Nihon No Okami

Teachers' Guide

Wolves of Japan

Updated summer 2024

Nihon No Okami, or Okami for short, is a simulation game that puts students in Edo and Meiji period Japan to make decisions while they experience feudalism, isolation, adaptation, and modernization. The game is aligned with the Alberta Social Studies 8 Program of Studies and requires students to learn about history to progress through the game.

Who We Are



Welcome! We want to start by introducing ourselves: we are Erin Quinn and Tara Vandertoorn, former grade 8 Humanities partner teachers, where we lived and taught in Calgary, Alberta on Treaty 7 territory, home of the Blackfoot, Tsuut'ina, Stoney Nakoda, and Metis (Region 3) people. Since we designed this project together, Erin has moved to her hometown of Wetaskiwin, on Treaty 6 territory, the traditional territories and gathering place for the Cree, Saulteaux, Blackfoot, Métis, Dene, and Nakota Sioux and Anishinaabe. This game was designed by Erin Quinn and Tara Vandertoorn, and was loosely inspired by a simulation game developed in the 1990s called Warlords of Japan[1]. We post a lot of what we do in our classrooms at www.creativitycollective.ca if you're looking for more!

We'd love to hear from you if you try this in your classroom. We can be reached at quinn.erin@gmail.com and tabroshvandertoorn@cbe.ab.ca.

[1] WARLORDS OF JAPAN. Roth, Peter. (1990). Culver City, CA: Interact (10200 Jefferson Boulevard P.O. Box 802 Culver City, CA 90232). www.teachinteract.com

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Principles of Game-Based Learning

Gamification has seen a spike in popularity in education in recent years. Gamified learning uses principles of games to motivate students within a traditional learning framework. The purpose is to increase student engagement and motivation in learning. Game-based learning, in contrast, involves designing learning activities so that game characteristics and game principles are inherent within the learning activities themselves (University of Waterloo).

The Institute of Play is a now-defunct independent school. They published many resources for educators to use in game-based learning. Here are their seven principles of game-based learning:

1. Everyone is a participant
2. Failure is reframed as an iteration
3. Everything is interconnected
4. Learning happens by doing
5. Feedback is immediate and ongoing



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6. Challenge is constant
7. Learning feels like play

These are the principles we kept in mind as we designed this game.

Game Structure and Overview

Okami is set up to take place over eight weeks. Each week will have students progress through research and learning, interpret their understanding through the lens of historical significance, and use the results of this learning to play the game on our game board.

Parkdale Version

Erin moved to Wetaskiwin in the summer of 2023 and embarked on a new journey with new students at a school called Parkdale. She adapted Nihon no Okami to the particular needs of her students and the timetable of her school. We have updated the teacher's guide with her changes that she made throughout, which you will see noted as "Parkdale Version." We wanted to make visible to other teachers that what we design in our particular context won't work as written in other settings. We want to empower you to hack, change, and adapt what we share with you in your classroom, for your students. If you do, we'd love to hear from you, and would love to share your version on our website too! E-mail us at erin.quinn@wrps11.ca and tabroshvandertoorn@cbe.ab.ca!

Overview

This slidedeck is an overview of the general rules of the game. We have moved away from showing this to our students before beginning the game because it's overwhelming with a lot of information that they don't really have context for. Instead, we have opted to teach the rules as we go, which has tended to work better.

Goningumi and Shiros

Students are placed into a goningumi, or a group. Groups of 4-5 students work best. In the Edo period, goningumi were groups of five households that were held collectively responsible. All households in the shogunate were members of such a group, with all members of the group held responsible for the good conduct of all of the other members.

This responsibility included responsibility for crime and for non-payment of taxes. They were headed by a leader who was usually elected from within, but sometimes appointed from above.

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The groups did not always contain five households. In some districts, the groups could comprise six, or even ten, households.

Students complete the whole game with their goningumi. Students are assessed individually, but rewarded as a group.

Each goningumi is assigned a home shiro, the Japanese word for castle. The shiros are: Hokkaido, Sendai, Edo, Osaka, Shikoku, and Nagasaki.

Weekly Game Play

We always engage our students when we form groups. For this game, had them fill in a quick form to help us create the groups. Since this project takes 8 weeks or more of classtime, we find that when we include our students in decision making around group formation, we are usually more successful.

Before starting the game, spend some time having each goningumi develop the unique culture of their group. We spend time on this concept all year and are greatly inspired by Erin's work with her colleagues at the University of Calgary, Collaborative Creativity Idea Book for Educators: Activities, Tactics and Strategies for Building a Collaborative Culture of Creativity. (Erin won't say but you should buy this book. - Tara)

The slidedeck will take students through three small tasks designed to help the group in beginning to build their collaborative culture: design a kamon (crest), create a group name and write that name in Japanese katakana, and write each student's name in Japanese katakana.

The game is structured around three phases in Japanese history. Week 1 - 4 situates the game before and during the Edo period of Japanese history, when Japan passed Exclusion Laws forbidding foreigners from entering the country. This period was based on a feudal society and the powerful military leader, the Shogun, and his local counterparts, Daimyo. Week 5 represents the civil war that erupted after these laws ended. Week 6, 7, and 8 represent the period of rapid adaptation and modernization that took place after the civil war ended and the Emperor was reinstated as the leader of Japan.

Each week is split into three phases: Junbi (Prepare), Tansaku (Quest) and Tatakau (Fight). Every week is guided by specific learner outcomes from the Program of Study. Each week, the group selects one student to play the role of Daimyo, or the group leader. Each student must take a turn as Daimyo before there can be repetitions.

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Parkdale Version Weekly Gameplay

When considering what would best serve her students, Erin thought the gameplay and the layout of the weeks would work well for her students, but that the daily work needed to be more scaffolded, differentiated, and give more opportunities for practice and multiple means to demonstrate understanding. To that end, Erin made some fairly significant changes to the weekly work. This is the slidedeck she used to introduce the game, goningumi groups, and the structure of each week. Under each of the sections below outlining the different parts of the week, Erin will explain the changes she made to each part.

Junbi (Prepare)

Junbi is all about learning about the week's key concepts. We begin with a story. We wrote a story that put our students right into the shoes of a citizen of Edo Japan. Borrowing elements of Dungeons and Dragons, we wanted to engage in collaborative storytelling, and often incorporating a decision or two right into the story that impacted gameplay. After the story, all students are preparing for the week ahead by using textbook chapters and readings to research the key concepts of the week. They each have a graphic organizer to use to take notes. The graphic organizers are different for each week as they include the key concepts to guide the students. A key skill we are assessing here is the ability to draw significant information from a text and organize that information.

We complete Junbi on Monday and Tuesday every week (two periods of almost an hour each).

Junbi Parkdale Version

Rather than save the Shinsa examination for day 3, Erin adopted an approach she learned from EduProtocols called Fast and Curious. The basic premise of Fast and Curious is that students reattempt a quiz multiple times over several days, allowing teachers and students to address misconceptions and fill in the gaps in their learning. It is based on the idea of spaced vs. massed practice, as well as formative feedback to drive learning.

On Day 1, students first listed to the story, and then did their first rep of the Shinsa examination for the week. This took two 36 minute blocks.

On Day 2, students did another rep of the Shinsa quiz and then began another EduProtocol called Iron Chef, where the week's learning was jigsawed in each group and one student in each group researched a question to share back with the class. On Day 2, students in each group chose one of the questions from the week, and created a slide with 4 facts answering the question. This took two 36 minute blocks.

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On Day 3, students presented their Iron Chef presentations to their classmates and took notes from these presentations. Following the presentations, they took one more practice Shinsa quiz.

Erin had several students in her class who were working on modified work (not at grade level). Erin used Diffit to create alternate readings and questions for these students. They completed this work instead of Iron Chef. If Erin were to do it again, she would consider how she could incorporate this work into the Iron Chef structure so these students were still participating in this class activity.

Shinsa (Examination)

Students will complete a short Shinsa (examination) about what they learned during Junbi. We invited our students to use their graphic organizer with their notes during the check-in. This takes place on Wednesday at the beginning of class. These quizzes are short checks to assess basic content knowledge. While students were working on their check-in, teachers circulate to have a quick look at their notes, assessing how students are managing information and ideas. Koku (currency) for the week's gameplay is awarded to the goningumi based on an amalgamation of scores for all members of the group.

Tara has developed an Excel formula in the spreadsheets for each week that calculates the amount of koku the group gets based on the averaged scores of the group during the check-in. You will need to change the formula to import scores from the Responses spreadsheet from the Google Form. We want this to be a very low-stakes way of being accountable, and we also want it to be difficult for anyone to guess what another group member got on their check-in. Alternatively, you can devise your own method for calculating koku for the group. The amount of koku we were awarding each week was generally between 15 and 30.

Shinsa Parkdale Version

As mentioned, the final Shinsa quiz took place on the third day, after they had two practice attempts. The platform Erin decided to use for the quizzes is Quizizz, which has a game-like structure and timed questions. The students loved this version. On Day 1 and 2, she used Classic Mode, which gives students one chance to answer the questions in 30 seconds. On Day 3, she used Mastery Peak mode. This mode forces students to reattempt questions they get wrong until they show 80% Mastery. Both Classic and Mastery Peak include fun ways students can interact with the other students. On the final Shinsa on Day 4, she used Test Mode, which removed the gamification aspects. This is the quiz she recorded as a grade in her gradebook.

Erin was able to use the AI features in Quizizz to generate a quiz for her students completing the modified work with a reduced number of questions. Students who were doing the modified work participated in all the reps of the Fast and Curious Shinsa quizzes.

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Tansaku (Quest)

In Tansaku, all students except the Daimyo choose a quest to complete. The quest asks them to select a concept from their research for the week that was historically significant and was impacted by or changed the worldview of the people of Japan. This quest invites them to conceptualize this idea in a creative way, demonstrating a deeper understanding than they did in their notes. Each quest must be accompanied by an artist's statement that explains how the choices that were made connect to worldview and historical significance.

We complete Tansaku on Wednesday (after they finish their check-in) and Thursday every week (two periods of almost an hour each). We check quests on Monday the following week as students are working on their next week's Junbi research.

The design of these quests were greatly inspired by the book Intention: Critical Creativity in the Classroom by Amy Burvall and Dan Ryder. We are deeply indebted to them for their inspiration. We encourage you to buy this book.

As students complete their quest and have it assessed, they can choose a card from the teacher's deck that corresponds to the same category as the quest they completed. The goningumi then selects two cards to keep and use during gameplay and returns all others. If a student does not complete their quest on time, they will not earn a card, though the work will still be completed and assessed.

The cards often impact happiness levels of their own goningumi positively or another goningumi negatively. The happiness multiplier is multiplied by the amount of koku the group earned in Junbi to determine the standings (the current place of each group i.e. first, second, third, etc.), which determine the order of play during Tatakau, gameplay.

Tansaku Parkdale Version

Erin's students needed a bit more scaffolding in these more open-ended tasks, so rather than giving students a massive list of quests, she provided them with two options. Students could choose whichever of the two options they liked better, and completed the work and an artist statement. Erin used the artist statement as an opportunity to work on organized paragraph writing using an approach called SEEC, which stands for State, Explain, Elaborate, Conclude. She decided to forgo the Daimyo task because attendance at her school can be inconsistent and knew having one pre-designated daimyo could be difficult if that person was away. All students therefore completed the Tansaku quest each week. Students doing modified work also completed a modified quest and artist statement.

In terms of timing, students had two 36 minute blocks to do their final Shinsa quiz and quest on Day 4.

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Tatakau (Fight)

Played on Friday, Tatakau involves the Daimyo acting on behalf of the group. The rest of the students can watch the game, or can decide to work on their quests quietly. The goal of the game is to conquer the most territory in Japan while having the happiest people.

In weeks 1-4, Daimyo take on the role of the local warlord trying to gain territory, as well as making improvements to their local shiro. Rules for how to play the game can be found in the rulebook. To play the game, groups must use koku (a unit of measurement used for rice that was considered a currency in Edo Japan), which is earned by the groups through their work on Junbi and Tansaku.

We found it was easiest to have the Daimyo prepare their koku tracking sheet and get ready to play on Thursday so they were ready to play on Friday.

Note: Though we are using Monday - Friday language, in reality, it became Day 1 - 5 as sometimes we had short weeks.

Tatakau Parkdale Version

Tatakau at Parkdale looked quite similar to the original version, with a couple of small changes. Erin created a simpler version of the accounting sheet, which the group completed at the beginning of Day 5. As mentioned, the approach to having one student serve as daimyo was problematic at her school due to attendance, so all students in the group worked together to make decisions collaboratively during gameplay. Game Day took two 36 minute blocks.

Day-by-Day

Day 1 & 2

- The daimyo for the shiro is determined.
- The story is read and decisions are made depending on the decisions moments in the story.
- Everyone in the shiro works on the Junbi phase. Students are reading and researching the key question for the week.
- Teacher is assessing the quests completed the following week and handing out cards. The teacher is also giving personalized verbal feedback to each student while she assesses. This was easily achievable in two class periods. Students choose a card if they completed the quest.

Day 3 & 4

- Students complete their Shinsa examination. As students are working on the open book quiz, the teacher is circulating to assess the notes.

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- All members of the shiro except the daimyo choose a quest to complete for the Tansaku phase.
- The daimyo completes the special daimyo task for the week that is included in the slidedeck, and prepares the koku tracking sheet to determine how much disposable income they have.
- All the daimyos meet with the Emperor to complete their koku tracking sheet. Earned koku is paid out and owed koku is collected, including taxes. There will also be koku earned and spent in gameplay so final accounting is done after Day 5's game.

Day 5

- The daimyo leads the group in gameplay. Students watch the game, or work on their quest quietly. When the game is over the daimyo must complete the Koku Tracking Sheet.

Parkdale Day-by-Day

Day 1

- The story is read and decisions are made depending on the decisions moments in the story.
- Each member of the goningumi selects one of the questions for the week to research for Iron Chef.
- Students complete their first rep of their Fast & Curious Shinsa quiz (Classic Mode).

Day 2

- Students research their Iron Chef presentations and prepare their slide.
- Students complete their second rep of their Fast & Curious Shinsa quiz (Classic Mode)

Day 3

- Students present their Iron Chef presentations.
- Students complete their third rep of their Fast & Curious Shinsa quiz (Mastery Peak Mode).

Day 4

- Students complete their final Shinsa quiz (Test Mode).
- Students complete their Tansaku quest.

Day 5

- Groups choose their cards if they completed a quest in time, and prep for gameplay using the Income & Expenses tracking sheet.
- Three rounds of the game are played

Weekly Variations for Gameplay

There are variations on the way the game works as we move through the historical context of the game. A chart outlining the changes can be found below.

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Week	Implications for Junbi (prepare)	Implications for Tansaku (quest)	Implications for Tatakau (fight)
1-4	Status quo	Status quo	Status quo as per the rulebook
5: Civil War	Status quo	Status quo	Moves are half price
6: The Meiji Restoration	Status quo	Status quo	All Daimyo become voting members of the diet. All hostile moves must be voted on my Daimyo.
7 & 8: Modernization	Status quo	Group quest to design a game mechanic that responds to a modernization	Game mechanics change based on mechanics designed by each goningumi

More detailed information about the changes in the game based on the week of play can be found in the slidedeck for the week.

Materials and Set Up

Materials

You will need the following supplies for this game. Quantities below are per class of between 25 - 30ish students.

- We used a large trifold to organize the game for each homeroom, just because we were short on bulletin board space. A large bulletin board could be used as well.
- A piece of poster paper or roll paper on which to trace the gameboard.
- Okami map template.
- Map pins in 6 different colours - we needed six packs for each class, which worked out to one full pack of each colour
- Pony beads in 6 different colours (for example) - we used about 1000 for each class



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- A variety of other pins. You can see photos of the pins we used on our Resources poster, but you could use whatever you want. We also had access to a 3D printer and printed out the jade dragon, shogun, and torii gate, and hot glued them to some pins.
- 6 large jars and 6 small jars for koku and the Emperor's "bank" of extra koku.
- Headers of each shiro's name to organize their stuff on the trifold/bulletin board
- Printed and laminated happiness tracker for each group
- Printed and laminated copy of the Resources legend
- Copies of these handouts for each goningumi:
    - Textbooks and printed readings - we assembled these into duotangs. The readings are supplemental information to the textbooks we have.
    - Rulebook
    - Koku tracking sheets (one for each week of play)
- Copies of the following handouts for each student:
    - Assessment checklist
    - Tansaku Quests
- Copies of cards, printed on cardstock and laminated. We printed 3 copies of each set of cards per class.
- Smartboard to share slidedecks

Set Up

To set up for the game:

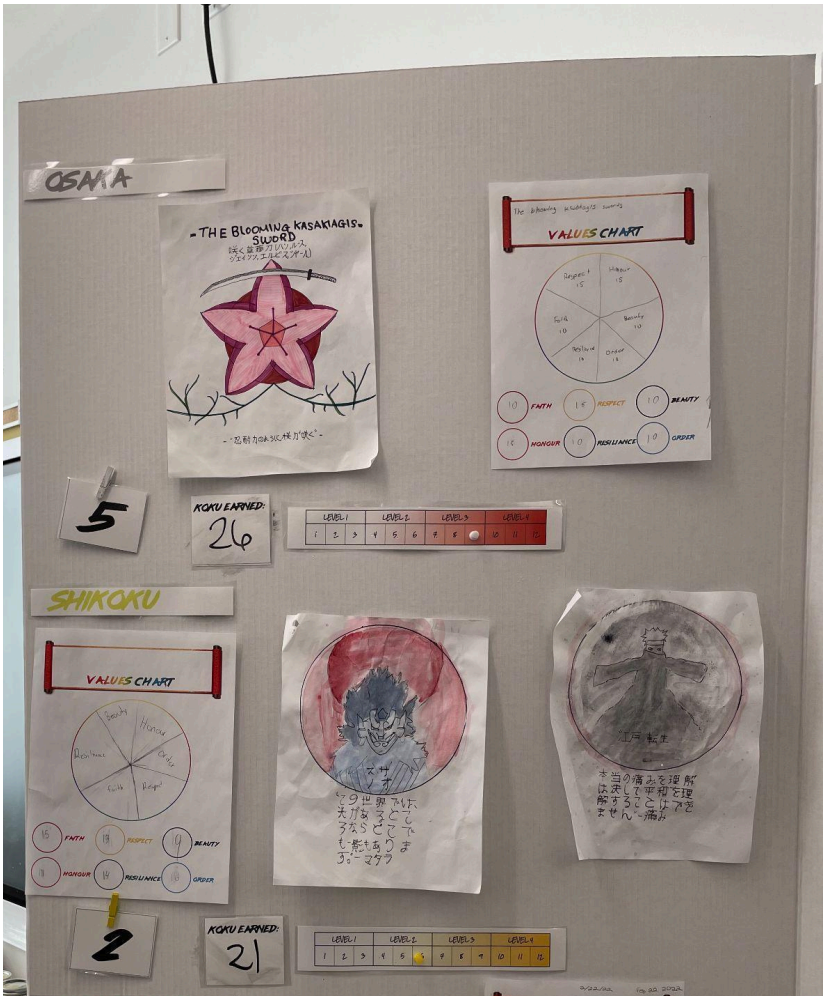
1. Use the game map template to draw a large version of the map on poster paper or roll paper, and place it on a bulletin board or trifold.

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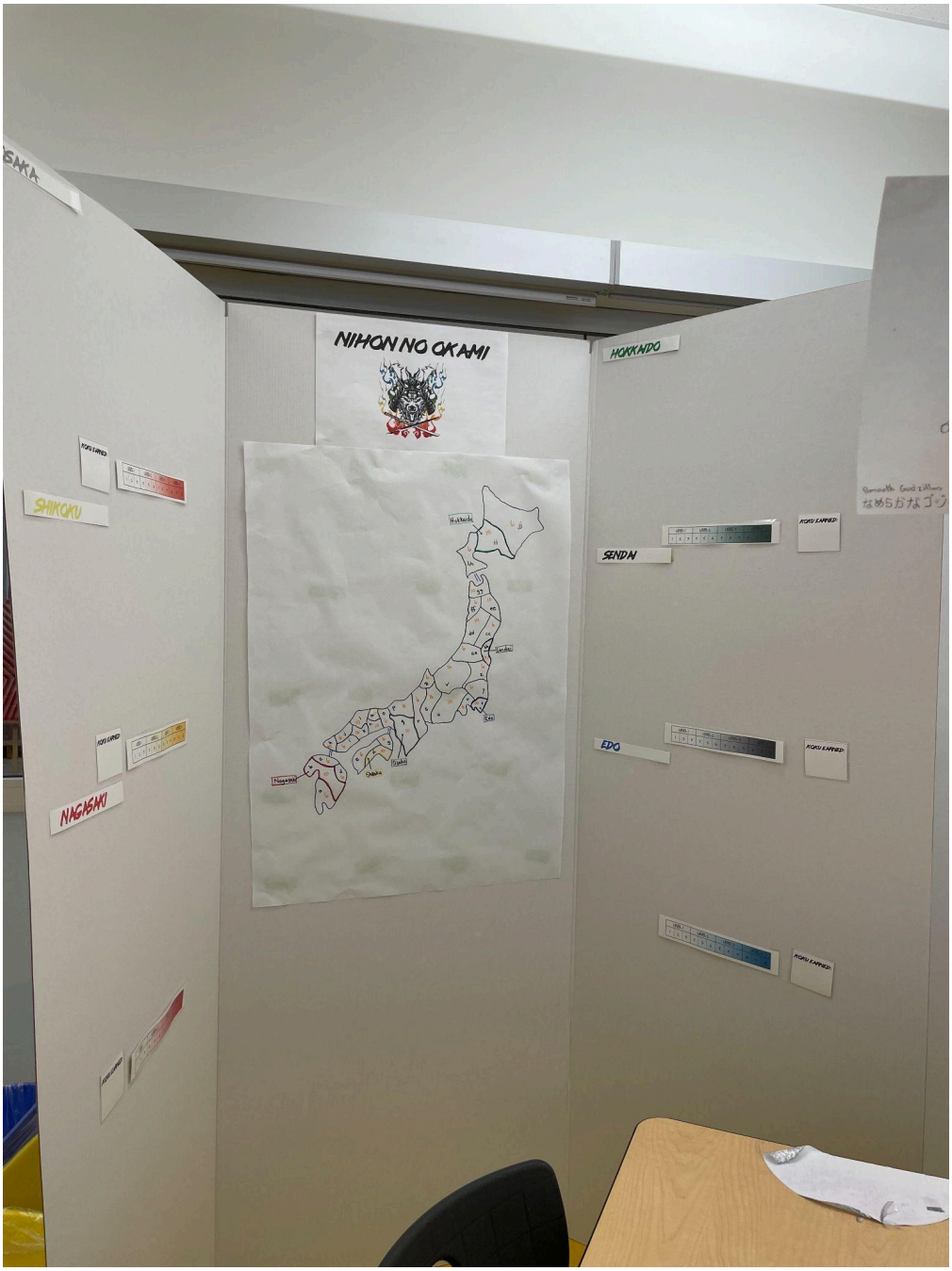
2. Place a heading for each goningumi on a section of your bulletin board or trifold. You can see our layout here. Under each goningumi heading, groups posted their kamon (crest), their values chart, and we also added a laminated card for koku earned through junbi and a happiness tracker. We also had little clothespin clips for current standings of the groups (order of gameplay).

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A close up of each goningumi's section.

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The trifold before we began.

3. Place the pony beads into each of your large jars. These represent koku (currency) in the game. Label six small jar with the names of the shiros. Beads are a different colour to prevent loss/theft. The large jars are your central bank. The small jars are each of the shiros' war chests.

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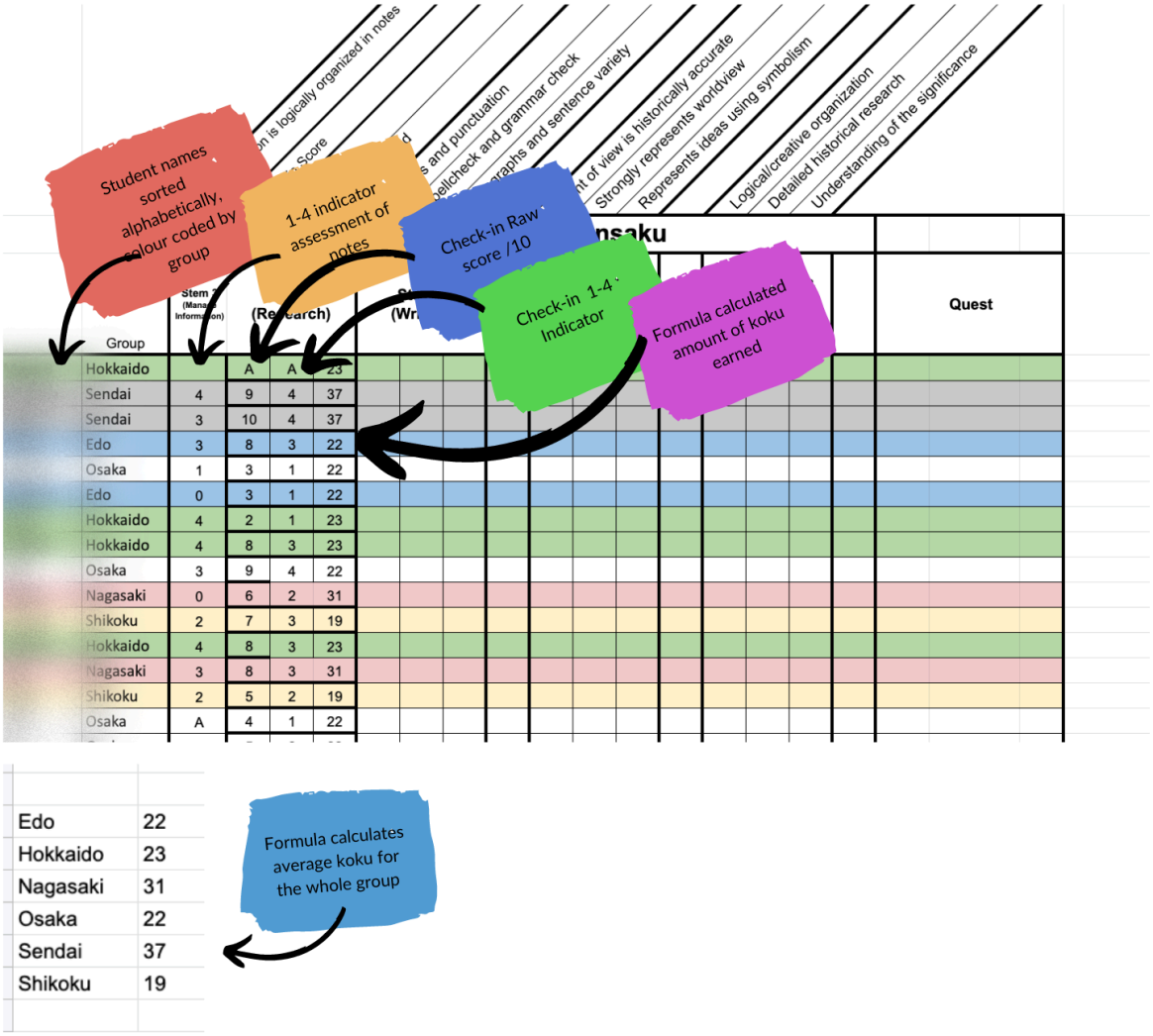
Classwork, Assessment, and Koku

We have carefully structured the assessment of this game based on several principles:

- Assessment is designed to look for growth over time and give students actionable feedback to move their learning forward.
- We recognize that assessment *is* teaching, and the bulk of the assessment takes place in class, with the students.
- Goningumi earn koku based on the work the group does during junbi. A careful balance was considered to encourage students to do their best with their work, and to not single out students who struggle. The work is assessed individually but Koku is awarded as a group, and not to individual students, for this reason. *Grades and the game's currency are related but not the same*.

We have developed an assessment checklist, which we provide to students. In our school district, we report using a series of stems, and use a 1-4 indicator scale for assessment and reporting. As teachers, we keep a classlist tracking sheet to easily keep track of student achievement. Copies of the assessment spreadsheets can be found in each week's materials, along with the junbi sheet, slidedeck, and check-in.

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Tansaku was assessed in class as students were working on Junbi in the following week. Once again, we circulated to look at student work as they were working and provided them with feedback for improvement for the next week.

On the tracking sheet, we list students alphabetically on this sheet to easily transfer grades to our online gradebook, but colour code the students' names by their goningumi to be able to visually see the group on the spreadsheet. We awarded koku for Junbi and gave out cards for Tensaku, and also gave bonus koku for exceptional and challenging work.

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Weekly Folders

Everything else you need for the game, including the slidedeck with the weekly story and learner outcomes, the assessment tracking sheet, the weekly junbi graphic organizer, and the shinsa check-in can be found in the following folders.
Week 1
Week 2
Week 3
Week 4
Week 5
Week 6
Week 7/8

Google Forms can be really tricky to share with others. To access the Shinsa check in for each week, right click the form in the Google Folder and make a copy. Then you should be able to edit the questions and administer it to your own students.

Parkdale Weekly Folders

Week 1. Link to Shinsa Week 1. Link to Modified Shinsa Week 1.
Week 2. Link to Shinsa Week 2. Link to Modified Shinsa Week 2.
Week 3. Link to Shinsa Week 3. Link to Modified Shinsa Week 3.
Week 4. Link to Shinsa Week 4. Link to Modified Shinsa Week 4.
Week 5. Link to Shinsa Week 5. Link to Modified Shinsa Week 5.
Week 6. Link to Shinsa Week 6. Link to Modified Shinsa Week 6.
Week 7&8. Link to Shinsa Week 7&8. Link to Modified Shinsa Week 7&8.

How to Play

Rules of the game can be found in the rulebook. We introduce the rules to students throughout the first week, and they learn the rules quite quickly. One thing that's important to note with the students is to let them know right from the beginning that the rules of the game will change. Because the phases of the game mirror what happened in history, the rules change throughout. See Weekly Variations for Gameplay for more information.

Thank you, Feedback, and Iteration

An older version of Okami, designed without cards, can be found here. It was super fun, but we added the story and the cards in the 2021-22 school year for a couple of reasons: to add more

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gamelike elements to the project, to increase the likelihood of any team to win (in other words, to prevent any one team from dominating throughout), and to make it more fun! We also feel it incorporated more curricular goals more meaningfully through the story and the cards.

Again, please contact us at elquinn@cbe.ab.ca and tabroshvandtertoorn@cbe.ab.ca if you have feedback, ideas, or suggestions. We love to see what you do with the things we design!

Like what you see? It takes a lot of extra time to create teachers guides, design websites, and share it out. Though we're happy to do it for free, we wouldn't say no if you bought us a coffee (via Ko-fi) to help pay for the cost of the website.

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