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は ha ひ hi ふ fu へ he



ほほほ? hohoho?

When I first met my friend's mother, I noticed she covered her mouth every time she laughed. I thought she must have something wrong with her mouth, but it looked all right to me. Why did she need to cover her mouth? Does it mean something?

■■■ I'm sure she has nothing wrong with her mouth. In the old days in Japan, when women laughed they generally tried to do so silently by covering their mouths with fans or their kimono sleeves. This was because they didn't want to make a spectacle of their emotions. Not to show their feelings was thought to be a kind of virtue, and showing their teeth when laughing was considered a little rude. That's why many women have a habit of covering their mouths when laughing. These days, it's mainly done by elderly women. Also, there was a practice in olden times called **ohaguro** in which people—mainly women—dyed their teeth black. There are various theories why they did this. One theory goes that **ohaguro** teeth give a mysterious impression of hiding a person's emotions. Let's discuss the mysteries of Japanese laughter.

★ There are many types of laughter. For example, 照れ笑い (**tere-warai**): embarrassed laughter; 作り笑い (**tsukuri-warai**): fake laughter; 苦笑い (**niga-warai**): bitter laughter; 思い出し笑い (**omoidashi-warai**): nostalgic laughter; 含み笑い (**fukumi-warai**): chuckling, etc.

Quiz: "ha, hi, fu, he, ho" from the Japanese alphabet (**hiragana**) are often used to express laughter, each with a different nuance and meaning. Match them up correctly.

- 1) ははははは **hahahahaha** A) Creepy laughter. It also can represent feminine laughter.
- 2) ひひひひひ **hihihihihi** B) Laughter when people intend to do something wrong or hatch a plot.
- 3) ふふふふふ **fufufufufu** C) Embarrassed laughter when people fail to do something or are trying to hide their shyness.
- 4) へへへへへ **hehehehehe** D) Cheerful laughter.
- 5) ほほほほほ **hohohohoho** E) Feminine laughter, often by elderly women.

Answers: 1) - D) 2) - B) 3) - A) 4) - C) 5) - E)

Quiz: When you put "あ (a) い (i) う (u) え (e) お (o)" in front of the sounds at left, it sounds more like spoken Japanese. Match the types of laughter in 1 to 5 with the meanings in A to D.

- 1) あはははは **ahahahaha** A)
- 2) いひひひひ **ihihihihi** B)
- 3) うふふふふ **ufufufufu** C)
- 4) えへへへへ **ehehehehe** D)
- 5) おほほほほ **ohohohoho** E)



Answers: 1) - B) 2) - E) 3) - A) 4) - D) 5) - C)

The following are phrases using the **kanji** 笑, **wara(u)** or **shō**, which means laugh or laughter. Choose the correct word to complete the expressions.

a) 一円を笑う者は() 円に泣く
ichien o warau mono wa _____ en ni naku
Look after the pence, and the pounds will take care of themselves.

- 1) 一 **ichi** (one)
- 2) 十 **jū** (ten)
- 3) 百 **hyaku** (hundred)
- 4) 千 **sen** (thousand)

b) 笑う門には()来る
warau kado niwa _____ kitaru
Laughter brings good luck.

- 1) 子ども **kodomo** (child)
- 2) 神 **kami** (god)
- 3) 福 **fuku** (luck)
- 4) 米 **kome** (rice)

c) 来年のことを言うと()が笑う
rainen no koto o iu to _____ ga warau
Nothing is certain but death and taxes.

- 1) カラス **karasu** (crow)
- 2) 鬼 **oni** (devil)
- 3) きつね **kitsune** (fox)
- 4) へび **hebi** (snake)

d) The following is a humble greeting written on a card or letter to be sent with a gift.

ご笑()ください
goshōnō kudasai
I hope you will kindly accept my small present.

Kanji for "nō" 1) 能 2) 脳 3) 納 4) 農

e) Here is another humble expression often used when we show our belongings to other people.

ご笑()ください
goshōran kudasai
I hope you enjoy looking at it.

Kanji for "ran" 1) 乱 2) 覧 3) 欄 4) 卵

Answers: a) - 1) b) - 3) c) - 2) d) - 3) e) - 2)