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Record snowfall kills 71 in Japan

URL: <http://www.breakingnewsenglish.com/0601/060110-snow.html>

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10 January, 2006

THE ARTICLE

Record snowfall kills 71 in Japan

Record snowfall has led to the death of 71 people in northern and western Japan, and the toll is expected to rise as more snow is predicted. A further three people died while clearing snow from their roofs yesterday. So much snow has fallen that many houses have collapsed under the weight. A combination of earlier-than-usual snow and record cold temperatures have made life miserable and perilous for many rural dwellers. Inhabitants face a dilemma of the roof falling about their heads or the precarious rooftop chore of shoveling the white stuff away. In many places, it has piled as much as 3 meters and has totally cut off mountain villages. Japan has dispatched its military to help rescue stranded villages and help clear snow.

More plummeting temperatures, hardship and calamity are expected throughout January and into February. Just to add to the woes of snow-blighted communities, Japan's Meteorological Agency has warned of deadly avalanches once a thaw sets in. This is unwelcome news for the predominantly elderly village residents, who are having to fend for themselves as the younger folk have headed for work in the cities. Daisuke Mori, a 78-year-old farmer from northern Japan, said: "I want it to stop. It has been relentless. My house is creaking and I can see the ceiling bowing under the weight. I keep thinking the snow will become my grave." Local authorities are desperate for volunteers to help those stricken by the thicker-than-thick blanket of misery and danger.

WARM-UPS

1. SNOWBOUND: You have been trapped in the mountains for two weeks. The snow is three meters high in places. Talk to the other “snowbound residents” in your class. How has the snow affected daily life? Are there any positive points? How do you survive? How tall have you built your snowman?

2. SNOW EFFECTS: Do you like snow? Talk about snow with your partner and how it affects each of the following:

- The elderly
- Christmas cards
- Sport
- Mountain roads
- Children
- Taxi drivers
- Animals
- My country

3. TWO-MINUTE SNOW DEBATES: Face your partner. Take part in the following for-fun debates. Partner A strongly believes in the first argument.

- a. Snow is beautiful. vs. Snow is boring.
- b. Snow is better than rain. vs. Rain is a million times more preferable to snow.
- c. A white Christmas is best. vs. A white Christmas didn't happen in Bethlehem.
- d. Snow is hazardous for driving. vs. Not if you have snow chains.
- e. Winter is better than summer. vs. Summer is better than winter.
- f. The Winter Olympics are more exciting. vs. The summer games are better.
- g. Living in a snowy country is better. vs. Living in the desert is better.
- h. Snow is important. vs. Snow has no importance whatsoever.

4. SENTENCE STARTERS: Complete these sentence starters about snow and discuss your finished sentences with your partner(s).

- a. Snow is _____.
- b. Snow isn't _____.
- c. Snow can _____.
- d. Blankets of snow _____.
- e. Snow in the desert _____.
- f. Snow is treacherous _____.
- g. The beauty of snow _____.
- h. Snow forms _____.

5. SNOW: Spend one minute writing down all of the different words you associate with snow. Share your words with your partner(s) and talk about them. Together, put the words into different categories.

BEFORE READING / LISTENING

1. TRUE / FALSE: Look at the article's headline and guess whether these sentences are true (T) or false (F):

- | | |
|---|-------|
| a. An avalanche has killed 71 people in Japan. | T / F |
| b. People have died while clearing snow from their rooftops. | T / F |
| c. In many places in Japan, snow is piled three meters high. | T / F |
| d. The Japanese military has said it would not help clear snow. | T / F |
| e. Forecasters predict a milder few weeks to come. | T / F |
| f. There is a no threat of avalanches. | T / F |
| g. The elderly are having to clear the snow by themselves. | T / F |
| h. An elderly farmer is going to make a grave from snow. | T / F |

2. SYNONYM MATCH: Match the following synonyms from the article:

- | | |
|---------------|-------------|
| a. toll | mobilized |
| b. collapsed | hit |
| c. precarious | marooned |
| d. dispatched | misery |
| e. stranded | succumbed |
| f. plummeting | survive |
| g. woes | figure |
| h. fend for | unremitting |
| i. relentless | treacherous |
| j. stricken | nose-diving |

3. PHRASE MATCH: Match the following phrases from the article (sometimes more than one combination is possible):

- | | |
|---|------------------------------------|
| a. the toll is expected to rise | once a thaw sets in |
| b. A combination of earlier-than-usual | shoveling the white stuff away |
| c. Inhabitants face | help rescue stranded villages |
| d. the precarious rooftop chore of | hardship and calamity are expected |
| e. Japan has dispatched its military to | woes of snow-blighted communities |
| f. More plummeting temperatures, | as more snow is predicted |
| g. Just to add to the | under the weight |
| h. ...deadly avalanches | snow and record cold temperatures |
| i. having to fend | a dilemma |
| j. the ceiling bowing | for themselves |

WHILE READING / LISTENING

GAP FILL: Put the words in the column on the right into the gaps in the text.

Record snowfall kills 71 in Japan

Record snowfall has _____ to the death of 71 people in northern and western Japan, and the _____ is expected to rise as more snow is predicted. A further three people died while clearing snow from their roofs yesterday. So much snow has fallen that many houses have collapsed under the _____. A combination of earlier-than-usual snow and record cold temperatures have made life miserable and _____ for many rural dwellers. Inhabitants face a _____ of the roof falling about their heads or the precarious rooftop _____ of shoveling the white stuff away. In many places, it has _____ as much as 3 meters and has totally cut off mountain villages. Japan has dispatched its military to help rescue _____ villages and help clear snow.

chore

toll

perilous

led

stranded

weight

dilemma

piled

More _____ temperatures, hardship and _____ are expected throughout January and into February. Just to add to the _____ of snow-blighted communities, Japan's Meteorological Agency has warned of deadly avalanches once a _____ sets in. This is unwelcome news for the _____ elderly village residents, who are having to fend for themselves as the younger folk have headed for work in the cities. Daisuke Mori, a 78-year-old farmer from northern Japan, said: "I want it to stop. It has been relentless. My house is _____ and I can see the ceiling bowing under the weight. I keep thinking the snow will become my grave." Local authorities are _____ for volunteers to help those stricken by the thicker-than-thick _____ of misery and danger.

thaw

creaking

calamity

predominantly

blanket

plummeting

desperate

woes

LISTENING

Listen and fill in the spaces.

Record snowfall kills 71 in Japan

Record snowfall has led to the death of 71 people in northern and western Japan, and the _____ is expected to rise as more snow is predicted. A further three people died while clearing snow from their _____ yesterday. So much snow has fallen that many houses have _____ under the weight. A combination of earlier-than-usual snow and record cold temperatures have made life miserable and _____ for many rural dwellers. Inhabitants face a dilemma of the roof falling about their heads or the _____ rooftop chore of _____ the white stuff away. In many places, it has piled as much as 3 meters and has totally cut off mountain villages. Japan has _____ its military to help rescue _____ villages and help clear snow.

More plummeting temperatures, hardship and _____ are expected throughout January and into February. Just to add to the woes of snow-_____ communities, Japan's Meteorological Agency has warned of deadly avalanches once a _____ sets in. This is unwelcome news for the predominantly elderly village residents, who are having to _____ for themselves as the younger folk have headed for work in the cities. Daisuke Mori, a 78-year-old farmer from northern Japan, said: "I want it to stop. It has been relentless. My house is creaking and I can see the ceiling _____ under the weight. I keep thinking the snow will become my grave." Local authorities are desperate for volunteers to help those _____ by the thicker-than-thick blanket of misery and danger.

AFTER READING / LISTENING

1. WORD SEARCH: Look in your dictionaries / computer to find collocates, other meanings, information, synonyms ... for the words **'snow'** and **'fall'**.

- Share your findings with your partners.
- Make questions using the words you found.
- Ask your partner / group your questions.

2. ARTICLE QUESTIONS: Look back at the article and write down some questions you would like to ask the class about the text.

- Share your questions with other classmates / groups.
- Ask your partner / group your questions.

3. GAP FILL: In pairs / groups, compare your answers to this exercise. Check your answers. Talk about the words from the activity. Were they new, interesting, worth learning...?

4. VOCABULARY: Circle any words you do not understand. In groups, pool unknown words and use dictionaries to find their meanings.

5. STUDENT "SNOW" SURVEY: In pairs / groups, write down questions about snow.

- Ask other classmates your questions and note down their answers.
- Go back to your original partner / group and compare your findings.
- Make mini-presentations to other groups on your findings.

6. TEST EACH OTHER: Look at the words below. With your partner, try to recall exactly how these were used in the text:

- | | |
|---------------|--------------|
| • toll | • plummeting |
| • collapsed | • woes |
| • combination | • fend |
| • dilemma | • relentless |
| • 3 meters | • bowing |
| • stranded | • blanket |

DISCUSSION

STUDENT A's QUESTIONS (Do not show these to student B)

- a. Did the headline make you want to read the article?
- b. Do you like snow?
- c. What do you think of the idea of three-meter high piles of snow?
- d. Do you prefer summer or winter?
- e. What adverse weather conditions cause deaths and suffering in your country?
- f. What can we do to protect ourselves from mother nature?
- g. Do you have any bad experiences of snow?
- h. Why do people live in places that are blanketed with snow for three months a year and are threatened by avalanches?
- i. Would you like to shovel snow from rooftops?
- j. What would you do if you lived in a mountain village that had been totally cut off?

STUDENT B's QUESTIONS (Do not show these to student A)

- a. Did you like reading this article?
- b. What do you think about what you read?
- c. Do you prefer the freezing cold or the boiling heat?
- d. Are there any good things about snow?
- e. What should Japanese authorities do to help the stricken elderly residents?
- f. Have you received any unwelcome news recently?
- g. What would you do if snow was threatening to crush your house?
- h. Do you prefer making snowmen or sand castles?
- i. When have you had to fend for yourself in a difficult situation?
- j. Did you like this discussion?

AFTER DISCUSSION: Join another partner / group and tell them what you talked about.

- a. What was the most interesting thing you heard?
- b. Was there a question you didn't like?
- c. Was there something you totally disagreed with?
- d. What did you like talking about?
- e. Which was the most difficult question?

SPEAKING

SNOW HEADLINES: In pairs / groups, agree on a score from 1 to 10 for the likelihood of the following “headlines” coming true. “1” is absolutely impossible; “10” is very likely. Discuss the consequences of the events in the headlines being real.

HEADLINE	SCORE	CONSEQUENCES
Sahara covered in snow		
Italy to buy 250 million tons of snow for Winter Olympics		
Snow disappears from Mt. Everest		
Scientists discover eating snow helps you live 20 years longer		
Europe buried under 10 meters of snow		
Company invents portable snow shield that protects a whole city		
Proven: Snow landing on your head greatly accelerates language learning		

Change partners and talk about the scores you agreed on with your old partner(s).

Talk about the consequences you discussed with your first partner(s).

HOMEWORK

1. VOCABULARY EXTENSION: Choose several of the words from the text. Use a dictionary or Google's search field (or another search engine) to build up more associations / collocations of each word.

2. INTERNET: Search the Internet and find more information on snow. Share your findings with your class in the next lesson. Did you all find out similar things?

3. SNOW: Write a story about being snowbound in the mountains. Read your story to your classmates in the next lesson. Did you all write about similar things?

4. S.A.S: You are head of the Snow Appreciation Society. Make a poster about the delights and wonders of snow. Show your poster to your classmates in the next lesson. Did everyone have similar thoughts and ideas?

ANSWERS

TRUE / FALSE:

- a. F b. T c. T d. F e. F f. F g. T h. F

SYNONYM MATCH:

- | | |
|---------------|-------------|
| a. toll | figure |
| b. collapsed | succumbed |
| c. precarious | treacherous |
| d. dispatched | mobilized |
| e. stranded | marooned |
| f. plummeting | nose-diving |
| g. woes | misery |
| h. fend for | survive |
| i. relentless | unremitting |
| j. stricken | hit |

PHRASE MATCH:

- | | |
|---|------------------------------------|
| a. the toll is expected to rise | as more snow is predicted |
| b. A combination of earlier-than-usual | snow and record cold temperatures |
| c. Inhabitants face | a dilemma |
| d. the precarious rooftop chore of | shoveling the white stuff away |
| e. Japan has dispatched its military to | help rescue stranded villages |
| f. More plummeting temperatures, | hardship and calamity are expected |
| g. Just to add to the | woes of snow-blighted communities |
| h. ...deadly avalanches | once a thaw sets in |
| i. having to fend | for themselves |
| j. the ceiling bowing | under the weight |

GAP FILL:

Record snowfall kills 71 in Japan

Record snowfall has **led** to the death of 71 people in northern and western Japan, and the **toll** is expected to rise as more snow is predicted. A further three people died while clearing snow from their roofs yesterday. So much snow has fallen that many houses have collapsed under the **weight**. A combination of earlier-than-usual snow and record cold temperatures have made life miserable and **perilous** for many rural dwellers. Inhabitants face a **dilemma** of the roof falling about their heads or the precarious rooftop **chore** of shoveling the white stuff away. In many places, it has **piled** as much as 3 meters and has totally cut off mountain villages. Japan has dispatched its military to help rescue **stranded** villages and help clear snow.

More **plummeting** temperatures, hardship and **calamity** are expected throughout January and into February. Just to add to the **woes** of snow-blighted communities, Japan's Meteorological Agency has warned of deadly avalanches once a **thaw** sets in. This is unwelcome news for the **predominantly** elderly village residents, who are having to fend for themselves as the younger folk have headed for work in the cities. Daisuke Mori, a 78-year-old farmer from northern Japan, said: "I want it to stop. It has been relentless. My house is **creaking** and I can see the ceiling bowing under the weight. I keep thinking the snow will become my grave." Local authorities are **desperate** for volunteers to help those stricken by the thicker-than-thick **blanket** of misery and danger.