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Floating Lanterns & Golden Shrines: Celebrating Japanese Festivals

Rena Krasno
Toru Sugita, Illustrator
Pacific View Press (May 2000)
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Why do parents in Japan buy a Koi Nobori (carp banner) for a new baby boy? So he will “be like the koi, swim upstream, fear nothing and never give up.” This description of the Children’s Day Festival is just one of many holidays depicted in Floating Lanterns & Golden Shrines. Though the book is subtitled “Celebrating Japanese Festivals,” it might better be subtitled “Everything we can think of to tell you about Japan.”

In addition to explaining seven traditional festivals, Krasno fills this informational book with recipes, craft ideas, folktales, examples of Japanese handwriting, games, art, culture and history. She touches on everything from Samurai Warriors to bonsai trees, from Buddhism to Japanese-American internment camps. Because the festivals are not presented chronologically, and there seems to be no particular order for the mass of information, someone doing research will greatly appreciate the index and table of contents. While each of the sections is brief, there is a good overall examination of many aspects of Japanese life. Westerners will be familiar with some of these traditions, such as the tea ceremony and origami, but may learn something new, too. Did you know that origami paper is folded and not cut in order not to harm the spirit of the paper?

Each festival and folktale is accompanied by a full-page watercolor illustration, and smaller pictures are presented with various subjects throughout the book. Though the text seems to be aimed at older elementary and junior high students, the watercolors will appeal to a younger audience.

Especially striking are the banners that go with each festival, written in Japanese and translated for us into English. The end papers contain a map of the Japanese archipelago and several geographical facts. Floating Lanterns is the most recent in a series of festival books from Pacific View Press.

LEIGH FORREST (July / August 2000)

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