

Kodomo no Hi:
Children's Day in Japan

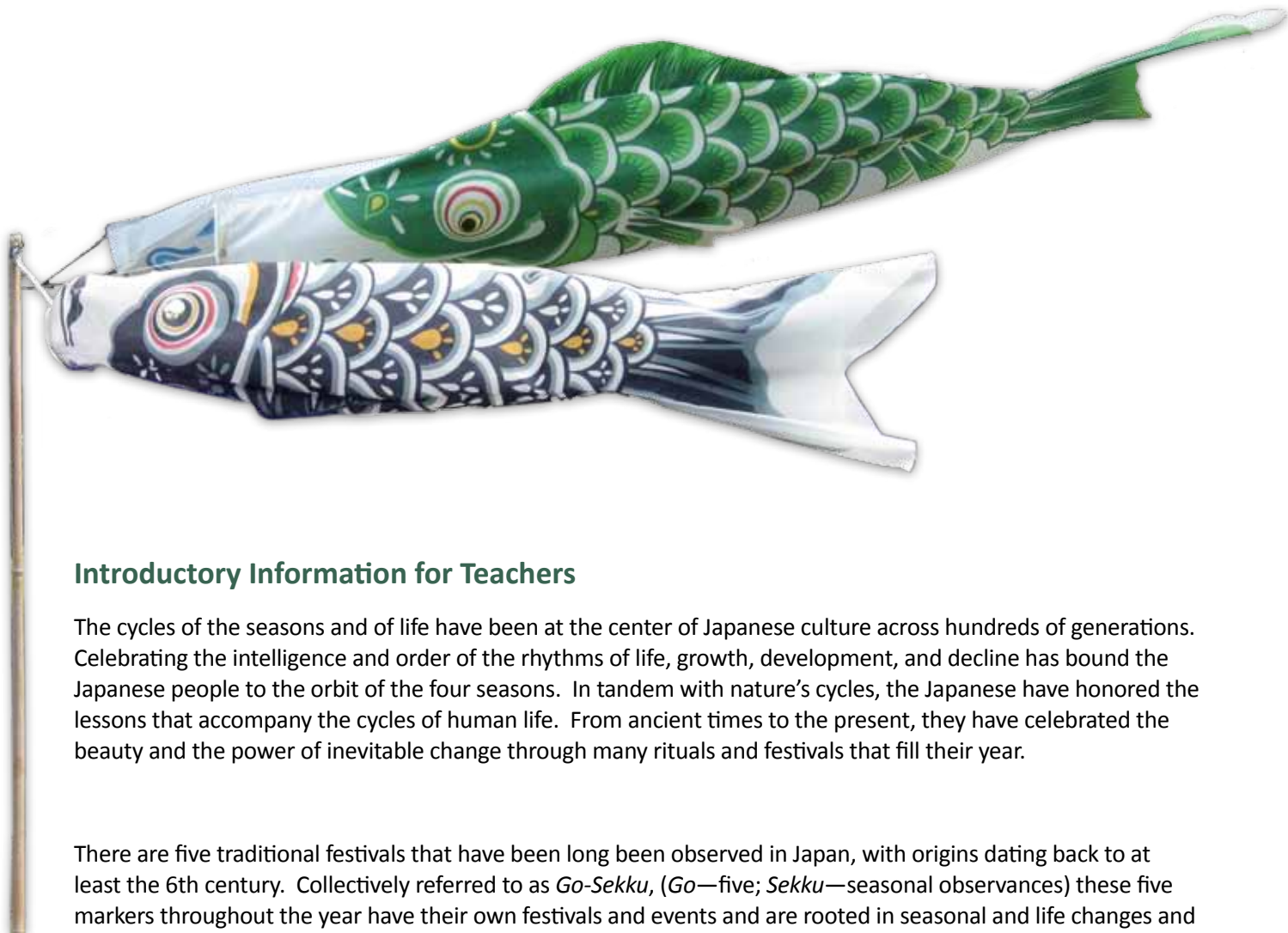
Grades: 3-8

Portland Japanese Garden
Lesson Plans for the Classroom



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Four Seasons ♦ Five Senses ♦ One Extraordinary Experience



Introductory Information for Teachers

The cycles of the seasons and of life have been at the center of Japanese culture across hundreds of generations. Celebrating the intelligence and order of the rhythms of life, growth, development, and decline has bound the Japanese people to the orbit of the four seasons. In tandem with nature's cycles, the Japanese have honored the lessons that accompany the cycles of human life. From ancient times to the present, they have celebrated the beauty and the power of inevitable change through many rituals and festivals that fill their year.

There are five traditional festivals that have been long been observed in Japan, with origins dating back to at least the 6th century. Collectively referred to as *Go-Sekku*, (*Go*—five; *Sekku*—seasonal observances) these five markers throughout the year have their own festivals and events and are rooted in seasonal and life changes and adaptations. (Further background on *Go-Sekku* is found on the Japanese Garden website: www.japanesegarden.com/events/celebrations; an expanded article on *Go-Sekku* by Diane Durston, Curator of Culture, Art, and Education is linked there.)

The focus of this lesson is an important national holiday in Japan called ***Kodomo no Hi***—Children's Day—held annually on May 5th. Students will learn a brief history of Children's Day that is rooted in the ancient Japanese festival *Tango no Sekku*. Students will learn the significance of some of the symbols of the ***Kodomo no Hi*** festival, primarily ***Koi-nobori***, the koi or carp-shaped banners that are flown in honor of children's health, happiness, and successful development. Students will create a personal ***koi-nobori*** made from recycled materials that they can proudly fly in the classroom and at home and reflect on its cultural and personal value.

KODOMO no Hi: Children's Day in Japan

Lesson Plan

Kodomo no Hi or Children's Day is a national holiday in Japan held annually on May 5th. On Children's Day, families display colorful fish-shaped banners to celebrate their children. These banners seem to 'swim' in the wind. They are called **Koi-nobori** (KOH-ee no-BOH-ree), because they are shaped like Japanese koi fish. These koi or carp-shaped banners are flown in honor of Japanese children's health, happiness, and successful development.

Materials

- Koi Templates (2-part pattern)
- Newspapers (double page or single page folded in half lengthwise)
- Recycled colorful magazines and catalogues
- Scissors • Glue sticks • Marking pens • Hole punch (optional) • String



Making **KOI-NOBORI** Banners in Honor of Children STEP-BY-STEP DIRECTIONS

- Take the 2 halves of the koi template and line them up with the 2 folds of a newspaper (On both the long folded edge and at the middle open fold)
- Trace each half of the template with a marking pen while holding it down
- Carefully cut out the fish-shape as a single piece without cutting through the lengthwise (vertical) fold. Open along the lengthwise fold to have a full fish.
- Carefully tear out colorful pages from recycled magazines. Fold each page into 8 rectangles: in half, half again, half again (3 folds=8 rectangles)
- Cut each rectangle box into an oval shape. If scissors are sharp, more than one oval can be cut at the same time. Cut each oval in half. Half-ovals make perfect Koi fish scales. A full oval can be used for an eye! (Add a smaller oval in the center of the eye—be creative!)
- Think Creatively... about colors and patterns and design for the koinoboro from mouth to tail!
- Beginning at the top of your koi, glue only the top of each scale. Add the next row of scales underneath the row above.
- Punch a hole at the top of the fish (may use tape to reinforce.)
- Tie string to the fish and proudly fly the Koi-nobori high in the classroom or at home (2 colorful Koi can be glued together for a 2-sided Koi-nobori.)

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Materials

- Recycled colorful magazines and/or catalogues for each student
- Koi Templates (2-part pattern is included with lesson) that have been printed on computer paper. For sturdier koi templates, they may also then be traced on recycled file folders, and cut out in advance of class by the teacher. A set of templates can be shared by 2-4 students.
- Newspapers (one double or single page per student)
- Class set of Scissors • Class set of Glue sticks
- Marking pens to share in groups • Hole punch (optional) • String

Vocabulary

Carp: A freshwater fish (*Cyprinus carpio*) native to Central Europe and Asia that is able to swim against currents and leap high above the water. Carp have been symbols of endurance, fortitude, strong spirit, and triumph-over-adversity in Japanese and Chinese cultures for centuries. Carp appear in legends and in many art forms in these cultures to carry the wish for success and high achievement.

Go-Sekku: Five traditional festivals of Japan that celebrate the cycle of the seasons and of human life.

Hina Matsuri (Doll Festival): One of the five *Go-Sekku* of Japan. Historically this festival was designed to honor girls annually on March 3rd. Even with the modern adaptation of *Kodomo no Hi*, special dolls are still given to girls beginning at birth and displayed in homes on this day.

Kodomo no Hi (KOH-doh-moh no HEE): Japanese Children's Day, a national holiday celebrated on May 5th in honor of all children's happiness and successful development; the day evolved from a traditional festival on the same day in honor of Japanese boys.

Koi: Brightly colored and highly prized domesticated carp of Japan where they have been selectively bred for vivid colors and patterns for at least 200 years.

Koi-nobori (KOH-ee no-BOH-ree): Japanese word for carp-shaped banners flown traditionally on *Tango no Sekku*, Boys' Day, and are now flown in honor of all children on May 5th, Children's Day. Koi-nobori carry valuable cultural meaning—'swimming' high in the wind, these carp-shaped banners honor the courage and strength in all children necessary to achieve success in life.

Tango no Sekku: The traditional *Go-Sekku* festival held annually on May 5th in honor of boys.

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Beginning the Lesson

1. Ask students what **DETERMINATION** means and requires. Write the key words on the board. (i.e. Never give up; Stick to something; Excuses don't cut it; Be your best; Have a goal; Learn from mistakes; Practice a lot; Stay focused; Patience; Learn/Get better along the way; and more).
2. Ask students to list **SYMBOLS OF DETERMINATION**. Their answers may include sports heroes; try to elicit other symbols, including people in their lives, slogans, and values learned at home.

(NOTE: The book *Hachiko Waits* may be used to further this lesson; see Bibliography.)
3. **Explain** that in Japan and China, people use the **CARP as a symbol of determination**. Find the cultural significance in the Teacher Background and share this with students. **Show slides 1- 8** in the PowerPoint included with this lesson. The YouTube video showing wild carp leaping out the river around a boat is both useful in demonstrating the strength and perseverance of these fish and fun to watch. The following link appears as a hyperlink in slide 6 of the PowerPoint listed below. <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=F37GA8I3gBQ>
4. **Introduce** the students to the project of **making their own koi-nobori**. Explain that this banner will be flown in the classroom and/or at home in honor of their determination to work hard and succeed in school, at home, and in the development of their own talents and interests.
5. **Show** the rest of the PowerPoint **slides #9-the last one #24**. (If there is time, another YouTube video of the beauty and peace of colorful domesticated koi can be shown <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=LA9YPbHGmT4&feature=related>)
6. **The step-by-step instructions** are included on a separate page. The instructions may be copied and distributed to students.
7. **Distribute the koi templates** to pairs or groups of 4 students. The templates are the top and bottom of a half-koi. Students will **trace the 2-piece pattern** aligning it along the lengthwise-folded sheet of newspaper. Alignment of both pattern pieces with a horizontal open fold is most useful.
8. **Students will cut the koi pattern** out of the newspaper. When the vertical fold is opened, the full koi is revealed.
9. **Distribute full color pages from magazines**. **Teacher will demonstrate** how to fold each page into 8 rectangles and how to cut an oval shape from each rectangle.
10. **Students will create their own koi-nobori banner** (2-3 classes of 30 min.)
11. After making their personal koi-nobori, **students will write a statement:**
 - **Explain** how koi and koi-nobori serve as symbols of determination and success in Japan.
 - **Explain** how their koi-nobori is a personal statement of their own determination and success.
 - **Explain** what Kodomo no Hi—Children's Day—celebration means in Japan.
 - **Reflect** on what a Children's Day celebration might mean in the United States (should it be a national holiday?) and what art form could serve as its symbol.

MAKING KOI-NOBORI BANNERS in HONOR OF CHILDREN

Curriculum Context

This lesson may be included in a unit on Japan, a multi-cultural study of festivals around the world, or a means to develop cultural understanding and its potential to enrich students' own lives. This lesson provides opportunity to integrate art, social studies and language arts content.

Objectives

The focus of this lesson is an important national holiday in Japan called Kodomo no Hi—Children's Day—held annually on May 5th.

- Students will learn a brief history of Children's Day that is rooted in festivals of ancient Japan.
- Students will learn the significance of some of the symbols of the Kodomo no Hi festival, primarily Koi-nobori, the carp shaped banners that are flown in honor of Japanese children's health, happiness, and successful development.
- Students will create a personal koi-nobori made from recycled materials that they can proudly fly in the classroom and at home.
- Students will reflect and write about the Japanese meaning of success as represented by Kodomo no Hi and the flying of koi-nobori and its application to their own lives.

Oregon Education Content Standards Grades 3-8

ART OR Educational Standards

AR.03.HC.01 Identify an event or condition that influenced a work of art.

AR.03.HC.05 Recognize how the arts can influence an individual's life.

AR.05.HC.01 Identify and describe the influence of events and/or conditions on works of art.

AR.05.HC.02 Identify and relate common and unique characteristics in works of art that reflect social, historical, and cultural contexts.

AR.05.HC.04 Describe how the arts serve a variety of purposes and needs in other communities and cultures.

SOCIAL STUDIES OR Educational Standards

SS.03.SA.03 Identify and compare different ways of looking at an event, issue, or problem.

SS.08.HS.05 Understand the political, economic, and cultural impact, and lasting influence of early civilizations on world development.

LANGUAGE ARTS OR Educational Standards

EL.03.RE.22/ EL.05.RE.20 Follow multiple-step written instructions (e.g., how to assemble a product)

EL.03.WR.09 Create a single paragraph with a topic sentence, simple supporting facts and details, and a concluding sentence.

EL.08.RE.08 Understand, learn, and use new vocabulary that is introduced and taught directly through informational text, literary text, and instruction across the subject areas.

KODOMO no Hi: Children's Day in Japan

KODOMO no HI– Children's Day in Japan BIBLIOGRAPHY

YouTube Videos

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=F37GA8I3gBQ>

Watch carp leaping out the river demonstrating the strength and perseverance of these fish. However, do note that these are an invasive species of wild grey Asian carp whose introduction to US rivers has upset harmony within nature.

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=LA9YPbHGmT4&feature=related>

Video of the beauty and peace of colorful domesticated koi.

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=BubbDnsarS0>

Kazo City in Saitama Prefecture is known as the leading producing district of koi-nobori. Watch a gigantic koi-nobori measuring 100 m (109 yards/328 feet), and weighing more than 350 kg (more than 770 pounds) hoisted into the wind.

http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=T6vA_I5HMec&feature=related

Hundreds of koi-nobori flying across a river with an American teacher as host.

More On Line Resources

<http://sg.theasianparent.com/articles/kodomo-no-hi>

Photos show the special foods and other rituals of traditional Boys' Day and Kodomo no hi.

<http://japanese.about.com/library/weekly/aa051400.htm>

Koi-nobori song in Japanese with pronunciation chart and audio link to listen.

YouTube videos with koi-nobori song

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=D6h4i45IYYI&feature=related>

Melody with koi-nobori swimming in air

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=GNeLgJePx2w&feature=related>

Waving koi-nobori banners with song

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=LHJRdVkkMK8&feature=related>

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=lw1N4kRqDPY&feature=related>

Song with background stationery carp painting

Print Resources

Hachiko Waits by Newman, Leslea (Author), Kodaira, Machiyo (Illustrator); Square Fish Press;

ISBN-13: 978-0312558062

Hachiko Waits, while not about Children's Day, shares some of the same celebrated values of perseverance leading to great accomplishments. It may be used to further this lesson by reading aloud to the class or recommending it to students. It is based on the true story of an Akita dog that serves as a national symbol for loyalty and hope in Japan. After his owner dies suddenly at work, the dog waits every afternoon at the train station—for 10 years (1925-35)—for his master to return. The honorific "ko" was attached to the dog's name and a memorial in his likeness was erected in the Tokyo train station.



ADDITIONAL BACKGROUND INFORMATION FOR TEACHERS

Historic Roots of *Kodomo no Hi*

One of the *Go-Sekku*, *Tango no Sekku*—Boy's Day or the Feast of Banners—was historically held on the 5th day of the 5th lunar month. Since 1948 *Kodomo no Hi* or Children's Day is a national holiday celebrating both boys and girls held annually on May 5th. *Hina Matsuri* or Girls' Day, another of the *Go-Sekku*, traditionally celebrated on the 3rd day of the 3rd lunar month remains a celebration on the 3rd of March.

Tango no Sekku was originally an event to celebrate the birth of boys, wishing for their future prosperity and strength. Although it is not known precisely when this festival started, some historians find early aspects of the festival dating to the reign of Empress Suiko (593-628 AD/CE). Empress Suiko, the 33rd emperor of Japan, was an influential ruler who is credited with spreading the early influence of Buddhism in Japan. However, many historians trace the rites associated with *Tango no Sekku* to ancient Japan, when rice-planting rituals of purification were sacred practices. In Japan, May is the beginning of the rainy season that coincides with the commencement of summer. The seasonal changes of the month of May mark the planting of the all-important staple of rice across most of Japan's geographic regions. The deities of rice and rice fields were deeply honored during this time with prayers and rituals to ensure that a good harvest would result.



Many of the customs of *Tango no Sekku* (and now of *Kodomo no Hi*), such as flying wind-filled banners, may stem from agricultural times when farmers attempted to drive away harmful insects and pests from the rice fields by frightening them with bright banners. Iris flowers and leaves were used in ritual purifications, as this plant was believed to drive away evil and sanctify uncleanness.

Samurai warriors began to gain power in 12th century Japan, and *Tango no Sekku* became influenced by the strength, bravery, and commitment to success of this warrior class. Some historians make a connection between *Tango no Sekku* rituals and the victory over invading Mongols on May 5, 1282; Samurai families erected flags and streamers in celebration of victory over the invaders. Another observance of this festival has been for high-ranking families with sons to display a miniature helmet, suits of armor, a sword, a bow and arrow, silk banners bearing the family crest, and warrior dolls.

During the Edo period (1603-1868), a time of economic and cultural development by a stable central government, *Go-Sekku* observances were designated as ceremonial days for all of Japan. By a decree of the Tokugawa shogunate, the whole nation was enjoined to adopt the seasonal observances. The *Go-Sekku*, including *Tango no Sekku*, were officially observed by all social classes of Japanese society.

KODOMO no Hi: Children's Day in Japan



Modern Observance of Kodomo no Hi

Since 1948, the May 5th festival has assumed the name and nature of *Kodomo no Hi*—Children's Day—a national holiday to honor both boys and girls. In the aftermath of World War II, the government established the new national holiday to be celebrated on May 5th. *Kodomo no Hi* or Children's Day was designed to uplift the spirits of the nation after the war. It is a day to respect all children's personalities and to celebrate the healthy growth and happiness of all children. However, many of the rituals and decorations culturally associated with *Tango no Sekku* on May 5th—particularly the proud display of fish-shaped banners—migrated to the universal celebration of all children.

It is important to note that another *Go-Sekku* festival historically developed into *Hina Matsuri*, (Doll Festival), designed to honor girls. The tradition of *Hina Matsuri* or Girls' Day dates back to the Heian Period (794-1185) when it was held on the 3rd day of the 3rd lunar month; with the adoption of the Gregorian calendar in 1873, this celebration was permanently affixed on March 3rd. Japanese families still recognize their daughters on this day with the time-honored presentation of special dolls, ritual foods, and songs.

The Significance of the Carp in Japanese and Chinese Cultures

Central to Children's Day is the flying of *koi-nobori*, colorful carp-shaped banners. Strong and spirited fish, carp are native to many areas in Central Europe and Asia. Certain species of carp weigh between 60-100 pounds and possess the ability to leap at least 10 feet high above the water. The Chinese began to breed carp as ornamental fish over a thousand years ago, introducing them to Japan in the 15th century. A domesticated variety of carp, known in Japan as Koi, have been selectively bred for their vivid color patterns for the past 200 years.

Originating in Chinese stories and legends that culturally migrated to Japan, carp have long been portrayed as strong and determined fish viewed with affection as special symbols of a fundamental family value in both China and Japan: 'Hard work, perseverance, and determination leads to a successful life.'

In China, the carp has appeared for centuries as an auspicious motif for scholars. For centuries, men from all social classes persevered, many over decades, in their pursuit of The Three Perfections—painting, poetry, and calligraphy. In addition, they studied and memorized the entire canon of classical literature, philosophy, history, government and ethics enabling them to pass the rigorous and highly esteemed series of civil service examinations. For the most ambitious this process was known as Climbing the Ladder to the Clouds, culminating in an elite position in the imperial government. Carp were a very appropriate representation of this influential group as these fish often propel themselves heavenward out of water. Legends tell of carp swimming upstream in the Yellow River, leaping swiftly over flowing rapids in their efforts to scale the Dragon Gate. According to these oft-repeated stories, the most resilient fish, those that refuse to surrender to this ultimate challenge, are transformed forever into powerful Dragon Fish.

This legend was transported to Japan in the distant past via legends, art, and literature. Consequently, in Japan carp also have assumed a cultural role as symbols of determination, triumph, and well-earned respect. In human terms this translates as a life marked by honorable achievements attained only by transforming adversity and challenges into successful advancements. Japanese children are introduced to this essential cultural value as young children. This dedication to build personal and national character by overcoming obstacles is reinforced throughout their lives.

KODOMO no Hi: Children's Day in Japan



NOTE: A *YouTube* video showing carp leaping out the river is useful in demonstrating the strength and perseverance of these fish and fun to watch. However, also note that these are an invasive species of wild grey Asian carp whose introduction to US rivers has upset harmony within nature. <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=F37GA8I3gBQ>

Koi and Koi-nobori: The Icons of Children's Day

Throughout Japan on *Kodomo no Hi*, colorful koi-nobori take to the skies as families raise a carp-shaped banner in honor of each child in the family. Actually, it is not uncommon to see these banners appear to leap in the winds beginning in late April. *Koi-nobori* typically range from a few inches in length to a few meters. In 1988, a koi-nobori measuring 100 m (109 yards) and weighing more than 350 kg (more than 770 pounds) was produced! *Koi-nobori* are made of paper, cotton, and now nylon; they are shaped like a carp and colorfully printed with stylized fish eyes, scales, and tails. Most *koi-nobori* are mass-produced today but some artisan workshops still create one-of-a-kind hand-painted and crafted fish. Kazo City in Saitama Prefecture is known as the leading producing district of *koi-nobori*; one family has been crafting banners for three generations out of a cotton/silk fabric that can last for over 30 years of flying proudly in the wind.

Often families fly the biggest *koi-nobori* in black to represent the father, the next biggest in red for the mother, ranging down in size to the smallest carp for the youngest child. It should be noted that while *Kodomo no Hi* has evolved in celebration of all children, some families tend to follow the earlier practice of flying *koi-nobori* only for male children and, inside the house, displaying the traditional Japanese helmet, *Kabuto*, which remains a symbol of a strong and healthy boy. Families often take baths sprinkled with iris leaves and roots. This is because the iris is thought to promote good health and ward off evil. Rice cakes wrapped in oak leaves and filled with sweet bean paste, called *kashiwa-mochi*, are also eaten.

In celebration of the strength, bravery, and successful future of the children of Japan, a more recent event has come to be celebrated on *Kodomo no Hi*. It is the Children's Day Olympics held at the National Kasumigaoka Stadium in Tokyo, the main arena built for the 1964 Olympic Games. After an opening ceremony that includes a torch relay, tens of thousands of children participate in various athletic races. There are even games for their parents. In addition to physical sports, artistic performances showcase the commitment Japanese children make to their own development, to their families, and to their nation's cultural heritage.

Japan's Children's Day Shares Common Values

In the year 2010, Secretary of State Hilary Clinton issued the following statement in honor of *Kodomo no Hi*:

On behalf of President Obama and the American people, it is my pleasure to offer my warmest wishes to all the boys and girls in Japan as they celebrate Children's Day on May 5. On this day, Japanese families take the time to celebrate the joys of childhood and family life. For all nations, children are our most precious treasure and a great source of happiness and pride. American and Japanese children have so much in common in their studies, sports, and entertainment. They remind us how close and entwined our societies have become and how linked our futures will be. Both the United States and Japan share a strong commitment to childhood health, safety, and education. We are committed to working together to ensure a peaceful and prosperous future for children in Japan and around the world.