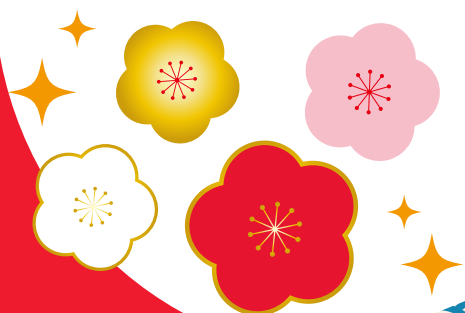
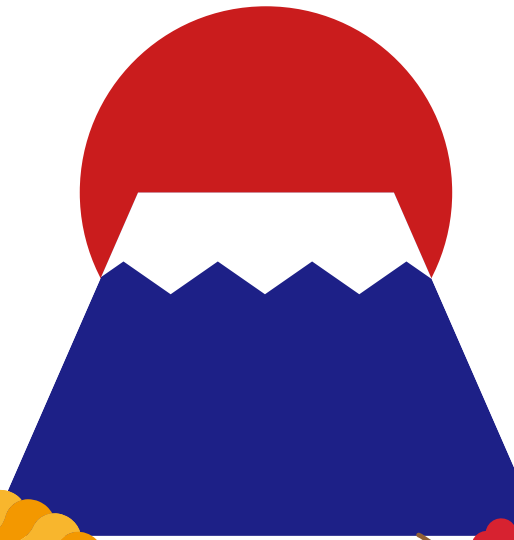




THE
JAPAN
SOCIETY

Japanese New Year

お正月





In Japan, the New Year is the most important celebration of the year and everyone has a holiday. It is a time to make a new start, so it is important that everything is just right and people spend a lot of time getting ready from the end of December.

What do people do at New Year's?

Before the New Year, people will normally clean the house from top to bottom, put up decorations for good luck, and spend time writing new year's cards to send to friends and family.

On New Year's Day people will spend time with their families and will eat a specially prepared meal called osechi and each osechi food has a special meaning.

Many people will also go to a shrine or a temple on New Year's Day which is called hatsumode, meaning 'the first visit of the year'. New Year's Day is especially exciting for children as they will receive otoshidama, gifts of money in decorated envelopes!





Decorations

Kagami-mochi is a traditional New Year's decoration that people display at home and it is as an offering to the New Year Gods. The decoration is made from mochi (cooked rice, which has been pounded until it combines together) so it can be broken into pieces and eaten after the New Year's holiday.



Can you find out the Japanese name for the fruit on the top of the Kagami-mochi?

Kado-matsu are New Year's decorations made from pine boughs, bamboo stalks, and sometimes plum tree branches. The decorations are a symbol to welcome long life, good fortune and prosperity into the household so they are set up in pairs, on both sides of the front entrance to a house. Pine trees grow tall and live a long time which is why they are used as a symbol of long life.



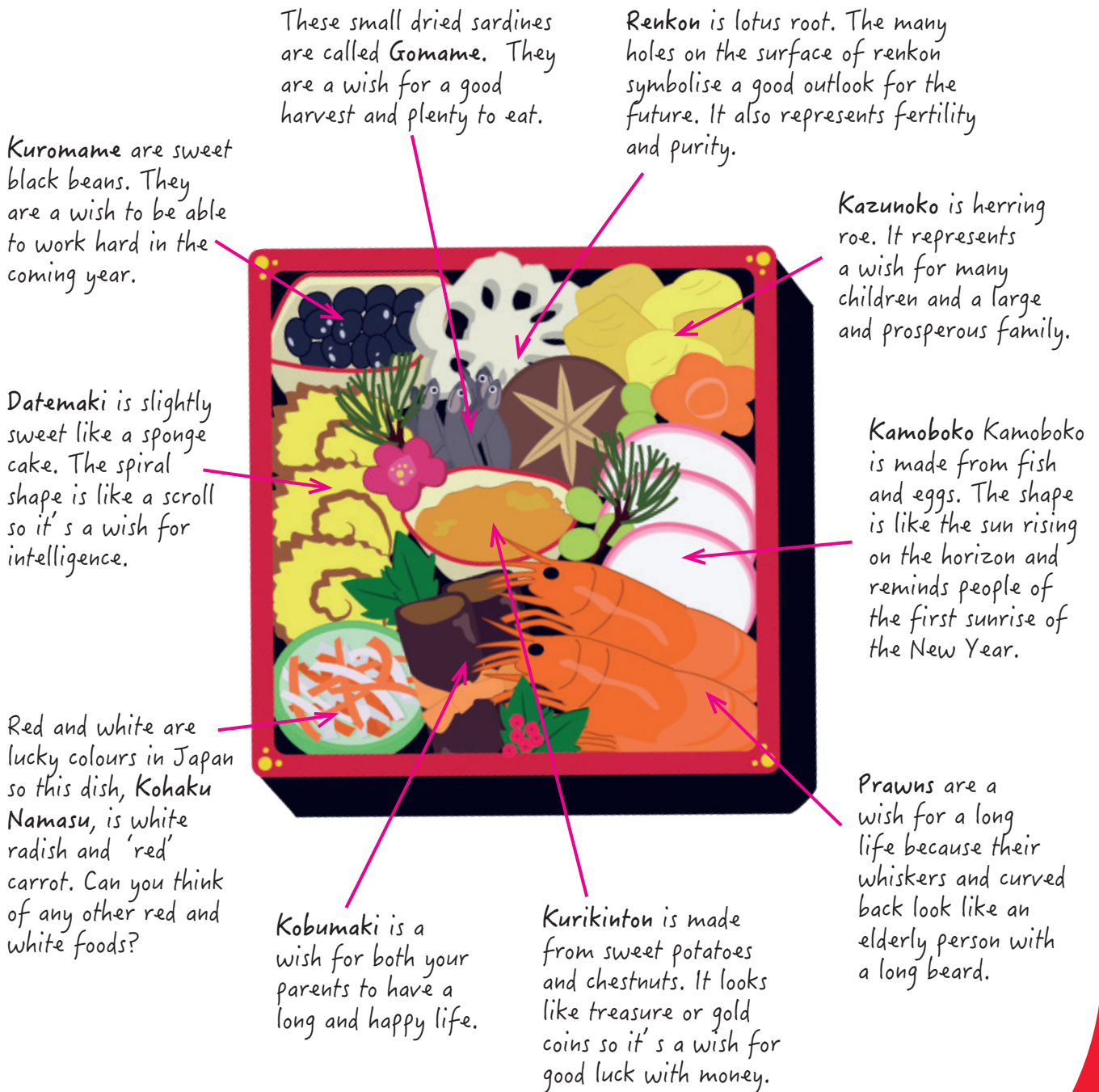
How many bamboo stalks are used in a kado-matsu decoration?





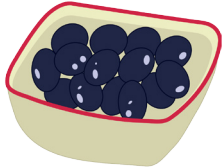
New Year's Food

On New Year's Day, Japanese families will eat a meal together called osechi and each food has a special meaning. Take a look at some of them below.



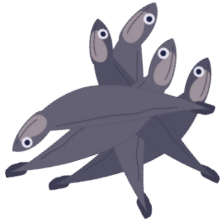


Can you match each osechi food with the wish?



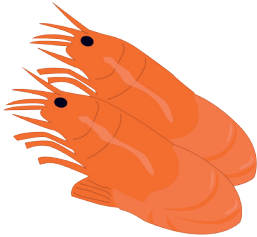
a •

• for a good harvest



b •

• for intelligence



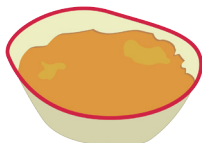
c •

• for good luck with money



d •

• to work hard



e •

• for a long life

Answers: a, to work hard; b, for a good harvest; c, for a long life;
d, for intelligence; e, good luck with money.



New Year's dreams

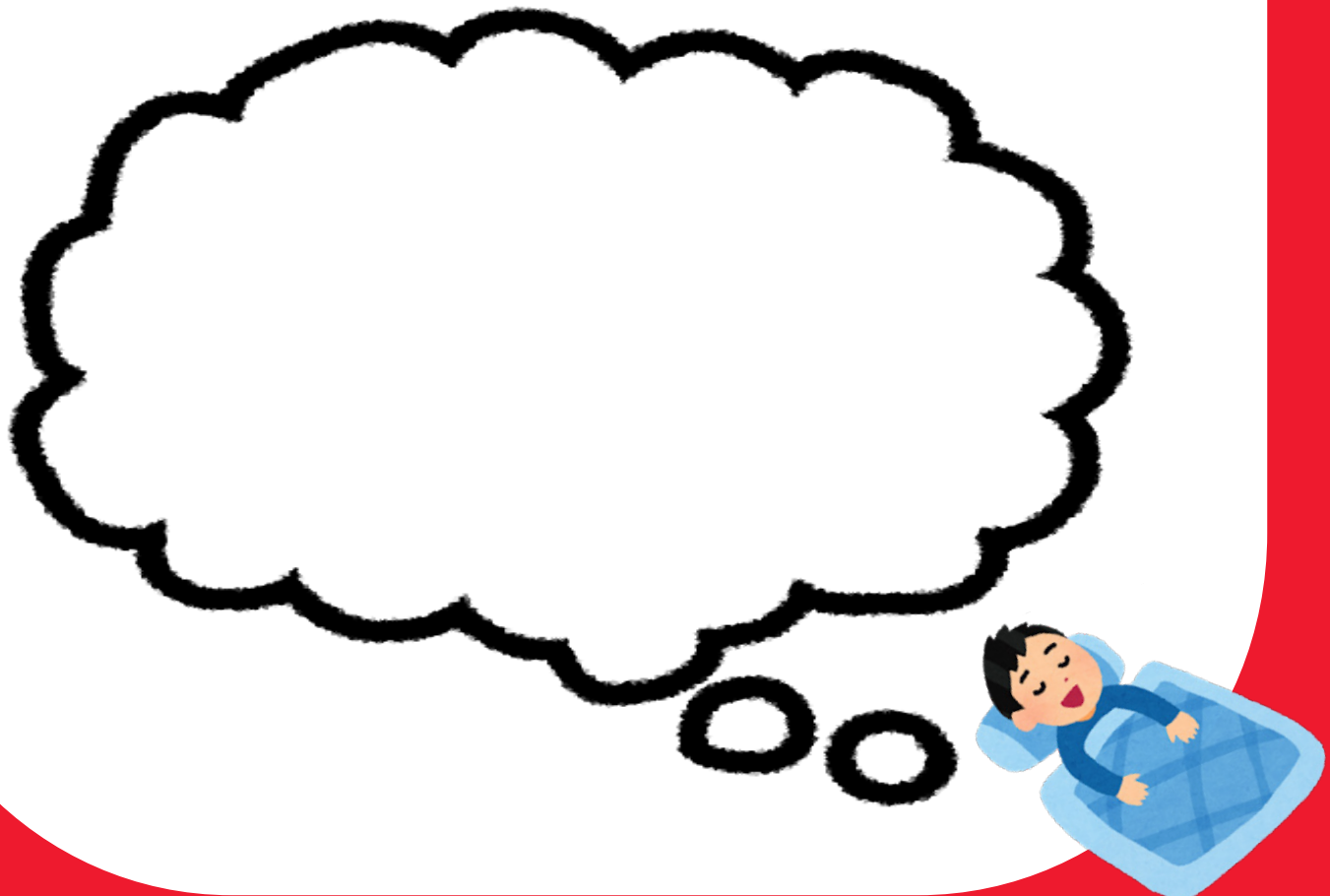
In Japan, the first dream you have in the New Year is called Hatsuyume. Hatsu means 'first' and yume means 'dream'. There is a popular myth that there are three lucky things to dream about and it is said you will have good luck in the coming year if you dream about them. They are:

1. Mount Fuji
2. A Hawk
3. An aubergine



There are some guesses about why these three things are the luckiest, but no-one is exactly sure why. Do you have any ideas?

What symbols of good luck can you think of? What would you like your hatsuyume (first dream) to be about? **You can draw your dream below.**





Kanji Characters

In Japanese, New year is 'shogatsu'. In Japanese characters it is written like this: 正月. You can practice writing it below. **Trace the characters by following the stroke order, then try to write them on your own.**

		正	月

Did you know that there is a tradition of doing calligraphy in the New Year in Japan? It is called **kakizome**, 書き初め in kanji characters, which means 'first writing' because it is the first calligraphy of the New Year.

Below are two 'lucky' Japanese kanji characters – why not try writing them?

幸: happiness or good fortune 福: good luck or good fortune

	幸				
	福				

Together, the characters 幸福 mean happiness.



Kites

Kites are a traditional toy in Japan and there are kite-flying festivals in various places throughout the year. For example, one popular kite festival called the Giant Kite Festival is held every year in Japan in July.

It's also a Japanese tradition to fly a kite around the New Year and many children would have played with kites on New Year's Day in the past. This is less common nowadays but, even so, kites are still associated with the New Year in Japan. The Japanese word for kite is tako.



Designs

Traditional Japanese kites are toys and also works of art. They come in a variety of shapes and sizes and many are decorated with bold designs and brightly coloured tails. Some kite designs are unique to the area they were made in and may be collected as works of art.

Japanese kite designs include: basic geometric shapes, warrior legends, local symbols or traditional patterns, written Japanese, birds or insects and more! One popular design is called yakko—it's the shape of a person.





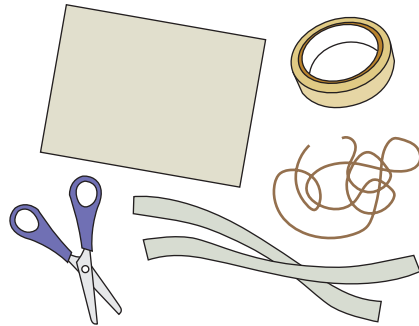
Make a kite

Japanese kites are usually made from washi (Japanese paper) with a light bamboo frame, but you can make your own simple kite out of newspaper and then decorate it using some of the common new year good luck motifs- there is a selection below! Follow the steps on the next page for instructions on how to make your own kite.



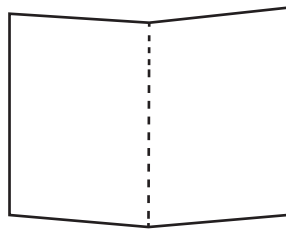
Make a Simple Japanese Kite!

Written by Susan Wright, edited by the Japan Society based on a design by Japanese kite-maker, Takeshi Nishibayashi.

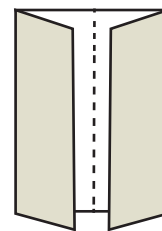


You will need

- A sheet of newspaper (or A3 paper)
- Scissors
- Tape
- A length of string or twine
- Two strips of paper or ribbon (Approx 2cm x 45-60cm)

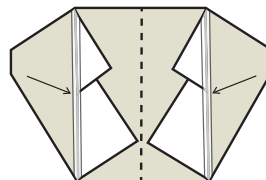
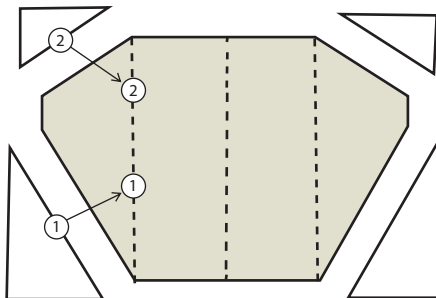
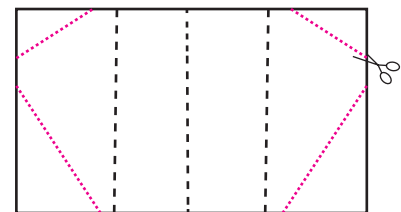
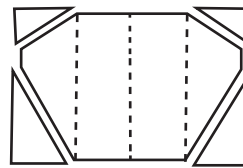


1. Fold an A3 sheet of paper or newspaper along centre and open out again.

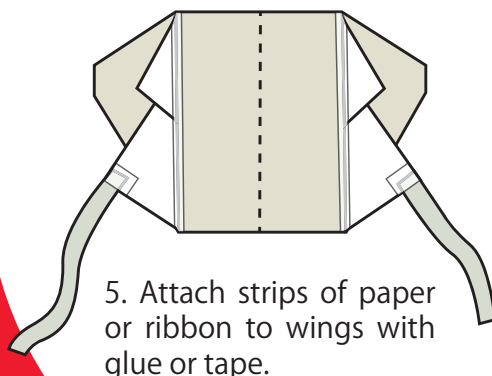
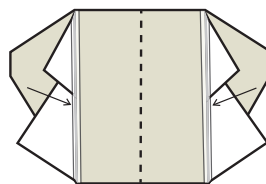


2. Fold outside edges to centre fold line and open flat again.

3. Cut off corners as shown and retain pieces. Flip the kite.

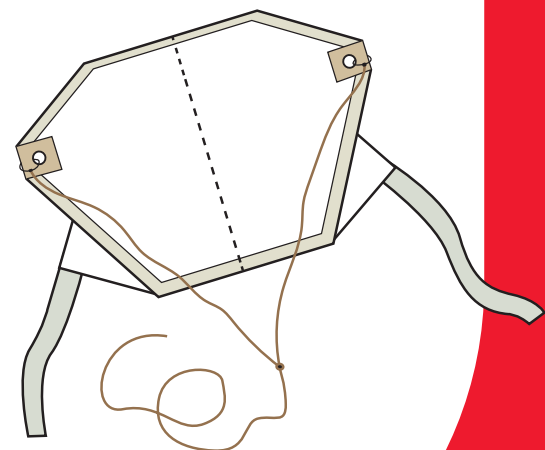


4. Tape cut off pieces to fold lines on back of kite as shown. Fold these 'wings' back and tape again on the other side to reinforce them.



5. Attach strips of paper or ribbon to wings with glue or tape.

6. Reinforce the kite edges with tape and punch a hole on each side. Tie 2 strings (60-70cm) through the holes with a double knot, then tie ends to form a harness.



*Tie an extra length of string onto the harness if you want your kite to fly high!



Activity: Write your own Nengajo!

Why not try to write your own New Year's message this year on a nengajo, Japanese New Year Card? You can use one of the templates provided or create your own!

HAPPY
NEW YEAR!!



Template 1



明けまして
おめでとうございます



Template 2



謹賀新年



Template 3



Template 4