

Fun with Japanese

Fun with Japanese (NHK, Japan) connects Japanese children with their culture. Each episode of the series explores one or two phrases from the Japanese language, and presents them through varied segments.

This episode features a phrase from *The Rice Cooking Song* – a song that highlights the proper way to cook rice, as well as a phrase from poet and songwriter Kaneko Misuzu, expressing the message that all things have life. First a small child recites *The Rice Cooking Song* while looking into a pot of rice, revealing dancers dressed as individual grains of rice dancing and singing the phrase (cf. screenshot 1). The audience is then treated to a traditional Kabuki-style performance of *The Rice Cooking Song* (cf. screenshot 2), a movement piece of the song that also involves the flag of Japan or the “Got It Dot” (cf. screenshot 3), as well as a child reciting the song lyrics in his home while eating rice (cf. screenshot 4). The 10-minute episode then switches focus from *The Rice Cooking Song* to Misuzu’s poem. A picture-matching game representing the poem is presented on-screen (cf. screenshot 5), followed by a group of people on a tropical island reciting the phrase “Everyone’s different, everyone’s unique” and cheering (cf. screenshot 6), a bird chirping the phrase (cf. screenshot 7), a song to re-enforce the poem featuring a costumed adult host with costumed children, and finally a video of a young girl sharing the longest name ever. The text phrases are displayed on-screen at the end of the episode to function as a review (cf. screenshot 8).

Fun with Japanese was one of the PRIX JEUNESSE INTERNATIONAL 2012 finalists in the Up to 6 Non-Fiction category.

International experts’ opinions

International experts shared their opinions about *Fun with Japanese* during the discussion sessions at the PRIX JEUNESSE INTERNATIONAL 2012. Experts were taken by the program’s joyful comedic nature, the beautiful and surprising design, and the program’s interesting spin on Japanese culture.

“I really like the way that the Japanese use comedy in *Fun with Japanese*. These kids looked like they were having the greatest time up there, dancing with that guy with the little spots all over him. They really just felt very joyful, like that the kids in the program were loving it.” (female expert, Canada)

“I found the program very interesting, because it has incorporated some of the traditional poems and theatrical elements into it. I think it presents it in a way that the children would not hate that.” (female expert, China)

To many experts, the program felt uniquely Japanese in design and execution.

“It was very playful I thought and aesthetically very pleasing. And it’s just a simple kind of thing that came back on itself. And with that Japanese energy, there’s this kind of energy that jolts you from time to time, which I liked.” (male expert, Canada)

“I thought *Fun with Japanese* was brilliant for its visual humor, and you heard the kids laughing.” (male expert, UK)



Ill. 1: Dancers dressed as grains of rice



Ill. 2: A traditional Kabuki dance performance



Ill. 3: The “Got It Dot”



Ill. 4: A child recites the poem while eating rice at home

Japanese experts reflected this sentiment; “We [in Japan] really focus on design, especially for producing programs for kids.”

Many experts questioned in discussion sessions whether a similar program to *Fun with Japanese* would work in their country.

“I think kids in Zambia would love to watch such a program.” (male expert, Zambia)

“It would work in the UK.” (male expert, UK)

“There’s such thought put into it, and so you do wonder why we can’t do that.” (female expert, Canada)



Ill. 5: A picture-matching game

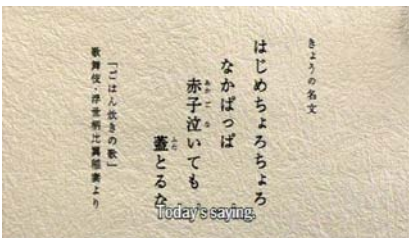
Kristen McGregor (Teachers College, Columbia University, New York, USA)



Ill. 6: A group of people on a tropical island recite Misuzu’s phrase



Ill. 7: A bird chirping a phrase from the episode



Ill. 8: Reviewing the phrases

Screenshots from *Fun With Japanese* © NHK, Japan

Target Audience 7.09	Idea 7.32	Script 6.91	Realization 7.41
Average Score per Category by experts’ voters at PRIX JEUNESSE INTERNATIONAL 2012			