

# Learning About Japan: A Teacher's Resource Guide



Japan Information & Culture Center  
Embassy of Japan  
1155 21<sup>st</sup> Street, NW  
Washington, DC 20036  
Tel: 202-238-6949  
Fax: 202-822-6524  
Email: [jicc@embjapan.org](mailto:jicc@embjapan.org)  
[www.us.emb-japan.go.jp/jicc/](http://www.us.emb-japan.go.jp/jicc/)

# JAPAN

## **Geography:**

Land Area: 145,883 sq. miles (377,873 sq. kilometers). Japan is slightly smaller than the state of California. Japan is made up of more than 6,800 islands. There are four major islands: Hokkaido, Honshu, Shikoku and Kyushu.

Cities: The five largest cities in order by population are Tokyo, Yokohama, Osaka, Nagoya and Sapporo.

Climate: Japan has four distinct seasons. Since the archipelago stretches over 1800 miles from north to south, the climate varies greatly. The northern end of Japan has the same latitude as Quebec, Canada, while the southern end has the same latitude as Key West, Florida. Most of Japan has a rainy season called *tsuyu* in the summer, and frequent typhoons occur from August through October.

## **People:**

Population: 127.4 million (July 2007), the 10th largest in the world. Population density ranks 30th.

Language: Japanese.

Religion: The two major religions are Buddhism and Shinto.

## Education:

The academic year begins on April 1<sup>st</sup>, and most elementary, junior high and senior high schools are divided into three terms: April to July, September to December, and January to March. Compulsory education extends from age six to fifteen. More than 97% of Japanese students continue on to high school. Japan has one of the highest literacy rates in the world.

Government: Constitutional Monarchy. Japan has a royal family with both an emperor and empress. The current emperor is His Majesty Emperor Akihito. The royal family holds no executive power. The head of government is Prime Minister Taro Aso. Japan has a parliamentary democratic system of government. The Diet (legislature), which consists of two houses (House of Representatives and the House of Councilors), is the highest organ of state power and the only law-making body. The Prime Minister is elected by the members of the Diet (legislature).

## **Economy:**

Currency: Yen. As of November 1st, 2007, the exchange rate was 114 Yen per US Dollar.

Trade: Japan's largest export (2005) is automobiles; its largest import is crude oil. Japan's largest trading partner (as a single country) is the United States. Japan's exports are as follows: 41% Asia, 30% USA, 16% Europe. Imports: 42% from Asia, 19% from USA, 12% from Europe.

## **International Relations:**

Japan's relations with other countries focus on:

- Working to peacefully resolve conflicts around the world
- Promoting arms control and stopping the spread of nuclear weapons
- Making sure that the world's economy will keep growing stronger
- Cooperating with developing countries to improve their economic and social

conditions

- Dealing with global issues, such as protecting the environment and slowing down population growth

# "Learning About Japan" Resources

**National Children's Museum**  
955 L'Enfant Plaza North, SW  
Suite 5100  
Washington, DC 20024

Tel: (202) 675-4120  
Website: [www.ccm.org](http://www.ccm.org)



## **Mid-Atlantic Region Japan-in-the-Schools (MARJiS) Program**

Room 3104, Benjamin Building  
University of Maryland  
College Park, MD 20742

Tel: (301) 405-7350 Fax: (301) 405-3573  
E-mail: [marjis@glue.umd.edu](mailto:marjis@glue.umd.edu)



MARJiS is ICTE's flagship program. Established in 1985, MARJiS, through its research partnerships, leadership programs, publications and professional development initiatives, has prepared more than 200 regional and national leaders in the U.S and Japan to integrate transcultural dimensions into pre-college education programs using Japan and the U.S. as cases.

Leadership programs have prepared participants on both sides of the Pacific to transform instructional materials by revealing the ways in which cultural images have shaped understanding under conditions of conflict, reconciliation, and peace. Participants have integrated minority perspectives into instructional materials, professional development initiatives, and curriculum frameworks. They have compared the roles of teachers as transcultural mediators and constructed new approaches to conflict resolution and peace education. For detailed accounts please see the links below:

**Resource Center:** ICTE maintains a teacher-friendly Resource Center and lending library of high quality books, curriculum guides, videocassettes, multi-media sets, maps, posters, periodicals, and other resources on transcultural education and instruction. Materials are available for loan to school administrators, teachers, students, education policy makers, and scholars. To date, the Resource Center has served thousands of students and teachers

Japan relation publications and videos:

<http://www.intleducenter.umd.edu/netscape/publications.htm>

**Discovery Boxes:** are object-based instructional materials for use in K-12 classrooms that introduce aspects of Japanese culture to students and educators alike. The boxes are thematic in approach-objects are organized to exemplify a particular aspect of Japanese culture. For example, the Japanese Elementary School Discovery Box contains a Randoseru;

(book bag); clothing associated with schools activities such as lunch time, physical education, and cleaning time; and various textbooks and other school paraphernalia. Discovery Boxes are available to educators in the mid-Atlantic region for classroom use. Please click [here](#) for borrowing information.

**Consulting Services:** ICTE staff serve as advisors and consultants to school districts, education policy makers, teacher associations, non-profit organizations, international agencies, publishers, college and university faculty, and community leaders seeking to build global education partnerships, prepare model instructional materials, design curriculum development initiatives, and conduct in-service professional development workshops.



1630 Crescent Place, N.W.  
Washington, D.C. 20009

Tel: 202-667-6800 Fax: 202-667-1475 [www.meridian.org](http://www.meridian.org)

Meridian combines world public opinion, a neutral convening forum for international leaders and cultures, a strategic location, and the energy of willing public and private actors to build understanding and collaborate on solutions to global challenges we face together.

For almost 50 years, Meridian International Center has been the nation's premier nonprofit institution dedicated exclusively to public diplomacy and global engagement. Meridian endeavors to strengthen America's ties to the world and create meaningful programs that build goodwill around the world. We embrace the power of face-to-face dialogue, seeking to foster connections and eradicate preconceived notions that lead to negative perceptions and conflict. In doing so, we bring our world closer together and engender mutual respect, tolerance and dignity among people and nations. This creates the conditions for collaboration and action to improve people's lives.

As Meridian approaches its 50th anniversary, in 2010, we understand our most critical work lies ahead. In the next half century, Meridian will advance its mission in direct response to the nation's pressing challenges.

### **Educational Outreach Programs**

- International Classroom
- Teacher's Professional Development Workshop
- International Resource Library
- International Children's Festival

### **Our History**

- Meridian International Center has a long history of bridging the gaps in international education, expanding the knowledge of students regarding the world in which they live, and supporting the efforts of teachers to prepare graduates to succeed.
- Our network of volunteers draws from universities, embassies, international

government agencies, multilateral development organizations, companies, and the DC area international community.

- Meridian Educational Outreach Programs work closely with the Mayor's office, the Superintendent of Schools, and directly with over 40 schools in the district to provide educational opportunities to over 2500 students and families

## Our Approach

Meridian's Educational Outreach department is unique among global education programs through the following:

- **Two-Way Exchange:** We go beyond ordinary classroom learning by facilitating genuine two-way intercultural exchanges between "country citizen ambassadors" and students.
- **Reinforcing Core Curriculum:** Our programs are designed to reinforce the fundamental skills that are part of the core curriculum.
- **Connecting the Community:** International Classroom brings members of DC's international community together with children in an experiential learning environment that awakens the interest of students to languages and international learning.

For questions or comments, please feel free to contact the Meridian Staff at

[internationalclassroom@meridian.org](mailto:internationalclassroom@meridian.org)

# Japanese Holidays & Celebrations

The New Year celebration is Japan's most recognized national holiday. Celebrated over a three to four day period, it is an occasion for families and friends to gather at homes to wish one another a happy and prosperous new year. *Hatsumode* is the tradition of visiting one's neighborhood shrine or temple during the New Year Holiday, to pray for good luck in the upcoming year.

## Japan's 18 publicly observed holidays are:

January 1:	New Year's Day ( <i>Shogatsu</i> )
January 2:	Bank Holiday
January 3:	Bank Holiday
2 <sup>nd</sup> Monday in January:	Coming of Age Day ( <i>Seijin no hi</i> )
February 11:	National Foundation Day ( <i>Kenkoku kinen no hi</i> )
March (date varies):	Vernal Equinox ( <i>Shunbun no hi</i> )
April 29:	Greenery Day ( <i>Midori no hi</i> )
May 3:	Constitution Memorial Day ( <i>Kenpou kinen bi</i> )
May 4:	Citizen's Holiday ( <i>Kokumin no kyujitsu</i> )
May 5:	Children's Day ( <i>Kodomo no hi</i> )
July 20:	Marine Day ( <i>Umi no hi</i> )
September 15:	Respect for the Aged Day ( <i>Keirou no hi</i> )
September (date varies):	Autumnal Equinox ( <i>Shuubun no hi</i> )
2 <sup>nd</sup> Monday in October:	Health and Sports Day ( <i>Taiku no hi</i> )
November 3:	National Culture Day ( <i>Bunka no hi</i> )
November 23:	Labor Thanksgiving Day ( <i>Kinrou kansha no hi</i> )
December 23:	Emperor's Birthday ( <i>Tennou tanjyobi</i> )
December 31:	Bank Holiday

Information on holidays in Japan is available online at:

[www.japan-guide.com/](http://www.japan-guide.com/)

## What are Japan's festivals?

The Japanese celebrate festivals throughout the year, and while many festivals are religious celebrations, many others have emerged as a celebration of the seasons. Hakata's *Gion* Festival, which includes the country's largest street parade, is one of Japan's biggest summer festivals. The *Yukimatsuri*, or Snow Festival, is held every February in Sapporo City, Hokkaido, where giant ice and snow sculptures are created as the main attraction of the festival. *O-bon*, a Buddhist festival honoring one's deceased ancestors, is practiced throughout the country. Observed on a lunar calendar and usually falling in mid to late summer, *O-bon* is an occasion for families to welcome the spirits of their ancestors home during the three days of celebration and festivals.

For more information on festivals in Japan, please view:

[http://web-japan.org/atlas/festivals/festi\\_fr.html](http://web-japan.org/atlas/festivals/festi_fr.html)

<http://web.mit.edu/jpnet/holidays/index.shtml>



# Japanese Cuisine: Making Japanese Rice Balls

*Onigiri* (also called *omusubi*) are usually shaped by hand into triangular shapes. They're easy to make - just take some cooked rice and use your hands to shape them. *Onigiri* are easy to carry to school for lunch, and have been a common picnic item for generations.

The trick to making *onigiri* is to moisten your hands so that the rice does not stick to them, and to shape the balls while the rice is still quite hot. If the rice has cooled down, the grains will not stick together well. Some people cover their hands with plastic wrap when making *onigiri*, because they don't like the rice sticking to them and they don't want to touch the hot rice.



## Onigiri (Rice Balls)

### Ingredients:

Freshly-cooked Japanese-style (short grain) sticky rice (3/4 – 1 cup cooked rice per *onigiri*), salt, white sesame seeds (optional), half a sheet of *nori*\* (dried seaweed) for each *onigiri*, your choice of filling (salted salmon, flaked; canned tuna drained and mixed with mayonnaise; Japanese pickled plum (*ume*\*); or Japanese rice seasonings (*furikake*\*).

\*These items can be purchased at Japanese or Asian grocery stores.

### Directions:

1. Moisten your hands with water so that the rice does not stick to them. Take a pinch of white sesame and salt and spread evenly over the palms of your hands.
2. Take enough freshly cooked rice to fill a small bowl. Use a type of rice that is sticky enough for the grains to adhere together. Place the rice on the palm of one hand, then gently press the clump together. Keep shaping until all grains adhere to each other.



3. Use two fingers to form a hollow in the middle. Insert some finely sliced grilled salmon or other filling. Cover the remaining part of the hollow with a little rice, to hide the salmon.



4. Place the clump of rice on the palm of one hand. Turn the rice several times with the other hand, while pressing it into the shape of a thick triangle. Do not press too hard, because you don't want the *o-nigiri* to be too densely packed. You may lightly sprinkle some extra salt on the surface of the *onigiri*.



5. Stand each triangle of rice in the middle of each piece of *nori*, then wrap the other sides of the triangle of rice. Now your *onigiri* are ready to eat!



# The Japanese Language

## 日本語 Nihongo

The Japanese language consists of three writing systems: *hiragana*, *katakana* and *kanji*. In the 6<sup>th</sup> century, Chinese characters were introduced and adopted into the Japanese language; the Japanese named this writing system *kanji*. However, because of the differences between the two languages, *hiragana* and *katakana* were created. *Hiragana* and *katakana* each have 46 characters, and each character represents a different sound (similar to the Roman alphabet). All Japanese words can be written using *hiragana*, while *katakana* is usually reserved for writing non-Japanese words. *Kanji* are used to express words or ideas, and two or more of these characters may be combined to express further concepts. Many *kanji* are written using a number of strokes and can be pronounced several different ways. Over 2000 *kanji* are used in everyday Japanese, although many more characters are also used in traditional text, proper names, and technical writing. Before a student in Japan finishes elementary school, he or she is expected to read and write approximately 1000 *kanji*.

Some Common Words in Japanese:

<u>Hiragana</u>	<u>Kanji</u>	<u>Pronunciation</u>	<u>English Word</u>
いぬ	犬	<i>inu</i>	dog
ねこ	猫	<i>neko</i>	cat
うま	馬	<i>uma</i>	horse
かわ	川	<i>kawa</i>	river
き	木	<i>ki</i>	tree
いえ	家	<i>ie</i>	house
とり	鳥	<i>tori</i>	bird
かみ	紙	<i>kami</i>	paper
はな	花	<i>hana</i>	flower
やま	山	<i>yama</i>	mountain



# Schools in Japan



## Did You Know...?

- Currently, Japanese schoolchildren attend school 5 days a week (with Saturdays and Sundays off).
- The Japanese school year begins in April and ends in March. The school day usually begins at 8:30AM and ends at 3:00 or 3:30PM. Students often have club activities or preparatory school (*juku*) in the afternoon.
- On weekdays, Japanese public elementary school children enjoy *kyushoku* (lunch service) in their classrooms. The food is prepared in a cafeteria and brought to each class, where the students take turns serving the meal to their classmates. *Kyushoku* are nutritiously-balanced meals served with milk, and consist of many Japanese dishes such as grilled fish or *sukiyaki*, although Western-style meals such as hamburgers or spaghetti are also popular.\*\*
- Compulsory education in Japan is from age six to fifteen. More than 97% of students continue to high school.
- Many private and public schools require their students to wear uniforms.
- Japanese students begin studying the English language from junior high school, and continue their English studies through high school.\*\*
- As of 2005, 45.3% of Japanese students pursue some level of higher education after high school.\*

\* *Facts & Figures of Japan 2002, Foreign Press Center*  
\*\* [www.jin.jcic.or.jp/Kidsweb/html](http://www.jin.jcic.or.jp/Kidsweb/html)

\* Below information courtesy of *Views of Japan*



# Origami



*Origami* is the ancient Japanese art of folding a single square of paper into a shape or object. The art was first practiced in the 8<sup>th</sup> century, when paper was introduced to Japan, and the sheets were folded into decorations for religious ceremonies. During the Edo period (1603-1868), *origami* became popular with mainstream society. Today, *origami* continues its popularity and is even used to teach geometry concepts to schoolchildren. The crane, a symbol of longevity and good luck in Japan, is one of the most popular *origami* shapes. Shapes can be as simple as a cup (five folds of the paper), to more elaborate creations such as a Pegasus or elephant, which require considerable skill. While many enthusiasts of the art use instructions of *origami* models to construct each piece, others have designed their own unique pieces. See the back of this sheet for *origami* instructions on folding a crane, called a *tsuru* in Japanese.

### Learn more about *origami* at:

- 1) [www.origami-club.com/](http://www.origami-club.com/)
- 2) [www.origami-usa.org/](http://www.origami-usa.org/)
- 3) [www.paperfolding.com/](http://www.paperfolding.com/)
- 4) [www.britishorigami.org.uk/](http://www.britishorigami.org.uk/) (British origami site)
- 5) <http://users.aol.com/stamm/>
- 6) [www.origami.gr.jp/](http://www.origami.gr.jp/) (The official site of the Origami Academic Society)
- 7) [www.pro.or.jp/~fuji/origami/index-eng.html](http://www.pro.or.jp/~fuji/origami/index-eng.html)
- 8) [www.stemnet.nf.ca/CITE/origami.htm](http://www.stemnet.nf.ca/CITE/origami.htm) (Origami web resources for students)
- 9) [www.tammyee.com/origami.html](http://www.tammyee.com/origami.html) (printable origami "sheets" & instructions; great for kids)
- 10) [www.kimscrane.com/](http://www.kimscrane.com/) (Kim's Crane origami supplies- located in Virginia)

### *Sadako and the Thousand Paper Cranes*, by Eleanor Coerr

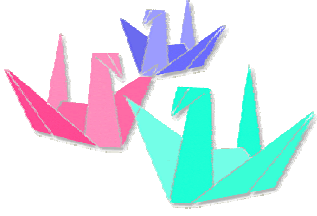
*Sadako and the Thousand Paper Cranes* is the true story of a young Japanese girl who was two years old at the time of the WWII atomic bombing of Hiroshima. At the age of 11, Sadako Sasaki developed leukemia as a result of exposure to the atomic bomb's radiation. While visiting Sadako in the hospital, her best friend told her about the Japanese tradition that folding 1000 paper cranes will give the person who folded them a long life. From her hospital bed, Sadako tried to fold 1000 cranes in hopes of fulfilling her wish to be healthy again. Although Sadako died of leukemia in 1955 at the age of 12, her legacy remains. In 1958, a statue of Sadako holding an *origami* crane was erected at the Hiroshima Peace Park. As a gesture of peace and hope, many students from around the world send *origami* cranes to be displayed around Sadako's statue in Hiroshima.

More information on Sadako and her story is online at:

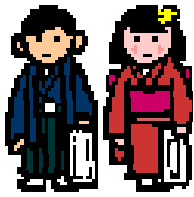
[www.sadako.org/](http://www.sadako.org/)

- See the *Website Resources* section for more websites on Sadako.

# How to Fold an *Origami* Crane (*Tsuru* 鶴)



Instructions at <http://monkey.org/~aidan/origami/crane/!!!>



**NOTE TO TEACHERS:** This Resource Guide was compiled to enhance your students' study of Japan and its culture. The information included in the packet represents some of the JICC's most popularly requested topics from teachers and students.

## Table of Contents

- Facts About Japan\*
- Map of Japan\*
- Facts About Mt. Fuji
- *Fuji no Yama* (Mount Fuji) Music & Lyrics\*
- Origami
- How to Fold an Origami Crane\*
- Japan – Just For Kids! (Holidays and Celebrations)\*
- More on Holidays
- The Japanese Language\*
- Japanese Language Charts\*
- Japanese Food\*
- Making Japanese Rice Balls\*
- Schools in Japan
- “Learning About Japan” Resources
- Useful Websites
- Pen Pal Programs

\* Pages marked with an asterisk were specifically designed for students.



### The following resources are available from the JICC upon request:

- Coloring Book packet
- Japanese Folk Tales
- Japanese Kites and Tops
- *Japan Overview* (Map)
- Japan-Related Info. in the DC Area
- Japanese Recipes
- Japanese Songs (sheet music and lyrics)
- *Kenta: My Life in Japan*
- *Nipponia* Magazine
- Origin of Japanese Characters
- *Views of Japan* booklet (General background on Japan)
- *Elementary School Life* packet
- *Junior High School Life* packet
- *Senior High School Life* packet
- The JICC also has videos and slides for loan; please note that a deposit fee is required. The JICC's complete video list and video rental policy are online at: [www.us.emb-japan.go.jp/jicc/video.htm](http://www.us.emb-japan.go.jp/jicc/video.htm)



# Useful Websites

## Teacher's General Resources on Japan:

[www.jinjapan.org](http://www.jinjapan.org)

On-line information on Japan including pop culture, geography, daily & school life and a kids page

[www.into.go.jp](http://www.into.go.jp)

Japan National Tourist Organization homepage: contains travel guide and general information on Japan

<http://lcweb2.loc.gov/frd/cs/jptoc.html>

On-line data on Japan

[www.colorado.edu/ealld/atj](http://www.colorado.edu/ealld/atj)

The Association of Teachers of Japanese homepage: contains teaching resources, and directory of Japanese study.

<http://score.rims.k12.ca.us/activity/konnichiwa>

Teaching resources

[www.smith.edu/fcceas](http://www.smith.edu/fcceas)

Five College Center for East Asian Studies homepage: contains on-line resources on Japan study.

[www.smn.co.jp](http://www.smn.co.jp)

Tokyo Kaleido Scoop homepage: independent news and analysis web site from Japan

<http://jguide.stanford.edu/>

Stanford Guide to Japan Information Resources homepage: links you to Japan-related websites.

[www.state.gov](http://www.state.gov)

See the "Country Background Notes" section for data on Japan by the State Department

[www.tjf.or.jp](http://www.tjf.or.jp)

The Japan Forum homepage: featuring school life, kid's life, intercultural topics (Japanese and English), and teaching resources

[www.us-jf.org](http://www.us-jf.org)

U.S.-Japan Foundation homepage: introduces their programs, activities, and U.S.-Japan Resources.

[www.csuohio.edu/history/japan/](http://www.csuohio.edu/history/japan/)

General information on Japan including pop/traditional culture, history, social studies, etc.

<http://japan-guide.com>

On-line resources on Japanese culture, art, life, history, etc.

## General Resources on Asia:

[www.aasianst.org](http://www.aasianst.org)

The Association of Asian Studies: contains information on local and national conferences, research and grant opportunities, publications and employment opportunities.

[www.aems.uiuc.edu/index.las](http://www.aems.uiuc.edu/index.las)

Asian Educational Media Service: An on-line search engine for films and other media resources on Asia.

<http://afe.easia.columbia.edu>

The East Asian Curriculum Project (EACP) of Columbia University Homepage: a national project devoted to supporting education on Asia at the secondary and elementary levels.  
[www.coombs.anu.edu.au/WWWVL-AsianStudies.html](http://www.coombs.anu.edu.au/WWWVL-AsianStudies.html)

Asian Studies virtual library (database) by Research school of Pacific and Asian Studies at the Australian National University.  
[www.indiana.edu/~easc](http://www.indiana.edu/~easc)

Indiana University East Asian Studies Center homepage: including teaching resources  
[www.asiasociety.org](http://www.asiasociety.org)

Asia Society homepage: resources on culture, art, economics, politics and education in Asia.

<http://staff.washington.edu/earc>

University of Washington East Asia Resource Center Homepage

### **Washington, DC Area Resources on Japan:**

[www.gwjapan.com](http://www.gwjapan.com)

Gateway Japan homepage: On-line information page for Japanese community in the Washington DC metropolitan area

[www.spfusa.org](http://www.spfusa.org)

The Sasakawa Peace Foundation is a non-profit, educational self-operating foundation in Wash., DC.

### **Learning About Japan For Students:**

<http://web-japan.org/factsheet/index.html>

<http://web-japan.org/kidsweb/>

\*\*Above website list courtesy of MARJiS.