



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

# TEACHING TUESDAY

## WAGARA

Wagara (和柄) are traditional Japanese patterns or designs, often seen on kimono and other textiles. The history of wagara patterns can be traced back to the 18th century in the Heian period, but the designs are still evolving even today. Wagara incorporate elements of brush calligraphy with painting motifs resembling natural elements and geometric patterns in classic Japanese colors.

There are many different types of patterns, many of which are tiny, elaborate, repetitive designs. Each design is often accompanied by a hidden meaning. Some examples include seigaiha (青海波), representing the waves of the ocean; Sho-Chiku-Bai (松竹梅), depicting pine, bamboo, and plum plants which are known for being hardy and resilient and together represent good fortune; Kozakura (小桜), tiny cherry blossoms; and Shippo (七宝), or the Seven Jewels, which has a pattern that looks like a shining diamond.

Traditionally, patterns like these were only used on kimono and yukata. However, as western clothes became more common, wagara began to be printed on other products in order to prevent patterns from being lost to history. To keep up with changing times, wagara patterns are commonly mixed with contemporary patterns to help appeal. More recently, stores dedicated to only wagara decorated goods have become very popular, and patterns have been used for everything from nail art to graphic design.