Every morning, campers were eager to get out of their cars and join the fun provided by the East Asia Institute’s Japanese Summer Camp. The campers began their mornings watching Japanese folktale videos that demonstrated different aspects of the Japanese culture. They were also encouraged to use the craft station, that provided coloring sheets and word searches, while they watched the videos. The folktales would give an insight to how the Japanese culture is unique to their own.

Every day after the folktales, campers had the opportunity to learn the Japanese language. The morning lessons started off with Hiragana and Katakana learning. For the first 3 days, campers were taught the Hiragana alphabet. Lessons included verbal practice, writing practice, and matching games. Campers were asked to repeat after the teacher of each alphabet sound and then to point out to what they looked like. When the campers became skillful enough, they were provided with flash cards to use for matching English and Japanese spelling. The same style lessons were repeated for the Katakana alphabet. The campers were always marvelous in their efforts.

After each morning’s language lesson, campers were taught different origami shapes. Over a projector, a step by step instruction was demonstrated so the campers had the help they needed to complete each origami and not feel lost. Origami shapes included Japanese style...
lantern, Kamisumo (paper sumo wrestler), Pikachu, ninja star and Totoro (character from a Japanese movie). Following the origami making, campers had the opportunity to do more activities and crafts that related to Japanese customs. Campers made crafts such as Kakigori (fake shaved ice), Koinobori (carp kites), Kabuto (samurai hat), byun-byun tops, and tsurushibina (decorative piece to honor a girl’s happiness). Campers also had a small Kamisumo tournament, played with Kendama toys (ball in a cup), and even made sushi! They had busy mornings crafting and learning different Japanese activities and customs. By the time lunch came around campers anticipated to know what was next.

When lunch time began, campers would settle into their seats, eat their food and watch Japanese animated children’s films provided by the East Asia Institute. Of course, the whole film was watched! The campers were always so quiet while the films played, appreciating and reflecting similar topics they learned prior to lunch.

Once lunch was over, in the afternoon lessons, the campers were taught self-introductions (including proper greetings, their country, and age), spelling of their names in Katakana, numbers 1-20, body parts, and family vocabulary. Campers had a worksheet that they had to fill out each day with something new to introduce who they were. On the back of the worksheet, the campers were required to obtain a sticker from the game, 3-minute challenge. In the game, campers were told to go to the camp counselors and introduce themselves properly in order to receive as many stickers as they could get, all in 3 minutes! It was a great opportunity to practice their new learned Japanese phrases. At the end of the week, the top three campers with the most stickers won a small Japanese prize.

After the language lessons, campers were in for more fun! They participated in wagashi sweets
making, crafting daruma (charm), onigiri making (rice ball), designing a Kokeshi Doll, and crafting paper stained glass. The campers were so great at crafting. They all have such a creative imagination! And of course, the sad part of the day was the last activity, chiming that the day was coming to an end. But, the campers were still eager to finish the day strongly. Each day ended with a boom, by showcasing activities such as Hachimaki making, learning Soran bushi (Japanese traditional dance), paper dyeing, calligraphy on fans, chopstick practice and case making, as well as more Japanese traditional games. At the end of the day, campers had arms full of the crafts they created during the day and ran to their cars to show them off to their parents and siblings. It was nice to see them full of smiles.

The Japanese Language and Culture camp at UTSA gave children a fun and safe environment where they could learn and enjoy a culture different than their own. It was such a pleasure to showcase the Japanese culture with the campers, and it was truly an unforgettable highlight of the summer. We at the East Asia Institute at UTSA look forward to next year’s Japanese Summer Camp!