WLLC 3600: Japanese Popular Culture
Fall 2026

Class Information

Instructor: Adam Manfredi, Assistant Professor of Japanese
Email: adam.manfredi@unt.edu

Office Hours: Tue and Thu 2:15 – 3:15 or by appointment **(LANG 405 J)**
Class Hours: Mon and Wed 3:55 - 5:15 **(BLB 010)**

Course Description:
This class introduces Japanese history, culture, and society through the lens of popular culture. We will answer questions like: Why does Godzilla keep destroying Tokyo? How did the great American pastime of baseball become Japan's most popular sport? What can popular culture tell us about the historical moment in which it arose?

With attention to how popular culture reflects, represents, and reproduces cultural memory and social norms, we will explore manga, anime, film, food, fashion, music, and more. Students will gain the tools to analyze popular culture for its sociological, economic, and historical significance and will share their own discoveries and interests with the class through a final project. Students studying Japanese will be able to use their language knowledge to engage with level-appropriate Japanese-language media.

Required Texts and Materials:

There are two required books (both manga) which you can purchase from the campus bookstore or online through any major bookseller.

> *Dragon Ball, Volume 1 (3-in-1 Edition)* by Toriyama Akira
> ISBN 13: 9781421555645
>
> *Sailor Moon, Volume 1* by Takeuchi Naoko
> ISBN 13: 9781646512010

All other readings will be uploaded to Canvas. We will watch several films, videos, and anime episodes throughout the semester. Some of these we will watch in class and others you will watch on your own using a link on Canvas. One of the films (*Godzilla Minus Zero*) will be out in the theaters this semester and you need to see it on your own in the theater. Please consult the class schedule or Canvas module for details If you have any difficulty accessing the required material, please contact me as soon as possible so that we can find other arrangements.

Course Policies

Class Participation:
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. Active participation will be reflected in your participation grade.

Attendance Policy:
Much of our engagement with Japanese popular culture will come through class discussions and small group activities and class attendance is mandatory. However, I have built in several dropped assignments to account for unavoidable absences and students are able to miss three classes without it affecting their attendance grade. 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 and will be accepted up to one-week late. In-class assignments cannot be made up. Assignments late because of excused absence need to be turned in one week after you return to class.

Electronics Policy:
Electronics are permitted in class to access Canvas files and Canvas posts. If you need to use your phone in an emergency, please be respectful to your classmates while doing so.

Office Hours
Please visit my office (LANG 405 J) during office hours for individual assistance or study suggestions. I am also happy to discuss other academic or Japanese-related topics. If the scheduled times do not work for you, please email me to arrange an online or in-person appointment.

Communications
Please contact me at adam.manfredi@unt.edu using your UNT email account or through Canvas. I will try to respond within 24 hours. However, my response might be slower on weekends and holidays.

Canvas Site
You can download PowerPoints from each lesson and assignment descriptions. If you miss class, download the relevant material from Canvas. You will also find helpful links, activities, etc.

Course AI Policy
For each assignment, I will include a specific AI use policy as part of the instructions, and we will discuss it in class.

I do not use AI checkers, but students should be able to explain any assignment they turn in, in their own words. If I have a question about a student's AI use, I will contact the student to have a meeting. The first conversation about AI use will be educational, not punitive, but I expect students to adjust their approach going forward. This might involve a brief reflection on how you used AI, a revision of the assignment, or just a conversation about strategies for future work.

Course Assignments

Grading Scale:
90-100% = A
80-89% = B
70-79% = C
60-69% = D
0-59% = F

Attendance and Participation (15%)
A large part of the course will involve group work and class discussion. As such, it is important that you come to class having read or watched the assignment material for that day and also that you actively participate in class discussions and activities**.** I will take daily attendance. **I allow three absences, no questions asked. Further absences will result in a lowering of your attendance and participation grade.** For excused absences due to illness, university sports related events, or other circumstances please contact me as soon as possible.

Reading/Viewing Comprehension Checks: 15%
Expect periodic in-class reading checks on assigned readings and viewings, given at the start of class. These will be short and designed to confirm engagement with the material. **I will drop your three lowest scores**.

Reviews: 20% (10% each)
You will write two public facing reviews, one on a manga/anime and one on a Japanese video game and share them with your class on Canvas. 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:

- Project Proposal (10%)
- Annotated Bibliography (15%)
- Project Check-in (5%)
- Poster Presentation (15%)

- Reflection (5%)

Detailed guidelines for each stage will be distributed separately several weeks in advance of their due dates.

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. If you are interested, please contact me early in the semester.

Note: The last day to drop the course is **Friday, November 6**. If you submit your drop paperwork by this date, you will receive a W on your transcript, which will not be calculated into your GPA. Dropping courses may impact financial aid and degree completion. Please contact your advisors if you have questions.

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 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 Fall 2026: Course Schedule *This is a tentative schedule and is subject to change*	
Date	To Watch/Read/Play Before Class
Week 1: What is Japanese Popular Culture?	
08/17 Mon	Course Introduction
08/19 Wed	*Japanese Popular Culture and Globalization*, Chapter 1: "Forms and Themes in Japanese Popular Culture" by William M. Tsutsui
Week 2: Japan's Post-War Recovery	
08/24 Mon	"The Prehistory of Soft Power Godzilla, Cheese, and the American Consumption of Japan" by William M. Tsutsui
08/26 Wed	*Godzilla*, 1954 (watch on Canvas)
Week 3: Manga and Anime 1	
08/31 Mon	"Manga Genres: Demographics and Themes" by Deborah Shamoon
09/02 Wed	*Sailor Moon* Volume 1, 1991 (read before class)
Week 4: Manga and Anime 2	
09/07 Mon	Labor Day (No Class)
09/09 Wed	*Madoka Magica*, Episodes 1-3, 2011 (watch in class)
Week 5: Manga and Anime 3	
09/14 Mon	*Dragon Ball* (pgs. 368-537), 1984 (read before class)
09/16 Wed	*One Punch Man*, Episode 1, 2015 (watch in class)
Assignment	Manga Review Due Friday, 09/18 6:00 PM on Canvas
Week 6: Stories of the Past	
09/21 Mon	"A Fistful of *Yojimbo*: Appropriation and Dialogue in Japanese Cinema" by Rachael Hutchinson
09/23 Wed	*Yojimbo*, 1961 (watch on Canvas)
Week 7: Stories of the Future	

09/28 Mon	"My Own Private Tokyo" by William Gibson
09/30 Wed	*Akira*, 1989 (watch in class)
Assignment	Final Project Proposal Due Friday, 10/02 6:00 PM on Canvas:
Week 8: Sports in Japan	
10/05 Mon	"Making a Game of Their Own: Baseball in Japan" by Paul Dunscomb
10/07 Wed	*KOSHIEN Japan's Field of Dreams* (2019) (watch on Canvas)
Week 9: Video Games	
10/12 Mon	"Gaming the World: The Famicom & Game Boy" by Matt Alt (Media Library Visit)
10/14 Wed	Nintendo Documentary (watch on Canvas) Media Library Visit
Week 10: Pokémon, A Mix Media Franchise	
10/19 Mon	"How 'Japanese' Is Pokémon?" by Koichi Iwabuchi
10/21 Wed	Pokémon episode (watch in class)
Assignment	Video Game Review Due Friday, 10/23 6:00 PM on Canvas
Week 11: Fashion and Cool Japan	
10/26 Mon	Visit to Texas Fashion Collection (405 S. Welch St. Suite 102)
10/28 Wed	"Japan's Gross National Cool" by Douglas McGray
Week 12: Music and Fandom in Japan	
11/02 Mon	Japanese Fandom Guest Lecture (Angela Harris)
11/04 Wed	Japanese Music Guest Lecture (Glenn Danielson)
Assignment	Final Project Annotated Bibliography Due Friday, 11/06 6:00 PM on Canvas:
Week 13: Japanese Food Culture	

11/09 Mon	"Cuisine and Identity in Contemporary Japan" by Theodore C. Bestor and Victoria Lyon Bestor
11/11 Wed	*Jiro Dreams of Sushi*, 2011 (watch on Canvas)
Assignment	Final Project Check-in Due Friday, 11/13 6:00 PM on Canvas:
Week 14: Godzilla Returns	
11/16 Mon	"Godzilla on My Mind: Fifty Years of the King of Monsters" by William M. Tsutsui
11/18 Wed	*Godzilla Minus Zero*, 2026 (watch in theaters)
Thanksgiving Break	
11/23 Mon	No Class
11/25 Wed	No Class
Week 15: Final Project Presentations	
11/30 Mon	Final Project Presentations
12/02 Wed	Final Project Presentations
Finals	
Final Project Reflection Due Wednesday, 12/09 6:00 PM on Canvas:	