Japanese Culture Kit
Bamboo Rice Paddle
Shamoji ~ しゃもじ

Rice is a staple food in Japanese cuisine. In a traditional Japanese household you’d be eating rice three meals a day.

This bamboo paddle, called a shamoji, is designed to stir and serve rice from a pot or rice cooker. Historically they’re made from bamboo, wood, or lacquer but more recently have been molded from plastic. These softer materials are used instead of metal because there’s less of a chance of cutting the rice grains or scratching the sides of the cooker.

The island of Miyagima, up north in Hokkaido, claims to be the birthplace for this kitchen utensil. Local lore tells of Seishin, a monk from the 18th century, who dreamed that the Shinto goddess Benten came to him holding her trademark biwa lute. The shape of the lute inspired the shape of the rice paddle.

After that Seishin gave the people of Miyagima a local craft that would draw travelers their island along with an important tool to help make delicious Japanese food.

Resources:
http://www.japan-guide.com/e/e2043.html (A site that describes different kinds of rice, common rice products, and dishes.)
http://www.tofugu.com/2009/01/05/crazy-delicious-japanese-rice-paddy-art/ (Amazing large scale rice paddy art)
Daruma Resolution Ornament

*Daruma* だるま

The inspiration for Japanese *Daruma* dolls, ornaments, and art goes back to the founder of Zen Buddhism, the Indian Priest called Bodhidharma. He attained enlightenment by meditating in a cave for seven years. The myths say that because he never moved his limbs during that time, they simply shriveled and fell off him.

*Daruma* dolls and ornaments like this one are made in his image, bristling with a gruff beard and eyebrows. He sits without any arms or legs, staring out with big eyes. The most common form of *Daruma* is as a paper mache doll, typically painted red and gold (they come in all colors now), illuminated with golden characters (bearing the name of temples or wishing good luck), and weighted inside so that when the toy is knocked over it always pops back upright. For this, *Darumas* have become a symbol for optimism, perseverance, and good fortune.

At new years people buy these paper dolls from temples without their eyes painted in. When they decide on a goal they paint in one eye and then after they’ve achieved it they paint in the other eye. Your classroom’s *Daruma* ornament has the traditional *Daruma* face and the name of the temple it was from written in black calligraphy. On the back, there are directions of where you can write your resolution (the column of characters on the right), your address (middle), and your name (characters farthest to the left).

**Resources**


Daruma Activity: Your students can color in their own *Darumas*, write their goals on its back, cut it out, color in an eye, and then color in the other when they fulfill their goal.
‘s Daruma
(Write a goal on its back!)

“七転び八起き”
(nana-korobi ya-oki)
“Fall down seven times, get up eight”
Clips for Hanging Up Your Futon

*Futon*~ふとん

Traditionally in Japan, beds are things you can fold out for the night, fold up in the morning, and then store away in behind a sliding door when they’re not needed (saving a lot of space!). Instead of having a high bed with springs and layers of bed pads and mattresses, in Japan you’d be sleeping on a *futon* mattress on your bedroom floor. These mattresses are thinner than the ones in the United States and measure between two and three inches thick. Luckily in a lot of houses where you sleep on futon you’re also sleeping on *tatami* mats (rice straw mats that cover most of the floor in a Japanese house), which offer more of a “give” than hard wooden floors.

The term *futon* can a little tricky since it can refer to a *futon* mattress or a *futon* comforter. So here are the names and descriptions of the parts of a Japanese bed for further clarification. The *futon* mattress is the first thing laid on the floor. On top of that goes a *shikibuton*, a mat usually stuffed with cotton, wool or synthetic fiber. Then there’s a thick comforter called a *kakebuton*. If it’s a colder night you’d pull a *mofu*, blanket, over that. For a pillow there’s a *makura*, that’s filled with beans or foam.

Futons need to be aired out in the sunlight on a regular basis to prevent mold. On sunny days you can see colorful futons hanging out windows or over balconies in urban areas of Japan. When you need to hang your futon you’d use these large clips to secure them onto railings and window ledges.
Good Luck Cat

*Maneki Neko* まねき ねこ

If you enter a store or restaurant in Japan there’s bound to be a variation of this cat figurine sitting on a counter beckoning you in. They’re called *maneki nekos* (welcoming cats). The traditional figurines depict a Calico Japanese Bobtail with orange colorings, golden eyes, sitting on their haunches with a raised paw. Some say that if the right paw is up, the cat is inviting good luck and wealth, while the left paw brings in customers. There’s also the belief that the higher the paw is raised the more luck they’ll usher in.

The first *Maneki nekos* appeared in the Edo Era, which spanned from 1603 to 1867. Much of what the cat is wearing or carrying dates to that time in Japan. The decorative bibs or belled-collars around their necks were probably imitating what pets in wealthy households would have worn. And the golden coin, called a *koban*, which the more traditional cat is holding would be worth a great deal Edo era currency.

Resource: http://en.origami-club.com/unique/cat/anime-cat/index.html (This is a video that shows the steps for folding an origami cat sitting on a cushion. It looks like a *maneki neko* but the process might be challenging.)
Jizo Figurine

(O) Jizo (-sama)* おじぞさま

Jizo (*sometimes Ojizo/Jizosama/or Ojizosama when you use honorifics) is one of Japan’s most beloved deities. You can find his stone carved statues by road-sides or in cemeteries across Japan. The specific Buddhist monk that has inspired Japanese Jizo is Ksitigarbha, guardian of children. He can be identified by his simple monks robes, holding a staff in his right hand and a light giving jewel in his left hand.

In Japan, Jizo is the guides for travelers, the giver of power to those who are weak, and guardian for those in dangerous places. Although he protects children, mothers, and travelers he’s chiefly the guardian of unborn children. Because of this in Japanese culture the monk Ksitigarbha is portrayed in a very childlike way. His statues are the same height as children and his face is very baby-like. When you pass a Jizo many are wearing knitted bibs and hats and may even have toys laid at their feet. These were given as offerings by parents to protect their children or to thank the Jizo for their help.

Resources: Here’s a link to a Youtube channel dedicated to videos of Jizo. It’s a good resource to see where they can be found in Japan and the sorts of traditions involved when people pray to these deities.

http://www.youtube.com/user/JapanJizo
Lucky Five Sided Pencils

Go kaku enpitsu~
ごかくえんぴつ

For superstitious test takers, they can go to their community’s temple and buy a set of Go kaku enpitsu “five sided pencils” for good luck on their next exam.

The number five is a very important number in Chinese and Japanese Buddhism. In Japan, five is one of the luckiest numbers while four is seen as the unluckiest. This is why having a five sided pencil is seen as giving you a boost for your chances for success.

The reason why the pencils come in different colors is because certain ones are to be used for the certain subjects the tests are taken in. They correspond with the five disciplines taught in Japanese schools; Japanese language, English, Math, Science, and Social Science.
Girl’s Day Card

Hinamatsuri no kādo~
ひなまつりのカード

This 3D card is something a young girl would receive on March 3rd, Japan’s Hinamatsuri Day. Hinamatsuri, Doll’s Festival, is a day to pray for a girl’s growth and happiness. Gearing up for the day, platforms are set up in Japanese households to display a set of ornamental dolls. These dolls are called hananingyo, “flower dolls”, and are elaborately dressed in Heian Period (794 to 1185 AD) clothing. Since the festival happens around the time of the peach blossom season, families often dedicate flowers to the dolls.

Each doll represents a member of the Imperial Court starting with the Emperor and Empress on the top tier, three ladies-in-waiting on the second, five musicians on the third, two ministers on the fourth, three samurai on the fifth, and finally an array of miniature furniture, palanquins, tools, boxes, and chests on the bottom tier. (Your card combines the ministers and the samurai in one tier) These hananingyo are usually bought for girls by their grandparents or sets of them are passed through generations of a Japanese family.

On this festival day special foods are eaten like hishi-mochi, a three layered diamond-shaped rice cake. There’d also be chirashi-zushi (sushi rice with egg and veggie toppings), sakura-mochi (bean paste-filled rice cakes with cherry leaves), hina-arare (rice cake cubes), and have a sip of shirozake (sweet white sake).

Resources: Here’s a youtube video of the traditional Hinamatsuri song–
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=GsjUDE1J_pw.
Hello Kitty
ハロー キティ

You’ve probably already met Hello Kitty, or Kitty-chan as she’s affectionately called in Japan. This cartoon icon was first designed by the Sanrio Company in 1974. Hello Kitty’s form is based on the traditional breed of Japanese Bobtail cats. That’s why her tail is so short! Strangely enough her character’s backstory says that she is was born in London, England. Kitty’s full name is Kitty White and she has a sister (Mimmy), a father, and a mother.

Why doesn’t Hello Kitty have a mouth? One reason could be that the first person who designed her, Yuko Shimizu, left it out because she had a hard time expressing Kitty’s mouth in a cute way. After that though, others have said that not having a mouth lets people project their own feelings onto her.

Hello Kitty had an early success when she first came out and even made it to America in 1976, but it wasn’t until the 90’s that she became wildly and globally popular. Sanrio started marketing Hello Kitty products to people of ALL ages and now they make over 74.2 billion yen (or $5.68 billion) a year. You can find Hello Kitty and her Sanrio friend’s faces on nearly any product in Japan such as your ANA airlines stickers and pencil case.

Resources:
An article and video about a seventh grader who sends a Hello Kitty Mimmy Doll into Space~
Carp Baseball Team Notebook
Kāpu yakyu teamu no nōto ~
カープやきゅうチームのノート

This team-spirited notebook showing the Hiroshima Carp’s stadium, fans, and mascot is a great example of Japan’s love of baseball.

Baseball was introduced to Japan in 1872, by an American professor named Horace Wilson who was living in Tokyo. He taught the game to his students as a way to get them to exercise. Baseball became a national sensation in the 1900’s when American Major League teams toured Japan, putting on exhibition games. Yakyu, as it’s called in Japanese, is the most popular sport in Japan now. There are two leagues in Japan: the Central League and the Pacific League. Plenty of professional Japanese baseball players have also played in the American Major Leagues. Such as Ichiro Suzuki, Hideki Matsui, and Daisuke Matsuzaka.

The Hiroshima baseball team, featured on this school notebook, was founded in 1950. This was partially due to how active student baseball was, but also because the people of Hiroshima wanted to build a professional team as a symbol of their revival after WWII and the atom bomb.

If you went to a game in the MAZDA Stadium in Hiroshima today, you’d be greeted by hoards of die-hard fans cheering for their team. You might even join in with plastic noise-makers; such as a red Team Carp horn or two miniature bats you’d hit together. In between calls, you could munch your American-style “hotto doggu” or your more traditional bento-box (a meal of rice, fish or meat, and cooked vegetables) that you picked up at the concession stand. And then at the game’s finish, no matter how they’ve done, you’d get to see each team face their fans to take their final bow.

Resources:
http://www.umich.edu/~wewantas/brooke/differences.html (This website goes into the cultural, economic, and rule-oriented differences between American and Japanese baseball)
These are Japanese language exercise and activity books for children between the ages of 3-5. In each of them, there’s a page of stickers that say things like “Great!” (すごいよ = sugoiyo) and “Well Done!” (ばっちり = bacchiri) along with bigger stickers meant to be used on different pages.

Japanese children learn hiragana first because it’s the basic form of Japanese writing. In addition, there are two other components to the Japanese writing system. One is katakana, a more angular set of characters mostly used for foreign words. Hiragana and katakana are both kana systems, which means that each character represents either a vowel or consonant followed by a vowel. Since each character doesn’t refer to a single consonant like Western alphabets, the kana systems are recognized as syllabary. This leaves kanji. These are more complex characters that were originally adopted from Chinese. They typically represent certain sounds or literal meanings like “horse” (馬) or “snow” (雪).

When practicing hand writing hiragana, katakana, or kanji, you must learn the proper stroke order that makes up each character. This helps keep all the characters looking uniform, although it makes learning kanji harder since you need to remember the order of as many as fifteen different strokes!

Resources:
A clear hiragana chart with all the English pronunciations:
A katakana-name generator to spell out your student’s names
http://www.languages-of-the-world.us/YourNameIn/Japanese.html
Pintrest Hiragana learning game involving popsicle sticks:
http://it.pinterest.com/pin/432556739180221097/
Doraemon Fan

Doraemon uchiwa~ドラえもんうちわ

There are two types of fans in Japan: folding fans called *ogi* and flat round fans called *uchiwa*. Traditionally, everyone in Japanese society would carry a personal fan. People wouldn’t be considered fully clothed without one! The shape of the fan is just as symbolic as it’s functional.

The small end where the spokes come together in a fan represents birth, and the many radiating blades symbolize all the paths a person can take in life. The colors of the fan have meaning too. Red and white colored fans are lucky, whereas gold in particular attracts wealth.

_Uchiwas_ are a sign of summer in Japan. In the humid weather they’re used daily to give some relief from the heat. They’re also a typical summer gift. Businesses have caught on to this and it’s common to see employees handing out _uchiwas_ in cities, with company logos and ads printed on both sides of the fans.

The creature featured on your _uchiwa_ is Doraemon, a classic character from Japanese manga and tv shows. He’s a cat robot from the 22nd century, that time travels to the present day to help a boy named Nobita, navigate his life and solve his problems.

Resources: Here’s a lesson plan by Judy Zimmerman on making three kinds of _uchiwa_ fans.

[http://www.cantonart.org/media/1/5/kimono_fan.pdf](http://www.cantonart.org/media/1/5/kimono_fan.pdf)
“Lucky Laugh”: A Face Game

_Fukuwarai_ ふくわらい

This is a fun game to play around New Years in Japan. It’s similar to pin-the-tail-on-the-donkey, because players are blindfolded and are given cut out features like ears, eyebrows, eyes, and a mouth to place correctly on a blank face. The results are pretty zany and the game usually dissolves into a lot of laughter, so much that it’s become _fukuwarai_’s namesake.

This game became popular in the Edo Period (1603 to 1867). Originally only one style of face was used, that of a round-faced and comical woman. She’s called an _okame_. The male face that’s also included in your culture box is a _hyottoko_. These days, faces of popular actors and anime characters are made into _fukuwarai_.

Resources: Here’s a complete set of instructions for how to play. [http://web-japan.org/kidsweb/virtual/fukuwarai/fukuwarai03.html](http://web-japan.org/kidsweb/virtual/fukuwarai/fukuwarai03.html). Your set comes with two noses, two mouths, four eyes, and two eyebrows.
Bamboo Helicopters
*Taketombo* 〜たけとんぼ〜

This hand held helicopter is a traditional toy in Japan. If you break up it’s name, たけ (pronounced ta-keh) means bamboo and とんぼ (pronounced to-mn-boh) means dragonfly. Making a *taketombo* a bamboo toy that flies like a dragonfly. The wood has been carved into a propeller with a shaft in the middle. To get this toy to fly, you rub the shaft between your palms and then release it upwards. If you let it go at the right time a *taketombo* can go as far as 4-5 feet ahead of you and 2-3 feet above you. Be careful when you test these out since they can fly pretty fast and at first their flight is little unpredictable.

All in all, they are easy to make, cheap to buy, and relatively easy to use. Most Japanese school kids have made *taketombos* at least once in an elementary school arts and crafts class. Ready-made parts can be bought in the kid’s section of 100 yen stores. These days a lot of these “bamboo dragonflies” are made from plastic, but they fly just as well and are more durable.

**Resource:** Here’s a video on how you can make and fly a *taketombo*.
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=vw_zFZ6FvU8
Cup and Ball Game
Kendama～けんだま

*Kendama* is a wooden toy made up of a handle (*ken*) and a ball (*dama*) connected by a string. There’s a cross-section on the handle with two different size cups on either end. There’s also a third, medium-sized cup on the bottom. The object of the game is to spike the ball on the stick point (*kensaki*) or to balance them in one of the cups. In professional *kendama* competitions there are hundreds of different *kendama* tricks with names like U.F.O, Whirl Wind, Frying Pan, and Zero Gravity.

There have been many guesses as to the origins of this toy. Some say it came from China, Greece, or from the indigenous Japanese people called the Ainu, yet the most likely scenario is that the similar French stick, string, and ball game called the *bilboquet* made its way to Japan via the Silk Road sometime during the Edo Era (1603 to 1867).

It really started catching on with Japanese kids in Meiji times and then after WWII *kendama* started being sold in candy stores. Kids in Japan usually sing songs as they play *kendama*, much like we do while jumping rope, to get a rhythm going. In 1975 the Japanese Kendama Association was founded and *Kendama* was made into a sport. Since then there have been two sides to *kendama* playing in Japan.

Professionally or for fun, playing with *kendama* is fun and portable game that boosts your hand-eye coordination while challenging your creativity.

**Resources:** Competitive *Kendama* has spread to the U.S. also. Here’s their website: [http://kendamausa.com/about/](http://kendamausa.com/about/). Under videos they have some great footage of tricks.
Shinto Talismans

*Ofuda* ~ おふだ

An *Ofuda* is a Shinto talisman of protection that’s meant to be attached to a door, pillar, or ceiling in a Japanese house. For a year an *ofuda* wards away accidents and house fires. After the year is up and its powers have faded, people return the talisman to the Shinto shrine and buy another for the New Year.

The *ofuda* on the right was issued by Kinkakugi and the other by Ginkakuji, two of the most famous Shinto shrines in Kyoto and arguably in all of Japan. Along with being *ofuda*, they doubled as admission tickets for visiting the shrines.

The religious idea behind *ofuda* is that by inscribing the name of the *kami* (a Shinto deity) and the name of the shrine on paper, the talisman becomes a manifestation of the *kami*. This piece of the *kami* can then be brought to a person’s household and will provide general protection for their home and family.

There’s also a more portable form of the *ofuda*, called *omamori*. The slip of paper with the name of the temple and *kami* in an *omamori* is enclosed in a little decorated cloth bag that’s tied up with a chord. These can be hung in peoples’ cars or attached onto things so that they can have protection wherever they go. However, one must never open an *omamori* or else its power will dissipate. Whereas an *ofuda* protects and benefits a whole family, *omamori* support an individual’s needs.

Resources: Here’s some more information on Shinto shrines at [http://factsanddetails.com/japan/cat16/sub182/item590.html](http://factsanddetails.com/japan/cat16/sub182/item590.html) and another site for protocol at [https://www.jnto.go.jp/eng/indepth/exotic/lifestyle/see.html](https://www.jnto.go.jp/eng/indepth/exotic/lifestyle/see.html).
Noshibukuro and Gift Giving Culture in Japan

Gift giving is a HUGE part of Japanese culture! Japanese people exchange gifts when they visit each other and give gifts on special occasions to celebrate a their friends and family members’ transitions in life. However, gifts of money in particular can’t be handed over just like that. They’re presented in carefully picked, specifically decorated envelopes called noshibukuro. These are sold in stationary stores where clerks are more than willing to help people choose the right envelope for the right event.

Red and white colors are commonly used for happy or auspicious occasions whereas black and white colors are used for condolence and mourning gifts. Even the knots on the envelopes differ occasion to occasion! The shapes and styles of the envelopes are important because they give a deeper meaning to the gift. And it’s a thoughtful gesture if the giver has taken the time to pick out the perfect noshibukuro for the receiver.

Protocol: When money is given the bills must be crisp and clean. When you present your gift you ALWAYS have to down play it. It’s customary and polite to say that you aren’t giving very much, even if you are.

Here are the different noshibukuro that are in your Japanese Culture Kit. Along with the picture there will be a quick blurb about the particular envelope’s purpose.
For Kids!

These envelopes are celebrating a child’s enrollment into elementary school. (They include little notebooks that are tucked into their bags.)

Later, these would celebrate enrollment into middle school. (Their bags each hold an English textbook.)

This is congratulating student for entering any school level.

These are more general kids’ envelopes for doing well at sports or getting good marks. Hallmark even makes noshibukuro!
More Noshibukuro

These are for weddings.

This is given by guests at a funeral to the family of the deceased.

These are for New Year’s money and are usually given by family members to kids.

These Valentines Day cards wouldn’t carry any money, but they would be given as gifts with nice messages.
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