

KODOMO NO HI!

CHILDREN'S DAY

Activities for Kids

By Michelle Hirano

Children's Day is a special, annual celebration in Japan held on May 5th. Learn more about the history of Children's Day and take part in fun crafts you can use to get festive with your friends and family.

HISTORY

This section of the document is meant for the educator.

Kodomo no Hi (or Children's Day) is observed every year on May 5th in Japan. The entire nation participates in celebrating children. Specifically, the nation celebrates children's health, happiness, and aspirations. Kodomo no Hi was formerly known as Boys Day (or Tango no Sekku), but was changed to celebrate the health and growth of both girls and boys in 1948.

During Kodomo no Hi, Koinobori, or carp flags, are displayed outside. The koinobori outside look like they're swimming in the wind, and are seen as a way to invite good fortune to the children inside. Koi, or carp, are symbols of perseverance, as they swim upstream through powerful waterfalls and currents. These kachikans, or values, symbolized in the koinobori are shared with children to encourage them to become strong and tenacious.

The koinobori banners traditionally have been set up vertically on a pole. The top of the post will have a colorful streamer - they may also have a family's crest. Then, the biggest fish (usually a black fish) is displayed - this is the father of a family. The second fish is usually red and is the mother of the family. The smaller fishes (blue, orange, green, etc.) are the children. Recently, some festivals have been displaying these koinobori horizontally. This makes it appear like there are many fish "swimming" all around the festival.

Another Kodomo no Hi tradition is to display kabuto, or samurai helmets. Children also make newspaper and cloth helmets as a fun craft. Households may also display gogatsu-ningyo (May 5th dolls), or samurai dolls and their weaponry. The samurai dolls often represent folktale characters like Momotaro.

Like other Japanese festivals, there are seasonal foods associated with Kodomo no Hi. During this time, children eat kashiwa mochi, which is wrapped in oak leaves.

In the various curriculums I've written about Kodomo no Hi in my time as an educator, I've placed an emphasis on celebrating health and happiness. Additionally, I've focused on the values of perseverance and hard work to encourage learners to keep striving for their best.

My hope is for this to create a sense of community within the classroom and in your home. This way, learners can be encouraged to care about the health and prosperity of their friends, peers, and neighbors. You may choose to use these curriculums as a way for your learners to reflect on themselves and their greater community.



THE KOI STORY

This is the folktale of the koi who turns into a dragon.
The story is adapted from a Chinese folktale.

Long ago, when giant dragons flew high up in the sky, there was a great river. This river was long and winding, and led to a monstrous waterfall. At the top of the waterfall was the Dragon's Gate. Small koi fish were given the opportunity, once a year, to swim this treacherous river and reach the Dragon's Gate. If they could swim the winding, rough currents and jump up the gigantic waterfall, they, too, could become powerful dragons.

A small school of koi began their journey at the foot of the river. Almost immediately they felt the strength of the river's current. Already some koi swam the other way, as they felt the journey was impossible.

The remaining fish carried on, struggling through the river's icy waters. Throughout this journey, more fish left the group, until finally, there was only one small koi remaining. When this koi reached the bottom of the waterfall, the gods above laughed. There was no way this small koi could ever overcome the massive waterfall.

But the koi gathered all the courage in his heart, and swam forward.

The gods tried to make the waterfall even more perilous. They added large, rough boulders to block the koi's path. They made the water so cold, small chunks of ice formed in the river. But still, the koi swam forward.

It took the koi many, many attempts. But each time, the koi took a deep breath, and swam forward.

Finally, the koi reached the final hurdle, one giant jump to reach the Dragon's gate. The koi did not listen to those who laughed or said it was impossible. Instead, the koi did what he had always done, and he swam forward.

The koi made one large leap and swam right past the Dragon's gate.

The gods gasped and cheered for this small koi. The koi had gained their respect, and transformed into a dragon. Because the koi persevered, and learned from the journey he went through, he became the mightiest and wisest dragon.

This is why we fly koinobori in the sky. This story reminds us that even though we may be small, we can achieve greatness.

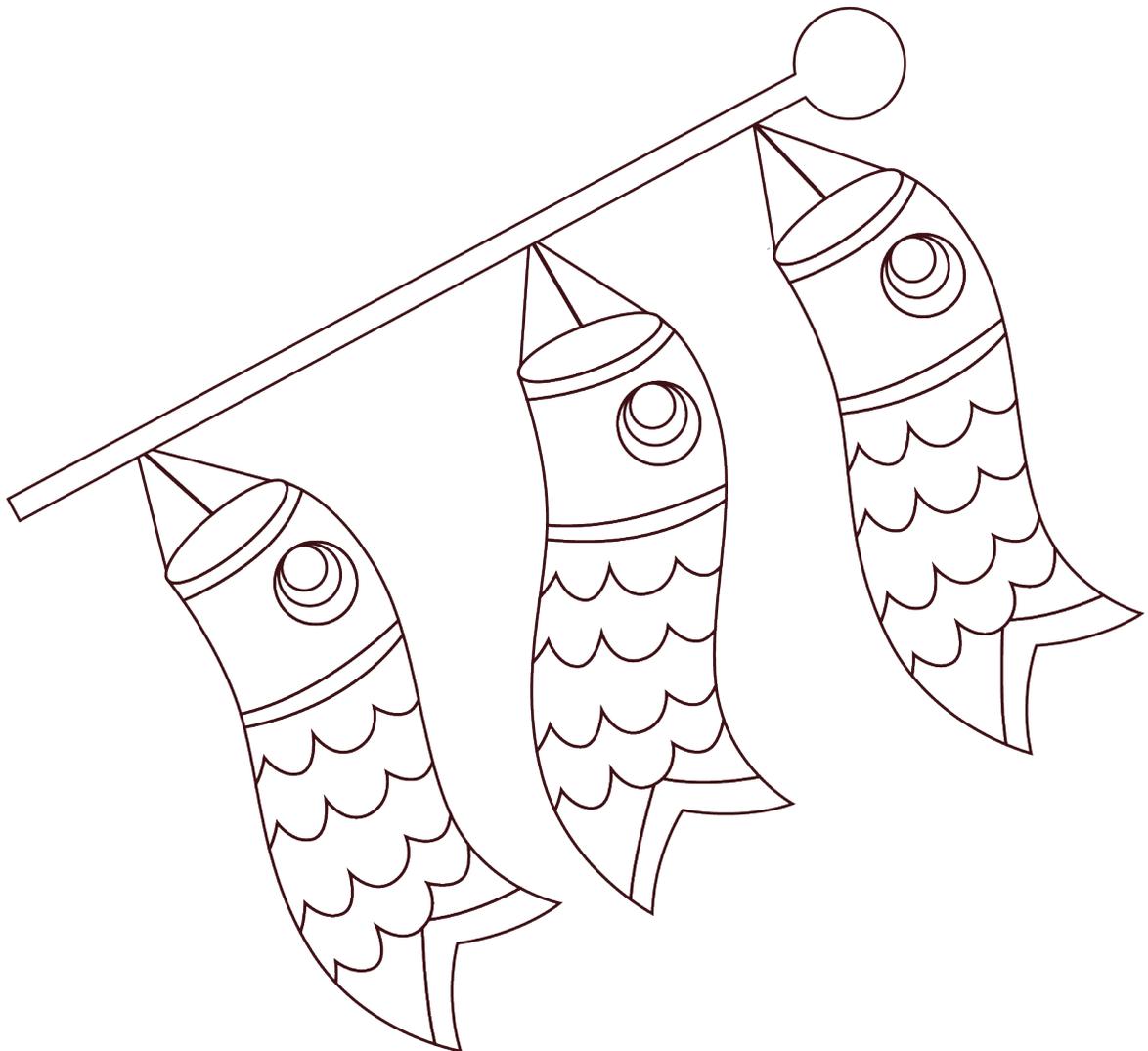
ACTIVITY I

COLOR YOUR KOI

DIRECTIONS

It's your turn to imagine what your koinobori would look like. Traditionally, the biggest fish is black, the second fish is red, and the other fish are colors like orange, blue, or green. What color will you paint your fish?

Extra challenge: Do you have a family crest or symbol? If so, make sure to add it. If you don't know it or don't have one, create your own!

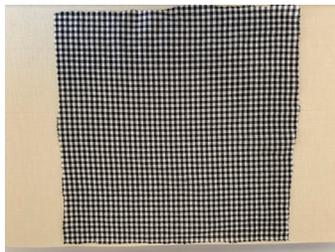


ACTIVITY II

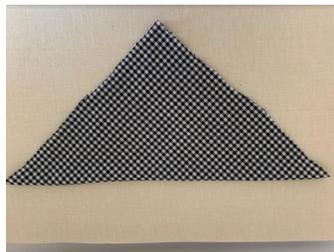
KABUTO MAKING

DIRECTIONS

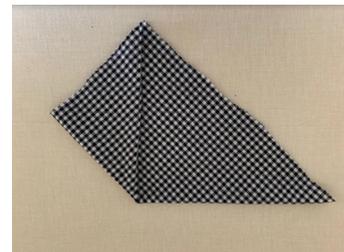
Let's create a kabuto, or samurai helmet. Like the small warriors in Japanese folktales, your armor is important. We'll show you how to make one out of newspaper and one out of cloth. You can attach it to your face mask and wear it in public!



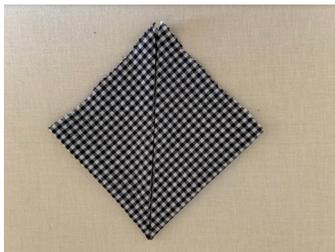
Cut fabric into a square (this craft is pretty forgiving, so if it's slightly uneven that's okay!)



Fold the fabric into a triangle. You should fold the fabric down (upside down triangle).



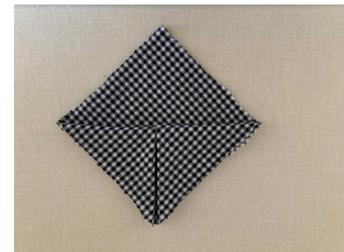
Fold the left corner up. The tips should meet.



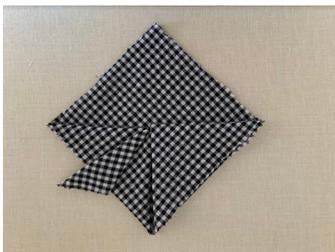
Fold the right side up. You should have a diamond shape.



Fold the left flap up to make a half triangle.



Fold the left flap up to make a half triangle.



Fold the right side up. You should have a diamond shape.



Pin down this flap.



Fold the right side, too, and pin it down.

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ACTIVITY II - CONTINUED



Take the bottom portion of the hat (downward triangle). Take the top flap, and fold it up. It should create a small triangle.



Fold the left over rectangular area up.



Pin this down.



Fold the left over flap into the hat. You can use a safety pin to hold the flaps in place, or you can sew it together.



Congratulations! As mentioned above, you can adapt this to different fabrics and materials (news paper, origami, etc.)



You can use this fabric hat as a hat, or you can adapt it to make decorations to celebrate Kodomo no Hi!



You can add different fabric or paper to vamp up your helmets.



These also make great gift labels, or place settings!

ACTIVITY III

KOINOBORI BENTO DIY

DIRECTIONS

Using materials you find at home, or using your Azay bento box, you can make your own koinobori! Try to repurpose things you have at home. To make this fun, do a video call with your friends and compare the different ways you can make a koinobori!

1. Get your fish base - we use our Azay bento top. Wash the top, and dry it well. Using the below stencil, cut out your fish. If you have multiple bentos, you can use each lid as fish. Otherwise, you can cut this shape below out, or use a toilet paper roll to make your koi.
2. With guardian supervision, punch out a hole on your koi. Try to make it in the mouth area.
3. You can color your koi directly, or you can cut small circles to make scales for your koi. You can choose to make each scale the same color, or you can make each scale a different color.
4. Using string, tie your koi to a small stick. If you have your Azay bento, reuse your ohashi (or chopsticks) as the pole. You can reuse any chopstick around your house, or popsicle stick. You can also reuse a dried out pen.
5. Tie up all your koi to your pole.
6. Display this on your window. You can also make some for your friends!

CREATIVE NOTES

- Cut long streamers from tissue paper or construction paper and add them to the tale of your koi
- You can make eyes for your koi
- You can add stickers or anything fun to your koi

ACTIVITY III - CUTOUT

