



THE
JAPAN
SOCIETY

Obon Festival お盆





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What? Obon is one of the most important Japanese festivals, after New Year's Day.

When? Obon takes place in August over three days.

Why? It 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?

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 family graves before the start of Obon.



It's also normal to lay out food offerings 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.

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



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. Find out more by watching our video about Obon celebrations on our YouTube channel.





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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.

Outdoor festivals in Japan also have food stalls called yatai which serve all kinds of food. Yakitori (grilled chicken skewers) and yakisoba (fried noodles) are common yatai.

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.



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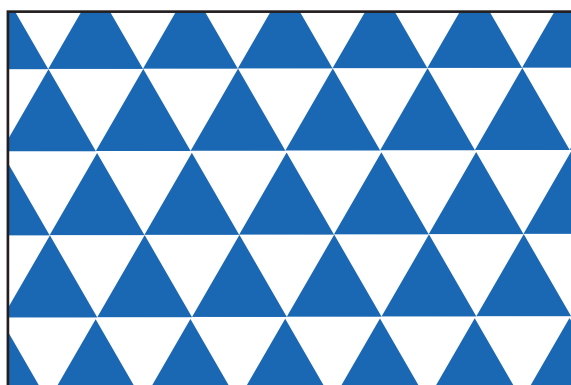
Yukata

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.

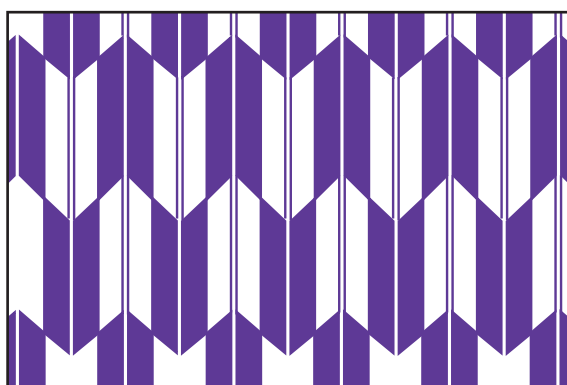
These are some traditional Japanese patterns. You might see them on yukata. The triangles in Pattern A represent the scales of a snake or fish.

What do patterns B, C, and D look like to you? (See the bottom of the page for answers.)

A. Uroko



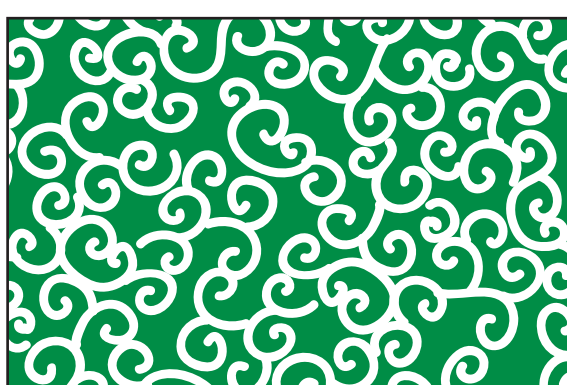
B. Yabane



C. Segaiha



D. Karakusa

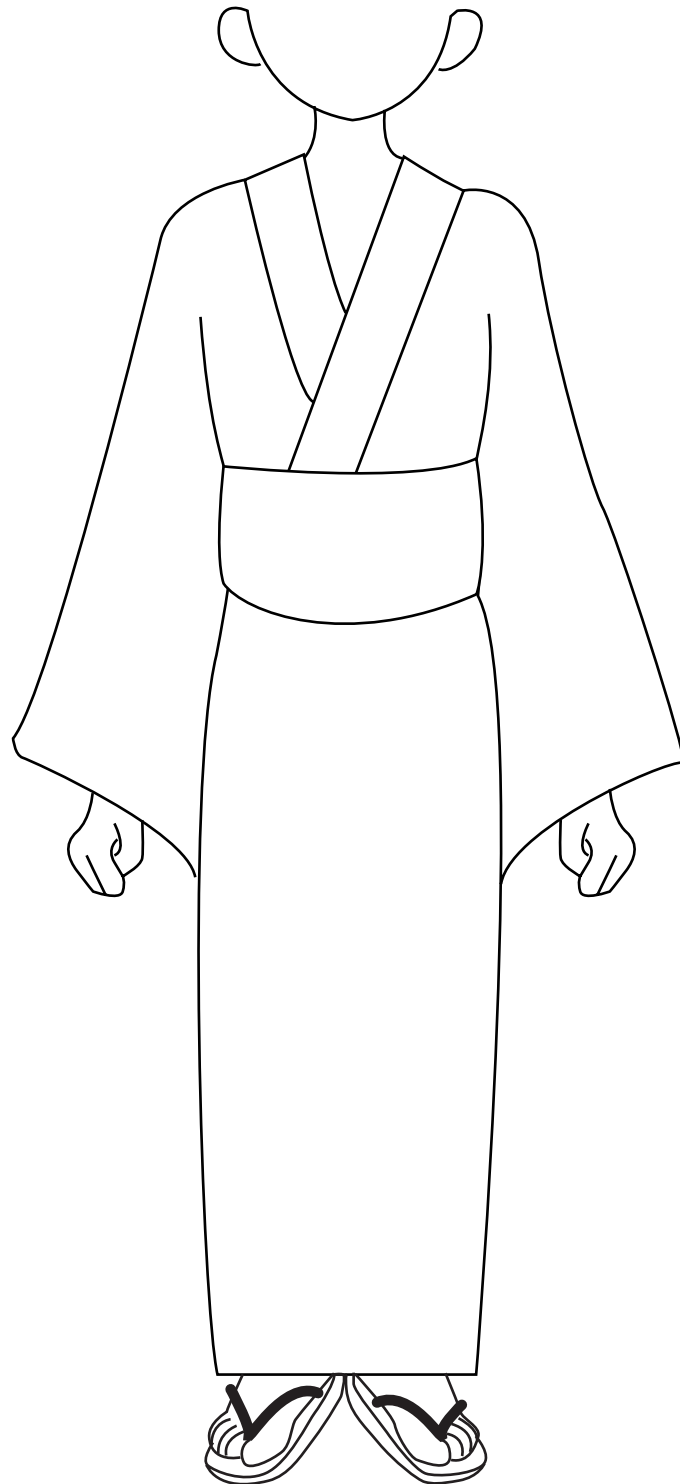


Answers: B. Arrow feathers C. Waves D. Vines



Activity: Design your own Yukata (girl)

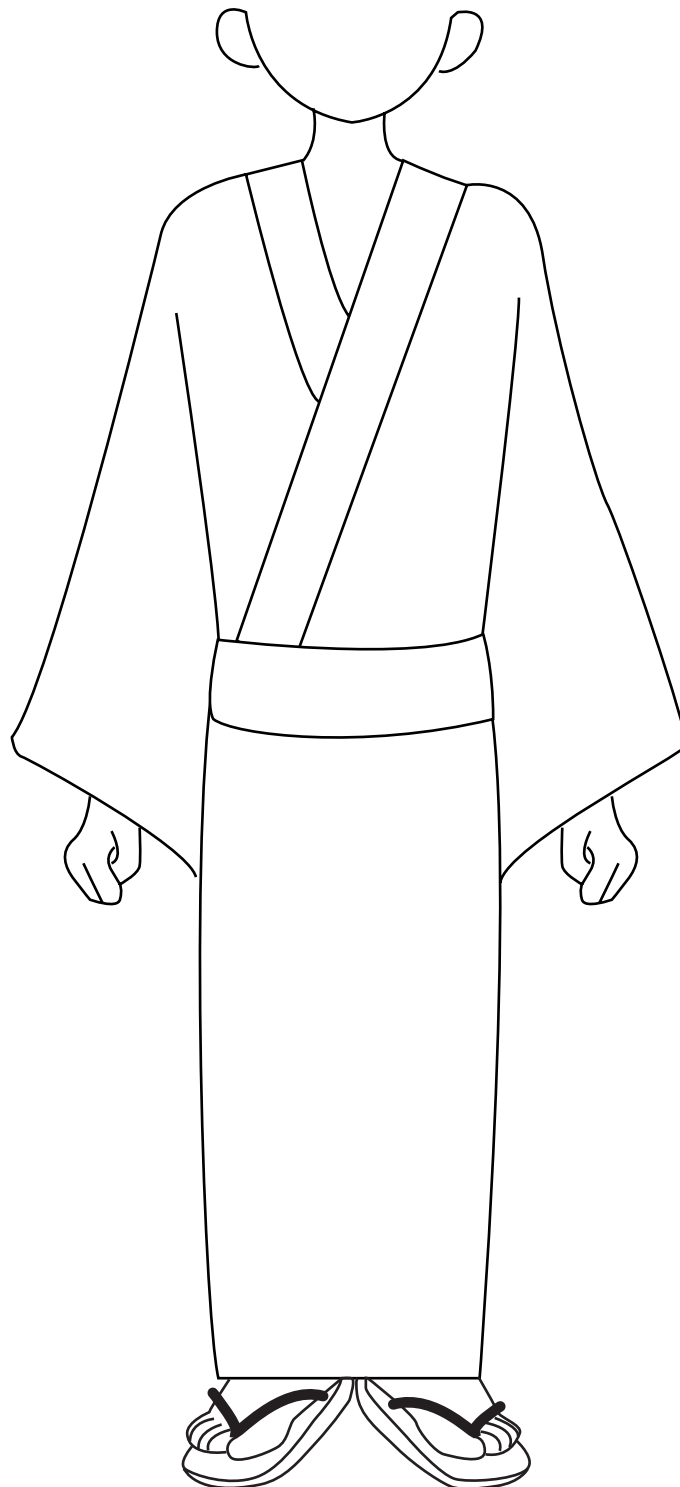
Imagine you are getting dressed up to go to a festival in Japan. What kind of yukata would you like to wear? Choose your favourite pattern and decorate the yukata below.





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.

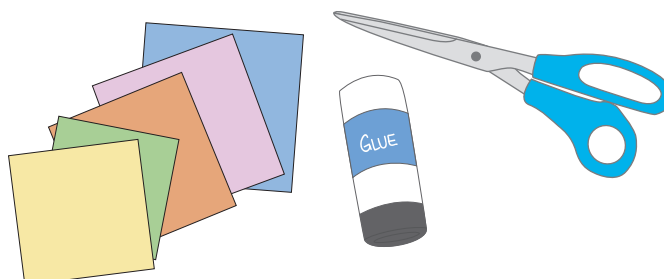




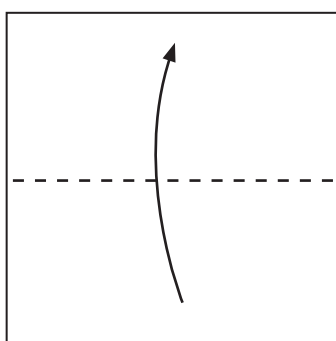
Origami Activity: Festivals Decorations

You will need:

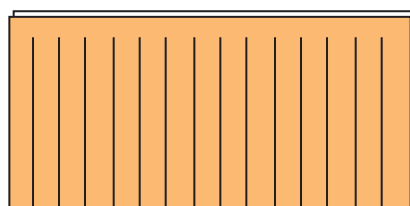
- origami/coloured paper
- scissors
- glue/glue stick



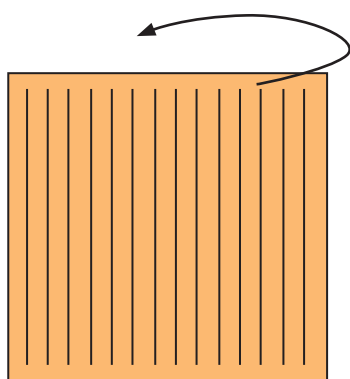
Lantern



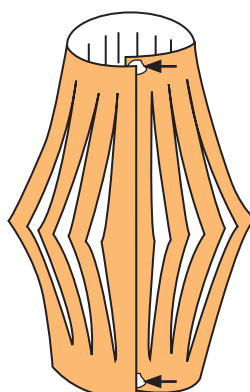
1. Fold paper in half.



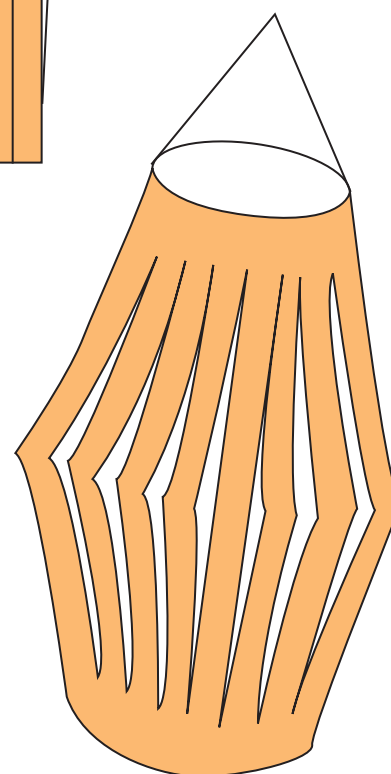
2. Cut with scissors (about 1cm apart).



3. Open and turn over.



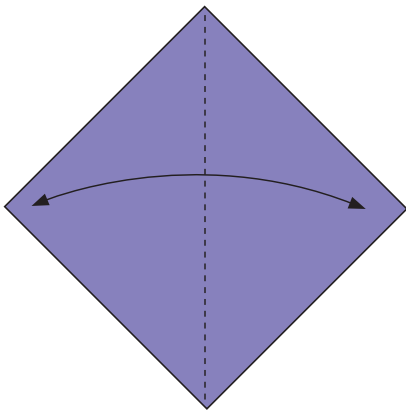
4. Glue top and bottom together.



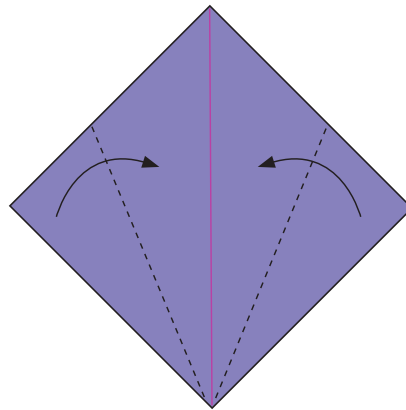
5. Done!



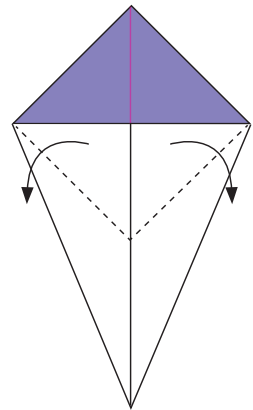
Paper Fan



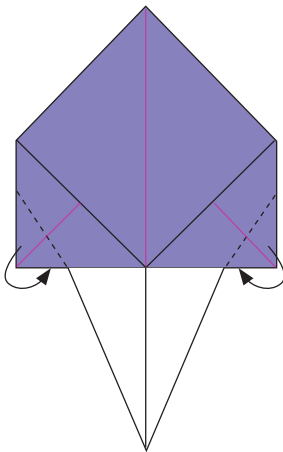
1. Fold in half to make crease and fold back.



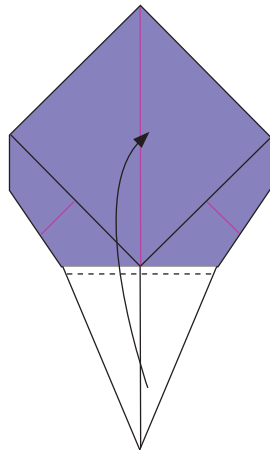
2. Fold to meet centre line.



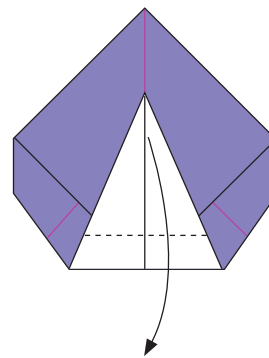
3. Fold down.



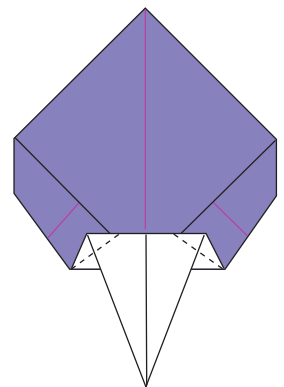
4. Fold backwards and tuck in.



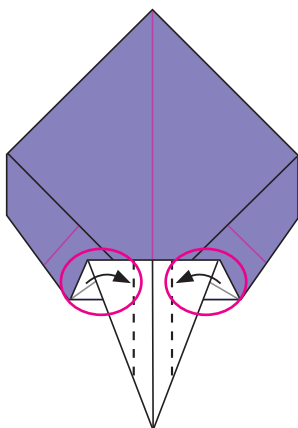
5. Fold up.



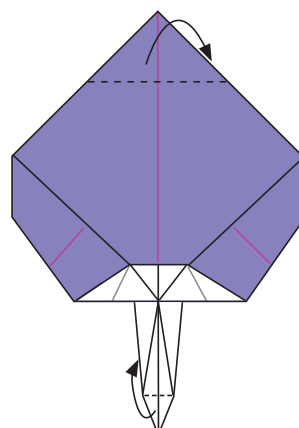
6. Fold down.



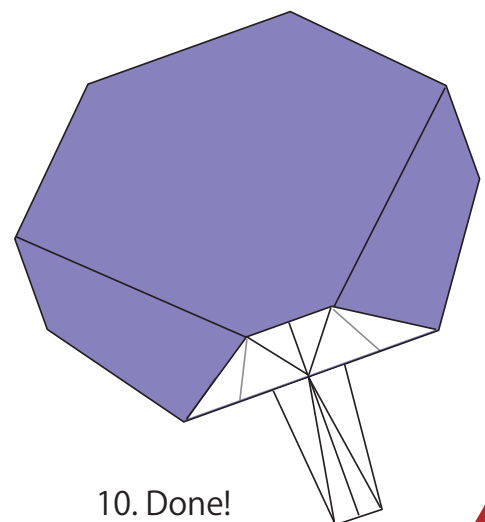
7. Fold in to make crease and fold back.



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



9. Fold backwards.



10. Done!