

Education Resources

Religion in Japan – Shrines and Temples

Lesson Plan

© The Japan Society (2026)

Learning Objectives:

- To learn about Shinto and Buddhism, and their places of worship in Japan.
- To recognise the key features of Japanese Shinto shrines and Buddhist temples.

Key Words:

- Shinto
- Buddhism
- Shrine
- Temple
- Kami (Shinto gods)

Main Resources:

Video: Let's Visit a Shrine and a Temple <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=VZZhjbGPjRA>

Worksheet: Religion in Japan – Video Worksheet (to fill in whilst watching video)

Worksheet: Ema Board Template

Additional Resources:

Worksheet: Write an Omikuji Fortune (extension activity)

Worksheet: Shrines and Temples (good to use as reflection activity)

To extend your learning... Learn about some religious festivals and celebrations that take place in Japan. See our resources on Obon (August) and 7-5-3 Festival (November) to learn more.

STARTER

- **Slides 1 & 2:** Ask pupils to discuss with a partner or in a small group the question on the slide.
- Prompt discussion with additional questions where necessary, for example: What kind of building do you think this is? Where do you think this is? Does this building look similar to anything you have seen before?
- Feedback and share ideas as a class. After gathering some ideas, reveal that this photo is of a Shinto shrine in Japan.
- **Slide 3:** Introduce the topic of today's lesson.
- **Slides 4 and 5:** Introduce the lesson's Learning Objective and Key Words.

Estimated Time: 5 minutes

INTRODUCE LEARNING

- **Slide 6-9:** Introduce the key information that pupils need to know about Shinto and Buddhism. They are Japan's two main religions that co-exist with one another. You can find shrines and temples all over Japan, and whilst many Japanese people might say they are not religious, it is likely they still participate in various Shinto and Buddhist activities, traditions, and celebrations.
- The aim of this lesson is introduce a general overview of what shrines and temples in Japan are like, so it is okay if pupils do confuse Shinto and Buddhism, as both religions have a long and inter-connected history in Japan.
- **Slide 8:** In Shinto, it is said that there are around 8 million kami (gods), and they can take many different shapes and forms. Kami can be found in nature, taking the form of trees, waterfalls, and even mountains.

Estimated Time: 5 – 10 minutes

TASK 1

- **Slide 10:** Watch the “Let’s Visit a Shrine and a Temple” video together as a class - <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=VZZhjbGPjRA>
- **Slide 11:** Hand out the worksheet. Whilst watching the video a second time, pupils should answer the questions on the worksheet.
- **Slides 13-26** cover in more detail the kinds of things you are likely to find at a Shinto shrine and a Buddhist temple respectively. Check the Teacher’s Notes at the bottom of the slide for more information on each of the slides (click on “Notes” on the bottom bar to open this if you cannot already see it).
- Pupils can fill in any question they might have missed on their worksheet whilst you talk through these slides. Once done, check answers together as a class.

Estimated Time: 15 – 20 minutes

TASK 2

- **Slide 28:** Introduce the ema board activity. Pupils will write a wish and draw a design to reflect their wish on their ema board using the template that is available to download on the resource page.

- **Slides 29 & 30** have some examples of what ema boards look like and the types of wishes people might make.
- Similar to how people hang up ema at a shrine, it may be nice to find somewhere for pupils to hang up and display their finished ema boards at the end of the lesson.

Estimated Time: 10 – 20 minutes

EXTENSION ACTIVITY

- In this activity, pupils will write their own omikuji fortune to give to a classmate. You can download and use the worksheet for this activity so pupils can plan what they would like to write and practice writing the word omikuji in Japanese.
- **Slides 32-34** have some more information about what omikuji are and the type of information they usually contain (i.e., travel, school, health, love, etc).
- Once you have checked over what pupils have written for their omikuji and ensured it is appropriate, they place their folded slip of paper in a bowl. Once everyone has placed their omikuji in the bowl, hand out omikuji slips at random to the class and pupils will see what fortune they ended up with!

Estimated Time: 10 – 20 minutes
