

# An Eventful Day

by Sharon Abe

In Japan, English is not just a foreign language, it's a foreign experience, and both students and teachers can benefit from interacting in non-class situations. Extracurricular activities are for learning about each other, working together, being spontaneous, and experiencing cultural differences. When planning an activity, there are many things to consider. But do not give up before you start; once you've held your first big event, it gets easier to do the next one.

Remember, the activities are for the children, not you, so the planning does not have to be elaborate or time-consuming. Children are easily entertained; careful planning is more important than detailed decorations or expensive gewgaws. Whether you are an old hand at activities or someone who has never even ventured to try, consider the following essential elements of good planning for any kind of event, and refer to them often.

## Purpose and Type of Event

So, why are you having an event? Is it to celebrate or commemorate a holiday or festival? Is the event for teaching, reviewing lessons, having parents visit, or just for getting together to have fun and learn more about each other? You probably already have in mind a party, a barbecue, or an egg hunt. Many teachers hold Halloween and Christmas/End-of-the-Year parties, but some other events might include: pizza parties; beach parties; potluck parties; mini-carnivals; T-shirt painting; ice cream socials; miniature golf; bowling; wading-pool parties; and craft-making events.

## Attendees and Supervision

Is the event for all your students at the same time, or for individual classes? Depending on how many students

you have, holding several smaller events with fewer children could be more manageable, but that is also more time-consuming. Is the event to be just for the students? Depending on the number of teachers and/or supervisors, you may want to have parents of particularly small children join the event to help their own children. This means more work preparing, but less work supervising at the actual event.

## The Date

When selecting the date of your event, remember, you cannot please everyone no matter how hard you try. Your students may have other lessons, sports practice, family holidays, or local events that conflict with the date you choose. Would it be worth it to you and your students if less than 100% attended? In order to get an idea of how many you can expect, you may take an informal poll in your classes so you can estimate the number of attendees. After choosing a date, choose an alternate date, especially for outdoor events when it might possibly rain or snow.

## The Venue

If your classroom or school is large enough, use it if you can. This saves money and preparation time. Otherwise, your local municipal (*shimin*) or community/public hall (*kouminkan*) is a good place to start. Or ask at your local branch of the city hall for suggestions of places to use or rent, but make sure you can tell any prospective place in advance how much money is in your budget and how many attendees you will be likely to have. Then find out if the date you want is available. If it is not, see if an alternative date is available. If your event is outside, you may want to reserve two dates if possible, in case of bad weather.

When reserving a venue, ask about

the following points as they apply to your situation, then double check everything during your preparations: reservation (first date, alternate date, reconfirmation); rental fee (cost, due date, applicable tax, cleaning/other fees); facilities (restrooms, kitchen); rules (food/drinks/children/music/etc.); decorations (wall/window, tape/tacks/etc.); and cleanup (garbage separation, vinyl tarp to cover floor, sweeping).

## Student Fees

Just remember that while the students may be keen to join an event, it's the parents who end up paying; if the fee seems too high, the parents may not allow the child to join. On the other hand, if the fee is too low, you may end up spending that month's income. One option is to charge each attending student and family member for one equal share of all costs that you estimate in advance. Making estimates is essential, as you can set the fee for the attendees based on a thought-out plan and it allows you to see a list of all the supplies you need.

## The Budget

Include in the estimate venue fees, all food products, paper goods, decorations, prizes, stationery goods, wrapping paper and bags, and camera film and developing. Take into consideration the ages of the attendees, as bowling alleys and other places charge different fees for different age groups. Try to be as specific in your planning as possible, right down to the ketchup, balloons, and tax. Stick to these estimates while preparing, and don't allow yourself to add 'just one more' of anything.

## Preparation

While shopping for supplies, don't forget discount stores and 100-yen shops. Many now sell fresh food



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items as well as holiday decorations. Unless you want everything to be 'authentic,' it's really OK (not to mention less expensive) to improvise. If you want the attendees to bring something to share with others, assign specific items to specific students and tell them the number of people it's for, whether it's food, colored paper, or straws. But make sure you have some back-up food or materials in case a student forgets to bring what they were assigned.

### **Record Keeping**

Keep records of everything you plan and do: estimates; actual costs; fees for students; dates; venue names, contracts, addresses, telephone numbers; names of actual attendees; supplies used and where you purchased them; preparations; photographs of decorations and students at the event; invitations and reconfirmation notices you handed out; and any problems encountered along the way. The next time you hold the same event, or a similar one, your preparation time will be greatly reduced by following your plans for previous events.

### **The Invitation and Reconfirmation Notice**

When making the invitation for an event, it is best to do it in writing even

if you also do it orally. Students and their parents tend to remember better if it is written down. Advertise an event at least a month before the date and give the students two weeks to sign up for it. To avoid problems in communication, write the invitation in Japanese, even if it is also written in English. Your invitation should contain the date (and alternate, if there is one), place, times, how much the students (and family members, if applicable) need to pay and by when, and whatever the students need to bring to the event, including a thermos of tea to quench their thirst at breaktime.

To solve problems with collecting fees, set a cut-off date for registration, and state 'fee payable with registration' on the invitation/registration form. Put a cutting line on the invitation and make the bottom part the registration form, with the cut-off date and a space for the total due clearly marked. If you want to have all the fees up front in order to pay for supplies and the venue, do not accept late payments. By paying with the registration, this usually prevents the 'I forgot' students by allowing you to say, 'Oh, that's too bad, but please join next year.' Accept only those who get their registration and money in by the deadline. The week or two before the event I hand out a confirmation/

reminder to those who are going to attend. I re-list the time, place, supplies to bring, and a map, if necessary. It is surprising how many students and parents forget about events they have signed up for.

### **Establishing Policies**

Finally, expect the unexpected. If something can go wrong, it will. The venue you have chosen may become unforeseeably unavailable. Students will suddenly get ill and not be able to come. Other children's parents will call up at the last minute and beg you to let their child join in because 'they didn't know about the event.' Someone is going to forget his or her supplies. Don't expect everything to go as planned. By having alternate group assignments and extra materials on hand, you can make these kinds of problems disappear as quickly as they show up. You also need to decide if you will refund money if a student is ill the day of the event and cannot attend.

We all like our students to have a good time, but we don't have to go out on a limb to prove anything to them outside of the classroom. Just remember the event you hold will be more successful with careful planning. Good luck, and let me hear from you about your adventures in the world of extracurricular activities! •