



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

# TEACHING TUESDAY

## NINJA

Originally referred to as shinobi, the practitioners of the ninjutsu art of warfare are called ninja. Ninjutsu was developed in central Honshu, mainly in the Iga Region of Mie Prefecture and the Koka region of Shiga Prefecture around 600-900 A.D.

It is theorized that ninja mainly came into being as a counter-force to the upper-class samurai in early feudal Japan. It is commonly believed that the Chinese monks who came to Japan to flee the downfall of the Tang Dynasty taught their own methods to rogue samurai, ronin, as well as Japan's warrior-monks, yamabushi, and other members of the first ninja clans. As the locals adopted these tactics into Japan's own unique style, it became ninjutsu.

Most ninja were villagers and farmers, fighting by any means necessary to ensure their own self-preservation. For this reason, many women, known as kunoichi, joined the ranks of ninja as well. Unlike common depictions of ninja, which come from kabuki theatre, most ninja dressed in navy blue at night, or as farmers, foot soldiers, actors, etc., to blend in during the day. Most ninja weapons were modified common work tools, that wouldn't arouse suspicion and were also unfamiliar to the samurai in combat.

During the Warring States Period, ninja could decide the survival or destruction of a clan depending on their actions. The fear of ninja gave rise to myths that they could climb sheer walls, walk on air, or disappear. In reality, they just excelled at espionage missions, and avoiding outright combat. However, as the Edo Period brought peace and stability to Japan, the ninja faded away. You can still experience the way of the ninja in Iga however, at the Iga-ryu Ninja Museum.