

WLLC 3600: Japanese Pop Culture Spring 2026

Class Information

Instructor: Adam Manfredi, Assistant Professor of Japanese
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Office: LANG 405 J
Office Hours: Tue 9:00-10:00 and Thurs 12:00-1:00 or by appointment
Class Hours: Tues and Thurs 2:00-3:20
Location: GAB 106

Course Description:

This class will explore the vast world of contemporary Japanese popular culture and introduce Japanese history, culture, and society through the lens of popular culture. We will answer questions like: *Why does Godzilla keep destroying Tokyo? How has the Olympics helped shape contemporary Japanese society? What can popular culture tell us about the historical moment it arose?* With an eye on historical context and the role of popular culture in reflecting, (re)presenting, and reproducing cultural memory and societal norms, we will explore a wide variety of media: manga, anime, film, and music. Topics include the Tokyo Olympics, sports, depictions of the future, and disaster and recovery. Students will also have the opportunity to share their discoveries in Japanese pop culture with the class. Students will gain a deeper understanding of Japanese history and popular culture and how to analyze popular culture for its sociological, economic, and historical significance. Also, students studying Japanese will be able to use their language knowledge to engage with level-appropriate Japanese language media.

Required Texts and Materials:

All readings will be uploaded to Canvas. We will watch several films and videos throughout the semester. Some of these videos we will watch in class. The majority of them you will watch on your own using a link on Canvas. Four of the films (*The Wind Rises*, *Akira*, *Your Name*, and *Shin Godzilla*) will need to be purchased on your own, but are available through various online streaming services. A DVD copy of each of these films will also be placed on reserve at the UNT library, and you can check it out and watch it at the library using the library's media stations. In addition, I will schedule a showing of these four films during the week we are to watch them (likely Wednesday from 6:00 PM). If you have any difficulty accessing the required material, please contact me.

Course Policies

Requirements:

Students are expected to complete all readings and videos and come to class ready to discuss the material. Students are expected to actively participate in class through discussion and raising questions that might be relevant to the day's topics.

Class Participation:

Regular class participation is essential. Students are expected to have readings (print or digital) with them during class to refer to texts directly.

Attendance Policy:

Attendance is mandatory, but I have built in several dropped assignments to account for unavoidable absences. Students with extenuating circumstances are encouraged to contact me as soon as possible.

Late Assignment Policy:

All assignments must be turned in on time for full credit. Late assignments will be marked down 1/3 of a letter grade for each day late. In-class assignments cannot be made up.

Electronics Policy:

Electronics are permitted in class to access Canvas files and Canvas posts.

Course Structure

Lecture:

Class on Tuesday will follow a lecture format and will focus on covering background material that will inform your understanding of the week's movie, manga, anime, or game.

Group Discussion and Activity:

Class on Thursday will focus on group activities and discussions. Groups will be formed in the second week of class, and new groups will be made twice during the semester.

Course Assignments

Grading Scale:

90-100% = A

80-89% = B

70-79% = C

60-69% = D

0-59% = F

Thursday Group Work Submissions (17%)

Most Thursdays, you will complete a structured group activity during class (such as discussion questions, analysis worksheets, or short response prompts) and submit one group worksheet per group online at the end of class. These submissions are graded primarily for completion and evidence of engagement. That means specific examples from the assigned material, not just general impressions. **The lowest 2 group submissions will be dropped automatically to account for occasional absences.**

Peer and Self Evaluations (3%)

Groups will rotate three times during the semester. At the end of each rotation, you will complete a brief peer evaluation of your groupmates and a short self-evaluation. Each of the three evaluations is worth 1% and is graded for completion. Peer evaluations are used to ensure fairness and accountability. In cases of clear non-participation (for example, consistent low peer ratings with corroborating comments), I may adjust a student's score for that rotation.

Reading Quizzes (15%)

Expect periodic in-class quizzes on assigned readings, given at the start of Tuesday classes. These will be short and designed to confirm engagement with the material. These quizzes will be open note, but those notes must be handwritten or printed. **I will give seven quizzes throughout the semester and drop your two lowest scores.**

Review (15%)

You will write one short analytical review, either on a manga or on a video game. Detailed prompts and evaluation criteria will be provided in advance.

Final Project (50%)

The final project is a semester-long investigation into an aspect of Japanese popular culture. You will choose one of three options: introduce a topic we did not cover in class, compare a topic we covered with an American popular culture equivalent, or complete a creative project. The project includes multiple stages:

- Proposal 1 (5%)
- Proposal 2 (5%)
- Annotated Bibliography (10%)
- Poster Presentation (20%)
- Reflection (10%)

Detailed guidelines for each stage will be distributed separately.

Supplemental Japanese Language Material:

Students studying Japanese will be able to substitute some regular assignments for assignments designed to engage and advance their study of Japanese. Please get in touch with me at the start of the course if you are interested.

Department and University Policies

Students' Concerns and Complaints:

Open communication is key to resolving concerns. Most issues or misunderstandings can be addressed effectively when those directly involved engage in honest discussion. If you have a concern related to your course, whether about materials, instruction, assessments, or the classroom environment, please begin by speaking with your instructor. If the matter remains unresolved, or if you are uncomfortable approaching your instructor, you may contact the WLLC department. To learn more about the complaint procedure or to file a formal complaint, you can

access the document WLLC COURSE COMPLAINT PROCEDURE FOR STUDENTS on the departmental website:

<https://class.unt.edu/world-languages-literatures-cultures/resources/studentcomplaint.pdf>

When emailing the department, be sure to include:

- Your first and last name
- Your instructor's name
- Your course title and section number

Thank you for helping us to maintain a supportive learning environment.

Office of Disability Access (ODA)

The University of North Texas makes reasonable accommodations for students with disabilities. Students needing a reasonable academic accommodation must first register with the Office of Disability Access (ODA) to verify their eligibility. If a disability is verified, the student will request their letter of accommodation. ODA will provide faculty with a reasonable accommodation letter via email to begin a private discussion regarding a student's specific needs in a course. Students may request reasonable accommodations at any time. However, ODA notices of reasonable accommodation should be provided as early as possible in the semester to avoid any delay in implementation. Note that students must obtain a new letter of reasonable accommodation for every semester and must meet with each faculty member prior to implementation in each class. Students are strongly encouraged to meet with faculty regarding their accommodations during office hours or by appointment. Faculty members have the authority to ask students to discuss such letters during their designated office hours to protect the privacy of the student. For additional information, refer to the [Office of Disability Access](https://studentaffairs.unt.edu/office-disability-access) website (<https://studentaffairs.unt.edu/office-disability-access>). You may also contact ODA by phone at (940) 565-4323.

Emergency Notification & Procedures

UNT uses a system called Eagle Alert to quickly notify students with critical information in the event of an emergency (i.e., severe weather, campus closing, and health and public safety emergencies like chemical spills, fires, or violence). In the event of a university closure, please refer to the UNT Learning Management System (LMS) for contingency plans for covering course materials.

WLLC 3600 Japanese Popular Culture Spring 2026 Course Schedule *This is a tentative schedule and is subject to change* *All changes will be posted to Canvas and announced in class*	
Date	To Watch/ Read/Play Before Class
Week 1: Crash Course Japanese History	
01/13 Tue	NA
01/15 Thu	“Defeat and Reconstruction: 1945-1970s,” Nancy Stalker (40 pgs.)
Week 2: Post-War Recovery	
01/20 Tue	“The Prehistory of Soft Power Godzilla, Cheese, and the American Consumption of Japan,” William M. Tsutsui (10 pgs.)
01/22 Thu	<i>Godzilla</i> , 1954 (watch on Canvas)
Week 3: Remembering the War	
01/27 Tue	“Forms and Themes in Japanese Popular Culture,” William M. Tsutsui (17 pgs.)
01/29 Thu	<i>The Wind Rises</i> , 2013 (stream online)
Week 4: Girls Stories	
02/03 Tue	Sailor Moon Manga
02/05 Thu	<i>Madoka Magica</i> , 2011 (watch in class)
Week 5: Boys Stories	
02/10 Tue	Dragon Ball Manga
02/12 Thu	<i>One Punch Man</i> , 2015 (watch in class)
Assignment	Due Friday 02/13 6:00 PM on Canvas: Manga Review
Week 6: Memories of the Past	
02/17 Tue	“A Fistful of <i>Yojimbo</i> : Appropriation and Dialogue in Japanese Cinema” by Rachael Hutchinson (from <i>World Cinema’s ‘Dialogues’ With Hollywood</i> , 2007), p 172-187
02/19 Thu	<i>Yojimbo</i> , 1961 (watch on Canvas)

Week 7: Visions of the Future	
02/24 Tue	Online Readings
02/26 Thu	<i>Akira</i> , 1989 (stream online)
Assignment	Due Friday 02/27 6:00 PM on Canvas: Final Project Proposal 1
Week 8: Food as Popular Culture	
03/03 Tue	Theodore C. Bestor and Victoria Lyon Bestor, "Cuisine and Identity in Contemporary Japan" (2011)
03/05 Thu	<i>Jiro Dreams of Sushi</i> , 2011 (watch on Canvas) No Class, Online Activity Due by 6:00 PM on Canvas
Spring Break	
Week 9: Sports in Japan	
03/17 Tue	Online Readings
03/19 Thu	Olympic Films (watch on Canvas)
Assignment	Due Friday 03/20 6:00 PM on Canvas: Final Project Proposal 2
Week 10: Video Games, Part 1	
03/24 Tue	Media Library Visit (Willis 250H)
03/26 Thu	Video Game Videos (watch on Canvas)
Week 11: Video Games, Part 2	
03/31 Tue	Online Readings
04/02 Thu	<i>Pokémon</i> , 1998 (watch in class)
Due Friday 04/03 6:00 PM on Canvas: Video Game Review	
Week 12: Japanese Popular Music	
04/07 Tue	Online Readings
04/09 Thu	<i>Linda Linda Linda</i> , 2005 (watch in class)

Week 13: Representation of Disaster	
04/14 Tue	Online Readings
04/16 Thu	<i>Your Name</i> , 2016 (stream online)
Due Friday 04/17 6:00 PM on Canvas: Final Project Annotated Bibliography	
Week 14: Godzilla Returns	
04/21 Tue	Online Readings
04/23 Thu	<i>Shin Godzilla</i> , 2016 (stream online)
Week 15: Final Project Presentations	
04/28 Tue	Final Project Presentations
04/30 Thu	Final Project Presentations
Finals	
Due Thursday 05/07 6:00 PM on Canvas: Final Project Reflection	