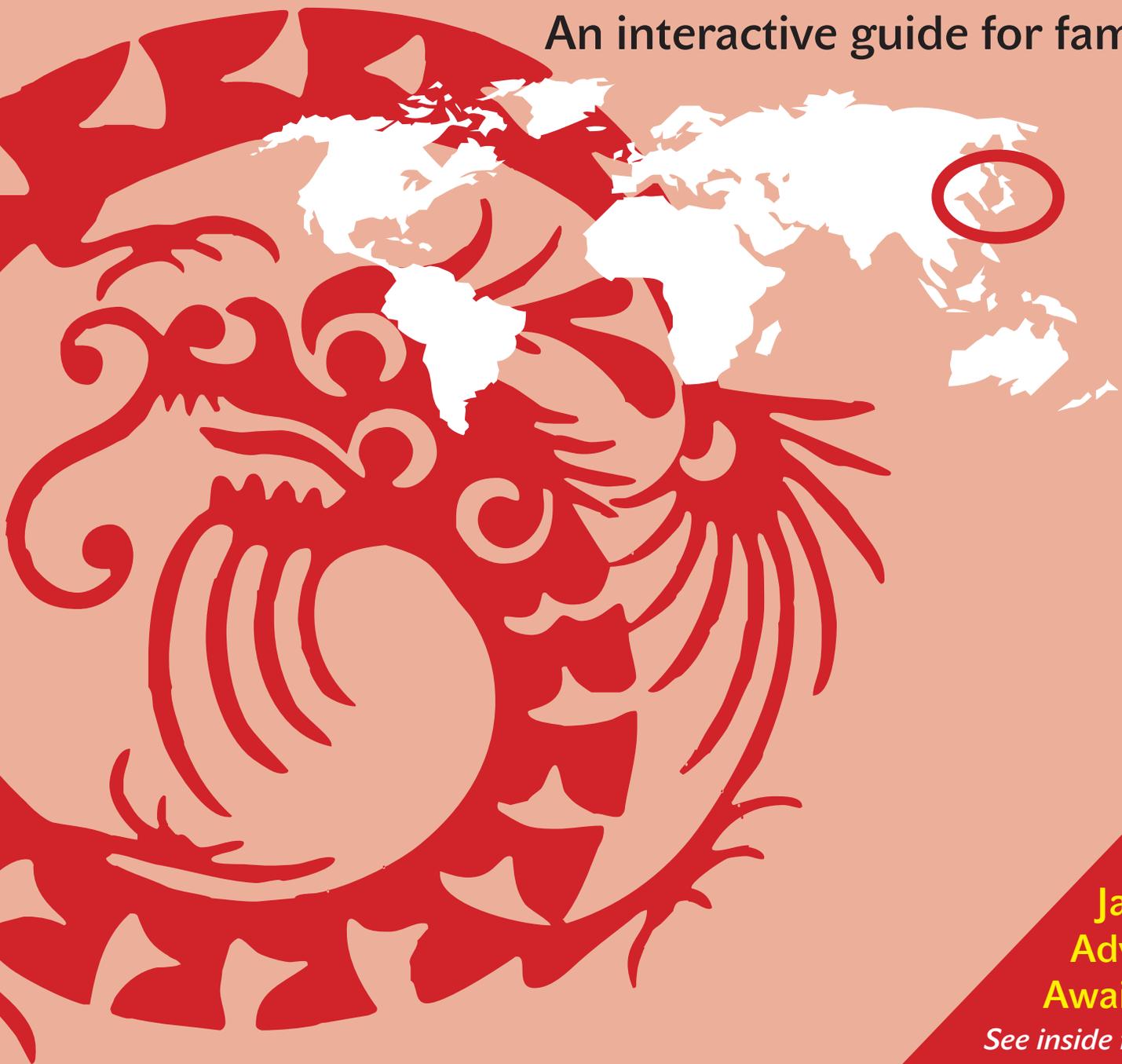


Artful Adventures

# JAPAN

An interactive guide for families



Your  
Japanese  
Adventure  
Awaits You!

*See inside for details*



# JAPAN

Japan is a country located on the other side of the world from the United States. It is a group of islands, called an archipelago. Japan is a very old country and the Japanese people have been making beautiful artwork for thousands of years. Today we are going to look at ancient objects from Japan as well as more recent works of Japanese art.

Go down the stairs to the lower level of the Museum. At the bottom of the steps, turn left and walk through the Chinese gallery to the Japanese gallery.

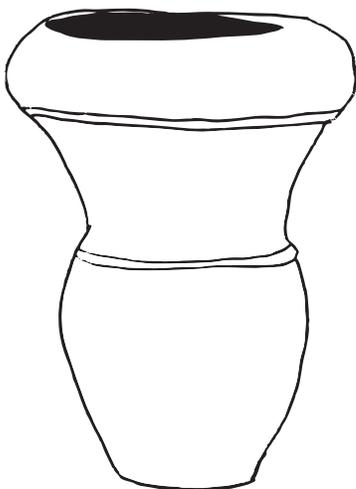


Japanese, Middle to Late Jōmon period, ca. 3500–ca. 1000 B.C.: jar. Earthenware, h. 26.0 cm. Museum purchase, Fowler McCormick, Class of 1921, Fund (2002-297). Photo: Bruce M. White.

Find a clay pot with swirling patterns on it (see picture to the left). This pot was made between 2,500 and 1,000 B.C., during the Late Jōmon period—it is between 3,000 and 4,500 years old! The people who lived in Japan at this time were hunter-gatherers, which means that they hunted wild animals and gathered roots and plants for food. The Jōmon people started forming small communities, and began to make objects that were both beautiful and useful—like this pot which is decorated with an interesting pattern and was used for storage. Take a close look at the designs on this pot.

### Can you think of some words to describe these designs?

1. ....
2. ....
3. ....



The word Jōmon, used to name this time period, means “cord-impressed” or “cord-patterned.” Can you guess why this word is used to describe this time period? (**Hint:** Look at the designs on the pot.)

The Jōmon period is called “cord-impressed” because the people who lived during this era pressed cords and sticks into wet clay to make designs and patterns on their ceramics. In the later Jōmon period (when this pot was made), people also used sharp tools to cut decorative patterns into the clay.

**Create your own swirling pattern with lines and spirals on the drawing of the pot to the left.** You can copy the pattern of the Japanese pot we’ve been looking at, or you can design a pattern of your own.



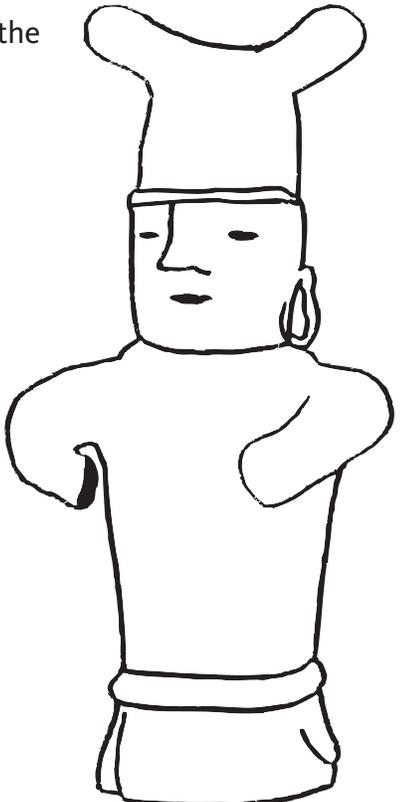
Japanese, Kofun period, ca. 6th century: haniwa tomb figure. Earthenware with traces of pigment, h. 50.0 cm. Museum purchase with funds given by Duane E. Wilder, Class of 1951 (y1992-2). Photo: Bruce M. White.

Now turn to your right and look for the clay figure wearing a necklace and an earring (see picture to the left). This is a *haniwa* tomb figure from the Kofun era (about the sixth century)— it is close to 1,500 years old! The word *kofun* means burial mound and describes the large, triangle-shaped hills of dirt where these ancient people buried their rulers when they died. The ancient Japanese people placed *haniwa*, or clay figures, on top of or surrounding these grave mounds.

Sometimes *haniwa* were shaped like dogs, horses, and other animals. Often these figures were made using a cylinder shape to represent the torso of a human figure, like we see here. These figures were likely used as part of a funerary ritual—perhaps acting as a home for the spirit of the person buried in the mound or as a marker of the mound’s boundaries.

If you look closely at the *haniwa* tomb figure, you can see that it is wearing earrings, a necklace, and a belt. Why do you think the person who made this clay figure gave it so many accessories?

If you were going to make a *haniwa*, which important details would you want to include? Draw them on the figure to the right.



Japanese, Heian period, 794–1185: youthful male Shinto deity, 11th–12th century. Wood, h. 95 cm. Museum purchase, Fowler McCormick, Class of 1921, Fund (2006-84). Photo: Bruce M. White.



Now find this sculpture of a male Shinto deity nearby (see picture to the left).

Shinto can be described as the religion of Japan. It is a certain way of thinking about the world and about other people, and is very important to Japanese culture. Some people in Japan still practice Shinto today. Shinto deities, or spirits, can have the form of a human, or an animal, or features from nature like mountains or rivers.



What form does the deity on the previous page have? (Hint: Is it an animal, a human, or something from nature?) \_\_\_\_\_

What material did the artist use to make this sculpture? \_\_\_\_\_

This sculpture is made of wood. It was probably made to stand in a wooden Shinto temple, where Shinto people practice their religion and hold festivals. A long time ago, this figure was probably painted and we can still see some of the pigment that gave his hair its dark color. When you get home, use the outline to the left to give this Shinto deity some color once again! People who practice Shinto feel very close to nature so you might want to sit outside or draw some patterns from nature, too.



Japanese, Kamakura period, 1185–1333: *Shotoku at Two Years*, ca. late 13th century. Wood, crystal, and pigments, h. 50.0 cm., w. 20.0 cm., d. 18.5 cm. Museum purchase, Fowler McCormick, Class of 1921, Fund (y1984-76). Photo: Bruce M. White.

Now move to the last freestanding sculpture in this area, the infant Shotoku Taishi (see picture to the right). Japan has had an emperor, which is a ruler like a king, since the Kofun period, when the *haniwa* tomb figure was made. Today, the emperor is an important symbol of the country but does not rule like he did when this sculpture was made. The emperor's son is called a prince. Shotoku Taishi was a Japanese prince who lived about 800 years ago. Here we see him when he was only two years old.

Shotoku Taishi has been celebrated in Japan for hundreds of years because he became an important statesman and founded several Buddhist temples. He was one of the first great patrons of Buddhism in Japan. Buddhism is a religion that originated in India and was brought to Japan from the neighboring countries of China and Korea. People who practice Buddhism are called Buddhists.

Compare Prince Shotoku Taishi to the male deity that we looked at a moment ago. Which sculpture do you think is older? Which one do you think was made more recently?

Why? \_\_\_\_\_





As Japanese culture developed, the sculptures made by Japanese artists became more detailed. From the four pieces we've looked at so far, we can see that Japanese sculptors were able to copy the human form more precisely as time went on.

Below are images of the four works we looked at today. Arrange them from the oldest to the most recent by looking at how many details each has. Put a number 1 next to the oldest sculpture and a number 4 next to the most recent one.



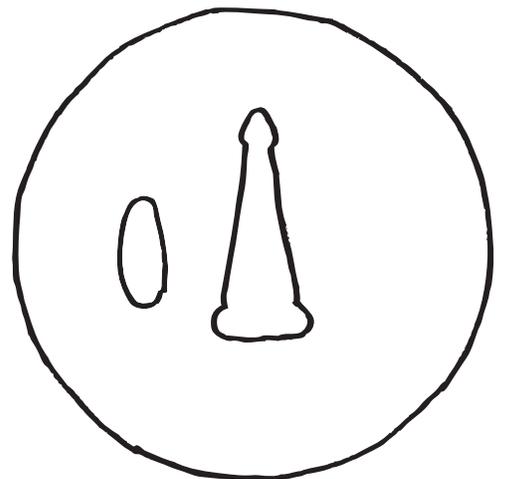
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\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

Now let's take a look at the objects in the case on the wall on your right. On the left side of the case are several round metal objects. These are not belt buckles! They are *tsuba*, or Japanese sword guards. They are used to stop warriors' hands from slipping onto the blade of the sword (ouch!) They also help to balance the heavy sword. These *tsuba* are elaborately decorated. If you were making a *tsuba*, what designs or images would you put on it? To the right is a *tsuba* for you to decorate. You can recreate one of your favorite examples from the case, or use one of your own designs.





These *tsuba* are decorated with images of flowers, birds, and other objects from nature. Are these decorations what you would expect to find on a warrior's armor? They're not very war-like, are they? Remember, nature is very important in Japanese culture. Many Japanese people want to live close to nature and in harmony with it. They make beautiful gardens in their homes so that they can always be surrounded by nature.

Can you name all of the animals you see on these *tsuba*? (Hint: dragons count as animals!) \_\_\_\_\_

Now look at the right side of the case. These little figures are called *netsuke*. They are similar to key chains, and were used by men wearing traditional Japanese clothing. Women traditionally were able to carry things in the extra-long sleeves of their *kimonos*, but men had to carry their belongings in *sagemono*, or containers. They would attach the containers to their belts with the *netsuke*, using them like buttons or toggles to hold the containers in place. *Netsuke* buttons depict many different subjects. See if you can identify the scenes listed below.

1. A father and son talking \_\_\_\_\_
2. Butai (a jolly-looking round man) \_\_\_\_\_
3. A teacher talking to his student \_\_\_\_\_
4. Two warriors \_\_\_\_\_
5. A warrior on a horse \_\_\_\_\_
6. Three men laughing and drinking \_\_\_\_\_

The final stop on our adventure today is the case filled with beautiful, delicate, and colorful vases and boxes at the back of the gallery to your right. These wonderful works of art are not as old as some of the sculptures that we looked at earlier. These vases were made around the same time that Monet and the other Impressionists (you can see their work upstairs!) were painting in France in the late 1800s. During this time, Japan traded with Western countries like France, Italy, and the U.S. The Japanese government paid artists from other countries to teach new techniques and styles to Japanese students. They were also interested in art from China. The objects you see in this case are made of cloisonné enamel. They are made by melting hard enamel onto a metal surface which has been divided into small compartments using metal wires. Although this way of making art came from China and before that from the Byzantine Empire, some of the most beautiful examples of cloisonné enamel were made in Japan during the late 1800s, like the ones we see in this case.



The Japanese people borrowed techniques, like cloisonné enamel, from other cultures and combined them with Japanese themes and patterns. We can see again by the designs chosen to decorate these vases and boxes how important nature is to the Japanese people.

Which is your favorite cloisonné enamel object in this case? Why? \_\_\_\_\_

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If you were going to celebrate an object from nature, which would you choose? The moon, like the thin white vase at the top? Or the flowering trees and birds, like those on the green incense burner at the bottom right of the case?

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Thank you for joining us today to explore the art of Japan. Don't forget to stop by the information desk to collect a sticker for your Artful Adventures Passport. We hope you enjoyed your visit to the Princeton University Art Museum and that you will come back soon for another Artful Adventure!

## **ART PROJECT:** MAKE YOUR OWN JŌMON-STYLE CLAY POT!

### **You will need:**

- A clean tabletop space
- Clay (air-drying or baking)
- A kids' knife or clay tool
- Your hands!
- Adult supervision (especially if you are using baking clay)

### **Directions:**

Roll your clay in your hands to make it nice and soft. Take half of your clay and make a bowl shape. Now take a small piece and roll it in your hands to make it long, like a snake. Take this long piece and press it into the sides of your clay bowl to make swirling patterns. Sometimes using a little bit of water helps your clay to stick together. You can also use your kids' knife or clay tool to cut interesting designs into your pot.

When you have finished decorating your pot, leave it out to dry or have an adult help you bake it in the oven!

# SUGGESTED READING

**My Japan**, by Etsuko Watanabe

7-year-old Yumi shows what her life is like in the suburbs of Tokyo. (K-Gr 2)

**Japanese Children's Favorite Stories**, by Florence Sakade;

illustrated by Yoshisuke Kurosaki

Singing turtles, flying farmers, and a dragon who cries; these are just some of the magical characters you'll meet in this delightful collection of classic Japanese children's stories. (K-Gr 3)

**An Illustrated History of Japan**, by Shigeo Nishimura

The story of Japan's development from an agrarian, feudalistic society to a modern nation told through panoramic paintings. (Gr 4-7)

**All of these books can be found in the children's section of the Princeton Public Library.**

