

Japan Day Event - Organiser Pack



What is this Pack?

This pack was created to provide inspiration and practical guidance for anyone planning an event for attendees to experience and learn more about Japan and Japanese culture. The activities aim to be accessible to all, including those who have not previously run events or activities related to Japan.

Who is it for?

This resource was primarily designed with teachers and community leaders in mind, to support the organisation of Japan Day events at school or for public outreach. However, there are no limits to who can use this resource - it's for everyone!

How can it be used?

Japan Day event organisers are free to mix and match the activities to design their event. It's possible to pick several to run simultaneously at different "stations" either as carousel or casual drop-in activities, or to create a timetabled programme. The activities listed can be adapted however is best suited to the organiser's needs.

What other resources do you have?

Schools (and other not-for-profit or community organisations which provide educational activities, such as libraries) organising a Japan Event can get in touch with the Education Team for more advice, information and loan resources via education@japansociety.org.uk.



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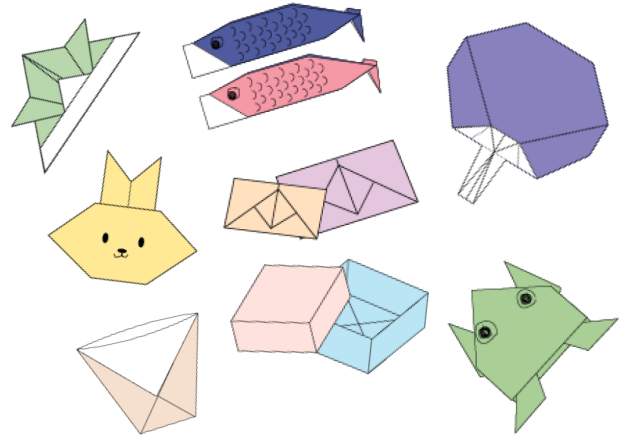
Origami

What is Origami?

Origami is the art of folding a square piece of paper into a 3D sculpture. The word origami is made of two Japanese characters meaning “to fold” (ori) and “paper” (kami, or gami).

Why choose it?

Origami is a popular choice for Japan Events as most participants will be familiar with it. It’s also low cost, requires minimal preparation and can be easily tailored to a theme through the pattern choices.



Age Range

All ages. Organisers can choose simple or complex patterns suitable for their audience.

Equipment:

- Origami or Square Paper* (5-6 sheets per participant recommended). It can be plain, coloured, or patterned.
- Printed step-by-step folding instructions
- Optional: Visualiser (for classroom settings, where everyone is following the same pattern step-by-step)

* The Japan Society can provide origami paper (suitable for one class) for schools or not-for-profit community organisations as part of [The Japan Activity Chest loan](#).

Set up:

- Participants will each need a space at a table
- No specific setup is necessary as long as each child has a space and the materials.

General Guidance:

- It is recommended that activity facilitators familiarise themselves with origami patterns in advance to better help participants that may struggle with printed instructions and more complex shapes.
- Adults or older participants can work on individual patterns as per their own preference, with a facilitator present to help if needed.
- Younger children or children that may be less confident with the activity may benefit from following the facilitator making a pattern step-by-step.

Learning Opportunities:

As many will already be familiar with origami, it presents a great opportunity for participants to learn about its cultural context and link to other aspects of Japan and its culture. The Japan Society provides origami patterns that reflect cultural objects relevant to Japanese festivals (e.g. Hina dolls, Kabuto helmet, Koinobori flags) so organisers can choose patterns which reflect the current season or festivals to deepen participants’ cultural knowledge.

The Japan Society also has a resource and a lesson plan for origami and mathematics, which can be incorporated into the curriculum for KS2 and KS3 students. Of course, many more patterns are available from other sources.

Resource List:

The Japan Society

- Various: [Origami Pattern Instructions](#)
- [Hina dolls](#) | [\(March Doll's Festival\)](#)
- [Kabuto helmet and koinobori flags](#) | [\(May Children's Day Festival\)](#)
- [Origami and Mathematics](#)

British Origami Society

- <https://www.britishorigami.org>

CND

- [Sadako's Cranes for Peace](#)

Origami Club

- <https://en.origami-club.com>

Kamishibai (Storytelling)

What is Kamishibai?

Kamishibai, meaning “paper theatre”, is a form of street theatre that uses paper illustrations and a wooden box to house them, that became popular in 1930s Japan. The wooden box containing the illustrations was carried by travelling performers. They also sold small sweets and snacks to children before the performance to make money. During a kamishibai performance the front of the box is open so the illustrations can be seen through the “screen”. As each part of the story is told, the performer moves the front card to the back, revealing a new illustration.



Why choose it?

Kamishibai is well-suited to events targeting families or young children. Anyone comfortable reading stories in front of an audience can perform kamishibai if a professional is not an option. There are many different stories available which can be tailored to your event. Once the story is chosen and rehearsed, there is little preparation required. If the event is at a school, pupils could even make their own kamishibai using The Japan Society resources and tell the story themselves.

Age Range

Most suitable for family events or younger children (primary school and below).

<p>Equipment:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Kamishibai story* • Optional: Kamishibai Theatre - homemade from cardboard, or borrowed from The Japan Society • (Optional): Wooden Clackers to call everyone's attention to the story start (hyoshigi) <p>* The Japan Society has physical versions for loan, as well as digital versions, and PDFs for printing.</p>	<p>Set up:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A space at the front should be set for the performer with a table or desk for the box theatre/screen (if using) and chairs/seating space for the audience • Set a time for your performance • If using a digital kamishibai, test the projector in advance and that the slides and sounds play properly • No other specific setup is necessary
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General Guidance

- Not everyone will be familiar with kamishibai so consider giving the audience a short introduction or explanation at the start.
- As the story is being told the performer can rely on the text on the back of the illustrations, but an important part of any kamishibai is to make the performance your own – adapting or adding embellishments is encouraged!
- Performers are recommended to familiarise themselves with the story and illustrations in advance and practice moving the cards. All the cards are numbered – double check they're in the correct order before each performance.
- The Japan Society has different stories for particular seasons or festivals and/or you can choose a story most suited to the age of your intended audience

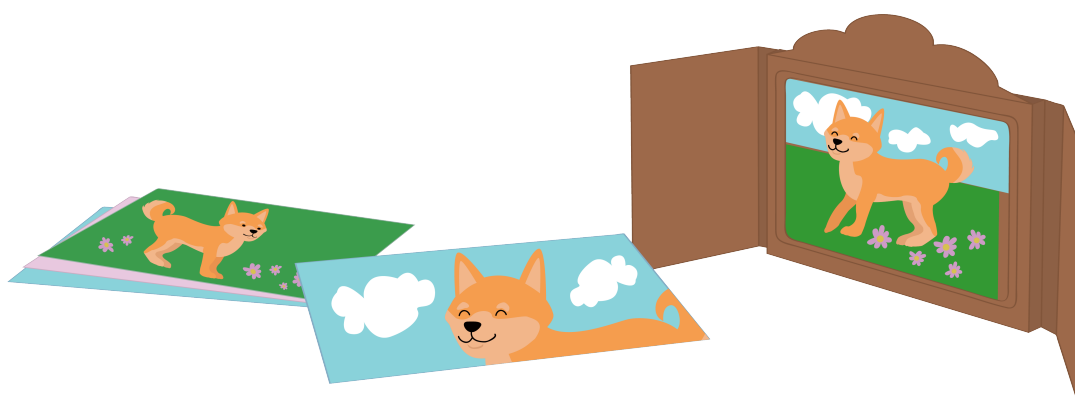
Learning Opportunities

This activity allows children to become familiar with Japanese culture through different traditional folk stories. Participants can also learn about specific seasons or festivals in Japan and their cultural significance. There are also possibilities to directly engage children prior to the performance; depending on your event, children could rehearse and perform or re-write their own versions of the story to practice creative writing.

Resource List

The Japan Society

- Physical Kamishibai are available from The Japan Society:
 - Browse and request a loan of our [kamishibai sets](#)
 - Browse and print downloadable [kamishibai stories and illustrations](#)
- Download [digital kamishibai](#), PowerPoint presentations of the different stories
- [Create Kamishibai - Lesson Plans](#)
- [Kamishibai Performance Video of Momotaro](#)
- Other [Kamishibai Resource Videos](#)



Kokeshi Dolls

What are Kokeshi Dolls?

Kokeshi are traditional handcrafted wooden dolls which originated in the Tohoku region in northern Japan where they were sold in areas with hot springs. Characterised by their lack of arms and legs, they are considered to be charms that bring children health and happiness. Originally intended as toys for children, kokeshi are now recognised as ornamental artisan handicrafts.



Why choose it?

Kokeshi introduces a traditional Japanese craft which will be new to most participants. This can be a good choice if participants have previously tried many other traditional Japan-related activities such as origami and organisers are looking for alternatives. It is suitable for all and allows participants to be creative. Wooden peg dolls are inexpensive and widely available from craft shops. The materials for decorating can be chosen according to what is most suitable for the event and audience.

Age Range

All ages. Participants can decorate their dolls freely.

Equipment: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Wooden peg dolls (height of at least 90mm recommended) • Materials to decorate – crayons, felt tips, colouring pencils, poster or acrylic paints • Paintbrushes, water pots, palette • Aprons, as appropriate • Pre-decorated examples 	Set up: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Tables and chairs with plenty of space for participants and materials • Table and floor coverings as appropriate • Access to a sink if using paints
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General Guidance

- Facilitators should explain to participants what a kokeshi is and show traditional examples before the practical part of the activity. There is a kokeshi information sheet available for older children for use when running this as a self-guided or casual drop-in activity.
- Examples of traditional kokeshi for display can be loaned from The Japan Society, either as part of [The Japan Activity Chest loan](#) or on their own.

- Different materials react differently on the wooden peg dolls, so it is worth testing in advance. For example, some types of felt tip pen may bleed and give a blotchy effect.
- This activity allows for a lot of creative freedom. If you would like participants to produce traditional designs, offer guidance or spend time pointing out these features at the start.
- Acrylic paints dry very quickly so are good for older participants and can be taken home the same day. If using poster paints, you will need to factor in drying time.

Learning Opportunities

There is the opportunity to link the activity to The Dolls Festival which is celebrated annually in March. Also, while kokeshi are traditional artefacts, they are also toys and are therefore directly aimed at children; participants can engage with Japanese culture in an enjoyable and practical way. You could look at other Japanese toys (paper balloons, kites, kodama spinning tops, and kendama are a few examples) or traditional crafts as well.

If the event is at school and you have time, this activity can be integrated into an art lesson where students create their own blank kokeshi dolls to decorate (e.g. from papier mâché) prior to the event.

Resource List

The Japan Society

- [Kokeshi information worksheet](#)
- [Loan kokeshi](#) for display

Japan House London

- [Learn more about kokeshi](#) and download the [design your own kokeshi](#) worksheet created by Japan House to learn about three different types of kokeshi doll



Nanbu (*Iwate*)



Naruko (*Miyagi*)



Togatta (*Miyagi*)

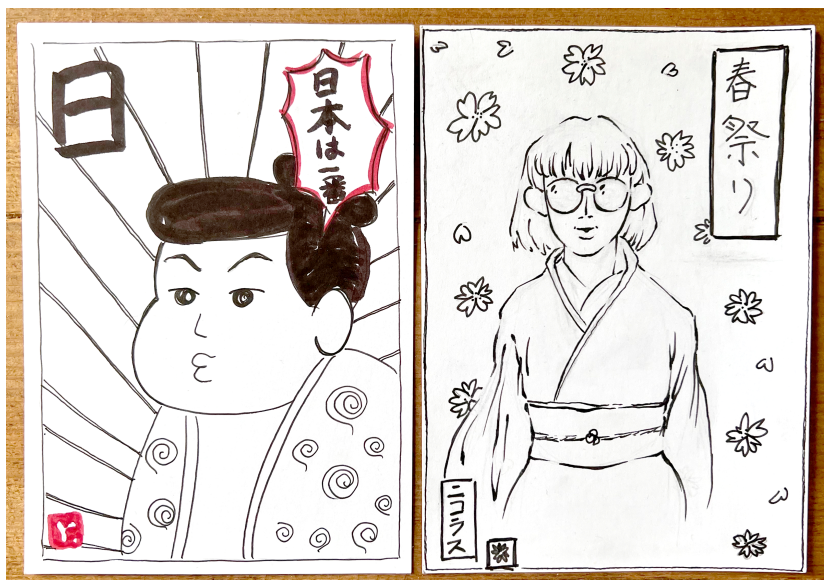


Tsuchiyu (*Fukushima*)

Manga Postcards

What is Manga? *

In Japan, manga means comics/graphic novels/sequential art in general. However, manga has a specific style distinguishing it from its Western counterparts. Comics, which are made in non-East Asian countries, such as Marvel and DC comics are not called “manga” in Japan; most Japanese people would refer to these as comics.



Today manga can be found in all kinds of genres, including romance, action, science fiction, fantasy, as well as serious and sometimes heavy topics aimed at adults. Even though many Japanese people think of “made in Japan” when they hear the word “manga”, today it is also a global phenomenon, produced in many different languages and by different people.

*This section is an edited version of The Japan Society resource notes for teachers, *Manga: Key Questions*, originally authored by Chie Kutsuwada and edited by Michael Tsang.

Why choose it?

Manga has gained a lot of popularity in recent years and many libraries now have dedicated manga sections. Even children who may not know about manga as a Japanese artform are likely to be familiar with Japanese animations which are based on manga series and appeared on British TV (e.g. Pokémon, Dragon Ball series, Naruto, etc.) and it’s a topic with broad appeal. This activity can be linked to the subjects of art, history, culture and literacy/reading.

Age Range

Recommended for age 10 and over and may be particularly good for secondary school age students. Younger children can participate but may need more explanation and support.

Equipment: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Basic drawing equipment: pencils, pencil sharpeners, erasers, colouring pencils (optional) • Fine liner pens (provide a variety of thickness if possible) • Blank postcards • Printed activity worksheets (see Resource List) • Printed examples of the manga style (The Japan Society has some worksheets) 	Set up: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Each participant will require a chair and flat space at a table • A whiteboard or screen may be useful if you want to show students examples or sketch ideas • Optional: Manga books as inspiration (available from most libraries or to buy from well-stocked bookshops)
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General Guidance

- The primary resource for this activity is a worksheet which focuses on making a manga portrait on a postcard in ukiyo-e style, which is a genre of traditional Japanese art (wood-block prints) popular between the 17-19th centuries.
- It might be useful for facilitators to read The Japan Society's *Manga: Key Questions, Teachers' Notes* in advance of the activity and to briefly familiarise themselves with ukiyo-e in order in order to answer any general questions participants may have.
- Additional general manga resources (see Resource List below) can also be provided for this activity if you want participants to produce a straightforward manga-style drawing.

Learning Opportunities

Through this activity, participants can learn about two different Japanese art styles: manga and ukiyo-e and create their own versions. It could be used to prompt comparisons of different styles of art and to learning more about the history of ukiyo-e or woodblock prints.

After the initial introduction of manga, it could be a useful tool in engaging students with reading and in English literature; in recent years there have been manga adaptations of literary classics such as works of Shakespeare and these could be a reading incentive for children who may otherwise be disinterested in reading.

Resource List

The Japan Society

- [Manga Key Questions \(Teachers' Notes\)](#)
- [Ukiyo-e Manga Postcard Instructions Worksheet](#)
- [Manga Lesson 1 Resources and Worksheets](#)
- [Manga Lesson 2 Resources and Worksheets](#) (including interview videos with 3 manga artists)
- [Magnificent Manga Lesson](#) including [Manga Expression Worksheet](#) (KS2)

Embassy of Japan

- [Manga Jiman competition](#) (runs annually)
- [Yonkoma Manga Information Sheet](#) (Yonkoma is a self-contained 'four panel' comic)

Calligraphy

What is Japanese Calligraphy?

Japanese calligraphy, or shodo, is an art form using a brush and ink. Japanese calligraphy originally came from China and predominantly used Chinese characters called kanji which are still one of the three writing systems used in modern Japanese. In time, Japan developed its own alphabets (hiragana and katakana, which are now used along with kanji characters) and writing styles.



Calligraphy Glossary

- **Fude** a calligraphy brush
- **Hanshi** thin and durable Japanese paper used for calligraphy
- **Sumi** black ink. Sumi is also a name for an inkstick which is the solid form of ink and ground in an inkstone with water to create liquid ink. Liquid ink is usually used for beginners.
- **Suzuri** inkstone.
- **Shitajiki** a cloth placed underneath the paper to prevent bleeding of the ink
- **Bunchin** a paper weight used to hold the paper in place

Why choose it?

Trying Japanese calligraphy is a memorable experience for participants which they are unlikely to have tried before. Students can also learn about the Japanese writing system and the background and meaning of kanji characters.

Age Range

All ages. More assistance/activity supervisors will be required for younger participants.

Equipment: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • All the items listed in the glossary or alternatives: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - fude or paintbrushes (or fude pens) - hanshi or copy paper - pre-mixed sumi ink or watered-down black paint - inkwells or palettes - paperweights - shitajiki or newspaper • Extra newspaper (used to sandwich participants' work to take home) • Optional: aprons 	Set up: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Tables and chairs where each participant will sit should have its own "calligraphy station" with the equipment set out • Cover all tables with wipeable plastic or disposable paper cloths • Adults should dispense a small amount of ink in participants inkwells as required • Print out and display different kanji characters with the stroke orders (see Resource List)
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General Guidance

- **We highly recommend this activity is facilitated by a professional or someone experienced;** participants will get the best results if they are advised on the proper techniques (e.g. stroke order, change in thickness of the stroke by using pressure, and so on)
- The [Access To Experts](#) directory lists some professional calligraphers offering workshops in the UK. Depending on location, volunteers from The Japan Society's [Japan in Your Classroom](#) scheme can occasionally offer calligraphy; contact the Education Team for more information.
- Fude brushes or fude pens (no ink needed) can be [loaned from The Japan Society](#) for classroom use.
- If a professional or experienced calligrapher is not available, you may like to offer the chance to use calligraphy equipment and can make use of The Japan Society's [Calligraphy Tutorial Video](#).
- Participants will get through a lot of paper – recycled or copy paper can be used for practice sheets and hanshi or quality paper can be saved for final versions.
- Only place one sheet of paper at a time on the shitajiki/newspaper to avoid ink bleeding through to other sheets
- Water is not necessary for the ink or the brushes during the activity but should be used to clean brushes afterwards. Brushes should be hung upside to dry where possible.
- Finished calligraphy pieces can be left to dry on a drying rack or sandwiched between sheets of old newspaper and rolled up to take home.

Learning Opportunities

Giving participants the chance to try Japanese calligraphy gives them a first-hand perspective on how nuanced it is and how small movements can make a big difference. Each brush stroke is unique and should not be corrected or gone over; if the artist is not happy with the work they will try again. Participants can learn to appreciate calligraphy and develop their own artistic sense.

Calligraphy can be linked to teaching about Japanese language and the writing systems, history and culture (e.g. China's influence, development of the writing system, Japanese court culture) and also can be a gateway into looking at other Japanese art forms (such as sumi-e ink wash painting or ukiyo-e woodblock printing).

Resource List

The Japan Society

- [Access to Experts](#) Directory including Japanese Calligraphy workshop facilitators in the UK
- [Japan in Your Classroom](#) Volunteer Scheme
- [Calligraphy Tutorial Video](#)
- [Writing in Japanese](#) - Lesson Plan and Presentation
- [Calligraphy Strokes Practice Worksheet](#)
- [Kanji Practice Worksheets](#)
- [Ready Steady NihonGo!](#) Is a 10-lesson interactive language project designed to help teach Japanese to KS2 pupils. [Lesson 4](#) looks at kanji and Japanese writing

Haiku

What is Haiku?

Haiku is a short Japanese poem consisting of three lines. There is no need to restrict or count syllables when composing haiku in English. More important is that haiku usually include a seasonal reference or word, called kigo in Japanese. Generally, haiku are poems made with the purpose of reflecting on the world around us, as well as capturing a particular moment in time.



Why choose it?

Haiku are an accessible form of poetry for all ages and can be created in a short time. Participants are likely to be familiar with the concept of haiku but may have not written one. Writing haiku encourages creativity and it can also promote mindfulness as participants need to focus on the world around them for inspiration. Going outside, or on a short “haiku walk” is particularly recommended when composing haiku and this can act as a good break from other activities.

Age Range

All ages – recommended from 4 years to adult

Equipment: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Printed Copies of the Writing a Haiku Outside worksheet for each participant Clipboards or something to lean on Pencils and pens 	Set up: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> None required Recommended: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Access to an outdoor green space Seating or area where participants can read their final poems aloud at the end
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General Guidance

- We recommend facilitators read the Beyond 5-7-5 Haiku Booklet and watch the short Beyond 5-7-5 Video (see Resource List) in advance of the session to familiarise themselves with the concept of haiku and traditional and modern examples.
- If you plan to go on a “haiku walk” with participants to gather inspiration, pick a short route and check in advance that it is safe and accessible.
- Emphasise the importance of writing from real experience and jotting down ideas based on what participants see, hear, smell and feel during the session. Try to steer them away from syllable counting.
- The activity is suitable for all ages, however bear in mind that younger students will need more supervision and assistance writing their haiku so group size should be tailored accordingly.
- You may wish to pick an enclosed green space to make monitoring easier and allow participants to explore within set boundaries. A green area within school grounds, playground, or local park can all work well.

Learning Opportunities

This is a chance for learn about the important features of haiku, to connect with poetry and create personal responses. The topic can easily be linked to the English curriculum via other forms of poetry, literacy or creative writing. Outdoor haiku workshops could also be linked to topics of mindfulness, mental wellbeing, science, and nature.

Haiku are meant to be read aloud and so the end of the session is a good opportunity for all participants to practice speaking in front of others and sharing their work. Haiku should be read aloud twice with a short pause in between.

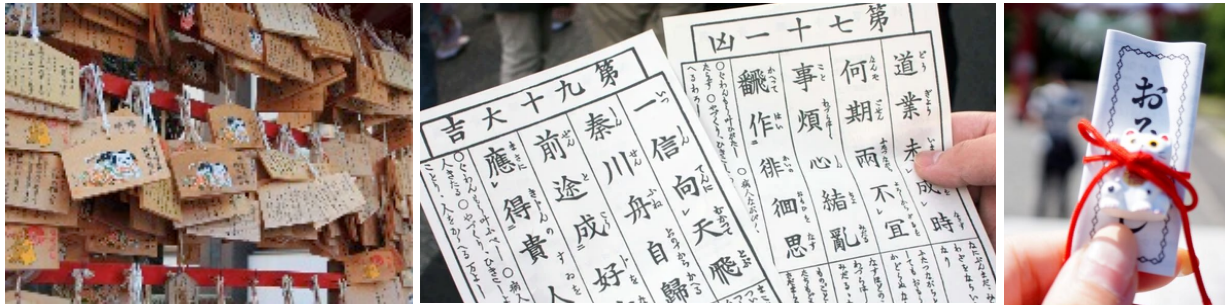
Resource List

The Japan Society

- [How to Haiku Video – Beyond 5 7 5](#)
This page also includes the downloadable booklet [Beyond 5-7-5](#) by Haiku Poet Paul Conneally. See pages 6-7 for Writing Haiku Outside worksheets, or download the worksheet only [here](#).
- [Journeys with Haiku](#) is a 3 lesson series exploring haiku for KS3
- Find out about future editions of [World Children's Haiku Contest](#) (runs biennially, launching in the autumn term)

Ema Boards and Omikuji Fortunes

What are Ema and Omikuji?



Ema (meaning “picture-horse”) are wooden plaques predominantly associated with Shinto (Japan’s own religion). One side is decorated with a picture and the blank side can be used to write prayers or wishes on. The ema are then hung up at a Shinto shrine so the gods, or kami, receive them.

Omikuji are printed fortunes on small slips of folded paper. These can be bought for a small amount (usually ¥100 or ¥200) by visitors to shrines and temples. The fortunes usually contain a general prediction about luck the visitor can expect in future as well as brief summaries about health, education, work, and romance or family life. Unlucky fortunes can be tied up and left behind.

Whilst these cultural items are linked to Japanese faith and religion, the majority of the Japanese population would not describe themselves as particularly religious; visits to both temples and shrines are part of daily life in Japan.

Why choose them?

These two activities are suitable for all and will be new for most participants. Preparation for the activity is inexpensive and simple (if using The Japan Society’s templates printed on card or paper). The activity can accommodate large numbers of participants, be completed quickly, and be drop-in or self-facilitated. Encourage participants to hang up their finished ema to create a nice display.

Age Range

All ages.

Equipment: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ema boards – print The Japan Society templates on card (see Resource List), or buy wooden ones online • Scissors, hole punch and string for card ema. Can be pre-cut and made in advance if you prefer • Pens and felt tips for writing wishes and decorating • Printed omikuji fortunes, pre-cut and folded 	Set up: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A box with all omikuji ready for participants to pick one • Space at tables where participants will write a wish on their ema • Prepare a space where the finished ema can be hung for display
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General Guidance

- Ema and omikuji can be treated as supplementary to other activities and children can come up to the ema and omikuji station between different activities or throughout the day.
- Children can be involved in the preparations for this activity. For example, every child can be asked to make up and write a fortune to add to the omikuji container (we recommend to have an adult check them first). Similarly, children can cut out and decorate the front of the ema boards in advance, or you could hold a design contest with the winning designs printed on the front of all ema at the event.
- Omikuji could be part of a fundraising element of the event if appropriate, with everyone donating a fixed amount in exchange for an omikuji.

Learning Opportunities

This activity is a fun way to introduce Japanese faith and religious customs to the students and to compare differences or similarities with their own culture or religion. Bringing the activity preparations into the classroom prior to the event can be an opportunity to discuss ema and omikuji in more detail and can also be used with The Japan Society's lesson Religion in Japan.

Resource List

The Japan Society

- [Religion in Japan Lesson](#) includes background notes, a lesson plan and presentation
- [Video – Shrines and Temples](#)
- [Ema board Template](#)
- [Omikuji Template](#)

Japanese: Basic Greetings and Counting to 10

About the Japanese Language

Japanese is distinct from other languages and spoken by roughly 120 million speakers. There are three alphabets or sets of characters used in Japanese writing which are kanji, hiragana and katakana. Hiragana and katakana have a set number of characters and are phonetic, each character represents a syllable within the Japanese language (occurring in consonant and vowel combinations such as *ka, ki, ku, ke, ko*). Kanji are Chinese characters first introduced to Japan around the 5th century. Single kanji characters represent meanings and can often be read in multiple ways. 2,136 kanji are classed as 'daily use' and all children must learn to write and understand these by the time they finish school.

Why choose it?

Language is a fundamental part of culture and can help broaden children's horizons. A language taster to Japanese can build excitement for future Japanese activities and may be particularly useful if your school or organisation offers Japanese lessons or has any exchange programmes planned.

Age Range

All ages

Equipment: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Optional: Printed greetings flashcards and blank bingo cards for game (see Resource List) 	Set up: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> None required but AV equipment should be prepared if using The Japan Society's Ready Steady NihonGo! Resource
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General Guidance

- This activity requires a Japanese teacher or speaker who can model correct pronunciation and answer basic questions about Japanese language'
- You might like to prepare badges for participants with their names written in Japanese or help them write their own during the session (if the latter, participants will need individual support and printed hiragana or katana sheets).
- Formal Japanese greetings can be long and so it is advised that facilitators speak slowly and break up greetings into smaller segments. Tell students not to worry about getting it wrong and encourage shy students.

Learning Opportunities

All participants can have fun learning language basics which will allow them to communicate in Japanese and build confidence speaking. Greetings can be regularly used in future and this introduction can be built on in future with more Japanese language skills.

Resource List

The Japan Society

- Lesson 1 - [Ready Steady NihonGO!](#)
- [Writing Exercise Worksheet](#) (Numbers 1 to 10)

Additional Topics: Festivals and Seasonal Events

About Japanese Festivals and Seasonal Events



In Japan, there are many festivals and seasonal celebrations from January all the way to the end of the year. These provide a great starting point to exploring to Japanese culture with children. Find our full list of lessons and activity packs related to these events below.

Resource List

The Japan Society

- [Festivals and Seasonal Celebrations](#) resources and activity packs