



The Slow Goodbye of the New Year Card

Read the passage and answer the questions. (CEFR B1–B2)

Class _____ No. _____ Name _____

1 For more than a century, the nengajo has been one of the quiet engines of Japanese social life. In 1899, post offices began a special service that held cards posted in late December and delivered them on New Year's Day. Then, in 1949, a private citizen suggested adding lottery numbers to the cards, and the idea became a national hit. At its peak, Japan printed about 4.46 billion New Year postcards for a single year.



2 Today, that number has fallen sharply. Younger people often send greetings through messaging apps, and in October 2024 the price of a postcard rose from 63 yen to 85 yen. A new phrase, nengajo-jimai, describes a polite final card announcing that the sender will stop sending them. Post office figures show that each year now brings far fewer cards than the year before.

3 Some people see this as the loss of a beautiful custom that kept distant friends connected. Others argue that the spirit of the custom survives, since people still pause at the start of the year to thank one another. The real question may be whether a greeting needs paper to carry meaning.

Comprehension

1. What is the main idea of the passage?

- (A) Japanese people have stopped greeting each other at New Year.
- (B) The post office invented the New Year card in 1949.
- (C) The New Year card was once very important in Japan, but it is now declining, and people disagree about what this means.
- (D) Messaging apps are more polite than paper cards.

2. What did a private citizen suggest in 1949?

- (A) Adding lottery numbers to New Year cards.
- (B) Delivering all cards on New Year's Day.
- (C) Raising the price of postcards.
- (D) Sending greetings through messaging apps.

3. According to the passage, what happened in October 2024?

- (A) Post offices stopped delivering cards on New Year's Day.
- (B) Japan printed a record number of New Year cards.
- (C) The phrase nengajo-jimai was first used.
- (D) The price of a postcard rose from 63 yen to 85 yen.

4. What can we infer from the phrase nengajo-jimai?

- (A) Many people now send more cards than before.
- (B) People who stop sending cards often want to do it politely instead of just disappearing.
- (C) Only older people still send New Year cards.
- (D) The post office asks people to stop sending cards.

5. In paragraph 1, the word "peak" in "At its peak" is closest in meaning to

- (A) the first year
- (B) the highest point
- (C) the lowest price
- (D) the last day

6. Why does the writer end the passage with a question about paper?

- (A) To tell readers to buy more postcards.
- (B) To show that the post office will stop selling cards.
- (C) To explain how New Year cards are printed.
- (D) To invite readers to think about whether the meaning of a greeting depends on its form.



Vocabulary, Paraphrase & Summary

Match the words with the definitions. Then rewrite and summarize.

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|-------------|---|
| 1. citizen | a. the time when something is at its highest level or greatest number |
| 2. lottery | b. suddenly and by a large amount |
| 3. peak | c. behaving in a kind and respectful way toward other people |
| 4. sharply | d. to tell people clearly about a plan or a decision |
| 5. polite | e. far away in space, or not close in a relationship |
| 6. announce | f. to continue to exist, even after a difficult time or a big change |
| 7. distant | g. a person who lives in a country or town and has rights there |
| 8. survive | h. a game in which people with certain numbers win prizes by chance |

Paraphrase — say it in your own words

1. “Then, in 1949, a private citizen suggested adding lottery numbers to the cards, and the idea became a national hit.”

Hint: Start with "In 1949, an ordinary person" and change "became a national hit" to "became very popular all over Japan".

2. “A new phrase, nengajo-jimai, describes a polite final card announcing that the sender will stop sending them.”

Hint: Start with "Nengajo-jimai means" and use "a last card" and "politely tells people".

3. “The real question may be whether a greeting needs paper to carry meaning.”

Hint: Use "Perhaps what we should really ask is" and "Can a greeting be meaningful without".

Summary

Summarize the passage in about 50 words.



Debate & Opinion Essay

Prepare for a debate. Then write your opinion (100–150 words).

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Motion: People should keep sending paper New Year cards.

FOR 賛成

- A paper card keeps distant friends connected, even people we do not talk to on messaging apps.
- Handwritten cards show more care than a short message, so they carry stronger feelings of thanks.
- Nengajo is a custom with more than a century of history, and once it disappears, it will be hard to bring back.

Add your own reason:

AGAINST 反対

- The price of a postcard rose from 63 yen to 85 yen in 2024, so sending many cards is now expensive.
- Messaging apps let people send greetings quickly, with photos, and for free.
- The spirit of the custom survives without paper, because people still thank one another at the start of the year.

Add your own reason:

Opinion	<i>I believe / I think that ...</i>
Reason 1	<i>First, ... For example, ...</i>
Reason 2	<i>Second, ... In fact, ...</i>
Counter	<i>Some people say ... However, ...</i>
Conclusion	<i>In conclusion, ...</i>