



THE
JAPAN
SOCIETY

Japanese New Year



お正月





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In Japan, the New Year is the most important celebration of the year and everyone has a holiday. It is a time to make a new start, so it is important that everything is just right and people spend a lot of time getting ready from the end of December.

What do people do at New Year's?

Before the New Year, people will normally clean the house from top to bottom, put up decorations for good luck, and spend time writing new year's cards to send to friends and family.

On New Year's Day people will spend time with their families and will eat a specially prepared meal called osechi and each osechi food has a special meaning.

Many people will also go to a shrine or a temple on New Year's Day which is called hatsumode, meaning 'the first visit of the year'. New Year's Day is especially exciting for children as they will receive otoshidama, gifts of money in decorated envelopes!





Decorations

Kagami-mochi is a traditional New Year's decoration that people display at home and it is as an offering to the New Year Gods. The decoration is made from mochi (cooked rice, which has been pounded until it combines together) so it can be broken into pieces and eaten after the New Year's holiday.



Can you find out the Japanese name for the fruit on the top of the Kagami-mochi?

Kado-matsu are New Year's decorations made from pine boughs, bamboo stalks, and sometimes plum tree branches. The decorations are a symbol to welcome long life, good fortune and prosperity into the household so they are set up in pairs, on both sides of the front entrance to a house. Pine trees grow tall and live a long time which is why they are used as a symbol of long life.



How many bamboo stalks are used in a kado-matsu decoration?





New Year's Food

On New Year's Day, Japanese families will eat a meal together called osechi and each food has a special meaning. Take a look at some of them below.

Kuromame are sweet black beans. They are a wish to be able to work hard in the coming year.

Datemaki is slightly sweet like a sponge cake. The spiral shape is like a scroll so it's a wish for intelligence.

Red and white are lucky colours in Japan so this dish, *Kohaku Namasu*, is white radish and 'red' carrot. Can you think of any other red and white foods?

These small dried sardines are called *Gomame*. They are a wish for a good harvest and plenty to eat.

Kobumaki is a wish for both your parents to have a long and happy life.

Renkon is lotus root. The many holes on the surface of *renkon* symbolise a good outlook for the future. It also represents fertility and purity.

Kurikinton is made from sweet potatoes and chestnuts. It looks like treasure or gold coins so it's a wish for good luck with money.

Kazunoko is herring roe. It is golden yellow so it is a wish for wealth. It also represents fertility.

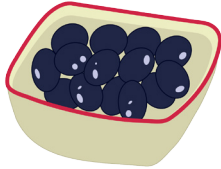
Kamoboko *Kamoboko* is made from fish and eggs. The shape is like the sun rising on the horizon and reminds people of the first sunrise of the New Year.

Prawns are a wish for a long life because their whiskers and curved back look like an elderly person with a long beard.



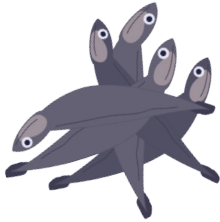


Can you match each osechi food with the wish?



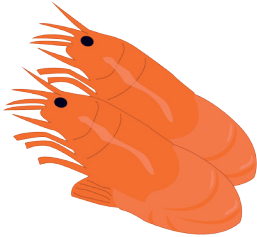
a •

• for a good harvest



b •

• for intelligence



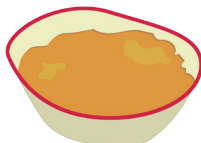
c •

• for good luck with money



d •

• to work hard



e •

• for a long life

Answers: a, to work hard; b, for a good harvest; c, for a long life;
d, for intelligence; e, good luck with money.



New Year's dreams

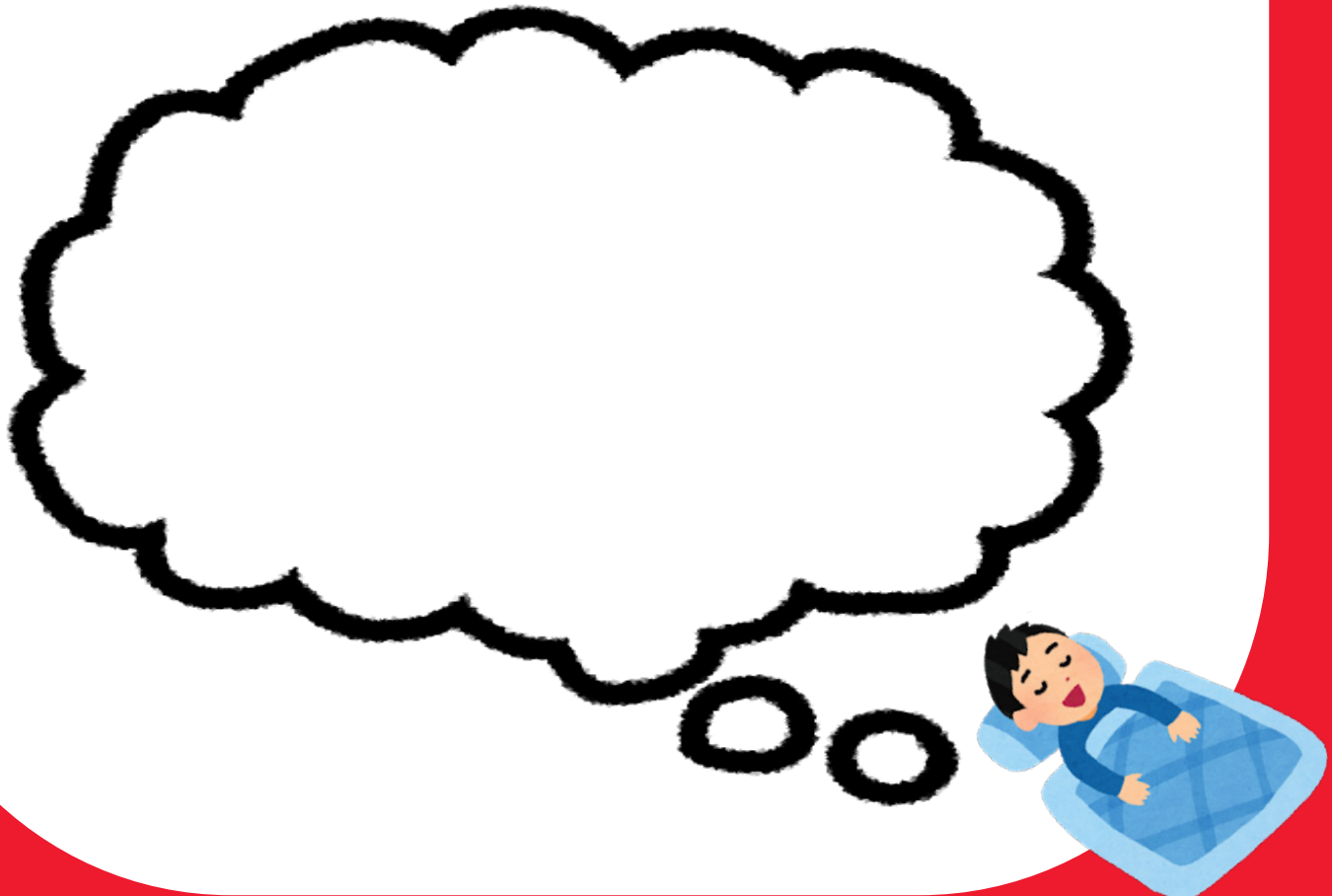
In Japan, the first dream you have in the New Year is called Hatsuyume. Hatsu means 'first' and yume means 'dream'. There is a popular myth that there are three lucky things to dream about and it is said you will have good luck in the coming year if you dream about them. They are:

1. Mount Fuji
2. A Hawk
3. An aubergine



There are some guesses about why these three things are the luckiest, but no-one is exactly sure why. Do you have any ideas?

What symbols of good luck can you think of? What would you like your hatsuyume (first dream) to be about? **You can draw your dream below.**





o sho gatsu
お正月

Kanji Characters

In Japanese, New year is 'shogatsu'. In Japanese characters it is written like this: 正月. You can practice writing it below. **Trace the characters by following the stroke order, then try to write them on your own.**

| | | | | | | | |
|--|--|---|---|--|--|--|--|
| | | 正 | 月 | | | | |
| | | | | | | | |
| | | | | | | | |

Did you know that there is a tradition of doing calligraphy in the New Year in Japan? It is called **Kakizome**, 書き初め in kanji characters, which means 'first writing' because it is the first calligraphy of the New Year.

Below are two 'lucky' Japanese kanji characters – why not try writing them?

幸: happiness or good fortune 福: good luck or good fortune

| | | | | | |
|--|---|--|--|--|--|
| | 幸 | | | | |
| | 福 | | | | |

Together, the characters 幸福 mean happiness.



Fukuwarai Game

Young people in Japan will spend the New Year's holidays much like children in the UK will spend their Christmas holiday. This includes things like spending time with family and eating meals together, relaxing, watching TV and playing games.

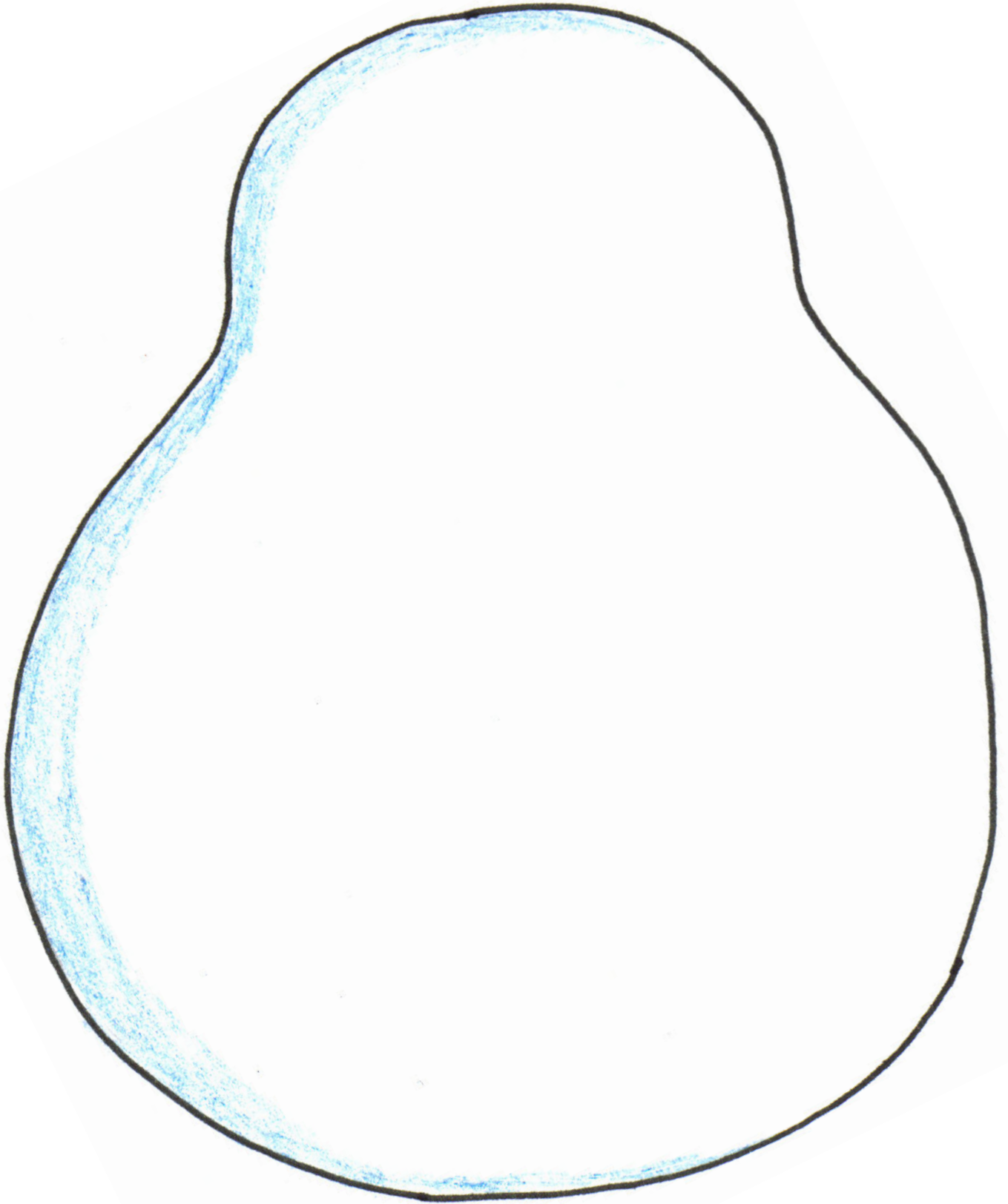
Below is one traditional game called Fukuwarai – why not try it?



Game Instructions:

1. Carefully cut out each part of the face from the template on the next page.
2. Stick blue -tack or masking tape on the back of each part.
3. Find a partner. Partner A will put on a blindfold and try to stick each facial part to the face in the correct spot. Partner B will be the helper who hands partner A each part, one at a time.
4. Once completed, switch over.
5. The winner is the person who can create the most accurate face!

Fukuwarai Game: Template



Face

Fukuwarai Game: Template

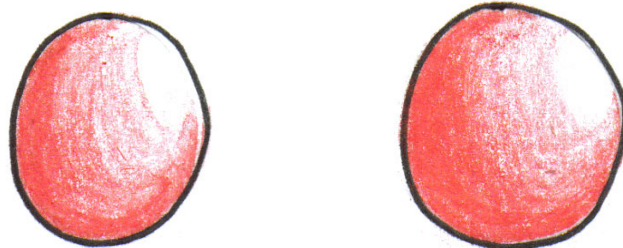
Eyebrows



Eyes



Cheeks



Mouth



Nose

