



# Tanabata

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**Ages:** 11–12 years old  
**Level:** Beginning  
**Culture:** The *Tanabata* festival; the difference in seasons, activities, and star constellations between Australia and Japan.  
**Japanese:** Introduce ...*ga hoshii desu* and *hiragana/katakana* for other words.



## Objectives

Students listen to the story of *Tanabata*. The festival is then explained using pictures and stories to help students visualize it. They learn that while they are sitting in front of heaters in July here in Australia, in other parts of the world it is warm and people are celebrating or star gazing. The expression ...*ga hoshii desu* is introduced and students use that expression to produce "wish strips" (*tanzaku*) which they tie to their own class tree (or branch), along with traditional *origami* decorations which they make by themselves.

## Materials

- story of *Tanabata*
- branch or small tree (bamboo if possible)
- tanzaku* cards, 4 × 15cm pieces of heavy colored paper with hole punched at the top
- string, felt-tip pens, scissors
- extra *origami* or colored paper for early finishers, instructions for *Amanogawa* and *chōchin* decorations

## Procedure

1. Write the following vocabulary on the board before class begins:  
*Tanabata*  
*Tanzaku*  
(Possible vocabulary to use on *tanzaku*)  
*heiwa na sekai* (a peaceful world)

- neko* (cat)
- okane* (money)
- inu* (dog)
- daiyamondo* (diamond)
- aisu kuriimu* (ice cream)
- gakkō no yasumi* (school holiday)
- ensoku* (school excursion)

2. Story of *Tanabata*, discussion of festival. (10 minutes)
3. Explain ...*ga hoshii desu*; practice using ...*ga hoshii desu* in a full sentence through individual responses from children. Use the list of vocabulary already on the board and encourage new ideas and vocabulary. (7 minutes)
4. Practice writing ...*ga hoshii desu* in *hiragana*. Insert some of the words listed on the board. (3 minutes)
5. Distribute *tanzaku*. Children write their wishes and, after showing them to the teacher, tie them to the tree. Early finishers can make decorations such as *Amanogawa* or *chōchin*. (25 minutes)
6. Clean-up. (5 minutes)

## Student Response

Student reactions were positive—many students looked at the night sky after the *Tanabata* lesson searching for the "two lovers." Students became



interested in the star map of the northern hemisphere (This was handled during science lessons).

Students were keen to learn about other Japanese festivals and used their Japanese knowledge to request, 「まつりがほしいです」。 Although this expression was not entirely correct, I was very happy to see the children attempting to communicate in Japanese!

### **Culture and the Foreign Language Class**

I was introduced to the Japanese language through cultural immersion and, as a result, I am a strong

believer in teaching language through culture. Participating in cultural activities enables children to align themselves more closely with reasons to learn a language, especially in a monolingual society like country Victoria. The learning of a language is given a purpose and therefore promotes intrinsic motivation in students.

Language and culture are powerful partners and tools for teaching Japanese. Teaching language without culture is purposeless—children do not become interested in learning more if they have no understanding of the people with whom they are learning to communicate.



## Comments from the Feedback Committee

### Educating for Cross-cultural Understanding

This *Tanabata* project is a good example of team teaching, especially in the way Ms. Ryan and the science teacher shared the star map of the northern hemisphere. The way that the Milky Way, or *Amanogawa*, looks must be different from what students are familiar with in the southern hemisphere. The same goes for the timing and the location of the two stars, the "two lovers." Students learn that while they are sitting in front of the heaters in Australia in July, in other parts of the world it is warm and people are star gazing outdoors. This is also a wonderful earth awareness project for both language and science. It is always helpful to know what other content areas your students are studying. Good communication with other teachers is another way to enrich your lesson plans.

### Lesson Plan

The followings are a few integrated activity ideas for the further development of this theme:

1. With an English teacher, try writing *haiku* in English on the wish strips, *tanzaku*.
2. For comparative languages, try comparative grammar and compare different sentence structures such as S+V+O (English and Chinese, "I want ice cream") and S+O+V (Japanese, "I ice cream want").
3. Try to read other Asian versions of the *Tanabata* story and find out how they are similar and why they are similar. With a history teacher, try to find out what connections Japan has had with other Asian countries. The Sea of Japan is known for the roughness of the waves and wind, but limited contact was possible throughout history. The story of *Tanabata* varies according to the region in Japan. Some show influence from the Korean version and some Chinese.
4. Music, movement, and dramatization are the

easiest and, for many of the students, the most enjoyable integrated activities to go with language lessons because they encourage total participation of all students with different skills and interests. Under the decorated *Tanabata* bamboo branch there is a classic *Tanabata* song for students to sing. Students might choose to sing the song, play musical instruments or dance to the music. Some students could work on the *kimono* style costumes for the dancers.

5. Some could work on a star map with Japanese names for the constellations (many animal names in *hiragana* and people's names from Greek mythology in *katakana*) as a back-drop.

### Language Learning

At the end of the project, her students were keen to learn about other Japanese festivals and used their Japanese knowledge to request, *Matsuri ga hoshii desu*. The students are quite motivated to learn more.

Other festival ideas include the Moon Viewing Festival in September, followed by some Japanese folk tales such the "Shining Bamboo Princess" or "Moon Princess", "*Kaguyahime*", as well as "Why is there a rabbit in the moon?" Linguistic elements in this theme may be 「私は、～から来ました」("I am from ...."), 「私は、～へもどります」("I must go back to ....").

The similarity between the two Japanese festivals is the people's view of nature and the relationship between nature and people as being harmonious. For the extension of the cultural studies, students might like to read more folk tales and do research on people's view of nature in Australia and the world. Learning a different language and culture deepens the understanding of one's own language and culture and oneself.