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# TEACHING TUESDAY

## KARATSU KUNCHI

NOVEMBER 29, 2016

The Karatsu Kunchi Festival (唐津くunchi) takes place annually on the island of Kyushu during the month of November. Designated an Important Intangible Folk Cultural Property, the festival features fourteen giant floats called hikiyama, which can be as large as 22 feet tall and weigh up to 3 tons.

The festival is said to be over 400 years old. The original hikiyama floats were used as offerings to show the gods appreciation for a good year and harvest. Lacquered and finished with gold and silver leaf, the floats are designed in the images of lions, grampuses, samurai helmets, sea bream, and flying dragons called hiryu. While the original floats have been lost to history, many of the floats have a long history. The oldest surviving float is the Akajishi Red Lion, which was produced back in 1819; it has since undergone major repairs 6 times, and still retains its original form to this day.

Over half a million people attend the festival, and the town often spends days leading up to the festival preparing enough food to feed all the revelers. As teams from the fourteen traditional neighborhoods of Karatsu push the floats through the sand and streets, the crowds shout “Enya, Enya” or “Yoisa, Yoisa” as encouragement.