



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

# TEACHING TUESDAY

## TANABATA

Tanabata (七夕), also known as the Star Festival is celebrated yearly on the evening of July 7th. The third biggest summer festival in Japan, it finds its roots in a legend about the Cowherd Star (Altair) and the Weaver Star (Vega), lovers separated by the Milky Way, only allowed to meet once a year - on the seventh day of the seventh month. Because of this, some areas of Japan, such as Sendai, on August 7 instead, since this is closer to the seventh day of the seventh month on the traditional lunar calendar. In those cases, Tanabata frequently carries over into Obon season.

Originally started in China, Tanabata was brought to Japan in the Heian period, and was fused with local traditional customs to become an official event at the Imperial court. It was soon picked up by the common people, and adapted to fit each locality. Because of this, there are often different ways of celebrating Tanabata. One thing that remains consistent is the use of tanzaku (短冊), which are narrow, colored strips of paper people write their wishes on and then hang on bamboo branches. They then pray hard that their wishes will come true. Sometimes the bamboo and decorations are afloat on a river or burned after the festival concludes.

You can learn more about the legend behind the festival at our JICC mini-exhibit until July 31. You can also write your own tanzaku wish to hang up on our tanabata tree, or use the hashtag #JICCTanabata and we will write your wish for you!