

# A Japanese Event in May

**Children's Day**

**こどものひ**

**Kodomo no hi**



## < Story about Iris >

1300 years ago **Emperor**



+

Iris



= Purification

= Peace reign

800 years ago **Samurai**



+

Iris is **Shobu** in Japanese.



= Martial spirit

## 2. Iris Leaves

Iris leaf is a symbol of Children's Day.

Iris leaves have been believed to ward off evil spirits and to purify oneself for 1300 years because of the strong aroma.

The Emperor Shomu ordered,

“Put an iris leaf into your crown or your hair if you come to Court on May 5th.”

He believed the power of Iris leaves, purification and peace reign.

In the period of Samurai rule, they put a new meaning to Iris leaves. The leaf- shape is like a sword and the pronunciation in Japanese, shobu, has another meaning like fight or martial spirit.

So, May 5th had been “the Boy's Festival” for long years before a law was enacted to change the name to “Children's Day” in 1948.

May 5<sup>th</sup> in 2021

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*Shobu-yu* Iris-leaf bath

### 3. An Iris -leaf bath

Even in the IT era, the Japanese still believe the Iris- leaf power.

A child is in an Iris -leaf bath.

He ties the leaf around his head to guard himself against evil influences.

He seems to follow the Emperor's order 1300 years ago!

Anyway,

children enjoy themselves in the special bath on Children's Day every year.



***Koinobori*** (carp streamers)  
are seen outdoors

## 4. Koinobori(carp streamers) are seen outdoors.

In Japan, we have custom of setting up carp streamers on Children's Day to pray that boys in the house will take after carp and live their lives strongly.

Why was the carp chosen?

Carp are believed to be fish capable of climbing up stream against rapid currents and overcoming all matter of obstacles. Therefore, carp are taken as a symbol of the strength, courage and patience to accomplish major goals.

We can see many houses with carp streamers in the countryside.

However, in the city many people live in the condominium, so there are few opportunities to see them.



***Koinobori*** suspended over the river



## 5. Koinobori suspended over the river.

Decorating a large carp streamer can be a daunting event, so they go to see many decorated large carp streamers on rivers and valleys in the suburbs.

The carp streamers are decorated on rivers and valleys, so when the wind blows, the scene is magnificent and impresses us.

# Sweets for children's day

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*Chimaki*



*Kashiwa-mochi*



## 6. Sweets for children's day.

Chimaki(circular cone shape~) came to Japan from China more than 1000 years ago.After Edo period, they are likely to eat Kashiwa Mochi (wrapped in an oak leaf).

Those who are living in Kansai area (west area in Japan) eat Chimaki and Kanto area (east area in Japan) eat Kashiwa Mochi.

Generally speaking, People in Kansai (West area) value tradition highly more than people in Kanto (East area).



Samurai doll, called *Musha ningyo*

## 7. Samurai doll, called Musha ningyo

This is a photo of my son and decorations given my parents and relatives 20 years ago. These had not been decorated until 3 years ago, when my grandson was born.

I displayed the doll in my house instead of my son's house because he and his wife didn't want to do so in their house. Big Musha ningyo is displayed only in a big house nowadays



A variety of Displays for Children's Day

## 8. A variety of Displays for children's Day

Center photo

These are the set of dolls of Sugawara Michizane, well known as the God of Studies. These were presented to my friend's sons by her father who thought intelligence was important as well as strength for boys and prayed for their good score at school.

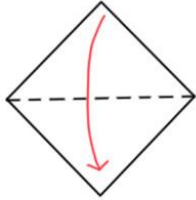
Samurai helmet made of cloths and small doll

I decorate these small ornaments given by my mother- in -law every year.

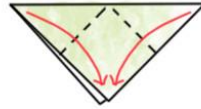
# Origami demonstration

【簡単なかぶと】

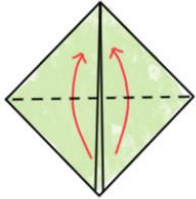
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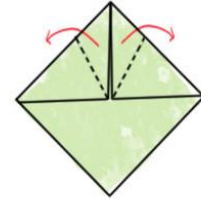
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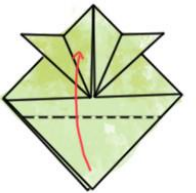
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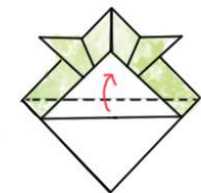
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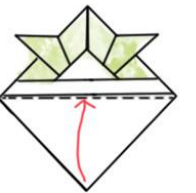
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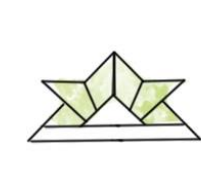
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***Kabuto*** (warrior's helmet)



# 9. Kabuto, Origami demonstration

My grandchildren enjoyed wearing kabuto warrior's helmet made by themselves using newspapers.

Today I'll show you how to make kabuto.

Prepare a piece of square paper.

First, make a triangle.

Second, fold like this, other side do the same.

Third, fold up, this part. Other side the same.

Then make a horn. Other side the same.

Last, this part, fold up like this.

And this part fold back. Finished.

This is kabuto. Thank you.

# Children's day in recent years : displays



***Hatsu Sekku***, the first Children's day



***Musha ningyo***



***Kabuto***

## 10. Children's day in recent years.

As you saw in the previous picture, they used to be displayed in tatami rooms. But lifestyles have changed.

The younger generation now prefers compact and easy to handle decorations. That is why this Samurai doll is made of ceramic, and the helmet decoration on a table is in a living room.

The helmet looked bigger than a baby boy at the time of "Hatsu sekku", the first celebration for the child after his birth.

# Children's day in recent years : foods



**Boys in the kitchen**



**Carp roll cakes**



**Helmet shape pies**

# 11. Foods for children's day.

There was an old Japanese proverb that goes, "Boys should not enter the kitchen." However, boys are in the kitchen and enjoy making cakes and helping their mother. Therefore, such words are no longer heard in Japan now.

Recently in addition to chimaki and kashiwa-mochi, roll cakes in the shape of Koinobori and pies in the shape of helmets with spring roll skins are popular for children.

5月5日

こどもの日



# 12. Frustration

The style of celebration has changed over the past 1300 years, but the wish for the growth and happiness of children has been passed down and will last.

We spend this day wishing for the healthy growth of our children.

**Thank you for  
your attention!**

**by IIN Working Group on Cultures**

