Hands On Learning
with Reading Museum Service

JAPANESE COSTUME G90

Pair of geta



Geta come from Japan, but can be seen in other countries across Asia. Each shoe consists of a wooden board, called a dai, which acts as the sole. The dai is then raised off the ground by two teeth, which make a 'clacking' sound when walking. The whole shoe is held in place with a 'V' shaped thong, which goes between the toes like a flip-flop. In this case the thong is made of string but it is often made of cloth.



Which one is left and which one is right? - trick question. Geta can be worn on either foot!

Traditionally, geta are made from the wood of the kiri tree (pictured on the right). They kept the wearer's feet and clothing off the dusty, muddy and uneven streets.



Today they are only really worn on special occasions such as festivals. As you can see from the picture on the right, the streets are far from dirty and uneven. Most people in Japan wear western style shoes in everyday life - much like ours.



Some geta only have one tooth. These are called tengu geta. Surprisingly, they are not too difficult to walk in, but standing still is more of problem and requires good balance!

Reading Borough Council

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Pair of sandals



These sandals are known as zori. Traditionally, they were made from rice straw or other plant fibres but today they are often made from synthetic materials. Look at the pictures on the right for examples of both.



Do they remind you of something? Flip flops, which first appeared in the United States of America during the Second World War, are believed to be based on zori. Soldiers brought them back from Japan and the fashion spread.



There is one difference between the two - the thong on the zori is very far forward and leaves the toes hanging off the end of the sole.

Tabi

Geta and zori are fine during the summer months, but keeping your feet warm in winter was a problem. Tabi socks have a separate section for the big toe. They are far more comfortable than trying to wear normal socks and having to wedge your foot into the geta or zori. The picture on the right dates from the mid twentieth century and shows a lady wearing tabi with zori.





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Kimono and belt





Both geta and zori are traditionally worn with a kimono, like the beautiful example in the box. The left side is always wrapped over the right, as you can see in the picture on the right. The belt, called the obi, is then placed around the waist to hold everything in place. The obi can sometimes be very wide, like the one worn by the costumed figure in the box.

Few people wear the kimono on a daily basis. They are usually saved for weddings and formal occasions.

There are several different styles of kimono.



The tomesode kimono is worn by married women at the wedding of a relative. It is black and has a patterned obi and some decoration on the lower part.

A single woman wears the furisode kimono (pictured on the right). This is bought for her by her family when she reaches the age of 20 and is usually made of brightly coloured silk with long baggy sleeves. Of course, few young women wear their furisode to work or university - they wear very similar clothes to young women in Britain. But the second Monday in January is a public holiday in Japan. It is called 'Adult Day' and many young women attend a ceremony wearing their furisode kimono.



The yukata is a light, cotton kimono worn in the summer months at Bon-odori - a traditional dance festival. The girl on the right is wearing a yukata kimono.

These are just three of many different types of kimono.

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Hair slide



In the past, both Japanese men and women wore their hair up and used ornaments and accessories both for decoration and to hold the hair in place. In fact, the Emperor Tenmu (672-686) decreed that everybody must put their hair up. The photograph on the right shows a lady with a very beautiful hairstyle.



A bun with a hair slide is still thought of as a classic Japanese way of wearing the hair and goes well with the clothing mentioned. Young people in Japan today might choose this style for a formal occasion, but otherwise have a wide variety of cuts, colours and styles.





Fan



The fan has a long history. There are pictures of women holding fans dating back to the seventh and eighth centuries.
Fans were produced in Edo (now Tokyo) and were decorated with landscapes or pictures of kabuki actors. Kabuki is a type of traditional Japanese theatre where the actors are known for their elaborate make up and for men playing the roles of women.

Japanese fans can be round or oval - like this one. You can keep cool during the hot Japanese summer by wearing a yukata and fanning yourself.

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Costume figure



The figure is wearing a kimono with a wide obi. She is wearing tabi but without any geta or zori.

Look underneath the folds of the obi at the back. The folded piece of board is called the obi-ita. It helps the ends of the obi to hang nicely, rather than just falling against the body. The sashes around her waist add extra detail but also stop the obi from moving around.

Headrest



These strange looking pieces of wood fold out to make a headrest. They can be folded up and carried around until the user wants to lie down for a rest. The head was placed in the curved part.



In Japanese it is called ki-makura, which literally means wooden pillow. There is a picture of a modern ki-makura in use on the right.



Ki-makura were also used during the Edo Period (1603 - 1868) to stop the hair from becoming messed up whilst resting. The fashionable hairstyle at the time was the chonmage (see on the right). It looks quite hard to maintain!