



Press Release

New Traveling Exhibit at Kids 'N' Stuff Children's Museum Explores Japanese Culture, Animation and Art

What: New traveling exhibit at Kids 'N' Stuff Children's Museum
Name: Jump to Japan: Discovering Culture through Popular Art
Dates: Sept. 19, 2009, through Jan. 2, 2010
Location: Kids 'N' Stuff Children's Museum, 301 S. Superior St., Albion, MI 49224
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Jump to Japan: *Discovering Culture through Popular Art* introduces visitors to Japanese culture through hands-on activities based on the art forms of animation, manga (comics), woodblock prints and traditional scrolls. Kids can hop on the magical Cat Bus from the film *My Neighbor Totoro*. Children and adults can be a shopkeeper or customer in a modern manga store, and create their own manga drawings and animation. Visitors can take off their shoes and step into a traditional tatami (woven floor covered) room for a tea party, try on kimono, yukata or happi (traditional Japanese clothing) and play the ancient card game karuta.

Japanese animation and manga have become immensely popular among American youth. *Pokemon* and *Yu-Gi-Oh!* are familiar animated television icons of Japanese pop culture influenced by traditional Japanese art. *Jump to Japan: Discovering Culture through Popular Art* explores both traditional art forms and popular icons in a fun and educational exhibit at Kids 'N' Stuff Children's Museum, September 19, 2009 through January 2, 2010.

Jump to Japan is one of seven exhibits developed with support from The Freeman Foundation as part of Go East, the Asian Exhibit Initiative. Presented by The Freeman Foundation Asian Exhibit Initiative and administered by the Association of Children's Museums, the seven exhibits that comprise the Initiative began traveling to children's museums in January 2004. *Jump to Japan* was developed by Minnesota Children's Museum and The Children's Museum, Seattle, in partnership with Studio Ghibli and the Ghibli Museum, Mitaka, Japan. *My Neighbor Totoro* used with permission of Ghibli Studios. © 1986 Nibariki.

The Exhibit

Jump to Japan features three main exhibit areas that invite visitors to explore the art forms featured inside. In Fantastic Animation, kids will explore feature film animation. Visitors can discover manga (Japanese comics) and anime (Japanese animation) in Manga Mania. Children can explore Artful Traditions and learn about woodblock printing and scrolls.

The art forms featured in the exhibit are linked in a variety of ways. The forms share compositional principles, subject matter and an iconic language. In Jump to Japan, the dominant link between animation, manga and woodblock prints is that they all are—or were—popular art forms.

The exhibit is composed of immersive environments and activities where visitors encounter the complexity of Japanese culture (traditional and contemporary, rural and urban, and realistic and fantastic) through art. Visitors are transported to a fantasy world as they step into a larger than life “Cat Bus” from Hayao Miyazaki’s film, My Neighbor Totoro. Children and adults can enter a small shop filled with manga and anime related goods and activities. In a traditional Japanese house, visitors can engage in time-honored Japan activities, dress in kimono and serve a tea, or discover the fine art of woodblock printing. Two art-making stations invite visitors to create their own animation and manga. Jump To Japan’s activities encourage visitors to explore and learn about Japanese culture.

Meet Totoro in Fantastic Animation

Visitors discover Fantastic Animation through scenes and characters from the animated film, My Neighbor Totoro, created and directed by Japanese animation artist, Hayao Miyazaki (2003 Academy Award winner for Best Animated Feature Film, Spirited Away). My Neighbor Totoro is a family film full of fantasy, joy and adventure. Set in 1950s Japan, the film tells of two girls, Mei and Satsuki, and their friendship with the magical Totoro, who can be seen only by children who love him. The girls share adventures with Totoro, and call on him and the Cat Bus when in trouble.

Characters from the film, Mei, Satsuki, Totoro and the Cat Bus, bring the story to life for visitors. Visitors are transported to this Japanese fantasy film when they step into a larger-than-life Cat Bus and take an imaginary journey. Kids can don a Totoro costume and role-play. A tree also has a shrine that signifies Japanese respect for nature. Through activities, children and adults playfully discover the art in My Neighbor Totoro.

Visitors can match background paintings from My Neighbor Totoro to photos in two “picture scroll” windows. By juxtaposing artistic renderings with corresponding photos, visitors discover how an animator’s inspiration comes from real places, things and events. The scenes in My Neighbor Totoro are inspired by Miyazaki’s memories of Japan in the 1950s.

Lights, Camera...Animation!

Children and adults can get to know the characters of My Neighbor Totoro while learning how film is a series of still images that appear to move when sent through a projector box, adding motion and light. Visitors view scenes from My Neighbor Totoro by moving a loop of film through reels and into a projector. Turning the crank activates a digital projector that casts an animated scene onto a screen in front of the projector. When the film stops moving along the reels, the digital projection stops as well, giving the impression that the film, instead of a digital video clip, has been projected onto the screen. Visitors can also make a series of still images come-to-life by placing 12-frame animation strips into a zoetrope.

Animation Stations

What animation exploration would be complete without creating your own animated story? Children and adults can choose from a variety of backgrounds, foreground elements and characters to animate. Visitors create their own animation using manga-style, characters, Japanese objects (such as a bullet train) and a memorable woodblock image.

Manga Mania

Manga Mania focuses on manga (Japanese comic books) and anime (Japanese animation). In Manga Mania, visitors can explore the prevalence and influence of manga in Japanese culture. Shelves hold a variety of manga books and magazines for visitors to browse, including four-panel comics published in anthology form, such as Machiko Hasegawa's long-running Sazae-san strip; stories that cross several formats, such as Osamu Tezuka's story of Atom the Astro Boy; examples of monthly manga magazines such as Shonen Jump and "how to" manga books. Kids will also find manga and anime popular in the United States, such as Cardcaptors and Pokeman.

Buying and Selling

Inside the manga shop, visitors role-play customer and shopkeeper at a sales counter using authentic Japanese objects. Children can "buy and sell" Japanese manga books. The shop contains manga and anime collectibles, such as dolls and plush figures. A case displays smaller collectibles, such as first edition trading cards, figurines, fad buttons and good luck charms.

At the cashier's counter, visitors use Japanese money, hear and say basic Japanese words and numbers and incorporate Japanese words into dramatic play. Children can push the buttons on a sound box and hear a voice say the number in Japanese. Or, push the kanji-labeled buttons and hear a voice say "Good morning," or "Thank you." The case beneath the cash register displays Japanese snacks and candy and the obligatory maneki-neko or beckoning cat, thought to bring good luck to commercial ventures. Using a touch screen interface, visitors can view a selection of three anime clips.

Take a Ride on the Bullet Train

Take a trip to Japan without ever leaving the United States! Visitors move a shinkansen (bullet train) along a track embedded in a map of Japan and into slots corresponding to locations. As visitors slide the train into a slot, backlit photos depict the place or activity and location name. Children can travel to the island of Hokkaido where a snow-sculpted temple from the annual Sapporo Snow Festival awaits, or visit Mount Fuji, an inactive volcano and beloved symbol of Japan's natural beauty.

Manga Making

Everyone in Japan reads manga; the average person can read 16 pages of manga per minute! An oversized "book" shows visitors how manga is read differently than comics in the United States. Puzzles demonstrate how manga is read—right to left and top to bottom. In the first puzzle, visitors arrange pieces of a six-panel manga strip in order. In the second puzzle, visitors place simple yon-koma (four-panel mangas) in sequence.

Create your own manga characters and story! Visitors can sit at a light table and create manga by choosing elements from transparencies featuring faces, eyes, hair and bodies drawn manga-style.

Artful Traditions

Artful Traditions focuses on the people, places and things depicted in nine displayed ukiyo-e (woodblock prints). Seven of the prints are from Edo Tokyo Museum's collection, Picture Book of Child Play by Syuntei Miyagawa. Two prints are by masters of woodblock prints, Katsushika Hokusai and Ando Hiroshige. Visitors are introduced to Japanese traditions—including clothing, festivals, children's games and stories – through activities shown in the woodblock prints. Each woodblock print is juxtaposed with a photograph of contemporary Japan, in which the same or a related scene is portrayed.

Visitors enter a Japanese home of the Edo period (1603-1867) modeled after details shown in the woodblock prints: walls of openwork wooden grating, wood lattice with paper panes and a roof of bamboo with wood shakes. Landscape elements and a bamboo overlay on two of the exterior walls represent the gardens outside many Japanese homes of this era.

Inside the home, a cabinet holds traditional Japanese clothing for visitors to try on. Visitors can experience yukata (informal cotton kimonos), kimono (Japan's traditional garment), happi (short coats worn by males) and geta or zori (sandal-like traditional foot wear). Visitors can pose in front of a mirror wearing traditional Japanese clothing and see themselves “in” a woodblock print.

In an adjacent area, children and adults are invited to remove their shoes before stepping on the tatami (traditional Japanese floor covering), store their footwear in cubbies and engage in dramatic play.

The tatami area (woven floor covering and low table) focuses on the celebration of two Japanese national holidays: Hinamatsuri (Doll Festival) and Kodomo no hi (Children's Day).

Hinamatsuri, also known as Girl's Day, is celebrated March 3 and devoted to all the daughters in a family. Girls dress-up in kimono and attend tea parties in the homes of friends. The central element in the festival is a Hina Ningyo (display of traditional dolls attired in traditional kimono) often family treasures passed from one generation to the next.

Kodomo no hi is a Japanese national holiday celebrating children. Traditions practiced on Children's Day include the flying of koinobori (carp streamers) and displaying gogatsu-ningyo (samurai dolls). Inside a box are different size and design puzzle pieces in the shape of carp streamers. Visitors can compare the puzzle pieces to hanging carp streamers and arrange the pieces in order. Text written on the fish puzzle pieces provides information about the symbolism of the carp and the koinobori displayed by Japanese families to celebrate Children's Day.

Chigai-dana (staggered shelves) in the tatami area hold festival day foods, serving dishes, trays, napkins, tea service and a carp streamer puzzle. Children and adults can take a seat on zabuton (floor pillows), where tea and traditional rice treats are enjoyed. The other interior wall holds a large Hinamatsuri display. A bamboo pole showcases colorful koinobori (carp streamers) that are flown on Kodomo-no-hi.

Visitors can also play an ancient Japanese card game, Karuta, which is still played today. A woodblock print shows a group of girls playing Karuta, in which contestants race to make matches between cards with one-half of a Japanese poem or proverb (in script or pictures) and cards bearing the other half.

From Past to Present

Visitors can view an ancient picture scroll, a reproduction from Chōjūgiga (The Frolicking Animal Scrolls) by the 12th century artist-priest Toba. A panel holds “seek-and-find” questions for visitors that call attention to details in the scroll. Visitors see similarities between ancient scrolls, woodblock prints and the contemporary art forms of manga and anime.

The process by which woodblock prints are made is demonstrated on a touch-screen monitor where seven layers of color are placed onto the samisen (ink lines) picture from Katsushika Hokusai's notable print, "Great Wave Off Kanagawa." A graphic panel explains the process of woodblock printing, and the similarities between woodblock printing, manga and anime.

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To learn more about Kids 'N' Stuff Children's Museum in Albion, MI, or the Jump to Japan exhibit, please call (517) 629-8023 or visit us online at www.kidsnstuff.org.

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