



JAPAN INFORMATION  
AND CULTURE CENTER  
在米国日本大使館広報文化センター

# TEACHING TUESDAY

## HANAMI

Just as many people travel from all over to see the Washington D.C. cherry blossoms in bloom, Japan, too, has a tradition of hanami, or cherry blossom viewing. The history of hanami goes back over 1000 years to the Nara era, when it is said nobles enjoyed sitting under the cherry blossoms gathering inspiration for their poems. For common folk, cherry blossoms were used to divine the upcoming harvest, and people would make offerings to the kami, or gods, that lived in the trees. The offerings were often feasts of food, which after being presented, the people would partake of with a little bit of sake.

In the Heian period, Emperor Saga adopted this practice for his Imperial court and hosted hanami parties with sake and food under the blooming trees. This is said to be the origin of modern hanami. Hanami is still extremely popular in Japan today; thousands of people gather and fill the parks to hold feasts under the flowering trees. In more than half of Japan, the cherry blossoming period coincides with the beginning of the scholastic and fiscal years, and so welcoming parties are also often opened with hanami. Yozakura, or nighttime hanami, has also become very popular. Lit up with special lanterns or spot lights, the cherry blossoms become more dreamy and romantic, and have an entirely different feel from the day time.