



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

TEACHING TUESDAY

DEZOME-SHIKI

The *Dezome-shiki* (出初式), organized by the Tokyo Fire Department, is a spectacular New Year's parade of firemen, with over 100 fire engines and helicopters participating, along with as large-scale fire-fighting and emergency drills. Similar events are held around Japan, but this is the largest of its kind.

The Dezome-shiki finds its roots in the Edo period. Tokyo, back then known as Edo, was often struck by huge fires, due to wooden buildings built very close to each other. The Great Fire of Meireki in 1657 destroyed over half of the city, leading to the formation of the very first Japanese fire fighters, the Jobikeishi fire brigade. Every year, the brigade would leave their four stations around the city and make their way to Ueno Toshogu shrine to pray for a safe year free of fires. This procession has transformed over the years into the Dezome-shiki.

The main attraction of the parade are the ladder stunts. Ladders were extremely important for firefighting in the Edo period, when the best way to stop a fire was to climb on rooves and tear down nearby houses to stop the spread. In the Dezome-shiki, however, ladders take on a different role as men dressed as their Edo period counterparts perform circus-like acrobatic stunts on top of bamboo ladders high up in the air. These demonstrations are meant to help warn people of the dangers of fire.