



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

TEACHING TUESDAY

NAKIZUMO

Every spring near the end April, shrines around Japan hold the annual Nakizumo (literally “crying sumo”) festival, also known as the crying baby festival. The old Japanese saying associated with the festival is 泣く子は育つ (なくこはそだつ naku ko wa sodatsu) which means “crying babies will grow up fast.”

Nakizumo is based on a legend that states that the loud cry of an infant will ward off demons and ensure the child grows up healthy and strong. To perform a nakizumo, two sumo wrestlers face off holding babies and proceed to growl and make faces and yell “nake! nake! nake! (cry! cry! cry!)” at the children, trying to make them cry. Occasionally, the wrestlers will wear even oni or demon masks in an effort to make the child cry. If both babies cry, whichever is loudest wins.

But don't worry, this is all done with parental consent and supervision, and without any physical pain involved. And most of the babies don't even cry; they prefer to simply stare or in some cases, laugh. During this traditional 400-year-old competition, parents pray for the good health of their children.