

■ 「月」の言葉 Moon Words

The moon has many faces, and there is a word for each!

The new or crescent moon is ^{しんげつ}新月, or ^{みかづき}三日月. The half-moon is ^{はんげつ}半月, and the full moon is ^{まんげつ}満月 or ^{めいげつ}名月.

^{じゅうごや}十五夜 is the 15th night of the lunar month when the moon is full, so ^{じゅうごや}十五夜の^{つき}月 also refers to the full moon. On

the night of ^{ちゅうしゅう}中秋の^{めいげつ}名月, the harvest moon, (the closest full moon to ^{しゅうぶん}秋分, the autumn equinox) many

Japanese follow the custom of (お) ^{つきみ}月見, moon viewing.

■ 帝と富士山 The emperor and Mt Fuji

According to the original story, when ^{かぐやひめ}かぐやひめ returned to the Palace of the Moon, she left behind a letter and

an elixir of life (^{ふし}不死の^{くすり}薬) for the emperor (^{みかど}帝) who had been her suitor. But he was loath to prolong his life

without her, and had both items burned on the mountaintop nearest heaven, Mt Fuji. There is a theory that the

word ^{ふし}不死 came to be written ^{ふじ}富士, and this is how ^{ふじさん}富士山 got its name.

■ 「竹」の言葉 Bamboo words

- ❖ ^{たけばやし}竹林 bamboo grove
- ❖ ^{たけ}竹の^こ子 bamboo shoot (also written ^{たけのこ}筍)
- ❖ ^{たけうま}竹馬 stilts
- ❖ ^{ちくば}竹馬の^{とも}友 a childhood friend
- ❖ ^{たけ}竹を割った^わような^{せいかく}性格 straightforward, frank person
- ❖ ^{たけ}竹のように^{そだ}まっすぐ育つ to bring up (a child) to be honest and true

■ かん じ 漢 字

The kanji 竹 たけ is clearly a pictograph of bamboo, and as a component it lends this meaning to other kanji, eg.

ささ 笹, bamboo leaf, ふで 筆 brush, ふえ 笛 flute, and はこ 箱, box.

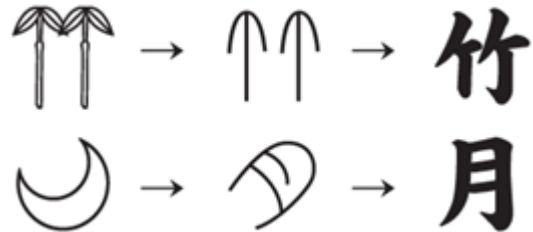
The kanji 月 つき comes from a picture of a crescent moon, and it also hints at this meaning as a component in other

kanji, usually on the right, eg. あか 明るい, bright, あさ 朝, morning, and き 期 in compound words like じき 時期, time. There are

many words which have the component 月 つき on the left-hand side, but in these kanji the component is usually a

variant form of the kanji 肉にく, meaning 'meat'. It is found in many words related to the body, eg. はだ 肌, skin, お腹, stomach and

しぼう 脂肪, fat.



月見
Moon Viewing

The full moon is considered to be at its most beautiful on August 15 in the lunar calendar (present-day mid-September). On this night,

called じゅうごや 十五夜, the Japanese celebrate by organising

moon-viewing parties at a spot suitable for admiring the moon,

preferably near a river or pond. At this time, homes may be

decorated with つきみだんご 月見団子 (rice dumplings), すずき (pampas grass),

and autumn fruit such as くり 栗 (chestnut), なし 梨 (pear) and さといも 里芋 (taro). If you don't have these decorations to

hand, you can even buy an お月見セット!

The custom of moon viewing on じゅうごや 十五夜 was introduced from China. Also introduced from China is the

story of the rabbit in the moon. According to the Chinese story, there is a rabbit living in the moon who

produces elixir of life pills. However, in the Japanese variation, the rabbit spends his days pounding rice



for もち(rice cakes). The alteration may have come about through a pun: previously the full moon was referred to as もちつき^{もちつき}(望月, now pronounced もちづき) but there is a word with the same pronunciation, もち餅つき which means 'pounding rice'.

Words relating the moon to food do not end there; そば and うどん dishes containing an egg are called つきみ月見そば and つきみ月見うどん respectively.

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