



Obon Festival お盆





Obon Festival

© JNTO

Obon Festival

Obon is one of the most important Japanese festivals, after New Year's Day. It takes place in August over three days.

The festival is based on Buddhist beliefs that spirits briefly return to their family home at this time of year. It's not a time to mourn, but to think about our ancestors and loved ones and celebrate their visit.

Pronunciation

Obon: *oh-bon*

Mukaebi: *moo-kai-eh-bee*

Okuribi: *oh-koo-ree-bee*

Bon odori: *bon-oh-door-ree*

Yukata: *you-kah-ta*

What do people do for Obon?

Before Obon

Many people will visit their family homes and spend time with their relatives. To get ready for the spirits' arrival, it's important to clean the house and the family's grave, a practice called **ohaka-mairi** in Japanese.



It's also important to lay out food offerings in front of the home shrine for the spirits, such as fruit and sweets. In some areas of Japan, people display **shoryo-uma** which means "spirit horse". These are cucumbers or aubergines with 4 legs made out of cocktail sticks. The cucumber represents a horse to help the ancestors return home quickly and the aubergine represents a cow to take the ancestors away again slowly.





During Obon

On the first day of Obon, people welcome the spirits of their ancestors by lighting small fires. These are called **mukaebi** which means “welcome fire”. Lanterns called **chochin** are also lit to help guide the spirits back.

It is common for families to visit a temple or to invite a Buddhist priest to their homes to perform a memorial service in front of the home shrine for the ancestors.



During the celebrations, many people will attend outdoor festivals. Then, on the last day of Obon, people light fires to see the spirits off safely. These are called **okuribi**. One of the most famous is in Kyoto, where five giant bonfires are lit on the mountains surrounding the city. Each bonfire is a different Japanese character or shape. In the photo below, the bonfire is in the shape of the character which means ‘large’ or ‘big’.



Find out more by watching our **video** about Obon celebrations on our YouTube channel! (<https://youtu.be/kcNnWgeFJvo>)

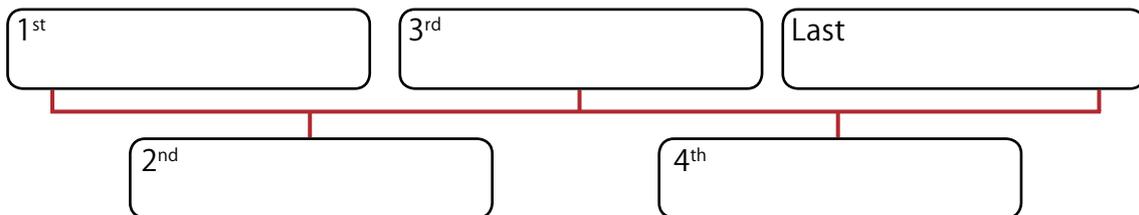




Do you remember the order of events during obon? Put the following activities in the correct order from 1 to 5 in the timeline below.

Layout offerings Go to a Festival Light Okuribi Clean Family Graves Light Mukaebi

Obon Timeline



Festivals

Many Japanese people celebrate Obon by attending summer festivals outdoors with music, dancing and fireworks. Obon festivals feature a special dance called **Bon Odori** which people can watch or join in with. Each region has its own version of the dance. Bon odori were originally performed for the deceased but have recently become a symbol of summer festivals themselves.

Outdoor festivals in Japan also have stalls called **yatai** which have all kinds of summer festival foods and games. This is also a time when you can see firework displays. In the UK, we normally think of fireworks as a winter activity when we are wrapped up in warm layers. However, in Japan, firework displays are held in summer.





Festival Yatai Food

Japanese summer festivals are known for their street food. You may have heard of some of them already.

Can you match each food with its description? (Answers on next page)



1. A savoury pancake with a variety of fillings in a wheat-flour-based batter topped with a special sauce.

•

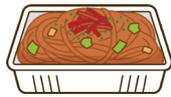
• A. Yakisoba



2. Small, round snacks the size of golf balls. They are made of soft batter with an octopus filling.

•

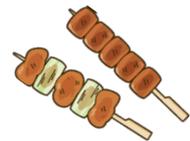
• B. Yakitori



3. Stir-fry noodles typically made with pork slices and chopped cabbage, onion, and carrots.

•

• C. Okonomiyaki



4. A type of skewered chicken, typically seasoned with a sweet and savoury sauce or salt.

•

• D. Takoyaki

If you were running a yatai at a festival, what food or game would you choose?





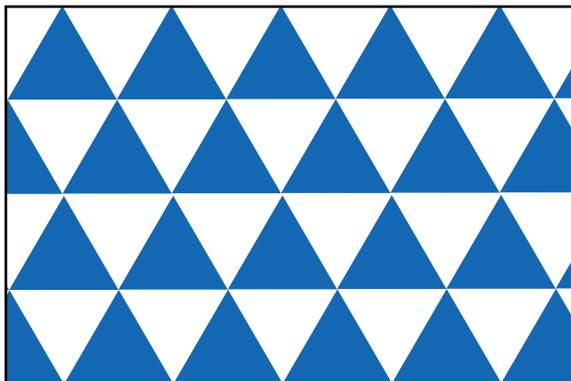
Yukata

To attend festivals, lots of people enjoy dressing up in summer kimono called yukata. Just like normal kimono, yukata come in many different designs and can be worn by anyone, but are more casual. Yukata are normally worn with a type of sandal called geta. You might also see people carrying fans to keep cool.

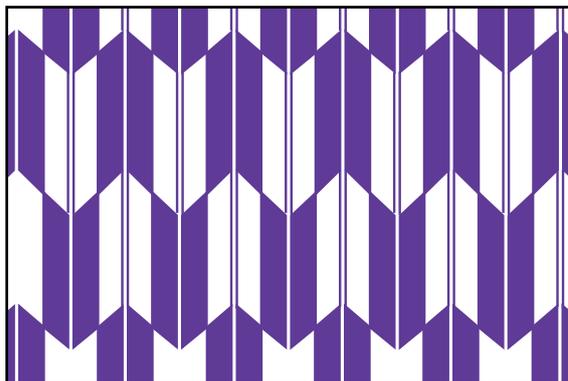
These are some traditional Japanese patterns. You might see them on yukata. The triangles in Pattern A represent the scales of a snake or fish.

What do patterns B, C, and D look like to you? (Answers on next page.)

A. *Uroko*



B. *Yabane*



C. *Segaiha*



D. *Karakusa*







Kanji

In Japanese characters obon is written like this: お盆.

Why not try writing it below? Follow the stroke order and trace each character, then practice writing them on your own.

		お	盆

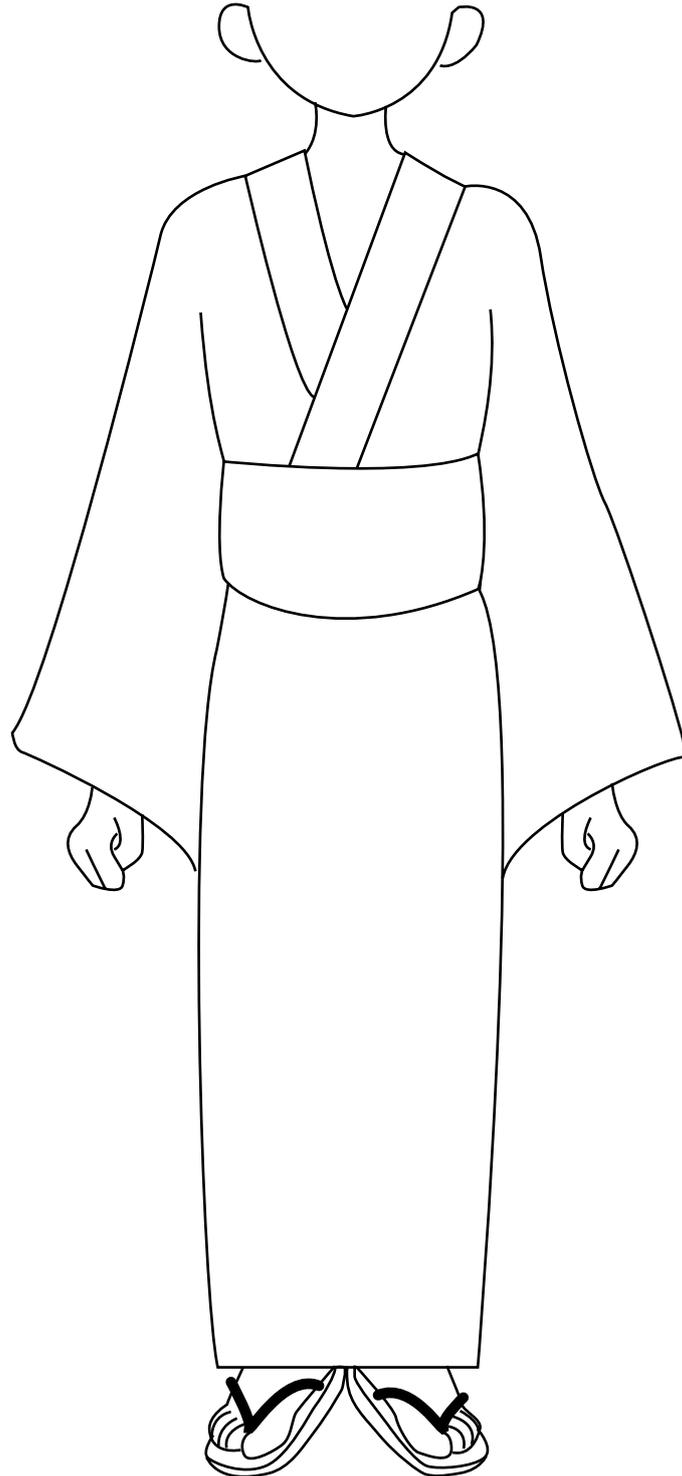
Well done! Now you can practice writing the characters 火, for 'fire' and 踊, for 'dance'!

	火				
	踊				



Activity: Design your own Yukata (girl)

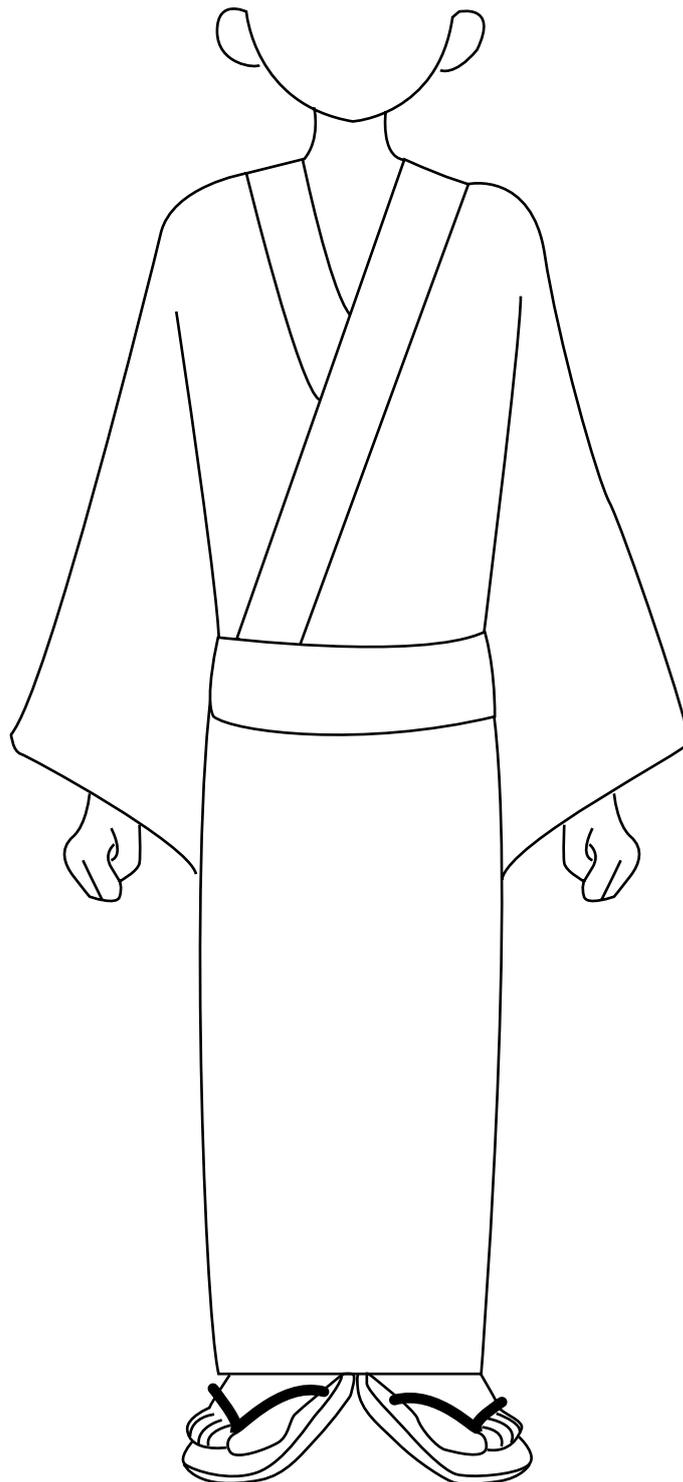
Imagine you are getting dressed up to go to a festival in Japan. What kind of yukata would you like to wear? Choose your favourite pattern and decorate the yukata below.





Activity: Design your own Yukata (boy)

Imagine you are getting dressed up to go to a festival in Japan. What kind of yukata would you like to wear? Choose your favourite pattern and decorate the yukata below.

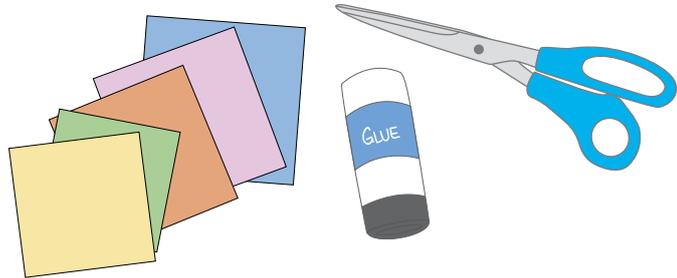




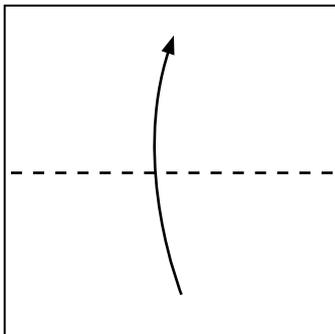
Origami Activity: Festivals Decorations

You will need:

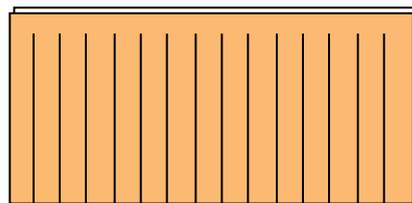
- origami/coloured paper
- scissors
- glue/glue stick



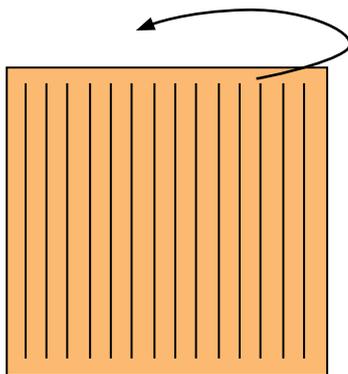
Lantern



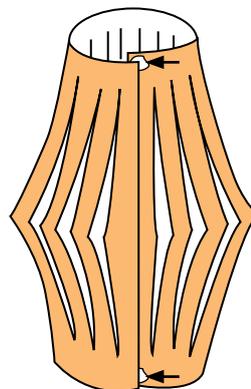
1. Fold paper in half.



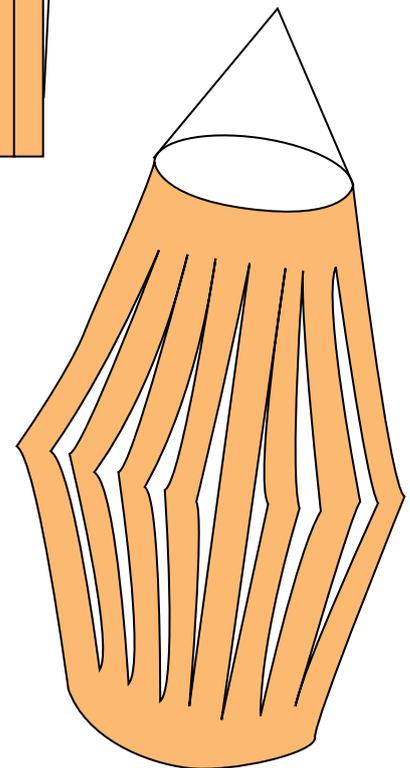
2. Cut with scissors
(about 1cm apart).



3. Open and turn over.



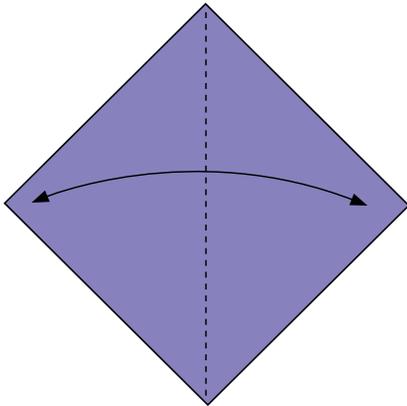
4. Glue top and
bottom together.



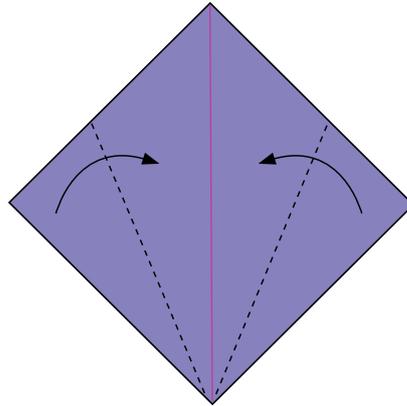
5. Done!



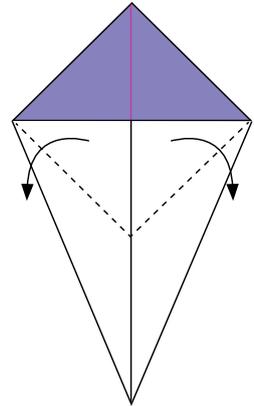
Paper Fan



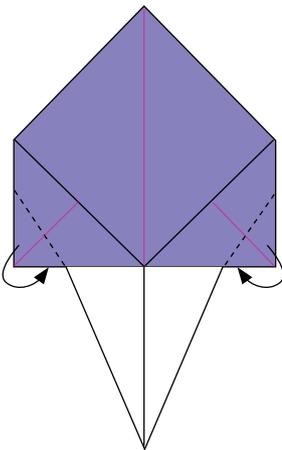
1. Fold in half to make crease and fold back.



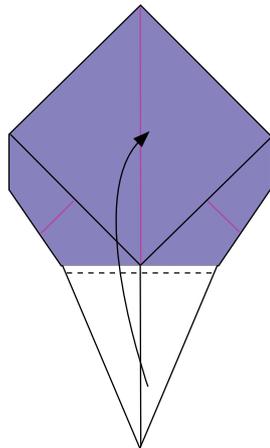
2. Fold to meet centre line.



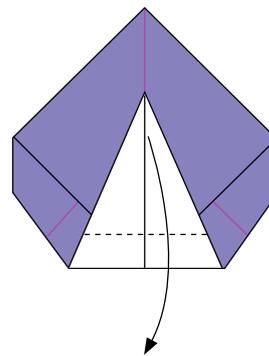
3. Fold down.



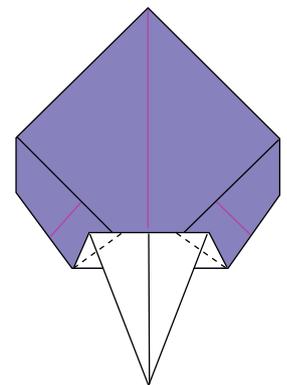
4. Fold backwards and tuck in.



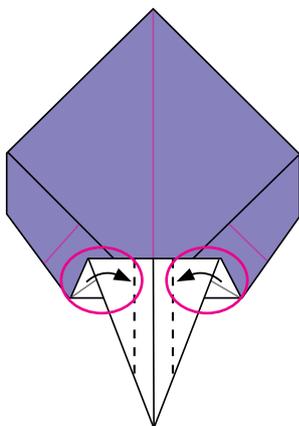
5. Fold up.



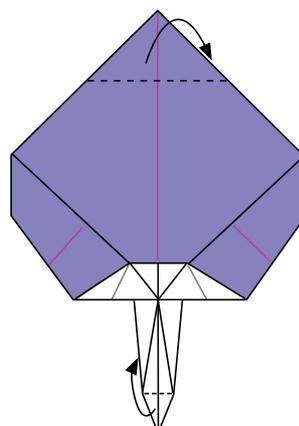
6. Fold down.



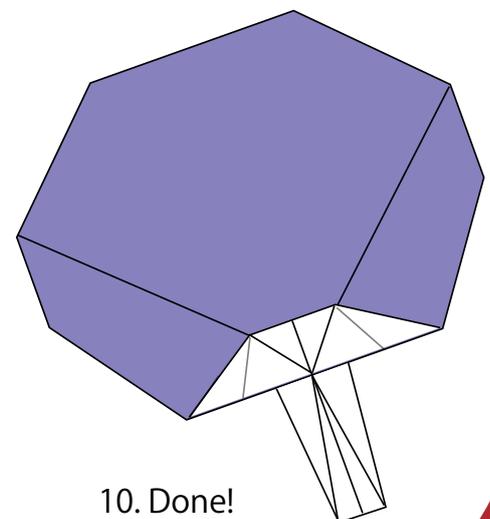
7. Fold in to make crease and fold back.



8. Fold in by opening and flattening the circled parts.



9. Fold backwards.



10. Done!