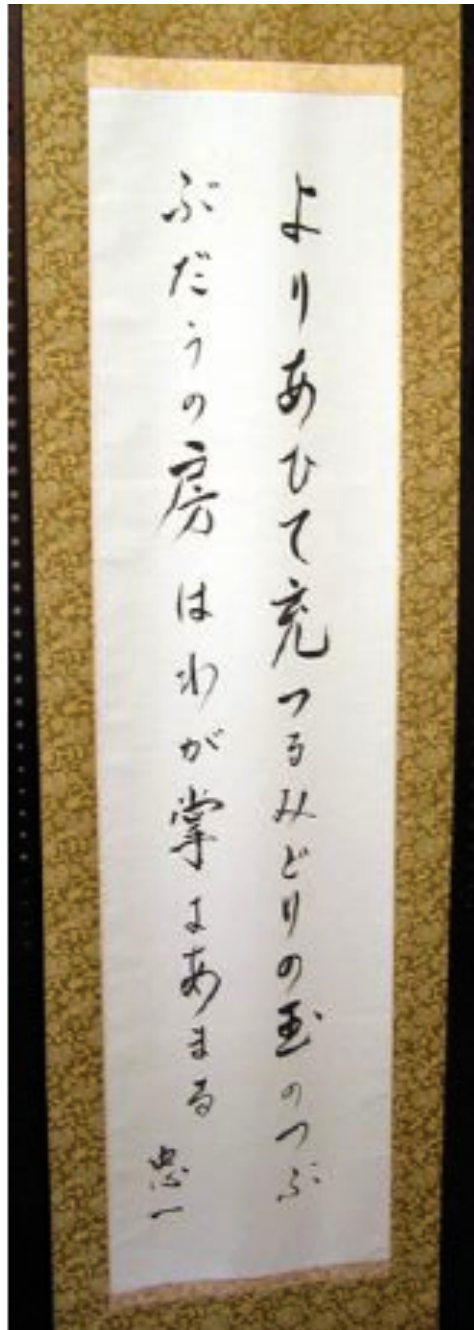


The Art of
Japanese Calligraphy

Shodo

Cathy Hart
Perry Middle
School
Worthington, Ohio



Tanka panel in Shiojiri

The art of shodo began in China and came to Japan in the sixth or seventh century. The methods for making brushes, ink, and paper also came from China. In those ancient days, calligraphy was practiced by the Japanese ruling noble families. Eventually, the art spread among the common people, too.

Today calligraphy is an art form to be admired as well as practiced. Shodo is used to create New Year's wishes (kakizome) and is also used in other daily life situations.



This calligrapher is stamping and writing in a temple book. The accordion temple book is a keepsake of all of the temples one has visited. A unique page is added at each one. It is a wonderful piece of art.



The precise number of characters in existence is disputed. Estimates range from 40,000 to 80,000. The high school sensei in Japan said there are about 48,000 characters.

Fluency in Chinese requires knowledge of approximately 3000 to 5000 characters, while fluency in Japanese requires knowledge of approximately 2000 to 3000 characters.



Junior high students in Japan



Both of these characters mean 'horse'.

The lower one is approximately 3000 years old and the upper one is about 1000 years old.

Can you see how the older one at the bottom looks like a horse with its mane blowing in the wind? Do you see the four legs and a tail? Of course you can see its eye!

How is the more recent one at the top different?

These two characters also have the same meaning. The top one is once again a newer, more abstract version and the lower one is a more ancient version.

Can you guess the meaning?



That's right! It means "child".

There are model sheets for the two versions of "horse" and "child" included with this lesson.



There's also a model sheet for "mountain", which you can see at the left.

Implements

Model (for the person across the table)

Sumi (black ink)

Bunchin (paperweight)

Suzuri (ink stone)

Shitajiki (soft writing pad)

Hanshi (calligraphy paper)

Fude (brush)



Implements

Shitajiki - writing pad of soft cloth, often felt and usually black; can have markings on it used for student guides

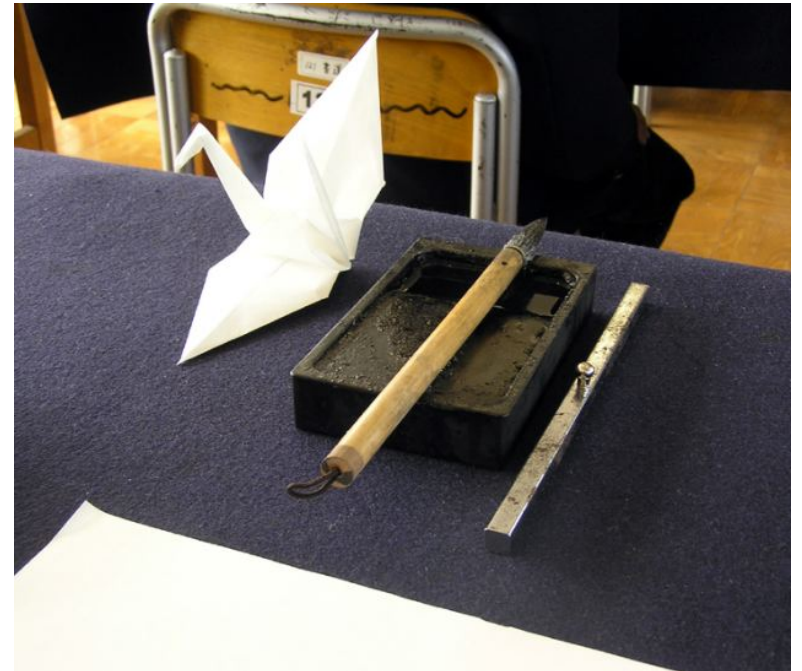
Hanshi - calligraphy paper, standard size is 9 1/2" X 13", thin so there is complete control over how the ink will be absorbed: at times a blotting effect showing a pause and at times an effect where the brush runs out of ink making a complex set of lines showing movement, smooth side is used

Bunchin - heavy metal bar used for a paperweight to prevent the paper from moving

Suzuri - ink stone of two parts called the ocean (**umi**) used to hold the ink and the land (**riku**) used to prepare or grind the ink

Sumi - black ink made from charcoal; stick form is best since preparation is part of the art and it will last; however, bokujuu (liquid form) is often used by students for temporary work

Fude - brush made of bamboo and animal hair, shaped to a nice point





Kunimoto Hayashi holding a brush used for demonstration

Fude come in all sizes!



Greg holding a giant fude for very large works



Students in Columbus Japanese Language School at Granby Elementary

Posture

Sit up straight without leaning on the back of your seat. Don't sit up too close to the desk. Hold the paper still with the hand you're not using to write with.

Holding the Brush

The brush should be held midway between the two ends. Basically use three fingers (your thumb, index finger, and middle finger) to hold it. Rest your ring finger for support, allowing your pinkie to lay naturally. The brush is held upright, with the hand not touching the paper.



Writing in temple book in Asakusa

Each character is made up of a number of strokes which must be written in a prescribed order.

The number of strokes per character for most characters is between three and thirty.



These kanji meaning "mountain" on the bottom and "fire" on the top combine to mean "volcano". They were created by fourth graders in Japan.

The sensei uses a brush with water on a special board to demonstrate the proper strokes.



Columbus Japanese Language School at Granby Elementary School



Junior high school in Shiojiri



Demonstrating two characters



The top character means "water", the lower one might mean "king" (as is) or "bowl" (with one more dot), meaning water drop



High school sensei in Japan

To begin, learn to make
"yokoga", horizontal lines.



Mrs. Hart practicing with Nozomi

Then, try something simple with only three strokes, like the "yama" character which means "mountain".

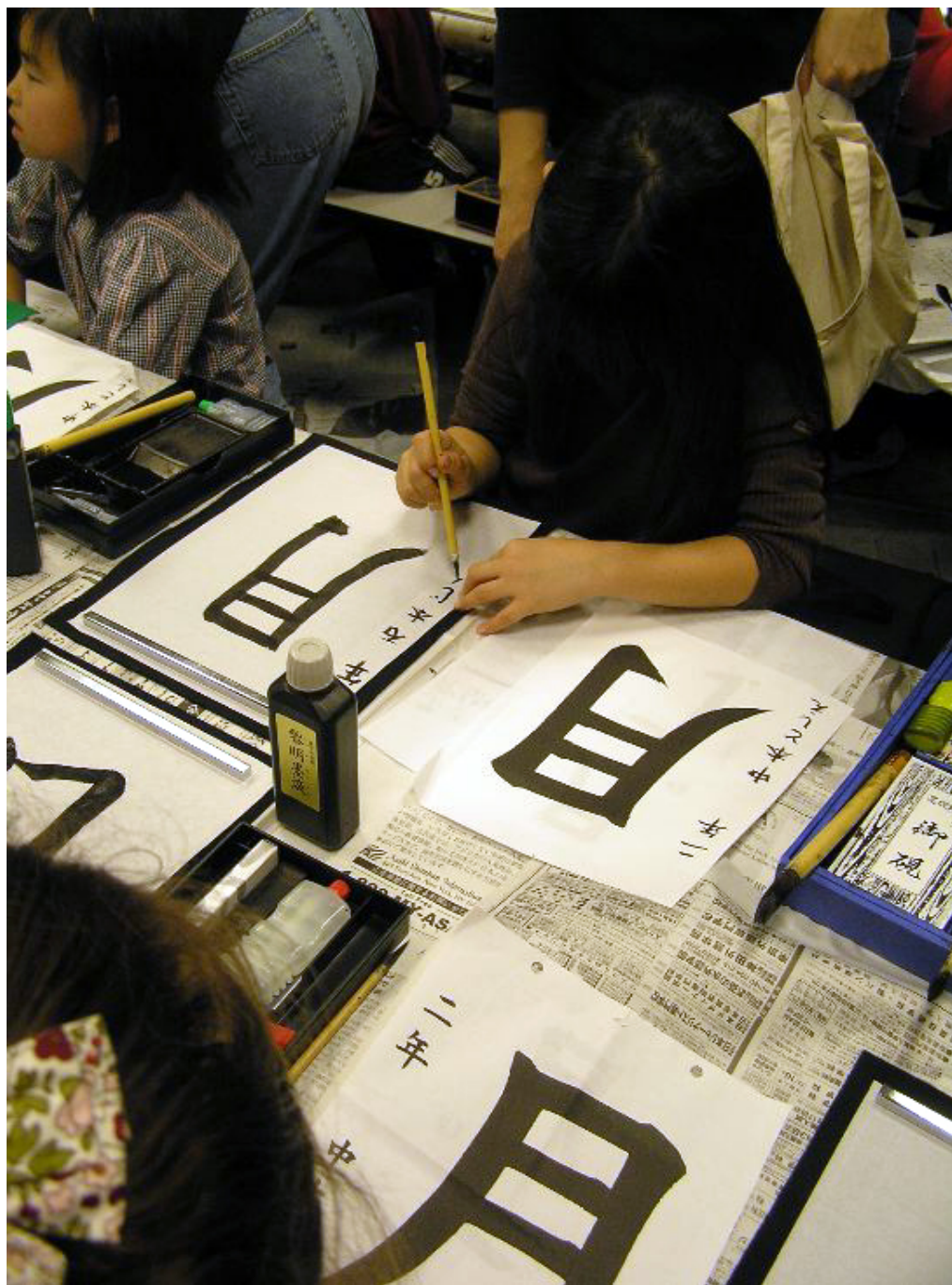


Students at Columbus Japanese Language School in Worthington

You might also want to try "moon". It's fairly simple, too.

Model sheets for both "moon" and "mountain" are included with this lesson. There is a sheet with just the character and a second sheet showing the order of the strokes for each one.

See how the student has the model sheet of "moon" next to her work in this picture?



This student is writing "genki" which means "strong, cheerful, healthy".

Look for calligraphy books in both the school and public libraries if you want to explore further. There are many characters to learn!



Works of calligraphy are admired for the accurate composition of their characters, of course, but also for the way the brush is handled in their creation, the shading of the ink, and the balanced placement of the characters on the paper.

Let's see what you can do!

