Hiragana Songs ひらがなのうた

When we learn a song in class, I always make a large colourful chart with the song written out in bold hiragana, and ask the students to decorate it. Once laminated, this becomes a bright creative resource that I can use many times, and it is a great way to encourage students to read hiragana.

Once my students know a song well and enjoy singing it, I write it out once again in bold hiragana, and then cut it into separate words. Making more than one set is a good idea, as students will choose to do this activity if it is left in the classroom between lessons.

Materials

• Coloured A2 cardboard sheets.

Activities

• As a starting activity, the whole group sings the song together, reading the song chart written in hiragana.

• Then give a smaller group of students the pile of cards with the words written separately. As the rest of the class sings the song, the smaller group sets about placing the word cards in correct order, on the floor in the middle of the circle.

• The other students continue to sing the song several times until the cards are laid out in correct order.

• An extra challenge for more advanced students is to separate the words into individual hiragana. As the larger group sings, the smaller group constructs words and then sentences.

• Two sets of words or individual hiragana can be made and the class divides into two cooperative groups and works quickly, while singing to complete the task first.
Hiragana Flip Flop Game  フリップフロップゲーム

This is an easy game to make and play, that gives the students an opportunity to construct simple words using hiragana.

Materials

• Plastic discs with hiragana written on both sides. Hiragana should be clearly written in permanent marker, with a line or mark underneath to indicate the right way up. A beginning group may only have discs with the first 10 or 20 hiragana; an older group may have discs using all hiragana.

Activities

• This resource can be used in several ways, individually or with groups. Students are given a group of discs which they “flip flop” by cupping them in their hands and tossing them randomly on the floor. They then try to make words and write them down in their workbooks.

• With younger classes, we start the activity with a whole group brainstorming of words that we know and I write them all over the whiteboard, with the meaning beside them. This then gives the students a reference point when flipping their discs.

• Students love to explore all the word making possibilities with this game, so it is a great idea to have some children’s Japanese dictionaries on hand for them to use.

• Another easy activity is to find hiragana that go together and record them in a workbook or on a chart. Categories might include hiragana with the same beginning sound; hiragana with the same vowel sound; or hiragana with the same number of strokes.

I encourage students to frequently swap their five discs with new ones. This enables them to make lots of words, and encourages recognition of many more hiragana.
Hiragana Make A Word
ひらがなことばづくり

This is an easy card game that encourages students to build words and recognise hiragana. It consists of a group of picture cards, colourfully illustrated and with the word written in hiragana on each card as well as individual cards with all the hiragana used in the game on them.

The objective is to build words by picking up hiragana cards and putting them in the correct position next to the picture. The player who completes a word by placing the last hiragana beside the picture card keeps that picture and word. The winner at the end of the game is the player with the most pictures. This game is best played by a small group or in teams.

Materials

• A set of picture cards, with the word written in hiragana on each card.

• A set of hiragana cards, made from the list of vocabulary from the picture cards.

• A few “blank” cards if you wish to make the game a little easier.

Activities

The game begins with 10 picture cards randomly selected and placed in a vertical row in the middle of the playing circle. These are the picture cards that will have a word built beside them. The teacher might choose to read these cards with the group as a starting activity. It is important to use familiar vocabulary, although as this game has picture cards with the word written on them it is ideal for beginning learners.

• Each student in the group picks up five (or a number the teacher chooses) hiragana cards and places them face up in front of them. The first player has the chance to place one card down beside a picture card. It does not have to be the starting hiragana. If you are using a few blank cards, one of these could be placed in any position.
Building Words With Hiragana

• The player who has just placed a card picks up a replacement card from the pile of letter cards (each player should always have five cards) and play moves to the next student.

• If you have a card that can be played, you must do so. The game continues in this way, and the picture card words are gradually built beside each picture.

• If a player is fortunate enough to place the last remaining hiragana card next to a picture card that completes the word, that player gathers up the picture and hiragana cards and keeps this word.

• A new picture from the picture pile is then put in its place on the floor. The game continues until all words have been made, and the winner is the player with the most words.

A time saving idea could be to have your students create the picture cards. I used clipart, and found some fun and engaging pictures that my students love. I have also added vocabulary to this game over time; it is an ideal way to reintroduce words that have been covered in class, and to learn new ones. It is suitable for all primary classes.

These learners have to make strategic decisions about which cards to place on the floor.
Animal Game
どうぶつゲーム

The object of this game is to match the correct hiragana with each picture on the large animal boards. This requires the student to remember vocabulary and read hiragana.

Materials

- Animal gameboards (easily made with pictures from magazines, and pasted on A2 sheets of cardboard).
- Small individual hiragana cards that make up all of the animal words.
**Activities**

The animal vocabulary needs to be covered in class so that the students are familiar with each animal's name in Japanese.

- There is a space under each photograph for the hiragana to be placed. There are several ways to use this resource: as a game with a player for each board, and letters drawn out of a box, or for an individual to complete as an activity.

- Another fun idea is for the teacher to place all of the hiragana around the room, in various partially visible places, and then give each group a board to complete. The group must then work together quickly to complete their words, and only take the hiragana they need.

These game boards are easy to make and could be used to reinforce other vocabulary such as family words, colours, verbs etc.
Building Words With Hiragana

Hide and Seek Hiragana
ひらがなかくれんぼ

This game involves dividing the group into small teams that have to find particular hiragana hidden around the room and create a word, one that is familiar and has been often used in class.

Materials

- Hiragana flashcards, as many sets as you need. (You’ll need a different colour for each group.)

Activities

This game can be played in a variety of ways, of varying complexity.

- Using the coloured hiragana cards, the teacher places them around the classroom, or outside if there is a suitable learning space, and assigns each group a colour.

- At the simplest level, the teacher also tells the group the word (in Japanese) that they need to find, and encourages the group to say how many hiragana it has. For example, the word might be きもの. These hiragana will be around the room, however so will others, and the group must look carefully to identify the correct hiragana needed to build this word.

- As the group hunts around the space and finds the hiragana, they work together to create the word. A slightly more advanced group may not be given the word, but only the colour of the cards they must find, and will have to shuffle their cards around to make a word. Of course, the word must be a frequently used familiar word to the group.

- This game can be made more complex by having the group find a sentence, but provide them with the particle cards first.

For example, if you would like the group to find うみにいきます provide the group with particle に. It is a good idea to make particle cards in a different colour to all of your other resources. This highlights their status in a Japanese sentence. Students will then be encouraged to take note of particles, and develop a deeper understanding of the way they modify the words surrounding them.

I often talk to my students about particles, as my own experience of learning Japanese taught me that they were often the key to comprehending the sentence.
Quick Draw おえかきゲーム

This fun game has been adapted from a popular board game, and is very simple to play and requires few materials. The objective of the game is to read a simple word in hiragana, then draw it quickly and silently. The other members of your group have to guess (in Japanese) what the word is before the opposing group does. Using a timer is a good idea, as it keeps disputes to a minimum!

Materials

• Words written on small pieces of paper, and then folded in half and put into a hat or box. The words must be written in hiragana and the vocabulary should be well known to the students.
• A countdown timer.

Activities

• When the teacher has the slips of paper ready, place them in a hat, and divide the class into two groups, then choose a student from each group to be the first drawer.
• One of the students selects a word, reads it and then shows it to the other group's first player. It is very important that no other player sees the word. The timer is then set for one minute (or more, or less, depending on the group).
• When the timer begins, the two students selected to draw, quickly sketch a picture of the word, whilst their group watches. The first group to guess the word (in Japanese of course) scores a point for their team.
• The game continues until everyone has had an opportunity to read and then draw a word. It is important to encourage every student to try to read his or her card independently, but always provide a hiragana chart just in case.
• With older students this game can be made more complex by writing kanji compounds, or verbs in a variety of tenses. The teacher would prepare these and place them in a hat. The student then must identify the kanji and draw a picture to represent it. If using verbs, the slip of paper could have a known verb in a particular tense, for example, べんきょうしてください. The student selected to draw would have to pictorially represent this.
Hiragana Happy Faces
ひらがなハッピーフェイス

This quick game resembles Hangman, and requires no materials. It can be played at the end of a lesson when you have a few spare minutes. I draw a big face on the whiteboard, and a number of lines that represent the number of hiragana in a word I am thinking of.

Choose a word your class is familiar with, and possibly tell them what type of word it is (e.g. an animal, a family member, a greeting etc). Write all of the hiragana from あ to ん on the board also. These will be crossed off during the game, as they are called out. (You could also use a laminated hiragana chart and a whiteboard marker.)

The students have seven chances to guess correctly, and as each hiragana is called out, it is crossed off the list, and the following is drawn on the face if the hiragana is not correct.

- 2 eyes
- a nose
- a mouth
- 2 ears
- hair on top

I have included a photocopiable sheet in the support material at the back of the book that students can use when playing in pairs (see page 117).
Expanding Vocabulary

- Hiragana Boxes
  ひらがなボックス

- Crazy Bodies
  おもしろいからだゲーム

- Hiragana Journey Through Japan
  ひらがなにほんりょうり

- Animal Flashcard Games
  どうぶつカルタ

- Hiragana Map Activity
  ひらがなちず
Expanding Vocabulary

Hiragana Boxes
ひらがなボックス

This is a great resource that can be used in a variety of ways. The boxes provide a colourful hands-on learning activity that will immediately engage primary learners.

Materials

The resource requires 46 small boxes, one for each hiragana, each containing several objects that begin with that hiragana. Initially while resource gathering, pictures could be used, but ideally the boxes should contain tangible objects that students can handle and manipulate. Each box also contains small flashcards with vocabulary printed on them. I also include lengths of cord that make up the character.

Activities

• Use as an introduction to a new character.

• Give students a group of boxes and have them empty them in a pile and sort them into respective groups.

• Play a memory game where items are displayed then removed, students write/say what is missing.

• Have a race where five boxes are set out on the floor, students select an item/flashcard from the teacher’s box and have to place it in the correct hiragana box.

• Students make up a crazy sentence using three items in the box, and write/say it.
  e.g. あかいあひるはあめがだいすきです
  The red duck loves lollies. (Underlined words all begin with あ.)

• Students use boxes to record their own vocabulary lists in their workbooks.
The possibilities are wide for this type of resource, and it is particularly valuable for visual-spatial and kinaesthetic learners. The hands-on appeal of this resource really engages the students.

*This student is enjoying exploring the boxes and matching words and objects or pictures.*
Crazy Bodies おもしろいからだゲーム

This is a game that reinforces vocabulary while encouraging students to use their hiragana reading skills.

Materials

• Life-size laminated outlines of bodies (made by the students).
• Vocabulary cards of body words, one set per body.

Activities

• Have the students make large colourful 2D bodies on big sheets of paper, and ensure that they are provided with a comprehensive list of body parts to add to their body (see next page). The bodies should be big, the larger the better, life-size is great!

• The class could be divided into small groups using several bodies and sets of words, or use one in a whole group situation, which is a good way to get the students started.

• The purpose of the activity is to accurately label the body, using the vocabulary cards. The variations on this concept are many; students could get up and identify their own body parts; teacher/facilitator could point to body part and then choose two students (one from each team) to find the correct label, with a point for the team that finds it first.

• Vocabulary cards can be drawn randomly from a box, and quickly placed into position.

• Use two bodies, with two sets of vocabulary and divide the group into teams. Have a race to label the bodies correctly.
Expanding Vocabulary

Suggested Vocabulary for Crazy Bodies Game

hand  て
eye   め
ear   みみ
nose  はな
mouth くち
belly button おへそ
neck  くび
finger  ゆび
arm   うで
fingernail つめ
shoulder かた
knee  ひざ
eyebrow まゆげ
hair  かみ
head  あたま
stomach おなか
back  せなか
Having Fun with Hiragana

Hiragana Journey Through Japan
ひらがなにほんりょうり

There is a sense of accomplishment that comes with being in a foreign country and having the ability to know the right words at the right time. This game was born out of the desire to give my students more experience with everyday Japanese words and images, and focus on hiragana learning at the same time. The most important resource needed to create this game is a good supply of pictures and photographs of “things Japanese”. I collected these on my travels, and also asked friends if I could make copies of their Japanese photos.

Materials

- **Gameboard**: The large gameboard consists of a pathway meandering through images of Japan pasted onto three sheets of A2 coloured card. There are 32 squares, numbered using kanji, that make up this pathway. You can make the pathway shorter or longer, depending on the level of students.

- **Game cards**: At least 40 photographs of Japanese things/places pasted onto coloured card (10 of each colour), and laminated with the word written below each image in hiragana are needed. You can add to these over time, and select particular cards to suit the group you are working with. This will also ensure that each time the game is played, it will be different. Your students will be fascinated with these photographs, and when I first introduced this game we spent the entire lesson looking at and talking about the photographs!

- **A die, and counters.**

These are the game cards that need to be placed on the playing board before the game commences.


**Expanding Vocabulary**

**Activity**

- Players form four teams. Alternatively, there may be only four players for a small group activity.

- Before commencing the game, each square on the pathway must be covered by a game card. These should be placed in random order on the gameboard.

- The first team rolls the die and moves along the pathway. The card that they land on is picked up and placed in front of them, as this becomes their first card. Play rotates until all groups have a first card.

- The object of the game is to collect as many cards as possible as you move along the journey. There are two ways to collect cards:
  - If the card you land on is the same colour as the card in front of you, you may pick it up and place it on top of your pile.
  - If any of the hiragana on the card you land on matches any of the hiragana on the card in front of you, you may pick it up and place it on top of your pile.

- Players are encouraged to read the hiragana words and look for matching hiragana on their top card. Beginning learners can simply look at the shapes of each character and recognise matching characters, the teacher can then say the word and ask players to repeat it.

- The game ends when the first player/team reaches the end of the gameboard, and then each team must count the number of cards they have collected. The winner is the team holding the most cards.

*This is the gameboard being set up ready to play. It has been illustrated with photographs and words to encourage incidental learning whilst the game is being played.*
Expanding Vocabulary

Animal Flashcard Games
どうぶつかるた

Colourful flashcards always get the desired response with my classes especially if there is a fun game to go along with it. I have made every effort in my Japanese classes not to use rectangular white card for flashcards, as these can be unappealing to the young learner, and all become the same after a while, no matter what the game or word. Another great reason to vary your flashcards is that it is very easy to locate them when you are in a rush to get to class with everything you require.

Making multiple copies of cards is expensive and time consuming, but you might consider it once in a while, as you can leave a set with a particular class until their next lesson. Ask the class teacher to remind the students to use them in between lessons. They can also be used if you have two groups running at once and another facilitator in the room to assist students.

This student is working independently with animals and flashcards.
Expanding Vocabulary

Materials

This resource, reinforcing animal vocabulary (but the principle could be applied to any other vocabulary group) consists of a group of bright star shaped flashcards, purchased at a major stationery supplier, with animal vocabulary written clearly on them.

Activities

We all have a repertoire of flashcard games, but here are a few my students enjoy:

• Cards are placed in a line across the room, students are selected to walk along the line reading each one out loud.

• Cards are placed in a cloth bag and put in the centre of the circle. A student is selected to come out and choose one, then mime the actions of the animal chosen. Other students guess by asking: くまですか. The student in the circle responds はい or いいえ.

• For more advanced learners, ask the student to select a card from the bag, and then the teacher or other members of the group ask questions about the animal, such as:

  Are you big? おおきいですか。
  Are you dangerous? あぶないですか。
  Are you small? ちいさいですか。
  Do you live in a zoo? どうぶつえんにすんでいますか。
  Do you live in a house? うちになんでいますか。
  Are you cute? かわいいですか。
  Are you noisy? うるさいですか。
  Are you quiet? おとなしいですか。

Limiting answers to these questions to a yes/no format is a good idea, but it is great to see my older students using other vocabulary they have learned, such as もちろんです of course; いつも always; ぜんぜん never; and sometimes ときどき!

• These cards can also be used as an individual or group activity with plastic animals, or pictures of animals. It makes an enjoyable sorting activity, or the animals can be divided between two and four players, cards placed face down, and selected and read out one by one. The first player to match all their animals to a card wins.
Expanding Vocabulary

Hiragana Map Activity ひらがなちず

Many students know the names of various places in Japan, but are unsure about where these places are. This activity helps students to sort cities into groups according to the four major islands in which they are located.

Materials

• A cut out map of Japan (four separate pieces) made by the class.
  Flashcards with Japanese cities written in hiragana. (Kanji could be used with advanced students.)
• A map of Japan, library resources, or use of Internet.

Activities

• This resource can be used with a whole class, or as an individual or small group activity. Students will need to research where each city in Japan is located, and can use the Internet, or visit the library for this information. A conventional map of Japan could also be used to assist students.

  • If four students are working together, each person could be responsible for an island, and endeavour to find the cities of that island, by selecting the cards one by one.
  • All of the cities could be placed in a bag, and drawn out and put into the correct position.
  • Using target language, students could use this resource to discuss where they would like to go in Japan. They could also plan a virtual tour of Japan, and indicate where they would go, and in what order.
  • Extra cards could be made to complement this resource. Photographs of famous locations in Japan could be cut out and laminated, and also placed on the map.
Support Material For Activities

- Hiragana Flashcard Master Copy
- Hiragana Templates
- Bingo! Master Sheets
- Hiragana Happy Faces Sheets
Having Fun with Hiragana

Support Material For Activities

Hiragana Flashcard Master Copy

あ
Having Fun with Hiragana

Support Material For Activities

う
Having Fun with Hiragana

Support Material For Activities

お
か
Hiragana き

Support Material For Activities

Having Fun with Hiragana
Support Material For Activities

Having Fun with Hiragana
Having Fun with Hiragana

Support Material For Activities

さ
Support Material For Activities
Having Fun with Hiragana

Support Material For Activities

そ
た
Support Material For Activities

Having Fun with Hiragana
Having Fun with Hiragana Support Material For Activities
Support Material For Activities

Having Fun with Hiragana

AISV  75
Having Fun with Hiragana
Support Material For Activities

なよ
Support Material For Activities
Support Material For Activities

Having Fun with Hiragana

ね

A I S V 79
は
Support Material For Activities

Having Fun with Hiragana

AISV 83
Support Material For Activities

Having Fun with Hiragana

ひぼ
ま
Support Material For Activities

Having Fun with Hiragana

AISV 87
Having Fun with Hiragana

Support Material For Activities

ゆ
る
Support Material For Activities

Having Fun with Hiragana

れ
Having Fun with Hiragana

Support Material For Activities

る
Support Material For Activities

Having Fun with Hiragana

わ
Having Fun with Hiragana

Support Material For Activities

た
Having Fun with Hiragana

Support Material For Activities

Hiragana Templates

あい

うえ
Having Fun with Hiragana

お か き く
Support Material For Activities

Having Fun with Hiragana

けこ

さし
すせ
ぞた
ちつてと
なに
ぬね
ゆよ
らり
Support Material For Activities

Having Fun with Hiragana

をん
Bingo!1 ひらがな1

ちょうちん

ふうせん

うちわ

きんぎょ

たいこ
Bingo! 2 ひらがな II
Bingo! 3 ひらがなIII
Hiragana Happy Faces ひらがなうれしいかお

Draw a round face in each square to begin the game. Think of a word in Japanese that you know well, and know how to write.

Make a space for each hiragana in the word, for example if your word is kimono, three spaces are required:

___ きもの

あいうえおかきくけこさしすせそたちっとつなにぬ
もめむみまほへふひはのね
You might like to let your partner know the category of your word (e.g. animal, colour, food, verb etc. They will have seven chances to guess correctly: 2 eyes, a nose, a mouth, 2 ears and hair on top. Cross off hiragana as they are used.
あいうえおかきくけこさしす

せそたちってとなに

ぬめむみまほへふひはのね

Having Fun with Hiragana
Support Material For Activities
あいうえおかきくけこさしすせそたちとつなぬ
をわわれるりゃゆや
もめむみまほへふひのはのね