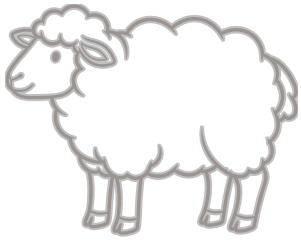
NENGAJO 2027 LESSON PLAN

OBJECTIVES

Students will learn about the Japanese New Year tradition of ***nengajo*** and create their own New Year's cards with seasonal illustrations to submit to the 2027 Nengajo Contest hosted by the Japan Information & Culture Center (JICC), Embassy of Japan in Washington, D.C.



KEYWORDS

Nengajo
Oshogatsu
Kagami-mochi
Kadomatsu
Osechi-ryori
Takarabune
Eto

MATERIALS NEEDED

- Blank cardstock or paper cut to 4 x 6 / 6 x 4 inches (or use page 7)
- Markers, crayons, colored pencils
- Reference images of Nengajo (for Year of the Sheep)
- *Let's Trace Japanese!* Worksheet (page 6)

LESSON PLAN OUTLINE

1. JAPANESE NEW YEAR

- *Discussion:* Discuss New Year celebrations in the students' families. Is New Year an important celebration? What kind of food do they eat? Do they play any special games? Do they exchange gifts?

- *See, think, wonder:* Look at pictures of New Year celebrations in Japan. What do the students see? What could they be? What questions do they have?

- Briefly introduce depicted New Year traditions in Japan (see attached *Guide for Educators* on pages 3 - 5)

CONTINUED ON NEXT PAGE

NENGAJO 2026 LESSON PLAN

LESSON PLAN OUTLINE (CON'T)

2. ABOUT NENGAJO

- *Introduce nengajo:* Traditional New Year's greeting cards that are exchanged in Japan.
  - Cards are sent to family, friends, and teachers.
  - Typically feature the year's zodiac animal (2027: Sheep).
  - Express gratitude and good wishes for the new year.

- *Show examples of nengajo* and traditional motifs, e.g. *Takarabune,* Mount Fuji, pine, plum flowers, bamboo.

- *Language component:* Teach students a few simple phrases to include on their cards.

  - あけましておめでとうございます
    (Akemashite omedetou gozaimasu) — Happy New Year!

  - ことしもよろしくおねがいします
    (Kotoshi mo yoroshiku onegaishimasu) — Best wishes for this year!

  - Have students practice writing these phrases with the *"Let's Trace Japanese!"* handout.

3. MAKE YOUR OWN NENGAJO

- Use "Make Your Own JICC Nengajo" worksheet or cardstock/paper cut to 4 x 6 inch or 6 x 4 inch sizes

- Be mindful of the following specifications for competition entry:
  - Includes a sheep (your own original creation)
  - The kanji 未 (for the New Year's zodiac sign)
  - The year 2027 or Reiwa 9 (令和九年) (Japanese calendar year)

VISIT OUR WEBSITE BELOW FOR MORE CONTEST INFORMATION!

WWW.US.EMB-JAPAN.GO.JP/JICC/EVENTS/2026/NENGAJO-2027.HTML

GUIDE FOR EDUCATORS

Nengajo are special New Year's postcards sent to friends and relatives and delivered on New Year's Day. Much like holiday cards exchanged in the West, nengajo are an important part of New Year's festivities in Japan and are decorated with special greetings and seasonal illustrations.

The custom can be traced back to the tradition of New Year's visits (*nenshi-mawari*); during the first few days of the year, people call on friends, family, neighbors, and others who have shown them kindness to express their gratitude and well-wishes for the coming year. When the post office began issuing postcards during the **Meiji period (1868-1929)**, New Year's postcards became a more convenient way of sharing New Year's greetings, and nengajo swiftly spread across the country. Today, Japan Post delivers about 4 billion nengajo a year.



Although digital versions now exist, the tradition of handmade nengajo remains popular in Japan. As the year draws to an end, families may create handmade nengajo together using traditional brush painting and calligraphy, stamps, and a little imagination. Nengajo designs typically incorporate the zodiac animal for the new year, traditional Japanese motifs like Mount Fuji and the rising sun, or popular characters like Hello Kitty and Mickey Mouse.

NENGAJO MOTIFS



- *Takarabune:* A treasure ship loaded with coral, gold, rice, and jewels. The ship carries the Seven Gods of Fortune (*shichifukujin*).
- *Zodiac animals:* Japan follows a 12-year astrological cycle that originated in China. One animal represents each year in the following order: Rat, Ox, Tiger, Rabbit, Dragon, Snake, Horse, Sheep, Monkey, Rooster, Dog, and Wild Boar.



- *Fuji, hawk, eggplant:* It is good luck to see these three icons in your first dream of the new year (*hatsu-yume*).



- *Pine, plum, bamboo*: Known as the "three friends of winter," these plants symbolize longevity, resilience, and renewal.

KEYWORDS GLOSSARY



OSHOGATSU

New Year (oshogatsu) is a very special holiday in Japan, when people return to their ancestral homes and spend time with their families. One of the most important and widely celebrated Japanese holidays, preparations begin long in advance as people clean their homes from top to bottom (*osoji*), prepare traditional food to be eaten during the first three days of the new year (*osechi-ryori*), and write New Year's greeting cards (*nengajo*). Although New Year was originally celebrated according to the lunar calendar, today New Year is celebrated on January 1st, in line with the Gregorian calendar.

OSECHI-RYORI



Osechi-ryori is a traditional meal enjoyed by families during the New Year. Each of the colorful dishes included in the meal is auspicious, representing things like good health and long life. The meal is beautifully presented in stacked *bento* boxes and served with a special hot soup *(ozoni).*

OTOSHIDAMA

Families present children with a gift of money in a special envelope (*pochi-bukuro*) on New Year's Day. The envelope is often decorated with the zodiac animal of the year or an auspicious motif like the *maneki-neko* (beckoning cat).

KAGAMI-MOCHI & KADOMATSU

Special decorations are put up for good luck during New Year's celebrations. One of these decorations, *kagami-mochi* (rice cake ornament) is made from two round rice cakes stacked on top of each other with a small orange on top. The decoration is set on a wooden stand as an offering to the gods.

Kadomatsu is another important decoration made of pine branches, bamboo, and sprigs of plum blossom tied together with a straw rope. It is placed on either side of the entrance to a home to welcome long life, good fortune, and prosperity into the household.



KEYWORDS GLOSSARY

HATSU-HINODE AND HATSU-MODE

Hatsu-hinode is the first sunrise of the New Year. People gather at beautiful locations around the country, such as Mount Fuji, to watch the sunrise on January 1st. The first visit to a temple or shrine in the New Year is known as *hatsu-mode.* On both occasions, people pray for good fortune in the coming year.



HANETSUKI & FUKUWARAI

These are games traditionally enjoyed by children at New Year. *Hanetsuki,* like badminton, is played with a shuttlecock and two wooden bats which are brightly decorated.

Fukuwarai involves trying to put the eyes, nose, and mouth on a face while blindfolded, like 'pin the tail on the donkey.' These games are less popular today, but the toys are often used for decoration at New Year.



Here are some common phrases in Japanese that are written on nengajo cards. Japanese has three writing systems: *hiragana*, *katakana*, and *kanji*.

未

This is the kanji character for **Sheep** on the *eto* zodiac calendar. It can be read multiple ways: "*hitsuji / mi* ."

未 未 未

令和八年 *"Reiwa kyu nen"*

Reiwa is the current and 232nd era of the official calendar of Japan.
Reiwa 9 is equivalent to 2027, since the Reiwa era began in 2019.

令 和 九 年 | 令 和 九 年

あけましておめでとう！ *"Akemashite omedeto"*

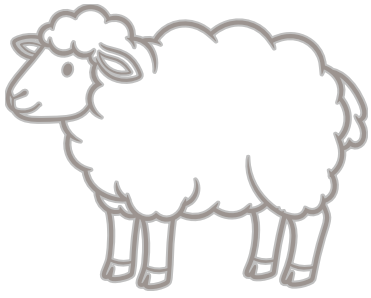
This is a shortened and casual, friendly way to say "Happy New Year!"

あ け ま し て お め で と う

ことしもよろしく *"Kotoshi mo yoroshiku"*

You can add this additional greeting to the phrase above.
It is often translated as: "Best wishes for this year!"

こ と し も よ ろ し く



MAKE YOUR OWN JICC NENGAJO!



Your 6 x 4 inch (or rotate this sheet for 4 x 6) nengajo design must have:

- A sheep (your own original creation)
- The kanji 未 (for the eto, or zodiac sign, Sheep)
- The year 2027 / Reiwa 9 (令和九年)

Designs must be original artwork. Any entries containing copyrighted, plagiarized, or AI-generated material will be disqualified without notice.

Include this info with your submission to jicc@ws.mofa.go.jp:

- Full name and age
- City, state, and country
- If under 13: Written parental or guardian consent

未