



Taking the Tiger by the Tail

Teaching with
Tora no Maki

By Richard Rice



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In the summers of 1995 and 1996, twenty and twenty-two teachers participated in the two-week Keizai Koho Center Program in Japan, in conjunction with the National Council of the Social Studies. The partnership dates back to 1980, and now the NCSS has distributed the resulting nineteen and twenty-two lesson plans in two sets to its entire membership. Widespread national dissemination of this teaching material demands close examination of this important teaching resource, and a format different from that of a normal review.

EAA editor Lucien Ellington has asked me to focus on the content of these lesson plans. I will make some general observations about the workbooks, and then present a detailed list of corrections teachers will need when using these materials. Normally, one would just give a general critique with some examples, but in this case the books are already out there in America's classrooms, and revisions need to be noted to ensure that students are getting accurate and current information.

Fortunately, most of the information presented is accurate and relevant, even though my nit-picking below might suggest otherwise. This is no doubt due to the manuscript review by Mary Bernson, Associate Director of the East Asia Center at the University of Washington. The second volume also was vetted by Linda Wojtan, the current KKC program coordinator and author of many important workbooks and curriculum guides on Japan.

However, given the expertise

and funds available to print and disseminate these volumes, I am disappointed. *Tora no Maki* is not a bad source of lessons on Japan, but neither does it set new standards in content or creativity. In fact, many of the lessons are reworkings of the topics, approach, and information found in earlier workbooks, which are often cited in the resource sections found in most lessons.

For example, Lynn Parisi's *Japan in the Classroom: Elementary and Secondary Activities* (1993) and *The Constitution and Individual Rights in Japan: Lessons for Middle and High School Students* (1992), Bernson and Linda Wojtan's *Teaching About Japan: Lessons and Resources* (1996) all have activities that are as useful as the current volume. Even the classic *Stepping Stones: Teaching About Japan in Elementary Grades, Selected Lessons from the Japan Alumni* has excellent classroom activities, although it has been out of print for years. *Tora no Maki* simply does not rise above its predecessors because it is largely the product of teachers who are new to Japan content.

Some of the volumes cited above have the same genesis; teachers are expected to develop lesson plans appropriate to their grade level after a short exposure to the country. I, too, have required teachers to use their

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Japan experience in the classroom. However, I think material that is widely disseminated to other teachers needs to be the joint product of specialists, teachers, and facilitators: those who excel in teacher outreach training. The problem is that few Asianists have the time or motivation to work closely with teachers, so sometimes lessons are not current or they replicate earlier workbooks, missing significant developments in Japan.

As one would anticipate with forty-one authors, there is a great difference in the quality of the lesson plans. The best include all the information teachers and their students need, the least helpful require library work to fill in the gaps. Some of the sources suggested (a particular issue of *The Japan Times*, for example: I:49) are not likely to be found outside a major research library. Lessons that deal with economic and other issues with rapidly changing information should warn teachers to look up current exchange rates and other statistics in their local papers. Given that the Japanese economy and political situation is a moving target these days, we cannot expect print information to remain current very long, but at least teachers should be warned frequently that they need to update.

Given the scarcity of good resources in most school libraries (money is now used for "technology" rather than books), it is surprising that more World Wide Web sources are not cited for both teachers and their computer literate students. Only the food lesson in II:173 (lessons are not numbered) includes extensive WWW

sources, although there are a few others. The proliferation of interesting sites on Japan should be included in a general appendix. The reliance on sometimes difficult to get print sources makes *Tora no Maki* seem old-fashioned. There is perhaps too much use of Keizai Koho Center publications; even though their statistics may be accurate, they do reflect a Japanese point of view. On economic issues teachers should also be given information from other sources such as the OECD, World Bank, and the IMF. The lesson on pollution control efforts in Japan (II:183) seems both too simple and uncritical.

The lack of a general editor for both volumes also leads to some problems. Statistics are sometimes internally inconsistent: Tokyo's population is given as twelve million (I:99) and as eight million (II:159); the former is more accurate. In volume II:114, 152, Lucien Ellington's 1995 article "Japan's Economy: 21st Century Challenges" is reprinted twice, in its entirety the second time. A cross-reference would have saved some space.

I have a broader and more important criticism that applies to many of the lessons. Information for students is presented as if Japan and the United States

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were in a vacuum; this leads to the danger of a “we-they” dichotomy when comparing the two countries, and it may make Japan seem “exotic” to students. If some European comparison is included, it often turns out that the United States is the anomaly; we are “exotic” in international comparisons, from crime rates to education, health care to the homeless. Of course, the dichotomy problem is not unique to *Tora no Maki*. The lesson on automobile use (I:109) avoids this pitfall and is one of the most effective for that reason.

I now turn to individual content issues with the goal of making these lessons more accurate and useful. Again, my attention to detail here is unusual, but the set has been placed in many classrooms, and the great majority of information on Japan is accurate, so teachers should not hesitate to utilize the lessons best suited to their needs.

What follows are my suggested modifications for several lessons. The lessons are identified by volume and page numbers.

I: 44 The yen is now almost 66 percent lower at 130=¥1.00, but this will change; check your local newspaper business section for current exchange rates.

I:51 Yen exchange rate again (in this case the date of the rate is given, a good idea).

I:54 Dubious dated assumptions for role-playing. Is it really still true that “American car manufacturers have not yet succeeded in building a car which is small, cheap, and high quality to compete with Japanese cars?” Pick your own candidate, but I would say that GM’s Saturn is arguably cheap and good enough to compete. Since much of the information is from JAMA, there is danger of bias in this trade simulation.

I:55 Students are told to act like Japanese: “. . . polite, honorable, careful and thoughtful. . . .” The implied stereotypes about Americans here are too obvious to comment upon.

I:62 It is not strictly true that “the only images in Shintō shrines are mirrors,” and there are statues of *kami* such as Hachiman, although not in most shrines. Although the 1868 law separating Buddhist deities and *kami* was meant to end the use of *shinzō* (*kami* statues), in fact some shrines still maintain them. Usually shrines use the mirror as the *shintai* (body) of the *kami* enshrined.

I:68 Hideyoshi did confiscate weapons from peasants, but not

so much to reduce the potential for violence as to monopolize it for his own ends; this is a little different from “gun control” as it is understood in our own violent society, and in fact the NRA would likely point to the event as showing the need for personal weapons.

I:75 This lesson on Hiroshima follows the Japanese view of themselves as victims in the war. It does not deny the tragedy of nuclear attack to recognize that Japanese were also aggressors.

II: 67 has another Hiroshima lesson. One might ask for a lesson on Japanese objectives and treatment of civilians (including their own comfort women) in World War II. Teachers using these lessons might also have students read Paul Fussell’s *Thank God for the Atomic Bomb* for a clear viewpoint of the other side of this issue.

I:98 Although the AP article on land prices in Japan is from May, 1995, teachers should attempt to find out current prices.

II:33 Thousands were killed in the 1923 Kantō Earthquake, nearly 143,000 in fact.

II:52 The discussion of women in politics neglects their significant role in local and consumer issues.

II:90 Although I do not follow

popular singers, I suspect that Tetuya is Tetsuya Komuro.

II:119 While the calligraphy lesson is one of the most interesting, simpler *kanji* would be easier for students to attempt; some of the works cited above have such examples.

II:144 Beginning in 2002, schools will not be in session on Saturdays.

II:159 I believe it was tradition, existing property rights, and other economic factors that prevented Tokyo from being rebuilt on a “rational” pattern after 1923 and 1945, not for “protection from invasion.” Perhaps the source is referring to the military origins of Edo castle, but that is not clear from the passage.

II:164 The picture identified as “Meiji Shrine” is certainly not the inner shrine, nor does it appear to be one of the outer gates.

II:178 Some of the words in the Japanese Food Vocabulary contain nonstandard romanized vowels in lieu of the macron: *budou* for *budō* (grapes); *toufu* for *tofu* (bean curd); *toumorokoshi* for *tomorokoshi* (corn); *kyuuri* for *kyuri* (cucumber); *shouyu* for *shōyu* (soy sauce), although the macron would be on the “u” in this case. ■

The Tiger’s Foreboding Allure

By Gary DeCoker

Without a doubt, the teachers who participate in the Keizai Koho program and NCSS publishing efforts receive many benefits from both activities. But after reviewing the *Tora no Maki* lesson plans, I wonder whether other educators, too, can benefit from these teachers’ efforts. Although the goal of the *Tora no Maki* series,



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to bring Japan into the K-12 classroom, is admirable, the publications as they exist may in some cases do more harm than good.

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My criticism of the publications should take nothing away from the Keizai Koho program. I cannot quarrel with the idea of giving teachers a first-hand look at Japan and encouraging them to develop lessons. Participants in previous Keizai Koho and other teacher excursions to Japan surely could use the lessons in the *Tora no Maki* series to good advantage. But for the teacher who never has been to Japan, the

lessons lack sufficient context. More troublesome, if teachers follow the lessons too rigidly, they may end up fostering rather shallow thinking and promoting stereotypes.

The lack of historical and cultural context on Japan results in part from the decentralized U.S. system of education. Few teachers have access to a detailed course of study that includes specific guidelines for teaching