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# TEACHING TUESDAY

## GION FESTIVAL

AUGUST 2, 2016

Summer is festival time in Japan, but no festival is bigger than the Gion Festival in Kyoto. The festival takes place over the entire month of July, highlighted by a grand parade of massive, wooden floats, some up to 80 feet tall.

The Gion Festival dates back to 869, a time of famine and plague for the area. In an attempt to appease the *kami*, the first festival featuring sixty-six stylized halbreeds and *mikoshi* (portable shrines) was performed. The festival continued sporadically until 970, when it was declared an annual event. It became more and more elaborate, and took on its current form in 1533, with giant wooden floats, musicians, dances, comic plays, and displays of artistic treasures, such as beautiful fabrics from Kyoto's famed textile merchants.

Many of the floats used in the festival and procession are actually restored versions of those originally used hundreds of years ago. These floats are carefully preserved throughout the year when not in use. Because the Gion Festival features an entire month's worth of events, there's always something going on!