Each morning, campers arrived eager for the fun cultural and language adventure that they would all soon take part of here at The University of Texas at San Antonio. The campers received their first taste of Japanese culture each morning from videos of classic Japanese folktales. These stories highlighted unique aspects of Japanese culture and tradition, which provided children entertainment and a wealth of knowledge on a culture that differs from their own.

Following the folktales, the children began learning Hiragana and Katakana, the two basic writing systems of the Japanese language. During the language lessons, the children learned basic pronunciation and novice proper writing form of these two writing systems in the span of a week. Each day they would practice matching, listening, reading, and writing words. Children first learned Hiragana in carefully selected proportions to ensure retention.

After the first three days the campers moved on to another Japanese writing system, Katakana, which they quickly mastered within two days. The campers would be verbally instructed upon pronunciation aloud in both Hiragana and Katakana as a group, in order to practice their newly acquired skill.

After the morning language learning, the campers would learn different origami, the Japanese art of folding paper, by making beloved Japanese...
popular culture characters such as Kumamon (black bear from Kumamoto prefecture), Hello Kitty and Totoro (character from a Japanese film). Each day they were able to take home and share with family and friends their newfound art. Campers also learned how to make specific arts and crafts related to Japanese culture. For instance, campers decorated Hina dolls, made ikebana (flower arrangement), byun-byun tops, and decorated Japanese fans to name a few. All of these arts and crafts activities gave the children a chance to experience a taste of Japanese culture in a way they could interpret and replicate them on their own. Each activity was provided with step-by-step instructions and all campers’ hands were busy working on their crafts to show off their creativity.

In addition to the arts and crafts activities, the campers watched critically-acclaimed family-friendly Japanese anime movies during the lunch break. The campers were able to appreciate Japanese cinema, which reflected the same cultural topics they had previously learned in the class.

SHORTLY AFTER LUNCH, CAMPERS WOULD BEGIN LEARNING SIMPLE SELF-INTRODUCTORY PHRASES IN JAPANESE. STARTING OFF WITH THEIR OWN NAMES ON DAY ONE AND CONSEQUENTLY ENDING WITH AN ACCUMULATION OF PHRASES TO BUILD UP THEIR SELF-INTRODUCTION. BY THE END OF THE CAMP, CAMPERS WERE ABLE TO INTRODUCE THEMSELVES ENTIRELY IN THE JAPANESE LANGUAGE.

They were also taught a variety of useful words and phrases in Japanese and further received a chance to verbally engage with the Japanese language. Campers went around and introduced themselves to fellow campers as well as Camp Counselors to
In addition to the activities mentioned above, campers participated in traditional Japanese games such as kendama, daruma-otoshi, and karuta. The children had fun playing each traditional Japanese game. Other activities include making ogre masks and calligraphy cards. Each camper hand drew their own calligraphy card with a Kanji character of their choice. The campers had a blast practicing calligraphy. Campers then decorated a frame anyway they liked, where they would then put their calligraphy card inside and take home. The Japanese Language and Culture Camp here at UTSA gave the campers a fun and safe environment to fully enjoy learning about a culture very different from their own. The camp will definitely be an unforgettable highlight of each camper’s summer. We look forward to hosting camps again!

Campers also participated in activities such as cooking traditional Japanese treats and kite making. The Japanese food making included onigiri, green tea cupcakes and sushi. The campers had hands-on experience making these treats while being instructed and aided by camp counselors. They had a great time making and tasting them. Some campers even took some food back home to share with their family members. During the kite making activity, the campers designed and assembled their own kites and had the opportunity to test their flying skills.

enhance their newly acquired Japanese language skills. It was impressive to see the campers being able to learn these Japanese phrases so proficiently in just a week during this camp.