



COMMENTARIES ON THE *TORA NO MAKI* LESSONS

The Keizai Koho Center (Japan Institute for Social and Economic Affairs) is a private, nonprofit organization that works in cooperation with Keidanren (Japan Federation of Economic Organizations) to foster better understanding of the goals and role of business in a free society.

The Keizai Koho Center (KKC) has sponsored fellowships to Japan every summer since 1980, with the cooperation of the National Council for the Social Studies (NCSS), to help schoolteachers learn about contemporary Japanese society in order that they might enhance the teaching of global perspectives.

Presently, over 500 educators have received KKC Fellowships. Beginning in 1995, the experiences of the KKC Fellows have been reflected and shared through the preparation and distribution of a collection of lessons, *Tora no Maki: Lessons for Teaching about Contemporary Japan*. Copies of vol. I and II have been disseminated to NCSS comprehensive members, previous KKC Fellows, and through general sales for totals of 10,300 and 11,400, respectively.

Since well over 21,000 educators have received *Tora no Maki* and the documents are endorsed by the National Council for the Social Studies, we consider the publications significant enough to warrant careful attention. Therefore, we invited three Japan specialists who focus upon incorporating Japan into the K-12 curriculum to review the guides. We also asked the coordinator of the Keizai Koho Center Fellowships Program to respond to the reviews.

Not Just Handshakes and Hugs

Lessons on Japan

By Pamela Fisk

“Not only did I learn about the growth process of the tuna, but I also learned a little bit about Japanese customs and how business is done. I now realize that when dealing with other countries in the business world, it is most important to first learn of their business customs.”

Michael White, Moorestown, N.J. High School senior, assessing a project, *Doing Business in Japan*, undertaken in *Global Issues*, a Social Studies elective course, in March 1998.

The Japanese have a saying that half of teaching is learning, and certainly *Tora no Maki* (1996) and *Tora no Maki II*, (1997) published by NCSS Publications, provide a wealth of teaching materials that will inspire learning on the part of teachers as well as their students. The volumes are the result of the Keizai Koho Fellowship program which, since 1980, has annually sponsored teachers from the United States, Canada, and Australia to visit Japan for a two week immersion into the culture of that nation.

The lessons are written on a multitude of topics ranging from classroom rules to a safer society; from housing to trade; from agriculture to the automobile; from fishing to tips for the traveler to Japan. They are intended for elementary, middle, or high schools, and in some cases adapted to be taught at two or more levels.

My brief was to evaluate the lessons at a practical level. Thus, a group of twenty-eight bemused seniors found themselves pretending to be Canadians hoping to establish trading relations with Japan. The objectives of the lesson were as follows: to compare household consumer items on the basis of where they were manufactured; to identify cultural differences



The author—Keizai Koho Fellow 1989

between the way business is done in North America and Japan; to identify potential problems North Americans may have in negotiating business transactions in Japan; to identify the elements required to put together a coherent business proposal.

The first task was to discover exactly what role Japanese goods play in daily life in the United States, and for that purpose the students were directed to survey their homes and bring in lists of the following categories: means of transportation; electrical goods; kitchen gadgets. Copies of each list were then made for each member of

the class. Working in groups, the students had to create overhead visuals to show the result of their inquiry, groups one and two taking transportation, groups three and four investigating electrical gadgets, and groups five and six reporting on kitchen equipment. Having established that Japanese imports dominated virtually all categories, the students were then to act out how this occurs—namely, through business transactions between Japan and the United States.

With this in mind, groups one and two were given Appendix 1, explaining their proposal—the Japanada Fish Company—from which they had to produce a creative way to keep tuna alive during the summer to fatten them to suit Japanese tastes; groups three and four were given Appendix 2, outlining

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specific roles to play as a delegation from Queenstown tried to persuade the Japanese to manufacture car parts in their town; groups five and six served as business consultants, their task being to listen to each proposal, to choose the better in each category (by completing a detailed Assessment Form), and then to explain (from Appendix 3) how the proposals might be more culturally appropriate.

The lessons, five in all, went very well. "I truly didn't do any work on my own," noted Megan Searl. "I feel we worked as a group through everything." Irene Kratt enthused, "It was great how we all worked together—we all had one goal, and that was to make it a strong presentation." In the process, they came up with creative ideas, such as a design for a tuna fish tank of enormous dimensions, and they incorporated cultural aspects, including greetings, gifts, and flowers.

Those students assessing the presentations took their job seriously, and there was an audible gasp when one member of the Japanada Fish Company casually handed over his *meishi* with

one hand rather than going through the formalities. There was also some thoughtful synthesis. "I have come to the conclusion that presentation and politeness may be more important than the product you are actually selling—in the case of Japanada, we chose the group with a better presentation but with a lesser product," noted Jason Sherwood. The last word on doing business in Japan came from Angela Aydjian: "I find projects like this open your mind to other cultures and show you that there are many different mannerisms, not just handshakes and hugs." Handshakes and hugs! This sounds like a topic for *Tora no Maki III*.

As a Keizai Koho Fellow myself (1989), I have a profound respect for the program. It is informative, purposeful, (under the skilled direction of Mrs. Linda Wojtan) and, as can be seen from *Tora no Maki*, highly productive. There is a precise formula to each lesson: NCSS Standards—Thematic Strands; Introduction—Purpose/Rationale; Recommended Grade Level/Course Placement; Objectives; Time Allotment;

Resources Needed; Procedure; Assessment; Extension and Enrichment; Supplemental Resources. This bears mentioning because it makes the volumes teacher-friendly and easy to digest. The format also brings cohesion to what, at first glance, appears to be an enormously disparate collection of lessons. Each lesson is very comprehensive, and the students working on *Doing Business with Japan* could have fulfilled their requirements by simply using the materials provided, even though many of them chose to go beyond that.

Another advantage is the size of the volumes; they are relatively slim and therefore very portable, an important consideration for overburdened teachers. Furthermore, the information in the volumes is up to date, and highly applicable to exposing the American student to things Japanese. In addition, most of the lessons lend themselves to interdisciplinary activities. For instance, *Doing Business in Japan* will likely find its way into the school's Business arena, but could also trespass into Foreign Language, or into

the hallowed hallways of the English department.

Without question, *Tora no Maki* serves as a fine example of materials coming out of the confection of fellowships offered to American teachers, if only because, as Dr. Pat Nickell, past president of NCSS and leader of the 1996 group, noted, ". . . it is a book of lessons that reflect the real work of real teachers who work with real children. It is not the work of theorists or philosophers."

Finally, why *Tora no Maki*? Translated as "Scroll of Tiger," it originated from an old Chinese tactical manual for military use before the ninth century C.E., one volume of which was titled *Tiger*. It was introduced to Japan by a Buddhist monk in the eleventh century and has several meanings: a manual or reference book containing expertise on a particular subject; books designed for teachers as guides in teaching; quick reference booklets. Each of these is as appropriate to twentieth-century teachers as it was to earlier military tacticians on the other side of the world. ■

STUDY IN JAPAN



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We invite teachers and students to visit our Web site or consult us by telephone, fax, or e-mail about anything to do with study in Japan.

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