Rice, Hijiki (Seaweed) with Sesame, Tuna and Soybean seasoned with Miso, "Noppei" Vegetable Soup., Milk	30 Wed Raisin Bread, Lasagna, Sautéed Vegetables, Milk	31 Thu Wakame (Seaweed) Udon Noodle, Fried Fish, Apple, Milk	

¹¹ *Classes, School Meals and School Life:*

Classes

Elementary School class has 45 minutes per period. First period starts from about 8:40 and there are four periods in the morning. Fourth period ends past noon before lunch. The break between periods is about 5 to 10 minutes. Sometimes there is a longer break called “middle break” between second and third period for about 20 minutes.

School Lunch

Meals are provided every day. The cost is about 210 yen per serving. It is about 3500-4000 yen per month. The cost is borne by guardians.

School lunch is provided either by “Center system”, a distribution from centralized cookery called school lunch center which cooks meals for whole town or several schools, or by “Individual system” where the school has its own cookery with its specialized nutritional teacher planning and cooking the meal.

In most cases the menu is announced in advance.

Basically staple diet is either bread or rice. In some days, rice would be pilaf or steamed rice with meats or vegetables. There are 1 or 2 main and side dishes. Sometimes a side dish would be replaced by dessert. Milk is regularly provided as a drink.

If any special elimination diet for allergy or other reasons is required, specially prepared meal would be provided in some cases, but otherwise the pupil brings his/her own meals.

Cleaning activities

In many schools there is cleaning activity done within a break after school lunch. It is mainly to clean the classroom, but sometimes other communal areas are included, shared between classes. To encourage cross-grade communications, some schools form groups with a few pupils from each grades. Sometimes the cleaning is done by these vertically-divided groups.

The end-of-the-day meeting

Sometimes “the end-of-the-day meeting” is held before the pupils go home. There the teacher deliver the messages, or reconfirm what to bring next day and homework.

¹² Even in the schools adopting “*Shudan Toko*”, going home will be done individually as the ending time will be different by grades or classes. In some cases that the school instructs “not to go home alone” due to safety concerns, pupils going to the same direction would meet up and go home together. In many cases there is also a designated routes for going home just like going to school.

¹³ Free time after school is used as follows (4):

Average minutes for their own time per day	Boys	Girls
Do school homework	31.4	38.4
Do homework or study other than for school	34.4	37.8
Watch TV or DVD	101.6	112.9
Play TV games or portable games	49.7	23.4
Use mobile phones	1.1	5.8
Use computers	12.7	13.1
Listen to music	5.8	13.3
Read books	15.3	25
Read comic books or magazines	20.6	20.7
Read newspaper	2.8	2.7
Help with housework	8.3	12.4
Take a nap	2.5	3.7
Play outside	53.5	36.7
Do nothing in particular	14	17.9

¹⁴ According to the survey by Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology in 2009 (*The survey regarding the use of mobile phones by children*, May 2009), 24.7% of elementary school pupils (6th grade) possess mobile phones. In metropolitan regions the ratio is more than 30%. Most of them are specially designed phones called “Kids Keitai”, which parents can easily put restrictions on network access, emails or the use of SNS.

¹⁵ About 80% of upper grade pupils go to tutoring schools after school or on weekends. Many also go to sports clubs, martial arts lessons such as Judo or Kendo, or music lessons like piano or violin. The average time spent for these lessons is about 4 hours per week while it is about 2 hours for tutoring school. (4)

¹⁶ According to (5) research, 85.9% of elementary school boys possess their own bicycles. Other popular items are portable game players (79.0%), desktop video game players (72.7%), writing desks (68.9%) and sports equipments (63.9%).
As for elementary school girls, popular items are clothing (90.0%), bicycles (86.7%), stuffed dolls (85.0%), picture books or novels (82.2%) and writing desks (77.0%). “Clothing” here is presumed to be Sunday dresses for outing, not everyday clothes.

¹⁷ Most local communities play short tunes in the evening (17:00 or 17:30), which children mark as a guide for going-home time.

¹⁸ Most of elementary school pupils eat dinner with their family, with few exceptions of about 2%. 26% of families eat dinner together every day, while about 19% eat dinner together more than 4 days per week.(3)

¹⁹ 6.5% elementary school pupils (6th grade, same hereafter) go to bed before 21:00, 40.4% from 21:00 to 22:00, 38.2% from 22:00 to 23:00, 12.8% from 23:00 to 24:00 and 2.8% go to bed after 24:00. (1)

[References]

- National Assessment of Academic Ability 2013*, Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology (MEXT)/National Institute for Educational Policy Research, Aug 2013
- White Paper on Children and Young People 2013*, Cabinet Office, June 2013
- Nationwide Survey on Families and Children 2009*, Ministry of Health, Labour and Welfare, December 2011
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<http://www.gakken.co.jp/kyouikusouken/whitepaper/201112/index.html>
- Fourth Basic Survey of Study and Field Survey of Academic Ability*, Benesse Educational Research & Development Center, January 2008

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小学生の日常生活 【記述の要点】

複数の資料やデータを元に、日本の小学生の日常について描写を試みる。

描写されている小学生の姿は、あくまでもひとつの例、フィクションである。ただ先に述べたように様々なデータを元に描き出そうと試みているもので、典型にはならずともある種の累計にはなっていると考えている。

主人公は中規模校(児童総数 450 名程度)に通う小学校 5 年生の男子。都市近郊に会社員の父と専業主婦の母との 3 人暮らしである。

その小学校 5 年生の男子の起床から就寝までを様々な調査データを元に記述し、さらに注として付帯データやその他の情報を付け加えた。記述した内容には、次のものが含まれている。

- 起床時間
- 朝食の様子
- 登校風景
- 始業までの様子
- 日直の仕事
- 授業の様子
- 好きな教科
- 給食
- 清掃活動
- 放課後の様子
- 帰宅後の生活
- 夕食から就寝まで