



THE
JAPAN
SOCIETY

Setsubun Festival

竹節分





節分

Setsubun is a festival celebrated between the 2-4 February in Japan, depending on the year. The name means 'division of the seasons' and it marks the end of the coldest winter months and the beginning of spring. There used to be four setsubun festivals, one for each change of season, but now only one is celebrated.



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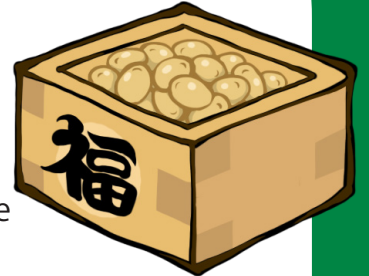
February is a cold winter month in Japan and it is easy to get sick or catch a cold. In the past, it was believed that bad luck and bad health was caused by demons (called oni in Japanese) so people would wish for good health and fortune around this time. Setsubun marks the beginning of spring and the cherry blossom is a symbol of spring in Japan. **What things make you think of spring?**

The Japanese characters for Setsubun are **節分**. Setsu means 'season'. Bun means 'to divide'. **Practice writing the characters below!** Follow the stroke order to trace the characters first, then try on your own.



What do people do?

One of the main activities on Setsubun is **mamemaki** or bean throwing. Roasted soybeans called **fukumame** or 'fortune beans' are believed to have the power to purify and drive away evil spirits who bring bad luck and bad health. The beans are either thrown out of the front door or at people who are dressed up as **oni** (demons).



At home, one member of the family (usually a parent) wears the oni mask and the rest of the family will chase them as they shout "*oni wa soto, fuku wa uchi!*" This means "demons out, good luck in!" Later on, each person will eat some of the beans – the same number as their age.



Many people will also eat a long, uncut sushi roll called **ehomaki** or 'lucky direction roll' for setsubun. They are supposed to be eaten in one go without speaking whilst facing the lucky direction of that year! They are said to bring good luck and people make a wish as they eat.



Pronunciation

Oni: on-nee

Mamemaki: mah-may-mah-key

Fukumame: foo-koo-mah-may

Ehomaki: air-ho-mah-key





Activity: Mamemaki Challenge

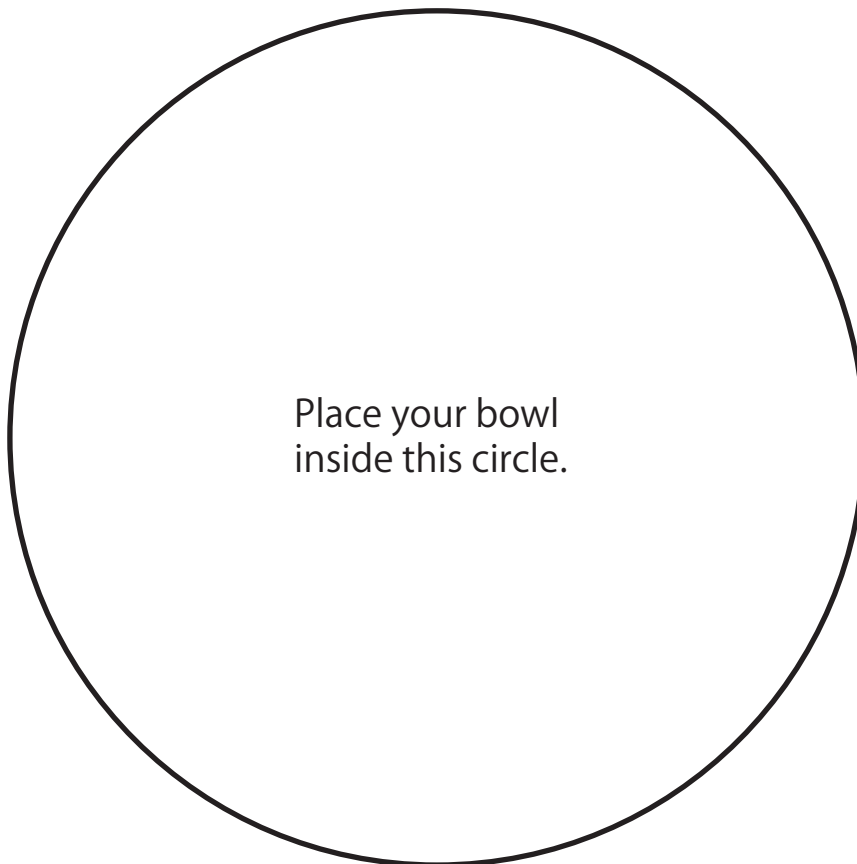
You might not be able to throw beans around at home but try this alternative mamemaki challenge!

How to play

1. Place an empty bowl on the circle below
2. Scatter some dried beans or pasta around the bowl
3. Use chopsticks to pick up the beans or pasta and move them into the bowl. You should move one bean for each year of your age.



Extra challenge : Set a timer for one minute and finish before the time runs out!



Place your bowl
inside this circle.

Don't try eating dried beans - in Japan they sell special, edible roasted setsubun beans!

Activity: Make an oni mask



Colour in the mask below and then ask an adult to cut it out following the dotted line and thread elastic or string through the ear holes so you can wear it.

Top tip: Oni usually have blue or red faces!

