

Why study Japanese?

<http://web.bu.edu/mlcl/about/why-study/japanese.html>

Whether you are a fan of *manga* and *anime*, a Japanese film buff, a ninja wannabe, or you just want to know more about the culture that brought us karaoke, karate, and Hello Kitty, studying Japanese is for you. Interest in Japanese continues to grow at BU and the Department has responded by hiring additional faculty and developing one of the most rigorous majors in the country. The focus of the major is on literature and linguistics and covers more than a thousand years' worth of poetry, drama, fiction, as well as film. Majors can also select courses on Japan from outside the department in fields including economics, art history, anthropology, history, and music. Students can opt to live in Japanese House, a Bay State Road brownstone in which students studying Japanese can practice their language skills around the clock.

About Japanese

Studying Japanese means learning a language that is so different from English that it will make you rethink your most basic assumptions about the way language works. It means learning to conjugate your verbs according not just to tense but also to politeness. It means getting used to the idea that adjectives can have a past tense. It means doing without plurals, choosing among dozens of different words for "I," and learning to wait for the verb until the very end of the sentence. Japanese is difficult in ways that European languages are not, but it is also surprisingly easy in ways that they can be difficult. There is no subjunctive mood to worry about, no grammatical gender, no definite or indefinite articles, and no complex conjugations according to person. It is also extremely easy to pronounce Japanese.

About Japanese literature

From the elegant world of the tenth-century *Tale of Genji* (the world's first novel written by a woman) to the postmodern dystopias of Murakami Haruki and Banana Yoshimoto, Japanese literature has something for everyone. The classical tradition encompasses an enormous array of literary genres including the classical court tale (monogatari), the martial tale (gunki monogatari), *waka* and *haikai* poetry, linked verse, the noh, kabuki, and puppet theater, as well as popular illustrated fiction, poetry and fiction in Chinese, and poetic travel diaries. With the fall of the Tokugawa Shogunate and the opening of Japan to the West in the late nineteenth century, the modern novel and short story came to the fore with writers like Natsume Soseki, Mori Ogai, Higuchi Ichiyo, and Akutagawa Ryunosuke, whose works captured not only the reality of daily life but also the dilemmas and contradictions of a nation swept up in the juggernaut of the modern global order. Two postwar Japanese novelists (Kawabata Yasunari and Oe Kenzaburo) have won the Nobel Prize for literature, and contemporary Japanese writers continue to produce fiction that draws from this rich tradition. Because of the enormous differences between Japanese and English, translations (when they exist) can only ever be a vague approximation of the original. So the best way to access this rich tradition is by studying Japanese. Japanese literature courses at BU are taught mostly in English translation but also include short passages in the original for those students who are up to the task. Around the third year of language study students will be able to begin reading in the original.

