



This is Maru. He is three years old and just started kindergarten. Even though the required age for children to be sent to school is 6 years old, both of Maru's parents work hard all day; plus, Maru's family puts a priority on education in their household. Maru already knows the Japanese language, and even knows how to write a few characters. He will learn how to speak English in kindergarten. Kindergarten is considered optional in Japan. Now that Maru has started school, he will have six years of elementary school, then three years of junior high school. Lastly, he will attend three more years of senior high school.

Maru has now started first grade. Uniforms are required in Japan, and Maru dresses himself every morning in a bright yellow ball cap, complete with yellow coats, umbrellas and boots. Maru will be found hanging out with his fellow classmates, trading Pokeman cards. Maru's school year will start in April with the blooming of the cherry blossoms (signifying a new beginning) and will end in March of the following year. If Maru ever wishes to travel to America to take classes, he will have to be held back an entire year because of the differences in start times.



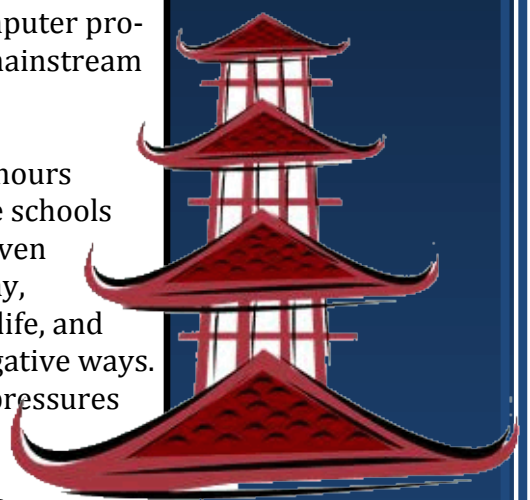
Maru will attend class for six hours a day, and then go home to homework, drills and tutoring. Maru's parent's hired a tutor specifically to teach him the English language and to sharpen his math skills. Even though Japan encourages teamwork and groupthink, competition amongst his peers will be brutal. In the summer Maru will have six weeks of vacation, and two weeks for spring and winter. Maru will have homework and chores for each of these breaks, and his parents will still make him attend his tutoring sessions. Maru has one teacher all day, and participates in many activities that encourage socialization. He has a class of 36 other students, which is small for his school. Lunch is provided by the government.



Now Maru is in Middle-school. Elementary school encouraged socialization and an easy workload. Now his focus will turn to rigorous academic subjects and his schooling will become intense and structured. His tutoring sessions will double and the competition throughout the school will sometimes turn hostile. Maru will be pressured to join many committees at school. Violence will often break out in the classroom due to the lack of attention towards student/teacher relationships. Maru's parents do not care if he has a social life; their main priority is for him to excel academically. Since Maru's parents are wealthy and have a high standing in society, Maru is attending the best school in his area. Not all schools are the same in Japan. Some will train their students for distinctly different careers. Some schools can only be attended if the parents have enough money or social standing. Maru's parents want him to become a chemical engineer. This decision was made years before Maru even knew what an engineer was.

Maru has now moved on to High School, where he will have three years to qualify for a competitive university. In order to be accepted into his High School, Maru had to take an entrance exam. He is luckier than his friends from Junior High School. Since their parents cannot afford to send them to a school like Maru, they have to work full-time and attend classes part time in order to finish their studies. These non-elite schools often teach their students subjects such as book-keeping, foreign languages and computer programming. These schools would be the equivalent to America's mainstream schooling. Over 92% of the population attends High School.

After classes, Maru attends kendo classes and then spends a few hours practicing the piano. Maru also attends classes at a "Juko." These schools have additional lessons in math or science in order to push him even further. There are many times that Maru will put in a 12 hour day, plus homework and studying. He does not have time for a social life, and many times the pressure of doing well on a test effects him in negative ways. However, when he has children of his own, he will put the same pressures on his children in order to uphold his standing in society.



As of 2009, Japan ranked 5th in Reading, 4th in Math and 2nd in Science. The spend a total of 3.6% of their total budget on school funding. In comparison, the United States spends 5.7% and ranks 14th in Reading, 25th in Math and 17th in Science.

References

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