



THE
JAPAN
SOCIETY

Setsubun Festival

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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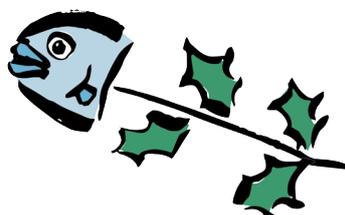
February is a cold winter month in Japan and it is easy to get sick or catch a cold. In the past, it was believed that bad luck and illness were caused by demons (called oni in Japanese) so people would wish for good health and fortune around this time.



Setsubun marks the beginning of spring and the cherry blossom is a symbol of spring in Japan. **What are some things that remind you think of spring?**

Decorations

Around this time of the year, you may find small decorations made of cooked sardine heads and holly leaves just outside people's homes. These are called hiragi iwashi which literally means **'holly sardine'**. There is a belief that demons dislike the strong smell of sardines and fear the sharp and pointy holly leaves, so people put up the talisman outside their home to ward off evil.





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





節分

Kanji Characters

In Japanese, the kanji characters for Setsubun are 節分. Setsu means 'season'. Bun means 'to divide'. Together the two characters means 'division of the seasons'.

You can practice writing the characters below. Follow the stroke order to trace the characters first, then try on your own.

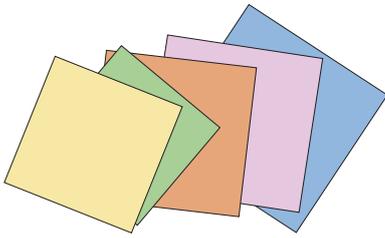
 <i>setsu</i>	 <i>bun</i>	節	分				

Below are the kanji characters for mame (beans) and oni (demon) – why not try writing them?

 <i>mame</i>	豆				
 <i>oni</i>	鬼				

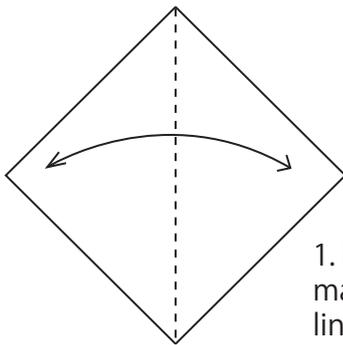


Origami Challenge: Oni

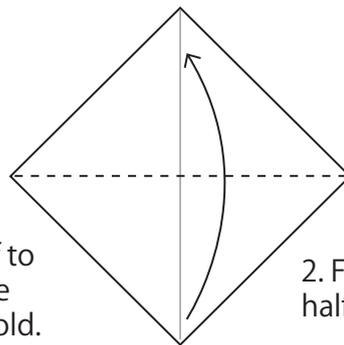


You will need:

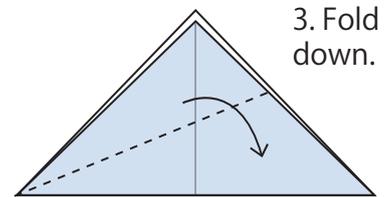
- origami paper or square paper
- colouring pencils or pens



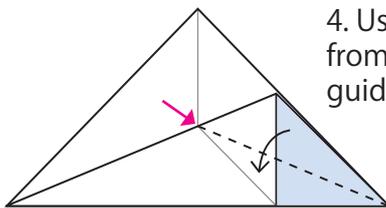
1. Fold in half to make a crease line then unfold.



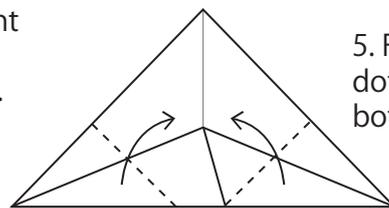
2. Fold in half.



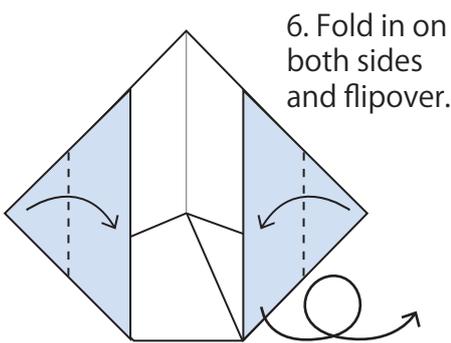
3. Fold down.



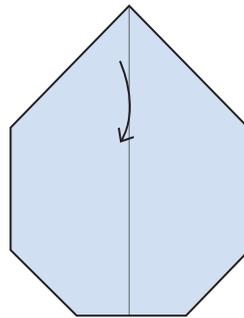
4. Use the crease point from step 1 as your guide and fold down.



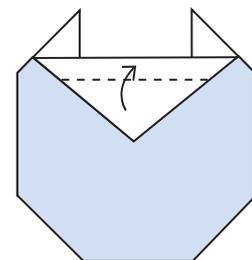
5. Fold up along dotted lines on both sides.



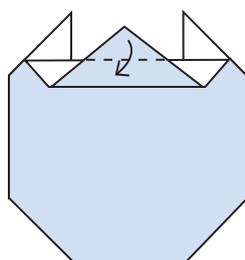
6. Fold in on both sides and flipover.



7. Fold down.

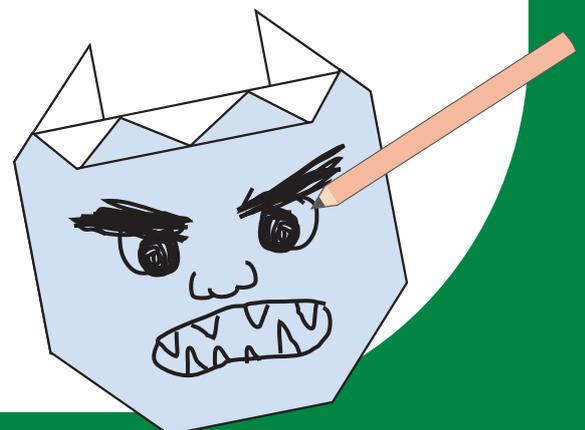


8. Fold up.



9. Fold down.

10. Finish by drawing the oni face.



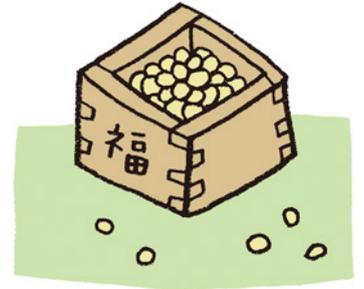


Activity: Mamemaki Challenge

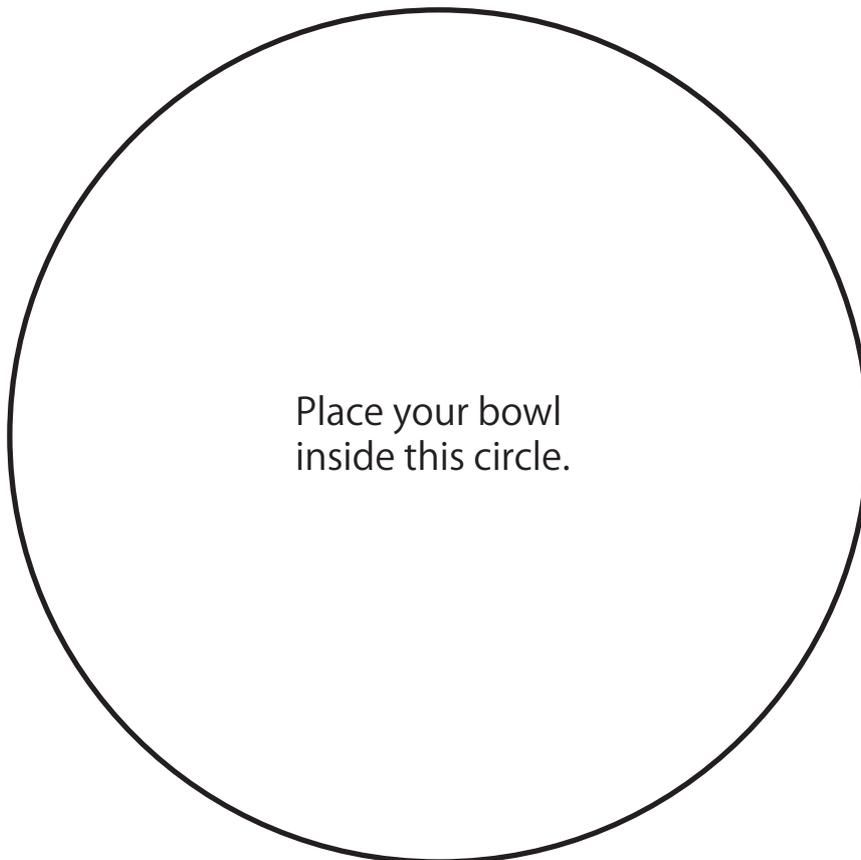
You might not be able to throw beans around at home but try this alternative mamemaki challenge!

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 edge and the dotted lines and thread elastic or string through the ear holes so you can wear it.

Top tip: Oni usually have blue or red faces!

