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TEACHING TUESDAY

KOINOBORI

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On May 5th, you may be surprised to see fish flying in the sky! May 5th is Children's Day in Japan and to celebrate the health and happiness of children, koinobori (鯉幟), or carp streamers are flown on top of houses and schools.

The koi, or carp, has come to represent a symbol of courage, power, and energy, due to its ability to go against the current and swim upstream. In Japanese, there is an old proverb, "the koi's waterfall ascent" (鯉の滝登り), which means to achieve success in life. This is based on a Chinese legend where a koi swam up a waterfall and became a dragon.

The tradition of flying banners stems from the samurai families who used to display their battle flags outside the home to encourage young boys to become strong and courageous. Inside of homes, samurai helmets and armor were displayed. Now, families fly koi banners to honor their children and express hope that their children will be as courageous as a koi. Koinobori usually consist of wheels with a ball-shaped vane on top, followed by a colorful windsock (sometimes bearing a family crest) and a number of carp streamers to represent the family. A black koinobori and a red koinobori represent the parents, and smaller, colorful koinobori represent the children.