

## What is Labo?

Your host brother or sister is a member of Labo and you will be attending Labo Party meetings and going to Labo Camp.

Each Labo club is called a Labo Party. (The word "party" is used like we use it to describe a group, such as the Republican Party.) Each Labo Party is led by an adult Labo Tutor, who is similar to a 4-H or Scout leader. Each Tutor may lead several clubs. For example, they may have a Labo Party for babies and their mothers, several Parties for young children, and one or more for teens and college students. They may even have an adult group. They also meet regularly with other Labo Tutors to plan new activities.

Labo Tutors play an important role in the lives of their Labo members. They spend a lot of time together, go to camps together and the Labo Tutor often encourages or advises Labo members about school or other topics.

Labo is a national public interest (like a non-profit) foundation. There are Labo Parties and Labo members all over Japan. It was founded a long time ago, so some former Labo members have gone on to become famous. One is an astronaut and another acted in the Pirates of the Caribbean movie. Labo members learn leadership, language, literature, culture, self-expression, creativity and develop international understanding. The name Labo comes from language laboratory learning equipment that was used when the program was first started.

Labo members can join a Labo Party when they are babies, coming to meetings with their mothers. In high school, they assist at Camp as Senior Mates. After high school graduation, they can participate in leadership roles as "College Mates". They stay in Labo until they graduate from college. Through Labo, they form friendships which last a lifetime.

International exchange is an important part of the Labo program. The best way to learn about another culture is as a friend, not as a tourist and these friendships contribute to international understanding and to world peace. The Labo exchange with the USA has been going on for over 40 years. Labo does exchanges with 4-H and also with several other countries and organizations, so when you are in Japan you may meet youth from another country or meet American youth who are not with 4-H.

By the time that a Labo member comes to the USA, Canada, South Korea, China, Australia or New Zealand for a one-month homestay, their parents may have been saving money for 10 years. There is also an extra opportunity for a homestay during or just after high school, a one-year exchange attending high school with a host brother or sister.

While Labo does not offer a year-long homestay in Japan, there is an option for USA high school youth to study/homestay in Japan for 8 weeks, and for college students to apply for a one-year internship with Labo.

The Labo members who will be doing a homestay this summer will leave Japan the third week in July, so you might meet some of them. They will appreciate the opportunity to practice English by introducing themselves to you.

Labo meetings and camps include kids of all ages. Older members have a role in planning the activities. They find ways to include the younger members and they help the younger kids during the games and plays/performances. During meetings, they will take a small child by the hand and lead them through the dance or game. Other times, they might even carry the child. Those little kids grow up to be the next teen leaders and to help other little kids.

Labo Party meetings tend to be active and may include playing games that you did in kindergarten. Some songs and games may be new to you because they come from many countries, including England. You may do Ring Around the Rosie, London Bridge is Falling Down, or other English-language rhymes that you haven't done since you were small. The point of the games is to have fun and play together (remember that Japan is a group-oriented culture), and for the Japanese Labo members to have a chance to practice repeating English words and numbers. As you know, it's easier to learn something if it is a song or rhyme.

Another important part of the Labo Party is the "theme activity". This is a story that Labo members act out. It's a great opportunity for creativity. The story may be a familiar one like "The Three Little Pigs", a traditional Japanese story, a story from another country, or an original story written especially for Labo.

The theme activity story comes as a book with a CD and each Labo member will have one. The story is in both English and Japanese. For example, the

phrase, “Once upon a time there were three little pigs” would be written and said in English and then repeated in Japanese. By listening to the CD over and over and then repeating both the English and Japanese, Labo members are able to learn the English sentences in a natural way, similar to the way that we learn to speak our first language. And you will be able to learn some Japanese.

Labo members talk with one another and plan how to do the theme activity. Through this process, the Labo members learn how to think creatively, express their opinion, listen to the ideas of others, work together to make a plan, rehearse and improve the plan, and present the performance.

The theme activity story is presented with few costumes, scenery or props. Labo members use their imagination to work together to have members act as trees, ocean waves, a boat, a bird, a doorway, a cauldron, etc. There is usually a lot of moving around during the performance of the theme activity. There is often background music and sometimes a song or two. Labo members have fun pretending that they are butterflies, the enchanted broom in the Sorcerer's Apprentice, the caterpillar or Cheshire Cat in Alice in Wonderland, or the Big Bad Wolf.

When you go to Labo meetings, the Labo Party members will be happy to meet you. They will want to try to introduce themselves to you, in English. They will probably tell you their name, age and some things that they like, such as a food and a sport. You will be asked to introduce yourself in Japanese and to also tell a little about what you enjoy. We will practice this during orientation.

Your Labo tutor will be delighted if you come to Japan with a story (or stories) that you could read to the members of your Labo Party. The story does not have to be very long and should have few words and a lot of pictures. The goal is for the members of your Labo Party to look at the pictures and listen to you speak natural English. A lot of repetition is a good thing. Some examples of stories you could bring would be: The Three Little Pigs, The Three Bears, The Little Red Hen, Good Night Moon. Many of these stories are available through book fairs, at the bookstore or supermarket or even garage sales in a lightweight paperback format, or as Little Golden Books. You can give this book to your Labo Tutor when you have finished reading it aloud.

If you have room in your suitcase, you may also want to bring small gifts for the members of your Labo Party. You will want to ask your host brother or sister how many members are in the Party, and then bring a few extra, just in case there are visitors. If you don't have this information, we suggest bringing about 50 items. Some options of what to bring would be: individually wrapped hard candies, such as Jolly Ranchers (available at the supermarket or warehouse stores like Costco and Sam's--don't bring chocolate as it will melt in the heat) and/or inexpensive pencils or stickers (possible sources-- JoAnns, Oriental Trading, Michaels, teacher supply stores, garage sales, donations from agencies or businesses).

If your host mother is a Labo Tutor, it would be a good idea to ask how many Labo members she has, as she will probably ask you to meet with all her Labo members and you will want to bring enough items for everyone. They may even have a Welcome Party for you, with a potluck meal. In this case, you might want to bring something like several bags of frosted animal cracker cookies or a big box of Goldfish crackers, which could be shared with a large group.

The best way to have fun at Labo Party meetings and at Camp is to jump right in! It may seem confusing at first, but you'll quickly figure it out. Nobody expects perfection, so you don't have to worry about "doing it right"; you can just relax and be creative. It's an enjoyable part of Japanese culture that you won't ever forget.