

celebrating... Kodomo no hi

One of the most popular national holidays in Japan, Kodomo no hi or Children's Day was originally known as Boys' Day, Tango no Sekka (Festival of Banners), with girls having their own day, Hinamatsuri (Doll Festival). To lift the spirits of the Japanese people after the Second World War, the Japanese government in 1948 re-named Boys' Day in honour of all children, to celebrate their happiness, wellbeing and progress. The festival, which takes place on May 5th, is also an occasion for children to thank and respect parents, relatives and teachers.

Exploring the festival

Flying fish

The day is celebrated by the flying of koinobori flags and kites, especially outside the homes of boys. The flags are made in the shape of carp fish, which look as if they are swimming when they flutter in the breeze. Because carp are known for their ability to swim upstream, they symbolise courage and determination. Ask children to talk about whether they have been brave or have persevered to learn how to do something (e.g. a new physical skill such as hopping).

Koinobori flags are cylindrical in shape and can be huge in size. They are made of cotton painted in vibrant colours. Show children Internet pictures of the flags (Google search: pictures of koinobori flags) and help them to make their own very simple kite versions, as well as pictures of real carp – ask children to look carefully at the shape of the carps' bodies and tail fins, and the pattern of the scales on their skin. Children can draw their own carp shapes on coloured tissue paper and decorate them using coloured felt-tipped pens. They can then cut them out and attach each one to a piece of wool 20cm long, attached at the mouth end with sticky tape. Encourage children to run outside, holding up their 'kites' to flutter behind them.



There's plenty to excite and educate your children about Japanese Children's Day, says **Linda Mort...**

Playing with paper

The iris is another symbol of the festival because its leaves are reminiscent of the blades of the swords used by traditional Samurai warriors, who are symbols of courage. On Kodomo no hi, warrior dolls and kabuto military helmets are displayed, and origami versions of the helmets are made and worn. Explain that in Japan, children and grown-ups enjoy both origami (paper folding) and kirigami (paper folding with cutting). Children may like to make their own kirigami-based fish. They can draw a carp shape on a folded piece of paper so that the top of the fish is 'hinged' when they cut it out. After decorating each side, they can put folded toilet tissue inside, seal the edges with staples and attach a straw to the bottom with sticky tape, so that the fish can be held and made to 'swim'.

children can each start a booklet called 'How I grow'. On that day, they can measure one another, with each child recording their own height in their booklet. They can carry on doing this once a term until they leave your setting. Next to each entry they can write, or have scribed, the names of healthy foods they have been enjoying.

Linda Mort is an early years specialist. Next issue, she will look at Raksha Bandan, the Hindu celebration of brotherly and sisterly love.

Grow for it

Traditionally, on Kodomo no hi, children are measured. Your



Let the Games begin!

WITH LONDON 2012 ON THE HORIZON, KODOMO NO HI IS ALSO A GREAT OPPORTUNITY TO KICK OFF AN EXPLORATION OF THE OLYMPICS...

In Japan, Children's Day celebrates healthy eating and physical fitness, and there are picnics and children's plays to enjoy. Thousands of children compete in the 'Kids' Olympics' held at the national Kasumigaoka stadium in Tokyo. On May

5th, why not hold a Children's Day 'mini-Olympics' event, focusing on collaborative team skills such as a relay circuit using a red crepe paper 'torch'? End the games with a picnic of favourite healthy foods. A popular snack in Japan is kashiwa mochi, rice dumplings filled with bean paste and wrapped in pickled oak leaves, but you could always settle for rice cakes!