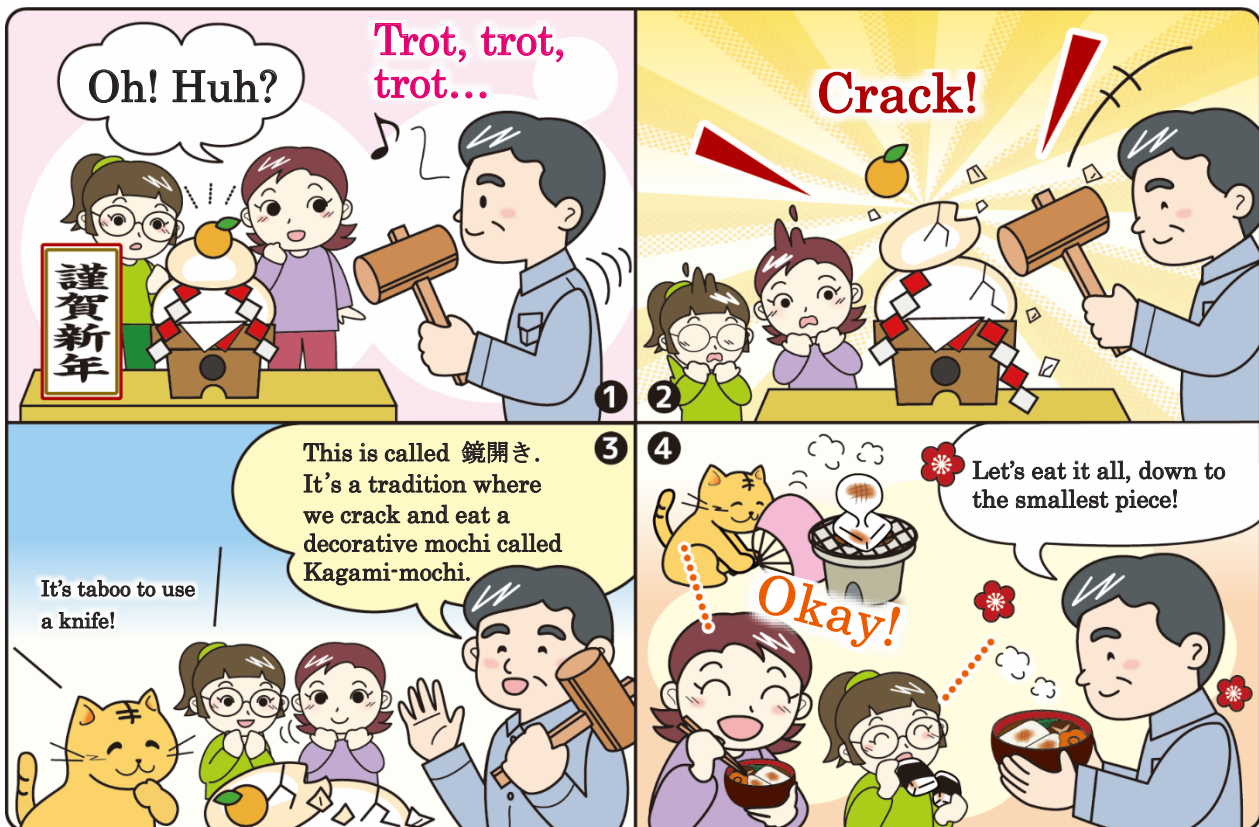


鏡開き (Kagami-biraki)



鏡開き is a tradition observed on January 11 after New Year's decorations are taken down (typically from January 1 to 7, though this can vary by region). One of these decorations is the Kagami-mochi. It is cracked open to bid farewell to the deity of the New Year and mark the end of New Year's festivities. As the mochi is thought to be imbued with a divine spirit, people believe that eating it will give them the strength to stay healthy and free from illness throughout the year.

“とも” provides helpful advice on living in Japan, tips for learning the Japanese language, and other such information, in Japanese with furigana and nine foreign languages (Vietnamese, Chinese, Filipino, Indonesian, Thai, Cambodian, Burmese, Mongolian, and English). The Japanese version is available on paper, and the foreign language versions are available in PDF format on JITCO's website for viewing on a smartphone, PC, or other such device. We hope you make good use of these resources. (<https://www.jitco.or.jp/ja/tomo/>)





～ インタビュー ～

“Writing this essay gave me time to reflect on myself”

32nd Japanese Essay Contest

First Prize Ms. TRAN THUY AN

実習実施者：株式会社ツクイ 監理団体：協同組合企業交流センター

Ms. TRAN THUY AN, a technical intern trainee from Vietnam, won the First Prize in the Japanese Essay Contest hosted by JITCO. She has been in Japan for about a year and a half and is currently undergoing training at a nursing care facility in Tokyo. In this January issue, we interview her about what inspired her to enter the contest, her thoughts on writing the essay, and insights about her Japanese language studies.

—How did you decide on the theme for your essay? What difficulties did you face while writing it?



When someone from the head office suggested I try writing an essay in Japanese, I initially declined because I had no confidence. However, after reading essays that my seniors have written and talking again with the person from the head office, I realized that ordinary things I hadn't paid much attention to could become themes for an essay. Gradually, I gained a clearer idea of what I wanted to write about and decided to focus on the theme of “greetings.”

This was my first time writing such a lengthy paper in Japanese, so it proved to be a significant challenge. I started by jotting down events and feelings related to the theme in Vietnamese to create a general outline. I then translated these notes into Japanese. It took me over a

month to complete the essay after I made the decision to write it.

—What do you find challenging about studying the Japanese language? Please also share any thoughts you have while studying Japanese.

I find pronunciation to be the most difficult aspect of studying Japanese. I struggle with sounds that don't exist in Vietnamese and correcting words I initially learned incorrectly. As for writing, it was challenging to write reports using technical terms related to nursing care at first, but I've gradually gotten used to it and can now write them more quickly than before. I hope to improve my Japanese further to pass the N2 level of the JLPT in July. I believe that daily efforts are essential, such as participating in group work with Japanese colleagues during company training sessions and completing homework assignments.

—What do you find rewarding about your work? Please also share an episode that has made you happy.

It may seem small, but I feel



happiest when I can do something to help elderly people. My work keeps me busy and challenging every day, so I feel truly rewarded when a customer remembers my name.

—Please share a message for readers who are thinking of writing an essay themselves.

Writing an essay is a great way to improve your Japanese. However, to me, the best thing was that writing allowed me to reflect on myself. Thinking deeply about things I experience daily turned out to be a meaningful experience for my future work. Writing an essay is challenging, but once completed, you'll discover a new side of yourself. Since you've come to Japan, believe in your potential and challenge yourself to write an essay.



We plan to continue hosting the Japanese Essay Contest in the future. Entry details will be announced on our website as soon as they are finalized. We look forward to your entries.

The “Collection of Award-Winning Essays from the 2024 Japanese Essay Contest” may be viewed on the JITCO website.
<https://www.jitco.or.jp/ja/service/competition.html>





Banknote (Paper Bill) Trivia

In July 2024, Japan introduced newly designed banknotes (paper bills) for the first time in about 20 years, making them harder to counterfeit and easier to distinguish. The new bills feature the portraits of three individuals who contributed to Japan's modernization. How are these people chosen? There are no specific legal requirements, but each individual is chosen based on the following considerations:

- The individual is a real figure, as

much as possible, who has made a significant achievement, is widely recognized and liked, or is in other ways respected as someone who represents Japan.

The individual has distinctive, eye-catching facial features that make them difficult to replicate from the perspective of preventing counterfeiting.

The new banknotes are now in circulation, but the previous ones can

still be used for the time being. Beware of false information or scams claiming that the previous bills can no longer be used.

We rarely pay attention to the details of banknotes in our daily lives, but when new notes come your way, you might want to take the opportunity to take a close look at both the front and back sides from various angles.

Learn about the three figures on the new banknotes!



しibusawa eiichi

渋沢栄一 (1840–1931) is known as the “father of Japanese economy.” He was a distinguished entrepreneur during the Meiji and Taisho periods, devoting himself to establishing systems for taxation, currency, and banking as an official in the Ministry of Finance during the Meiji period. After leaving the government, he played a vital role in establishing Japan's first bank, Daiichi Kokuritsu Ginko, and was instrumental in founding a diversity of over 500 companies.



つだうめこ

津田梅子 (1864–1929) is known as a “pioneer of women's education.” As a female educator herself during the Meiji and Taisho periods, she went to study overseas and thereafter focused her efforts on women's higher education to elevate the social status of women.



きたさとしばさぶろう

北里柴三郎 (1853–1931) is called the “father of Japanese modern medicine.” He saved countless lives through his contributions to the development of prevention and treatment methods for tetanus, a disease that was greatly feared at the time.

Kokugonomori

This is an exercise for learning Japanese words and kanji and their usage. Think of the correct answers while having fun! (Answers are provided on the next page.)

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A group of trainees participated in an annual festival at their local shrine. Donned in *happi* coats and *hachimaki* headbands, they even experienced carrying a *mikoshi* shrine with local residents. The exposure to traditional Japanese culture must have made their day!

※2024年9月投稿 監理団体：TNK協同組合 実習実施者：株式会社兼藤

We are looking forward to your entries.

Every month, a photo is selected from among those which receiving/supervising organizations have contributed to “技能実習 Days” on the JITCO website. Scan the QR code at right to visit the 技能実習 Days page and learn about the entry guidelines.

(<https://www.jitco.or.jp/ja/days/>)



We've joined social media!

We have launched official JITCO accounts on Facebook and X. We will be using Facebook to share information that might be helpful to foreign workers and X to provide useful information to companies and organizations accepting foreign workers. Our Facebook posts will be available in 10 languages, including Japanese. Please follow us and give us a “like”!



ひらがなも、かたかなも、もとは漢字です。ひらがなは漢字の全体をくずし、かたかなは漢字の一部を取り出して作りました。まちがいが多いのが、「シ」と「ツ」です。シは「之」、ツは「川」が元の字です。点の並び方の違いは、「シはたて、ツは横」と覚えてるといいですね。



Hiragana and katakana originated from kanji. Hiragana was created by reshaping entire kanji, and katakana was formed by using specific parts of kanji. A common confusion is between シ and ツ. シ comes from the kanji 之, and ツ comes from the kanji 川. You might be able to distinguish the two by remembering that for シ, the pair of dots is lined up vertically, while for ツ, it is lined up horizontally.

とも

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