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Special Person Interviews in Upper Levels: Let *Ikigai* Be Your Guide

**"I do not fear the opponent that has practiced 10,000 different kicks.
I fear the opponent that has practiced one kick 10,000 times."
— Bruce Lee**

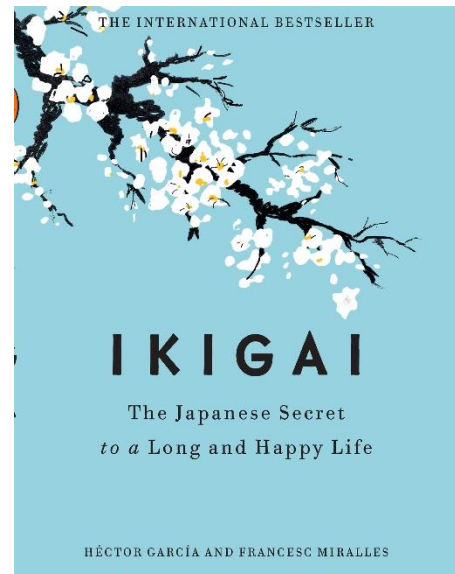


Again, instead of 10,000 different activities, consider **making asking follow-up questions** the activity, the “kick” you practice 10,000 times. Ask your upper-level students **Ikigai**-type questions, and then ask follow-up questions. Once you develop this skill, these 4 topics will easily be enough for interviews in your upper-level classes for the entire school year, several school years, in fact. You can help your students to begin to discover how to build a meaningful life and learn amazing amounts of the target language at the same time.

生き甲斐 ikigai

ikigai is the Japanese concept of “**a reason for being.**” Everyone has an ikigai. To find it requires a journey of self discovery. But the search is worth it.

Your ikigai is the meaning to your life.



Book: *Ikigai*, by Héctor Garcia & Francesc Miralles



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This is the other consideration students lean towards, and again, it is not sufficient. “How much money can I make?” is part of the equation, but the entire answer must involve more.

Can you make enough to live on by doing it?

How much are you likely to make at it?

Are you thinking only of the money?

What are the odds that you can earn a living at it?

Have you spoken with anyone that is doing this work?

What kind of income would be required for the life that you want to live?

• **What You Are Good At**

Are you good at it?

What are you good at?

What are some things that you have always had a knack for?

Is this a natural ability, or have you worked at it?

Are you above average at it, or do you just wish you were?

Your grandmother saying you are good at it doesn't count. Who else says you are good at it?

What have your friends said you were good at over the years?

What have your teachers said you were good at?

What have coaches said you are good at?

What does your boss say you are good at?

What classes or subjects have indicated to you that you are good at this?

In which classes have you been able to learn thoroughly and well?

Any hobbies that you are particularly good at?

Repeat back what they have said, without judgement, using the student's own frame of reference.

Keep asking questions that show you have been paying attention.

Show that you are actually thinking about the student's responses by continuing to ask follow-up questions.

Encourage other students in the class to ask questions, provided they can maintain the proper tone and respect. No busting someone's dreams is allowed.

Ask open-ended questions that require more than a one-word answer.

NOTE: Most teachers are not trained counselors, and even if we were, that is not our duty in the classroom. With these Ikigai questions, we are not trying to fill that role. We are merely asking questions to get students to think. We are using the time-tested Socratic method of asking questions to help students discover. The Socratic method is based on the idea that knowledge is something that cannot be given: you have to discover it for yourself. So, the only way to help someone is by asking questions that will help students reason their way to the truth.



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Ikigai in Spanish



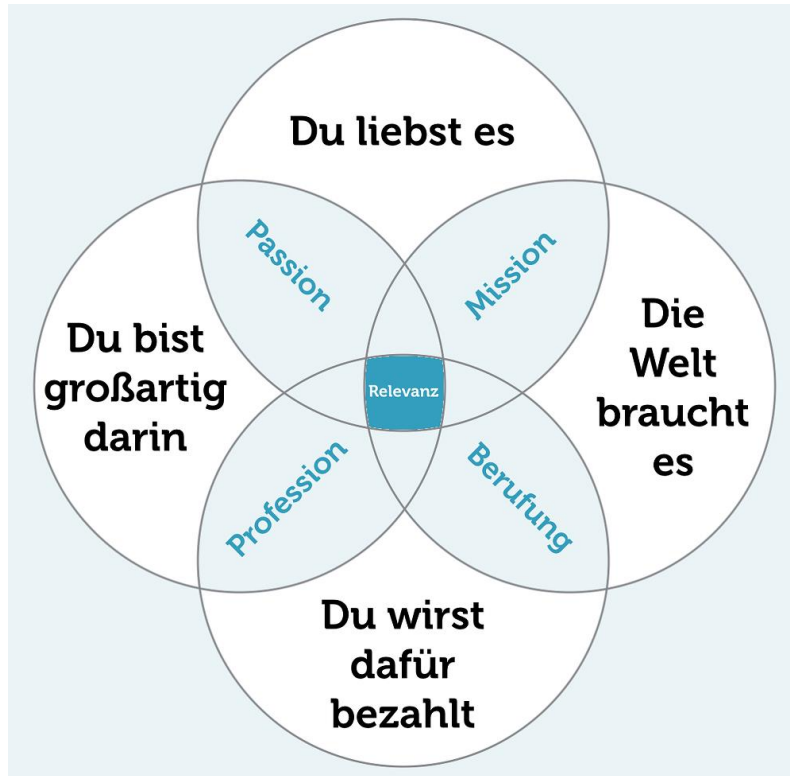
Ikigai in French



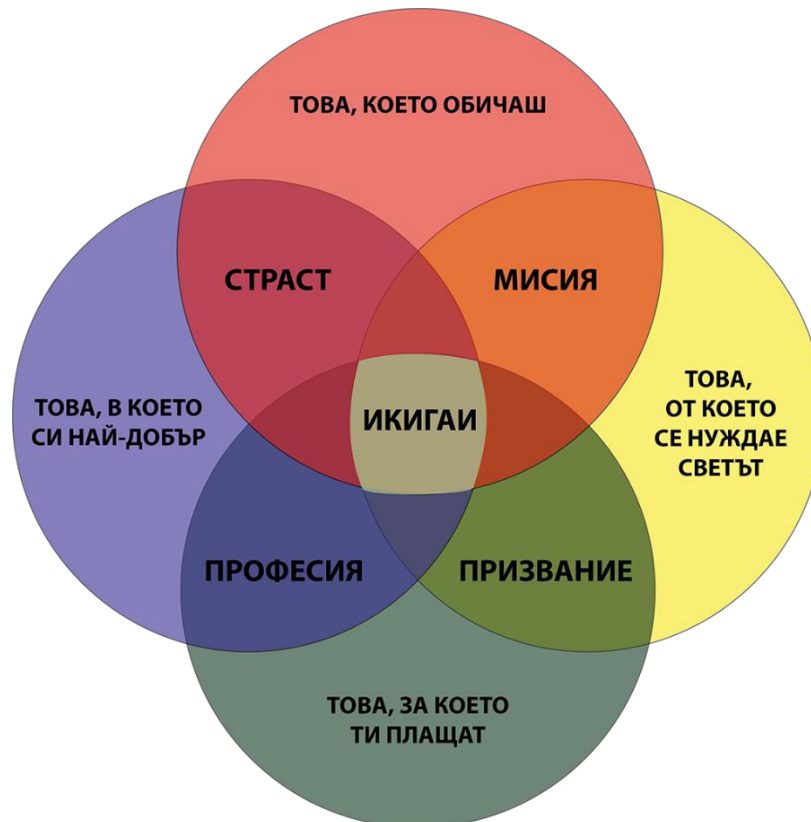


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Ikigai in German



Ikigai in Russian





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DEEP QUESTIONS

We ask students to tell us stories about themselves that will connect us all. These are not family secrets, or tragedies or deeply personal items (and make that abundantly clear), but we are asking for a glimpse into what makes them tick.

These questions are not necessarily about preferences like music, pop stars, video games, media, or movie stars. No, we are going for deeper and more meaningful interaction.

At some level, we are all working on becoming better human beings and we want to allow our students to share that growth with us and with one another. Setting up this type of voluntary self-disclosure gives each student permission to express his or herself in unique ways. It allows students the opportunity to think about themselves and their futures in ways they may have never thought before. The core question we are trying to get from every student is this:

Everybody has a story. What's yours?

We talk with students not only to engage them, but also to help them to overcome loneliness, isolation, and anxiety. We obviously can't ask kids "So what do you do for a living?" And thank goodness we can't ask them that boring cocktail party tripe yet. We get to ask them better questions based on this type of thinking:

**"It doesn't interest me what you do for a living,
I want to know what you ache for,
and if you dare to dream of meeting your heart's longing."
—First line from *The Invitation*, a poem by Oriah Mountain Dreamer**

The questions we need to ask our students have to do with what they want to get better at, their goals, interests, life purpose, their future legacy, what they are willing to struggle for, their unique story, what they have learned and observed in their lives, what skills they want to develop.

We show them through our questions that we do not look down on them because of their youth. They've seen some things. They've thought about some things. And we want to know what those are. Here are some sample questions to prime the pump.

DEVELOPING SKILL

We all need to get busy doing something. We need to develop our natural talents and inclinations and then get good at them and turn them into valuable skills.

Passion is most often the result of action, not the cause of it. Pick a problem that you want to help solve. Remember that getting good at something worthwhile means being awful at it at first. You need to be willing to fail, then fail again and then fail better each time. So ask your students:

- **What do you want to get good at?**
- **What do you enjoy getting better at?**
- **What do you enjoy competing at?**
- **What are you willing to do poorly until you can do it well?**
- **How can you embarrass yourself better?**



LIFE PURPOSE QUESTIONS

Hardly anyone ever enjoys their job every single day. All work stinks sometimes. We all have certain tasks or aspects of our jobs that we do not particularly like, so ask your students questions that take that reality into account.

- **What are some things that you have to do at this time in your life that you dislike the least?**
- **What unpleasant duties do you have right now that you are able to handle well?**

- **What is there about your life now that would have made your seven year old self cry?**
- **What dreams did you used to have when you were younger?**
- **What did you want to be when you were seven years old?**
- **When you were a little kid, what did you want to be when you grew up?**

- **What do you like to do so much that it makes you forget to eat?**
- **What activity is there that you do that makes you forget everything else because it is so engrossing to you?**

- **If you had to leave your house every day, where would you go?**
- **What would you do if you got to choose what to do every day?** *Crashing on a friend's couch, hanging out at a coffee shop, and playing video games all day, every day do not count. You will have to do something all day, every day, so... so what would you do?*

To live happy, healthy and productive lives we have to hold on to values that are greater than our own pleasure or satisfaction.

- **How do you think you are going to help save the world?**
- **How do you plan on helping people in the future?**

WHAT DO YOU WANT TO BE KNOWN FOR?

- **If you knew you were going to die in one year, what would you do? What would you want to accomplish?**
- **How would you want to be remembered?**
- **What do you want your obituary to say?**
- **What do want to be respected for?**
- **What are people going to say about you when you are gone?**
- **What are the stories they are going to tell about you?**

WHAT ARE YOU WILLING TO STRUGGLE FOR?

If we were to ask you, "What do you want out of your life?" You would probably say something like, "I want to be happy and have a great family and a job I like," But that is generic answer that almost everybody would come close to, so it doesn't really mean much. Some more interesting questions, question that most of us have never been asked before are:

- **What pain are you willing to have in your life?**
- **What are you willing to fight for, even though it may be tough? Even though you may not win?**

The question that determines your success in life is not "What do you want to enjoy?" A much better question is:

- **What pain are you willing to bear to achieve your goals?**



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The quality of your life is not determined by the amount of your possessions, but by the amount of struggle you are willing to experience on the way to achieving your goals. A person that was born rich is fortunate, but not successful unless they are contributing something to society. A person that wins a lot of money in the lottery may be lucky, but they have not achieved anything. You have to get good at dealing with negative experiences in order to get good at dealing with life.

You stick with things you enjoy. Will power only goes so far. Will power cannot compete with emotional attachment. Unless you are emotionally rewarded for a task, you will not stick with it.

- ***What is one thing that you want to do in your life?***
- ***What are you missing in your life? How can we help you with that?***
- ***What is one thing that really bothers you that you can work at fixing?***

This is not a gripe session. We are not just complaining. We are finding out what students are interested in and asking them about it.

PERSONAL STORIES TO GET STUDENTS TO OPEN UP

The classroom interviews are not sneak attacks to label kids and put them in some power order according to approved activities. We are not trying to figure out who are the alphas in the room. Personal stories are equalizers. Questioning like this helps kids to overcome shyness. They get to listen to each other's stories. We get to break through the walls and get to the place of sharing.

In these classroom conversations, it is interesting to keep in mind that the origin of the word "conversation" has to do with how we conduct ourselves in the world, how we keep company with one another, how we treat people, how we live.

These questions are not intended to get us to a certain point; they let the interviewee decide where it goes. We are just trying to get to know one another. We are putting kids in a situation where they can be the hero of the story, if they wish, rather than the victim that so many of them see themselves.

Ask about the 4 F's: foods, films, fears and fabulous things. You can also ask about books and teachers.

MEANINGFUL FOODS

- ***When you have guests at your house, what do you (or what does your family) cook for them?***
- ***Does this food have to do with your family heritage?***
- ***What memories or associations do you have with bread?***

WORTHWHILE FILMS

- ***Tell us about a movie that made you cry.***
- ***Who would you want play you in a movie?***
- ***What is your favorite funny movie?***

SUBSTANTIAL FEARS

- ***What is a fear you have overcome?***
- ***What is a fear that a lot of people have and how do you think they could overcome it?***

FABULOUS VICTORIES

- ***Has there ever been a time in your life that you have overcome racism or a stereotype about you?***
- ***What is one of the nicest things that anyone has ever done for you?***



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- *Tell us about a time that you discovered you were stronger than you thought you were.*

IMPORTANT TEACHERS & BOOKS

- *Who was your 'Dumbledore'?*
- *Who was your favorite teacher in middle school? Elementary school?*
- *How has a book you have read affected you?*

QUESTIONS THAT HELP BUILD RAPPORT

- *Would you like to be famous? In what way?*
- *When did you last sing to yourself? To someone else?"*
- *Name three things you and your partner from _____ seem to have in common.*

- *What do you love in life?*
- *What makes you happy?*
- *What makes you smile?*
- *What makes life exciting for you?*
- *What is the greatest dream you have for your life?*

- *What do you really like, but hesitate to admit?*
- *What are your guilty pleasures?*
- *What is one thing you can't say no to?*

- *What is the craziest thing you've ever done?*
- *What is something unique and exciting about you?*
- *What do your friends like the most about you?*
- *What are some things in your life that you are most proud of?*
- *If you could wake up tomorrow and be any place, where would it be and why?*
- *What are some of the most important life lesson you have learned so far?*
- *What is a favorite memory you have from your childhood?*

ADDITIONAL VALID QUESTIONS

- *What are three words that best describe you?*
- *If you were made the mayor of your city for one day, what would you do?*
- *What stresses you out?*
- *Whom do you envy?*

LOVE

- *How would you know that a guy/girl was right for you?*
- *What makes him/her stand out from the rest?*
- *Do you believe in love at first sight?*
- *Is it possible to fall in love just by looking into someone's eyes?*



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