

The 2nd Australia-Japan Relations Essay Contest for NSW and the NT

お月さんのウサギさん The rabbit in the moon

Thank you to all those high school students and their teachers in New South Wales and the Northern Territory who entered the 2015 contest.

Entries received

The consulate was delighted to receive substantially more essays than in the inaugural contest held last year.

In Junior Division, there were 400 entries, and in Senior Division, there were 184, for a total of 584 entries.

Even more pleasing was that entries were received from 39 schools, up from 26 schools in the previous year.

The judging process is in its final stages at the time of writing.

Results

Winners will be announced on the consulate website

www.sydney.au.emb-japan.go.jp by the middle of October. Students and schools will also be informed directly.

An awards ceremony for winners of highly commended, outstanding and first-place essays in each division will be held in early December at the official residence of the Consul-General of Japan in Sydney.

Letters to the Editor

The editor of *Japan Reports* is waiting keenly for any comments and suggestions you may have.

We welcome your experiences of Japan or Japanese culture in Australia.

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It's a clear night with a beautiful full moon. Around the world people look up in admiration. 'There's the man in the moon.' Well, that might be what is said in Australia, but if you are in Japan, you'll be looking at a rabbit. And not just any old rabbit, this rabbit will be pounding rice.

Autumn in Japan is a time of clear skies and at this time of year the moon is considered particularly beautiful. The full mid-autumn moon has long been admired, and *o-tsukimi*, moon viewing, is a traditional festival to celebrate the harvest moon.

While *o-tsukimi* is perhaps not as commonly observed as it once was, the traditional imagery is still well known. Moon-viewing is exactly what the rabbits are doing in this image, one of a series of twelve ornaments designed to illustrate aspects of traditional Japan month by month.

The rabbits are enjoying the full moon with *dango* rice dumplings piled up in a pyramid as an offering to the moon. These are obviously particularly lucky rabbits, as cranes, an auspicious symbol of long life, fly past the moon. The *susuki* rushes are another symbol of this time of year; these tall pampas grasses are seen throughout rural Japan in autumn.

A Cute Tail Tale: There is no need to wait for a clear night with a full moon to get your Japanese bunny fix. Located off the Hiroshima coast in the Inland Sea is a small island called Ōkunoshima (大久野島), now better known as Usagijima, roughly translated as Bunny Island. In a country where cute/kawaii has great currency, recently Ōkunoshima/Usagijima has become popular with tourists because it is home to hundreds of 'wild' but friendly rabbits. They will happily approach visitors who offer food, even at the ferry terminal as people alight after the 10-minute trip from the mainland (Takehara City).

Part of the charm of this ornament is that the moon viewers themselves are rabbits, because of course, there are rabbits in the moon. When the moon is full in the sky, the shadows on the surface are said to depict a rabbit bending over a mortar and pestle as it

pounds *mochi* rice into paste.

In autumn you will find traditional Japanese sweet shops selling delicacies shaped like rabbits. Some are the simplest designs – oval-shaped white rice

cakes with two brushstroke-like marks lightly burnt on to the surface to represent the rabbit's ears.

There are several folktales featuring rabbits in Japan, one of which describes the selfless nature of the rabbit. As such, the rabbit is normally considered to be a good animal. Some samurai even had rabbit ears on their helmets. Why? Perhaps it was to suggest an older version of the rabbit-in-the-moon story in which the rabbit is pounding a medicine for immortality.

