

## Explaining Japanese festivals and celebrations

Choose a festival/ celebration from below. Explain it in as much detail as you can so that a foreign person who doesn't know much about your country would understand. Your partner will just listen. When you finish, your partner will add anything that you missed, correct anything that you said that was wrong and/ or ask questions. You can prompt them to do so with questions like "Did I miss anything?" and "Is there anything else I should say?" Take turns doing the same with other things below until your teacher stops you.

### Japanese festivals and celebrations to explain

- bounenkai
- enkai
- "Golden Week"
- hanami
- hatsumode
- hina matsu
- Japanese Christmas
- Japanese New Year
- Japanese Valentine's Day/ "White Day"
- Japanese-style wedding
- kodomo-no-hi
- natsu matsu
- nomikai
- nyugaku-shiki
- o-bon
- seijin no hi
- setsubun
- shichigosan
- sotsuen-shiki
- tanabata

### Suggested questions to ask about a festival or celebration

- Are there any special superstitions/ special foods/ special clothes/...?
- Do people (still)...?
- How often...?
- In your town/ area/ region/ prefecture/ ward/ county/ state/ country/...,...?
- Is it true that...?
- What do people eat/ do/ wear/...?
- What do people use... for?
- What does... mean?
- What happens...?
- What is (a)...?
- What is special about...?
- What is... called?
- What is... made from?
- What kind of food...?
- What's the difference between... and...?
- When do people...?
- Who do people do...?
- Why do people...?

*Do the same with the things connected to festivals and celebrations below.*

**Things connected to Japanese festivals and celebrations to explain**

- amazake/ shirozaki
- bento
- bon-odori
- butsudan/ kamidana
- chirashizushi
- e-ma
- fukubukuro
- furisode
- giri choco
- hakama
- jimbei
- kakigori
- karuta
- koi nobori
- koma
- kouhaku uta gassen
- mikoshi
- mochi
- nengajo
- nihonshu
- nomihoudai
- omikuji
- o-sechi-ryori
- o-toshi-dama
- sakura
- saru-doshi
- taiko
- tako-yaki
- toshi-koshi soba
- tsunokakushi
- yaki-soba
- yukata

*Ask about anything above which you couldn't think of how to explain (well), working together as a whole class to explain that thing each time.*

*Match the mixed explanations below to Japanese festivals and celebrations or things connected to them above. Not all words above have explanations below.*

- It's a kind of "entrance ceremony" to mark the first day of school.
- It's a cherry blossom viewing party. People usually have a picnic, eating Japanese lunchboxes and drinking rice wine under the cherry blossom trees.
- It's a doll's festival. Old-fashioned dolls are displayed in the house.
- It's a Japanese lunchbox.
- It's a kind of household shrine, usually with photos of your ancestors. You leave offerings of food and light joss sticks and candles there.
- It's a kind of Japanese carp flag, streamer or kite. It is flown on Children's Day. The fish looks like it is swimming upstream, which means boys should persevere and not give up. Traditionally families have one for each boy in the family.
- It's a kind of light, summer kimono, like a dressing gown. It's popular in hotels, hot springs and summer festivals.
- It's a kind of television singing competition, where the men and women are in different teams. It's traditional New Year television.
- It's a New Year postcard. It's sent out to many people you know, similar to Christmas cards, usually with a picture of the animal of the next year of the Chinese horoscope.
- It's a portable shrine, usually carried through the streets during summer festivals.
- It's coming of age day, which marks when young people become adults. The young people dress up smartly, often in traditional clothes, and have a ceremony at the town hall/ city hall.
- It's food eaten at New Year, often because it is lucky or has a lucky name.
- It's fried noodles, often sold at street stalls during summer festivals.
- It's shaved ice with sweet toppings, usually eaten at summer festivals.
- It's the first time when people go to a temple or shrine to pray in the New Year. People sometimes burn arrows to take away bad luck.
- It's the year of the monkey, which is one of the years in the Chinese zodiac.
- It's the time when the spirits of your ancestors are supposed to come and visit, a bit like Halloween. People usually clean their ancestors' graves.
- People throw dried beans in their house to take away bad luck. Sometimes someone dresses up as a devil and people throw their beans at the devil. People are also supposed to eat one bean for each year of their lives.
- The direct translation is "sweet rice wine", but it isn't alcoholic.
- The literal translation is "forget the year party". It's held at the end of the year, often with colleagues.
- Three-year-old, five-year-old and seven-year-old children dress up, usually in traditional clothes, and go to a temple to be blessed.
- It's a kind of chewy, very filling rice cake, made from sticky rice.
- It's a Japanese drum, often a very large one.
- It's a traditional spinning top, spun with a piece of string.
- It's an envelope of money, given as a gift at New Year.
- It's a piece of paper which tells you your fortune for the coming year.

*Check as a class, then underline useful language for describing festivals and celebrations and things associated with them in the sentences above. Not every sentence has useful language to underline, and some have more than one useful thing to underline.*

### Suggested answers

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*Brainstorm other useful language for describing festivals and celebrations, compare your ideas with the following pages, then use the language above and below to describe other festivals and celebrations, e.g. those in other countries, e.g. British traditions or Chinese festivals.*

### Useful language for describing festivals and celebrations

- ancestors
- bad luck
- bamboo
- (formal) banquet
- blessing
- blossom
- to bow
- bride
- burn/ light
- buy
- candles
- candy/ sweets
- card/ postcard
- carp
- ceremony
- chewy rice cake
- Chinese horoscope/ Chinese astrology
- colleagues/ co-workers
- coming of age
- cream cake
- decorate/ decoration
- devil/ demon
- display
- dress up
- extended family
- fireworks/ sparklers
- flag
- flowers
- gift/ present
- give a speech
- good luck
- grave
- groom
- holiday/ public holiday
- household shrine
- joss sticks
- lucky charm
- lucky food
- kite
- made from/ made of
- mandarin/ satsuma/ tangerine
- mask
- myth
- New Year's Day/ New Year's Eve
- offering
- office party

- official...
- party
- party poppers
- picnic
- pine needles
- portable shrine
- pray
- raise a toast
- religious...
- replace
- (Japanese) rice wine
- romantic
- share
- shrine
- special dish
- spirits/ ghosts
- spring cleaning
- stay up
- street food
- stall/ street stall
- superstition
- (Buddhist) temple
- traditional clothes/ traditional footwear
- traditional game/ traditional sport
- traditional music
- visit
- watch
- wear
- wedding reception
- wish for

### **Phrases to describe festivals and celebrations**

#### **Useful phrases for giving translations and explaining meanings**

- The direct (= literal) translation is.../ Translated word for word it would be...
- The normal (= usual) translation for this is...
- Although there's no obvious translation, it could be explained as...
- It can be translated as...
- In Japan we say this when (we are talking about)...
- This is often explained as...
- This means (something like)...

#### **Useful phrases for comparing different countries**

- It has something in common with... but...
- It's a bit like/ something like (the British/ American/ Chinese/ Korean/...) but...
- It's similar to... in (*name of country*).
- This also exists in China/ Korea/ most Asian countries/...
- This only exists in Japan (and a couple of other countries) and is...