

Setsubun 鬼は外、福は内 Out with bad luck, in with good.

The coming of spring has always been looked forward to, particularly in countries such as Japan where winters can be tough. Its arrival means winter's grip on the land is a memory for another year.

In Japan, one way to observe this transition is the custom of Setsubun. Setsubun actually means 'seasonal division', but today the term is only used to mark the end of the period known as *daikan* or 'big cold'. This is the eve of Risshun, the 'first day of spring' and used to be New Year's Eve under the old Japanese calendar. Today Setsubun is observed on 3 or 4 February.

The Setsubun ceremony involves people scattering beans, a practice called *mamemaki*, to get rid of evil or bad luck.

Mamemaki is done inside and outside a home or building. While scattering the beans, normally soybeans, you say *Oni wa soto, fuku wa uchi*, literally 'Out



with the devils (*oni* 鬼), in with good fortune (*fuku* 福)'.

In a family, one person is normally made to wear a mask and becomes the *oni*, and the others, especially the children, have fun throwing beans at the *oni* to drive evil out. This element of fun probably explains why the custom has endured.

Crowds of people also gather at temples or shrines where celebrities are asked to perform *mamemaki*.

Another custom at Setsubun is to eat the same number of beans as your age to ensure good health for the year.

Educational Resources

Teacher's Kits

Teacher's kits containing fact sheets, magazines and booklets on various aspects of Japan, its people and culture, and **posters and maps** for the classroom may be obtained from the Consulate upon written request.

DVDs may be borrowed by schools with no cost to the school apart from the cost of return postage. The catalogue can be emailed to teachers upon request.

A small range of **cultural items** is also available for borrowing.

Web Japan

This is an excellent site to look for reliable information and new content is added regularly.

Kids Web: content specifically designed with younger students in mind. From the top page you can navigate through 'Play', 'Learn' and 'Try' sections. This last section allows students to explore school life and food culture.

Trends in Japan: interesting reading for older students and members of the general public.

Japan Fact Sheets: information about Japan's geography, government, economy, society, culture and sports.

<http://web-japan.org>

School Visit Program

The Information Section of the Consulate-General of Japan, Sydney, conducts a school visit program open to both primary and secondary schools.

While it is not always feasible to meet such requests, we do encourage schools in regional areas to approach us too.

For more details and how to apply see:

www.sydney.au.emb-japan.go.jp/english/education/school_visit.htm

12th World Children's Haiku Contest

Held every two years, the World Children's Haiku Contest is conducted by the JAL Foundation. This year's theme is "Festivals".

Entries are invited from school children around the world. Applicants must be primary or middle school students aged 15 or under. One entry per applicant is allowed. The haiku must be accompanied by a hand-drawn/hand-crafted artwork on the same piece of paper (A4 or larger) - any form is acceptable, excluding photographs or digital images. See website for details and examples from previous contests.

Winning and selected entries will be published in a book.

Closing date: 31 March 2012

For more information see:

www.jal-foundation.or.jp/new/haiku/contest/12th.html

The contest is sponsored by JAL Foundation and co-sponsor JAL Airlines.

It is supported by the Japan Foundation, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Japan, the Agency for Cultural Affairs in Japan and the Japan Committee for UNICEF.

Did you know that Australia has its own haiku association?

The Australian Haiku Society, HaikuOz, was formed in December 2000. Their aim is to promote haiku in Australia and Australian haiku around the world.

Details can be found at: www.haikuoz.org.