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# TEACHING TUESDAY

## UMBRELLAS

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Traditional oil-paper umbrellas, known as wagasa (和傘), were brought to Japan during the Asuka period (538-710). Originally used as sacred religious instruments, the crafting technique for umbrellas in Japan really began to advance during the Heian and Muramochi periods, with new types of paper production, bamboo work, pigments, and water-repelling wax.

The most famous type of Japanese oil-paper umbrella is the kyowagasa, or Kyoto wagasa. Completely handmade and featuring traditional Japanese colors and images, the materials are strictly controlled. The handle and scaffold are constructed out of local bamboo, while the umbrella itself is made from Japanese washi paper that has been brushed with sesame oil. When decorated with colorful concentric circles on the exterior, the umbrella is called a janomegasa (蛇の目傘), which literally means eye of a snake. Other types of umbrella include the Gifu umbrellas and the Yodoe umbrellas.

Wagasa aren't used a lot in modern day life, but they still have many functions in Japanese culture, which can often be determined by their color. Geisha use purple umbrellas, dancers use pink, men and elderly use dark blue, actors use black or brown, weddings use red, and so on.