

Sumo

An Introduction to Sumo

© Japan Society (2025)

Learning Objectives:

- To learn and understand what sumo is.
- To recognise the significance of sumo as a sport.

Learning Outcomes:

- Pupils will increase their understanding of sumo - the rules of sumo, its history, its traditions, and the daily regimes for a professional sumo wrestler.
- Pupils will be able to recognise and understand the meanings of different sumo terminology.
- They will demonstrate these outcomes through the activities at the end of the lesson – see below.

Lesson Duration: 50 minutes – 1 hour

Keywords: Sumo, dohyo (ring), rikishi (wrestler), mawashi (loincloth), mage (topknot), Shinto

Resources:

PowerPoint – Sumo Presentation

Worksheet: Fill-in-the-Blanks Activity Sheet

Worksheet: Day in the Life of a Sumo Wrestler – Manga Template

Activity: Sumo Training Moves – PPT and PDF

Starter

- **Slide 2:** Ask pupils to discuss in pairs or small groups what they know about sumo, using the questions on the slide to prompt them.
- If pupils are having trouble or do not know what sumo is, you could show them some images or a video to help them discuss and answer the questions.
- Call on pairs and groups to feedback their answers, and explain that they will learn more about some of these things within today's lesson!
- You could come back to this activity at the end of the lesson to check pupil understanding.

Estimated Time: 5 minutes

Main Learning

- **Slides 3 and 4:** Introduce the Learning Objectives for today's lesson and the key vocabulary – do pupils know any of these words already?
- **Slide 5: What is Sumo?** - This section will provide pupils with a general overview of what sumo is, its rules, and why it is so significant.
- **Slide 6:** Explain to pupils what sumo is, using the image on the slide to guide you. Were their ideas in the starter activity accurate?
- **Slide 7:** Ask pupils what they think national sport means. What does sumo being the national sport of Japan suggest? Emphasise how this represents the significance of sumo in Japan and to the Japanese people.
- You could then ask pupils what they think the national sports of other countries might be.
- **Slide 8: History and Traditions** – This section will provide pupils with a brief overview of the origins of sport and some of the traditions and rituals that are important in professional sumo.
- **Slide 9:** If necessary, define what Shinto is, as it is likely pupils may not know what this is or have studied about it before. Shinto is an indigenous religion to Japan and it is one of the country's main religions, alongside Buddhism.
- **Slide 11:** Explain to pupils that traditions and rituals in sumo have been influenced by Shinto beliefs. Use the challenge questions on the slide to prompt a discussion. If pupils do not understand what tradition or ritual means, you could define these here and use an example they may have learned about in their RE lessons.
- **Slides 12 and 13:** Show pupils what the roof above the dohyo looks like, On slide 13, click on the slide again to reveal an image of a Shinto shrine – are pupils able to see the similarities between the two images?
- **Slide 14:** You could show pupils a video of a sumo ring entering ceremony (dohyo-iri in Japanese) as an example. Try the challenge question the board and ask pupils to think of other sports that have special traditions – these traditions do not necessarily need to have religious associations.
- **Slide 15: Wrestlers** – This section will provide pupils with more information about the sumo wrestlers (rikishi) including some key characteristics of their iconic appearance as well as slides covering information about women in amateur sumo.
- **Slide 16:** First, ask pupils to look at the image of the sumo wrestler on the slide, and ask them to think about what characteristics, features, and traits they notice about them.

- **Slide 18:** When mentioning the Edo Period (1603-1868), you could ask pupils if they know what was happening in the UK and elsewhere in the world during this time.
- **Slide 19:** Make sure to mention that there are no weight classes specifically in professional sumo. This point will be further developed in **slide 23** (Amateur vs Professional Sumo).
- **Slide 22:** Pupils may ask why women are not able to participate in professional sumo – this is because of a traditional Shinto belief that prohibits them from entering the ring. However, there are many passionate women wrestlers out there who are fighting to be recognised as professionals and want to see a change to the rules of sumo, that will allow them to be able to compete.
- **Slide 23:** When discussing amateur vs professional sumo, click on the slide to reveal the points in order. Emphasise that, professional sumo wrestlers train every single day, live in stables, and get paid – it is a career for them. There is a bigger emphasis on following the Shinto traditions and rituals. In contrast, amateur sumo focuses more on the competition and is more accessible to people across the world. Amateur sumo tournaments happen across the world, and both men and women are able to participate.
- **Slide 24: Day in the Life of a Sumo Wrestler** – This section will cover what a typical day might be like for a professional sumo wrestler living in a stable.
- **Slide 26:** Emphasise that being flexible is important for a sumo wrestler because it can help them adapt to their opponents' moves when in the ring; improve their balance; and prevent injuries.
- You could also show pupils here a video of what a training routine looks like for sumo wrestlers in a stable, as they can see what some of the moves look like in action. This is good if you are planning on doing the Sumo Training Moves activity.

Estimated Time: 20 – 30 minutes

Activity 1: Fill-in-the-Blanks Worksheet

- **Slide 30:** Hand out the worksheet to pupils. Make sure they read the text carefully on the sheet beforehand, and ensure they fill in the blanks on the worksheet using the word box to guide them.
- **Challenge:** Once pupils have finished the activity, ask pupils to label the image below using the correct vocabulary. If they want a challenge, encourage them to write the Japanese words instead (i.e. mage instead of topknot, rikishi instead of wrestler).

- Once complete, go through the answers with pupils to check their knowledge and see if they were able to fill in the blanks correctly.
- You could also return to **slide 4** and test pupils to see if they remember the meanings of each of the key vocabulary from the lesson!

Estimated Time: 10 - 15 minutes

Activity 2: Day in the Life of a Sumo Wrestler – Diary or Manga

- **Slide 31:** In this activity, pupils will write a diary entry from the perspective of a sumo wrestler. Alternatively, print out and use the manga template so that pupils can draw what their daily routine would be like if they were a sumo wrestler.
- If you choose to write a diary entry, remind pupils of what the common features of a diary are (i.e., that their entry must start with “dear diary”, and it must include the date).
- If you choose to let pupils draw their daily routine using the manga template, remind them that, typically, manga books are read from right to left, so they should ensure they draw their first panel from the far righthand side. If you feel that this is too complicated for pupils, they can instead stick to drawing from left to right.
- Ensure that pupils cover key points within their diary/manga. For example, times of each activity, what they are wearing, where the activities take place, etc.

Estimated Time: 20 - 30 minutes

Activity 3: Sumo Training Moves

- Slide 32: Teach pupils some of the fundamental training moves that sumo wrestlers do everyday as a part of their training.
- You can download the separate PowerPoint presentation which includes additional activities to further your sumo learning, as well as a PDF that contains instruction cards for each of the moves. See the Sumo resource page on The Japan Society website for further information: <https://www.japansociety.org.uk/resource?resource=118>

Estimated Time: 20 minutes+
