

Somerset Interfaith & Belief Network

Tanabata Wish – star festival

A crafting session to CONNECT with each other through compassion, peace and hope for the future

This versatile activity is meditative, relaxing and enjoyable. It can be a route into conversation-based activity for adults, families, people of all ages.

The creating a wish draws on some traditions and lore from animism, Buddhism, Shinto-ism, Confucianism and folk beliefs, held within Japan and the Japanese diaspora.



Image: The Japan Society

Setting the context: Tanabata, the Star Festival draws on traditions and lore from animism, Buddhism, Shinto-ism, Confucianism and folk beliefs. The 7th day of the seventh month is a special day in Japan and for Japanese diaspora communities, where people celebrate Tanabata, the Star Festival. Tanabata celebrates a love story; the romantic story is represented by the stars Vega and Altair who are only allowed to meet each other once a year as long as the skies are clear.

On Tanabata, people write wishes on small pieces of coloured paper called tanzaku and hang them on bamboo trees. These become beautiful wish trees. On the following day, the decorated trees are floated on a river or in the ocean and burned as an offering. There are many celebrations across Japan, which also include parades, food stalls, colourful decorations, and fireworks.



Overleaf are suggestions for running your own activity.

The GLADE Centre can run this workshop for you. Items we provide to use:-

- paper/ card for the tanzaku OR bunting
- a selection of pens, pencils
- a takeaway activity sheet

Contact Lynn; lynn@glade.org or Liz; liz@glade.org to book

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Suggestions to start / continue with a traditional story:

- **Tanabata, the Star Festival**

The 7th day of the seventh month is a special day in Japan and for some Japanese diaspora communities, where people celebrate Tanabata, the Star Festival.

Tanabata is celebrated to commemorate the romantic story of two lovers represented by the stars Vega and Altair who are only allowed to meet each other once a year as long as the skies are clear.

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Traditionally celebrated on the 7th day of the 7th lunar month, which is 7 July in the modern calendar. Some places in Japan celebrate Tanabata on August 7th in accordance with the older Chinese calendar, which is where the legend originated.

The most famous of all the Tanabata festivals is celebrated in Sendai on August 7th, but most of Japan recognizes Tanabata on July 7th.

Tanabata originated from a Chinese legend called Qixi and was brought to Japan in the 8th century. This is the story of two lovers. Princess Orihime, the seamstress, wove beautiful clothes by the heavenly river, represented by the Milky Way. Because Orihime worked so hard weaving beautiful clothes, she became sad and despaired of ever finding love. Her father, who was a God of the heavens, loved her dearly and arranged for her to meet Hikoboshi, the cow herder who lived on the other side of the Milky Way. The two fell in love instantly and married. Their love and devotion was so deep that Orihime stopped weaving and Hikoboshi allowed his cows to wander the heavens.

Orihime's father became angry and forbade the lovers to be together, but Orihime pleaded with him to allow them to stay. He loved his daughter, so he decreed that the two star-crossed lovers could meet once a year--on the 7th day of the 7th month if Orihime returned to her weaving. On the first day they were to be reunited, they found the river (Milky Way) to be too difficult to cross. Orihime became so despondent that a flock of magpies came and made a bridge for her. It is said that if it rains on Tanabata, the magpies will not come, and the two lovers must wait another year to be reunited, so Japanese always wish for good weather on Tanabata. There are many variations of this story, but this version is the most widely held.

<https://www.japan-suite.com/blog/2014/7/6/tanabata-story-of-two-star-crossed-lovers>

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Connections to the month of July

The Japan Society of the UK has a selection of resources and activities for family learning and for teachers, about Tanabata.

<https://www.japansociety.org.uk/resource?resource=37>

July is associated with one of the Far East legends about stars.

Two of the brightest stars of the summertime sky are Vega (visible in the summer sky of the Northern Hemisphere – for more info visit;

<https://www.skyatnightmagazine.com/advice/vega>) and Altair (for more information visit <https://www.skyatnightmagazine.com/advice/altair>) These bright stars represent two star-crossed lovers who are separated by the Heavenly River (the Milky Way).

In the ancient Chinese story, Vega is Princess Tchi-Niu, daughter of the sun god and an exceptionally skilled weaver and creator of beautiful garments. Altair is Kien-Niou, the royal cow herder who watches over the imperial livestock.

From her side of the river, Tchi-Niu the princess watched the herdsman, Kien-Niou with increasing admiration. Finally her father arranged for a meeting and after a time, Tchi-Niu and Kien-Niou (the princess and the cow herder) were married.

Once married, their love grew so much that Tchi-Niu and Kien-Niou spent all their waking hours with each other and neglected their responsibilities. The weaving that many depended on the princess for, lay unfinished and the imperial cattle were neglected and began to wander.

The sun god warned both his daughter and son-in-law more than once that they had to attend to their duties, but finally, when all else failed he separated the pair by returning his daughter to the other side of the river. The princess begged her father for another chance, and after many tearful pleas he finally broke down and offered a concession. The couple, said the sun god, could be reunited, but only for a single night each year — on the seventh day of the seventh month (7 July).

And there was a catch: This annual rendezvous could only take place if the weather was clear.

<https://www.space.com/far-eastern-star-legends>

For information about star constellations and the night sky visible in the UK visit <https://www.bbc.co.uk/bitesize/articles/zpnhsk7#zyb3r2p>

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- Fallen star legends and traditional religion of Japan: an aspect of star lore. *“Japanese star lore is a complex mixture of animism, Buddhism, Shinto-ism, Confucianism and folk beliefs....In western part of Japan, there are Shinto shrines and Buddhistic temples that are said to be built as monuments of fallen stars. Usually fallen stars were divided into three, and a trio of shrines/temples are said to be the remnants of this phenomenon. Similar legends are found in Kudamatsu (that means "fallen pine=pine where stars fallen") of Yamaguchi Prefecture, Bisei-cho (that means "beautiful star") of Okayama Prefecture, Hoshida (that means "rice field or village of star") shrine of Osaka, and also Hoshida shrine of Nagoya.”*
<https://ui.adsabs.harvard.edu/abs/2015IAUGA..2256535G/abstract>

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