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Learning English Through Japan –
Lucky And Unlucky Numbers In Japan

Focus: Reading and Writing (Free writing, Discussion, Opinion)

1) Watch the video and notice:

is there something different

in the video? What is it?

2) Read the text below about 'Lucky and Unlucky Numbers In Japan'. (This article from Lingualift was modified. You can see the original article here).

In Japan, some numbers are considered lucky and unlucky. It is really important to know these numbers because if you do not, you could be accidentally telling someone you would like them to suffer a slow agonizing death when you are giving them some souvenirs, for example.

First, the 'bad' numbers. Four is an unlucky number in Japan because it sounds like shi (死 - death). This number has two readings - shi and yon - so, whenever possible, people try to avoid using the deathly one.

The same is true of the ku (九 - nine), which sounds like ku (苦 - suffering, agony or torture). Similarly to four, there are two readings for nine - ku and kyu.

Some buildings such as hospitals do not have fourth or ninth floors. Maternity wards may not have a Room 43 because it sounds like shisan (死産 - stillbirth). Certain license plate numbers are not used such as 42, which sounds like shini (死に - to death); 49, which sounds like shiku (敷く - to run over); 42-19, which sounds like shini iku (死に行く - to go and die); 42-56, which sounds like shini-goro (死に頃 - time to die); and 24, which can be nishi (二死 - two deaths or two out if you're a baseball fan).

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On the other hand, Japan considers the number seven lucky. This is steeped in the country's religious traditions. Seven is an important number in Buddhism. Japanese Buddhists celebrate a baby's seventh day and mourn the seventh day after a person dies when the soul is said to cross over.

Although slightly less well-known, eight is also a lucky number. This is due to its shape - 八, called suehirogari (末広がり), it is lucky because it widens at the bottom which reminds one of prosperity and growth.

Japanese people tend to be superstitious and this is why lucky and unlucky numbers are important. You should never give someone four or nine of something. Gifts are given in threes and fives instead.

3) Put the numbers in the correct box.



Lucky	

Unucky	

4) Based on the reading, what is odd in the video? Why does this 'odd fact' happen?

5) In your opinion, is it important to know people's superstitions? Why or why not?

6) Are there superstitions like this in your country? If so, give one example.

The teacher will analyze your answers manually.

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