Japan: O-Bon Festival

Post-visit Activity: Quick Write

Name: ________________________________________  Date: ________________

Choose one of the two topics to complete a Quick Write about the O-bon Festival. Use the words found in the word bank.

1. Describe O-Bon from an invited ancestor’s point of view.
2. Summarize what you learned about the Japanese celebration of O-Bon.

festival  ancestor  reunion  relative
yagura (stage)  circle  taiko drums  Buddhist
yukata (kimono)  fruits  vegetables  rice
Bon-Odori (dance)  altar  river  lantern
mukae-bi (welcoming fire)  spirits  gravesite
okuri-bi (sending-off fire)  flowers  O-Bon
Japan: O-Bon Festival

Post-visit Activity: Quick Write KEY

Information included in the student Quick Write should include some of the following:

O-Bon, a centuries-old Buddhist memorial festival, is a time to pay respects to one’s ancestors. The most important family gathering, O-Bon is celebrated during the 7th month of the lunar calendar which coincides with August.

O-Bon is both serious and festive. Families travel back to their hometowns for a 3-day reunion with their living relatives as well as the spirits of the deceased. To start the celebration a mukae-bi (welcoming fire) is lit at the entrance to the home. It is meant to light the way for the ancestors’ spirits to return to the world of the living. People also visit and clean their ancestors’ gravesites to welcome the spirits back. They offer fruits, vegetables, rice, and flowers at a family altar. Sometimes the local Buddhist priest visits. Then three days later, an okuri-bi (sending-off fire) is lit to guide the ancestors back to the world of the spirits. In some regions of Japan people send off their ancestor’s spirits using a lantern which is floated down a river to the ocean.

The more festive side of things occurs during the evening. Families go to the village center or local Buddhist temple, where something like a big carnival takes place. There is music and dancing. Vendors sell food, toys, and souvenirs. Family members usually wear a yukata, which is a lightweight cotton kimono. During these O-Bon evenings a special community dance, called Bon-Odori, is performed at the festival. Everyone participates – from grandparents to little kids. They all form a circle around a raised yagura stage decorated with lanterns. It is set up for musicians who play Japanese taiko drums, gongs, and flutes. Everyone sings and claps their hands to the steps of the dance as they go round and round the yagura.