

# Celebrating Hina Matsuri

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Japan is a land of many festivals stemming from ancient traditions. The festival of Hina Matsuri, celebrated on March 3, is a very special day for all girls in Japan. The word *hina* means doll, and the word *matsuri* means festival, and is translated as *miniature doll festival*. This celebration centers around the health and well-being of girls. It evolved from an assortment of traditions dating back to the seventeenth century. Simple handmade dolls were thrown into the river along with offerings and a wish for the health and happiness for the daughters of the family. Dolls were also placed near the bedsides of children to ward off evil spirits. The present-day display for Hina Matsuri originated in a palace in Kyoto during the Edo period. The aristocracy adopted the practice and its popularity with common people spread throughout Japan.

## Celebration

On March 3, a special tiered altar is set up in the principal room of the house. It is draped in red cloth that is a symbol of good luck. Dolls that have been handed down from generation to generation are placed upon the altar with the emperor and empress on the top shelf. The rest

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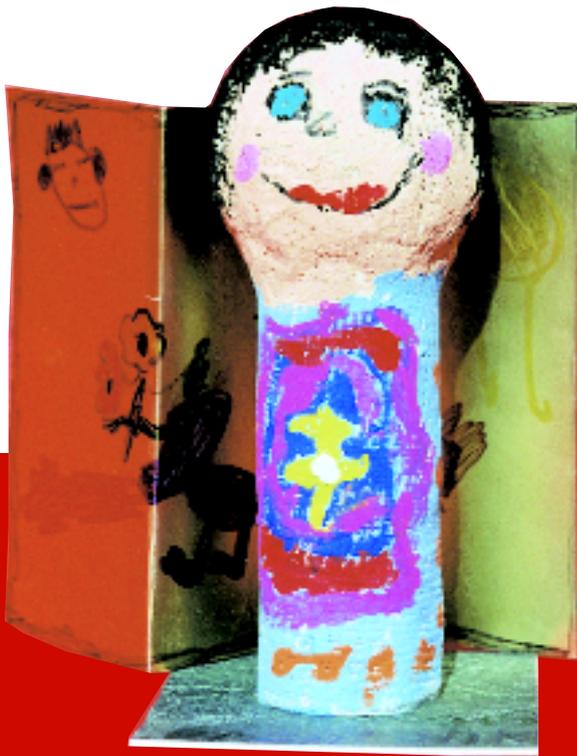
of the imperial court is placed on the other shelves along with musicians and an assortment of miniature furniture. Typically the display consists of fifteen dolls that are dressed in costumes from the Heian

period. Cherry blossoms, which are in season at this time, are part of the traditional display. Girls visit from house to house admiring each other's collections. Special rice cakes, called *mochi*, are first offered to the dolls, and then they are enjoyed by the girls and their families.

## History of Dolls and Doll-making

The history of dolls reaches back nearly 24,000 years to the first known doll in the world. Dolls were found in the ruins of ancient Egypt, often in the arms of children. They have been crafted in all parts of the world since early times for many different purposes. They have been worshipped as objects endowed with magical powers, as embodiments of spirits to be worshipped, as human playthings, or for the purpose of display and appreciation.

The tradition of doll-making in Japan dates back to the beginning of the Jomon period, about 3000 BC.



However, it was during the Edo period, a time of great stability free of political struggle, that dolls became very popular for visual enjoyment. During this time, the art of doll-making flourished with an improvement in the materials and techniques used. Throughout Japan, dolls unique to a particular locality began to appear, establishing the foundation of the rich and varied doll culture of today.

At our school, second-grade students created traditional Kokeshi dolls for our celebration of Hina Matsuri. Kokeshi are simple wooden dolls that first appeared in Japan during the latter half of the Edo period.

### Process

We used toilet paper tubes and 3" (8 cm) Styrofoam balls for the basic structure of the dolls. Because the dolls have no arms or legs, our construction was simple. We taped the ball to the tube and wrapped the form with moistened plaster strips.

Students made sure that each strip was carefully smoothed over the surface, revealing the form underneath.

Students also worked on hairdos with the gauze strips. If a student worked on a female doll, strips of gauze were attached to the head and were allowed to hang down as hair. They also created "buns" on the top of the dolls' heads.

Students painted the head first and then painted the cylinder or body of the doll a medium to light color. Once the base-coat dried, stripes and simple floral patterns were applied with tempera paint. Students glued the dolls to a square of matt board that served as a stand. For display purposes, we created folding screens for each of the dolls with gold poster board. A black border was added to the screen with permanent black marker and other designs were added with colored markers.

We created a large display of our dolls for the festival of Hina Matsuri. A red cloth was draped over a step

altar and more than sixty dolls were displayed. We planned a "look and learn" session for kindergarten students. Second-grade students gave a presentation on the dolls in the Hina Matsuri display, explaining the history and construction of the dolls. In the true tradition of the festival, we invited the kindergarten back to the artroom to make simple uchiwa fans. ☺

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### WEB LINK

[www.jadejapandolls.com](http://www.jadejapandolls.com)

### NATIONAL STANDARD

*Students know that the visual arts have both a history and specific relationship to various cultures.*