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TEACHING TUESDAY

USUI

FEBRUARY 21, 2017

Before Japan moved to the Western calendar with its 12 months and 4 seasons it used the 24 Sekki, or 24 Japanese Small Seasons. This week marks Usui (雨水), which literally means “rainwater”.

The 24 Sekki were brought to Japan from China, and eventually modified to fit Japan’s climate. The sekki were based on the movement of the sun and the resulting trends in during various times of the year. It essentially acted Japan’s version of a farmer’s almanac, and the sekki were popular subjects of haiku, waka, and other literary styles.

Usui marks the transition from winter to spring, as snow begins to turn to rain and the snowpack on the mountains begins to melt away. For agriculture, this melting snow is important as farmers take this season to get ready for their work in the fields, cultivating and preparing for sowing the seeds of the crops. Usui is also celebrated with the Hina-Matsuri festival in early March, and the “shiro-zake” (white and sweet sake) is served at the festival.