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TEACHING TUESDAY

O-MIKUJI

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At the beginning of the year, many Japanese people line up at shrines and temples to receive their *o-mikujī* おみくじ, or paper fortunes. *O-mikujī* began over 1,000 years ago, when people drew lots to hear a divine opinion, and evolved into a fortune to predict how the year will go. Although *o-mikujī* are available year-round, it is common for Japanese people to receive their first one during *hatsumōde*, or their first shrine or temple visit of the year. The overall fortune is indicated by a kanji at the top of the fortune, generally with the ranks of excellent luck 大吉, luck 吉, middle luck 中吉, small luck 小吉, bad luck 凶 and terrible luck 大凶 respectively, although terminology can vary by shrine or temple. Beneath the kanji, the fortune covers different aspects of life such as love, study, work, travel, and health, to name a few. There is typically a 100 yen fee to draw an *o-mikujī*.

Drawing an *o-mikujī* varies by shrine or temple. Some shrines and temples still have the traditional drawing method which is done by shaking a cylindrical box filled with numbered sticks called *mikujī-bo*. The number on the *mikujī-bo* corresponds to an *o-mikujī*. Other shrines or temples may have themed boxes where *o-mikujī* are drawn from at random. Lucky fortunes are kept, ideally on oneself or in a wallet at all times throughout the year. Shrines and temples used to encourage visitors to take their bad fortunes home. However, many people began to tie them to trees or various parts of the shrine to counteract the bad luck. Now many shrines and temples provide an area to tie unlucky *o-mikujī*. Even if you draw an unlucky *o-mikujī*, there is always advice written on how to improve your fortune for the year.