Every May 5th, in Japan, is Children’s Day. This day is dedicated to the happiness and celebration of the youngest. It is an opportunity to express gratitude for their health and to pray for the prevention of illness and negative influence. Today, the focus of the festival is in the carp shaped banners (koi-nobori). Huge carp of paper or fabric, symbolizing perseverance, value and strength, are raised on tall flagpoles in every homes’ gardens. Carp are able to swim against the stream and go up very high waterfalls, so the koi-nobori swim against the wind and represent the wish that children also grow up tenacious and strong.

Other features of the celebration are rice cakes filled with sweet bean paste and wrapped in oak leaves (Kashiwa-mochi). These are shared with neighbors and friends. Other rice cakes (Chimaki) are wrapped in bamboo leaves and usually eaten in the family. Tradition has children being washed that day in water with petals of the iris flower. It is believed that these petals have the ability to eject evil influences and illnesses.

This workshop can develop in many ways and can cater to the needs and age appropriateness of your classroom. Koinobori can be made of everything from origami paper to tissue paper, cotton fabric to nylon. Rice cakes can be made and shared as the history of the celebration and its traditions is relayed to your class via a digital presentation.

If there is a Japanese Visiting Scholar in Vermont through ASOP, he or she can come to your school to lead the celebration.