

Japanese Schoolchildren Say Schoolbags are Too Heavy

VOCABULARY WORDS

1. Base (Verb) /bers/ to have as main place for working, doing business, etc.
Example: The company is based in Tokyo and have many branches all over the world.
2. Manufacturing (Noun) /ˌmænjuˈfæktʃəriŋ/ the making of large amounts of items using machinery
Example: The toy manufacturing industry has a lot of toys targeted to adults recently.
3. Firm (Adjective) /fɜːrm/ having a solid structure or surface
Example: We never thought that the chair would break because it looks firm and sturdy.
4. Leather (Noun) /ˈleðər/ a material made from animal skin
Example: She bought new car seats made from leather.
5. Originally (Adverb) /əˈrɪdʒənli/ at or from the beginning of a situation, activity, etc.
Example: The family is originally from Memphis, Texas before they decided to migrate to Japan.
6. Affordable (Adjective) /əˈfɔːrdəbl/ having a low or reasonable price
Example: We found a very affordable tour package to Vietnam.



Over 90% of elementary schoolchildren in Japan think their schoolbags are too heavy, according to a recent survey. Footmark, a Tokyo-based manufacturing company, asked 1,200 children in their first to third years of elementary school about their schoolbags. Called randoseru, these firm leather backpacks are commonly used by elementary schoolchildren in Japan. These randoseru have recently gotten heavier, the survey found. Some say it's because children now have to carry larger textbooks and electronic tablets.

According to the Footmark survey, the average weight of a child's randoseru increased by about one third of a kilogram between 2021 and 2022. And if children attend cram schools — after-school lessons that help students prepare for exams — in addition to regular lessons, their randoseru are often even heavier, with some children reporting that they carry more than 10

kilograms in weight. As a result, nearly one in four children in the survey said they had felt back or shoulder pain on their way to and from school.

Originally used by the army, randoseru were first used by schoolchildren in 1885, when a school in Tokyo introduced them to try to create equality among its students. All children, no matter their family background, had to walk to school carrying their own bags with no help from adults.

Today, randoseru come in a range of styles and prices, with some brands selling for as much as 330,000 yen — or about \$2,500. So, with many unable to afford these prices, the idea of equality seems to have been forgotten.

Footmark has taken the opportunity to sell its own brand of backpack. Called the rakusack, this backpack is designed to be lighter and more comfortable than the traditional randoseru. And with prices around 10,000 yen — or about \$75 — it is more affordable too.

DISCUSSION

1. What did you complain about most often as a school student?
2. What subjects did you enjoy the most in school?
3. Did you have a lot of homework when you were in school? Who usually helped you with it?
4. Who were your favorite school teachers? What made them so good?
5. How did you like to spend your lunch breaks at elementary school?