



Vol. 2, Issue 5, August 2025



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Obon: It's Past and Present

The festival of Obon stems from the belief in ancestral spirits and the Japanese Buddhist custom of honouring said ancestors. An altar or shrine dedicated to lost loved ones is commonplace in a typical Japanese family home, and Obon presents the chance for relatives to reunite, pay their respects, and give their time to clean or provide offerings towards these shrines or their ancestors' graves.



The beginnings of Obon can be traced back to the legend of Maha Maudgalyayana. A notable disciple of Buddha who wished to ease his mother's suffering in the afterlife. He was advised to leave offerings to Buddhist monks on the 15th day of the seventh month, until eventually, his mother's spirit was freed from its pain. Delighted with this, Maha performed a dance which would come to be known as the Bon Odori 盆踊り. Nowadays, this dance is still a mainstay of the celebration.



It is also heavily influenced by Buddhism's Ghost Festival, originating in China, wherein it is believed that ghosts and spirits make visits to their living descendants, as well as the Taoist festival of Zhongyuan.

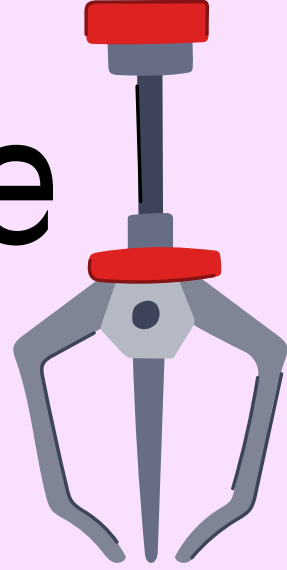


The first recorded instance of an Obon celebration in Japan was under Empress Suiko, established as an official holiday in Japan by the year 733.

This year, the festival will be observed from August 13th to the 16th. For a lot of us, that means some well-earned (mandatory) time off. Schools are closed, and Okayama Prefectural JETs will have the 'opportunity' to take the week off as part of their additional summer leave. Bear in mind that the Nozomi Shinkansen will have reserved seats only between August 8th and 17th. Not that I would recommend travelling during this time if you can avoid it, given people from all four corners of Japan will be congregating en masse within major stations to make their yearly pilgrimage home.



Mastering the Claw



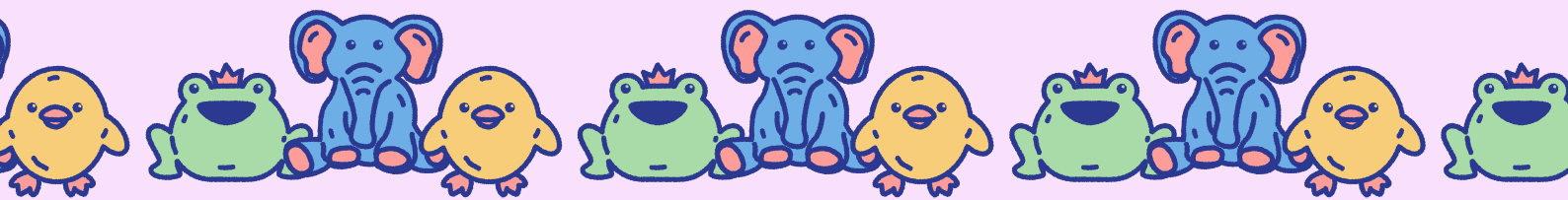
As the anniversary date of my first full year in Okayama draws near, I've reflected a bit on my time here in Japan and Okayama. One thing that stands out is my love for UFO catchers and claw machines. I'm here to give you my tips and tricks when it comes to successfully maneuvering, and possibly even winning. I am unfortunately a bit of a fiend when it comes to these games. I love the thrill of winning a prize, but yet hate the disappointment when I fail to win. As someone who's spent more money than she's willing to share on crane games, I wanna share some strategies and just general info about these games.

Now there's many types of crane games nowadays, the most common is the classic claw. Usually, just with 1 attempt at these claws, you can tell if you're close to winning or not. Many of these machines have a payout system, meaning until it's eaten enough of your money, the claw strength won't be all that optimal, leading to a lot of drops. Most arcade games in my opinion are about 70% gambling, and 30% skill.



My most important skill I learned playing these games is when to walk away. Unless I am absolutely committed to a specific prize that I NEED to have, if the first attempt shows a weak claw, I walk away. Otherwise, next thing you know you've spent nearly 2000 yen and still not any closer to winning.

My second tip, before you enter, give yourself a budget. If you walk in with no plan in mind, there's a good chance your wallet may be crying on the bus ride home. I find that if I set a budget for a planned trip to an arcade, this helps keep me accountable and not spend more than I can or should.



Now, I find that if I go with friends that also enjoy these activities, I may end up spending more than I would alone. This is due to the fact that we will egg each other on, and in hopes that we can see each other succeed in winning our desired prizes. However, some friends are not like this, and may be more responsible with their money. They can go along and have a good time, but they also know when to stop and in turn can help save you from wasting more of your own money. In this regard, I just suggest that you know your company when going to an arcade. If you're like me, (who is easily influenced by the encouragement of others) it may be helpful to avoid making a habit of going to arcades all the time with certain people. But if you find you have difficulty holding yourself accountable to a budget, maybe going with a more level headed and responsible friend can help you keep from straying.

As for technical suggestions, this I cannot speak on as an expert. Although I have won many prizes here during my 7 month stay so far, a handful have been pure luck, a few others were almost paid out, and some I really had to work for. But if you're looking for the most simple, I'd suggest just sticking to the classic claw. It's the easiest to win in my opinion, as well as the easiest to tell if you have any chance of winning. If a prize drops immediately, there's a good chance the machine is not paid out, and you can walk away.

Also, when it comes to the classic claw, instead of just pressing the button once and letting it drop, you can press the button a second time before it lowers completely into the bottom and it will stop where it's at and close the claw. This tip has helped secure many more prizes for me vs just letting it drop all the way to the bottom.



Now that I've rambled on and on about crane games of all things (the fun way to gamble), I hope that y'all find yourself enjoying a crane game here and there, and maybe writing this can be a cathartic solution for my own addiction lol.



Written by:

@annawilson20

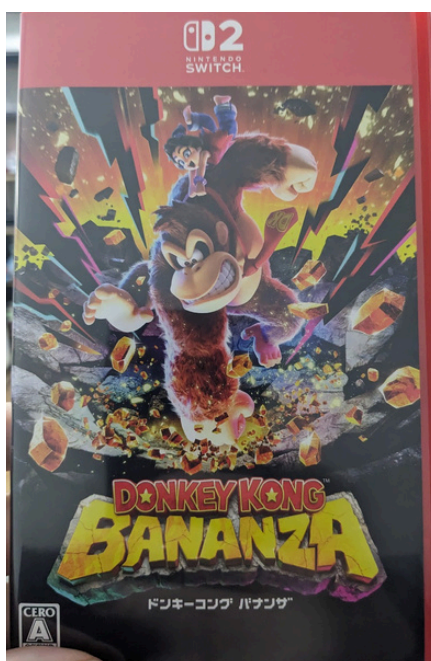


It would simply be rude not to start this segment off talking about anything other than Donkey Kong Bananza smashing, crashing, and barrel blasting its way onto the scene on July 17th. The game is a revelation, as was expected given the development team's last outing being Super Mario Odyssey. It takes everything great from that game and piles more love and creativity into it. The gameplay is buttery smooth and satisfying, levels are vast and chock-full of secrets and sub-areas, and a new skill tree makes exploration more rewarding and streamlined.



It didn't take long for it to be compared to another fantastic 3D platformer in Astro Bot. You know, 2024 Game of the Year award winning Astro Bot? I believe these two games offer one of the finest examples of both having your cake and eating it too. They are both delightful.

I even gave into the temptation of picking up the Donkey Kong and Pauline Amiibo figure for a reasonable price that brightens up my shelf a little and provides the in-game boon of making a certain collectable easier to get.



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But I mean come on, just look at his big stupid grin, that's the smile of an ape that knows I dropped 10,000 yen on his game and merch.



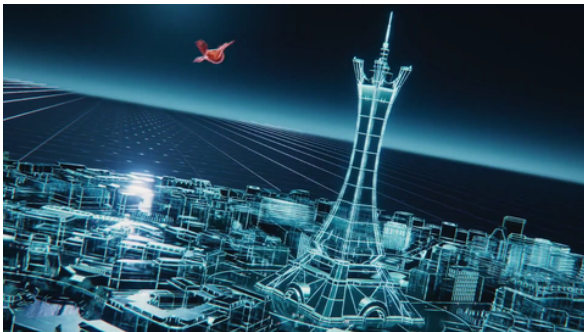
In other news, Sucker Punch Productions' showcased a State of Play for Ghost of Yōtei. Features such as Kurosawa mode return, allowing players to experience the game in full black and white. There are a sundry of new playstyles and weapons available taking advantage of the game's time jump from Ghost of Tsushima, which is also shown in the small amount of plot shown off during the trailer.



As the title suggests the game takes place in the Ezo region during the early 1600s, with the looming, ever-present Mt Yōtei a centrepiece. It releases on October 2nd 2025 with pre-orders available now, alongside a couple of stunning special edition PlayStation 5 sets and controllers. It's exclusive for this console for now, but I imagine a PC release is inevitable later on.



Last up for this section, we had a hotly anticipated Pokemon Presents on July 22nd with some long awaited news for Pokemon Legends Z-A among other things. There's no doubt that Legends Arceus, Game Freak's first attempt at a more sandbox approach to Pokemon storytelling, was a success with fans and critics. It's a format that lends itself well to the concept of Pokemon, and Kalos' Lumiose City from Generation 6 does seem to be rife with opportunities.



But I feel I may be in the minority when I say, I just don't care about this style. Traditional RPG elements are partially what gives Pokemon such addictive longevity. There has been such a wild uptick in 'open world' games that I think some developers are scared of going back to linear narratives. The quality, creativity, and heart of a game make it much more special than a huge empty map could do by itself.

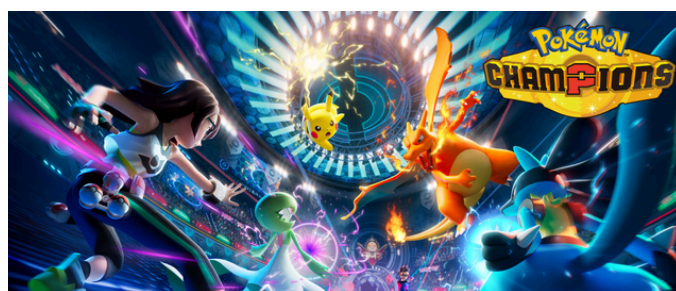
PokePark Kanto gave some fans of that series a glimmer of hope before revealing itself to be something unheard of: a place one must go outside to access. Doors will open in 2026 at the Yomiuriland theme park in Tokyo.



Aardman Productions teased a new claymation series called The Misadventures of Sirfetch'd & Pichu. If even half the charm of Wallace and Gromit can be recreated here, it could be something unexpectedly brilliant. That's slated to drop in 2027.



And finally, Pokemon Champions promises to be Nintendo's next answer to those itching for Stadium and Battle Revolution type gameplay. It will allow us to use our favourites from all games linked to Pokemon Box and allow application of custom stats for competitive matches. If pure battles are your vibe, it's probably the game for you. It'll also be free to play, a rare added bonus.



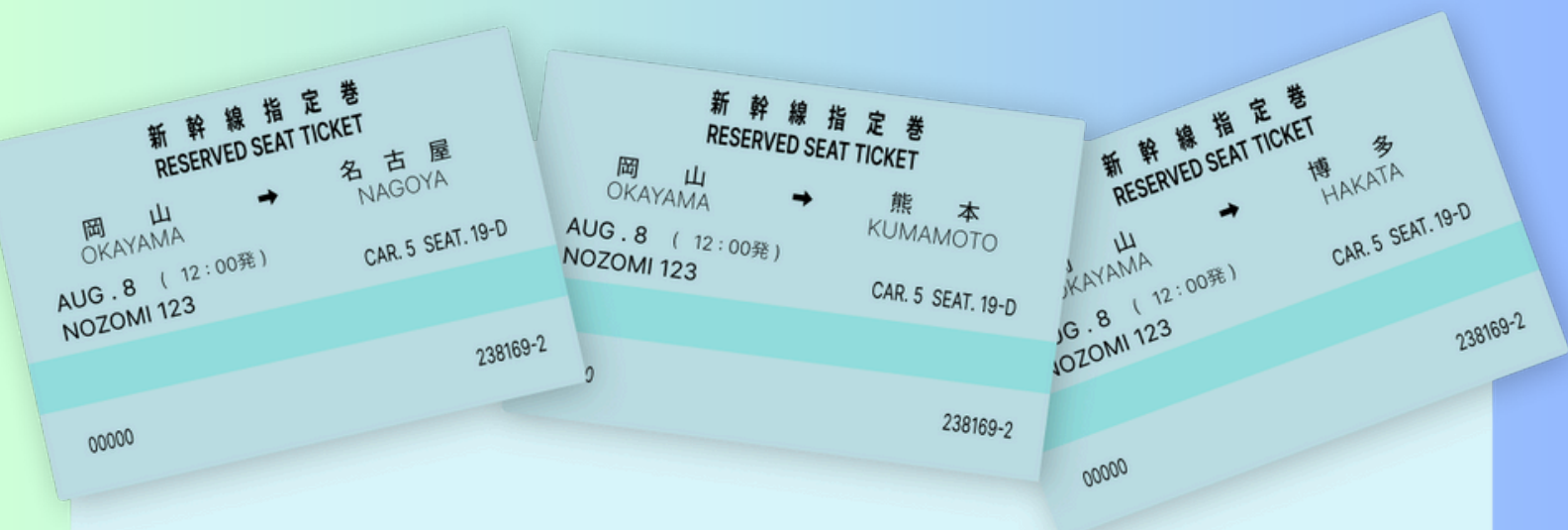
A decent month for gaming I'd say, now get that Direct out Nintendo, we're all still waiting...

GAME
OVER

Written by



@lewischissio



LOOKING TO TRAVEL VIA THE SHINKANSEN?
NOZOMI SHINKANSENS
WILL BE
RESERVATIONS ONLY
FROM
AUGUST 8 - 17



2025 Welcome Party!

Mark your calendars! AJET is hosting a welcome party for all of the new incoming Okayama JETs! Keep an eye out in August for the sign up form if you're interested! More specific information below.

Date: Saturday, September 13th

Time: Start @6:30pm

Location: Okayama City Tenmaya rooftop Beer Garden

Price: ¥5,500 per person



2025 Leavers Features

As we are entering August, this brings the time of welcoming new JETS to Okayama, as well as saying goodbye to some of our friends leaving the program for new pursuits. We have gathered some words of wisdom from some of our 2025 Leavers, and wish them well on future endeavours!



Ryan Calpito:

3 years as ALT

Favorite Memory: specifically pertaining to being an ALT, working with, coaching, and advising my students in the national Commercial High School Speech Contest. We went on to Tokyo to then trump all other prefecture's students in the national championship and brought back Okayama Prefecture's first ever victory in the contest. From then, in the last half of my last year, with another student, we tallied another speech contest victory in Takahashi. And, again, I have managed to get 2 of my students to be both of Okayama's representative students, in this year's Tokyo Commercial High School Championship.



insta: @suitsu_sensei

Beyond the job of teaching, spread out over the instances and shenanigans in 3 years, I loved making connections, creating connections, and enjoying life with other JETs, other ALTs, JTEs, other Japanese Teachers, and the locals of Okayama. I loved traveling, such as going to Tokyo for the speech contest, or when I went up to Izumo for the first time. I loved the long chats along the canal in 西川緑道公園. And I loved all the random encounters, events, and side quests that happen with life. Events were fun, and I really enjoyed the first Welcome Party since Okayama AJET's revival - it was great to be part of the board too. And sports! I will always remember going to Koshien in summer of 2024, to watch the National High School baseball champs. I will forever remember going with everyone to Hiroshima to watch my beloved Hanshin Tigers sweep the grounds of Mazda Stadium with the Hiroshima Carp; I also loved the night that followed, however admittedly can't remember much of it after the 二次会.

Post JET Plans: I will continue to search for a job that I can start my professional career with, ideally in marketing, and ideally internationally oriented. While I am sad that I am leaving Okayama and Japan, I know in the near future, somehow I will return. I wish to start a career that builds upon my experiences here, and spans between both homes in Japan and the US.

Advice: Japanese language can greatly enhance your experience. You can gain so much more information, you'll be brought more into the loop at school with teachers beyond just your JTEs, and you will foster so many more connections. Your students will love talking to you and telling you things normally; but if you can connect in their native language, not only do you properly emulate the advice we give them as ESL teachers, they will also tell you EVEN MORE interesting and/or funny things. Additionally, MORE students will also want to talk to you, as they'll feel a daunting wall of not being confident in a foreign language is suddenly gone.

AN IMPORTANT DISCLAIMER: You don't need to be fluent, or even have a command of the language at the beginning either. What's important is expressing the interest and showing the effort in simply LEARNING the language. I have watched other JETs here bring themselves up from only knowing how to say "Hello, my name is ALT Taro," to full on conversations complete with Okayama dialect, in a matter of months, and be able to hold their own.



insta: @roguevibe2

Blair Evans:
3 years as ALT

Favorite Memory: I've met many other JETs in the prefecture through Orientation and SDC! Because of those connections, I've been able to go on many trips with them and travel all around Japan with my new friends.

Plans Post JET: I'll be working at a BPO company in Toyama Prefecture!

Advice: Be the person to take the first step in making connections with others -- whether it's other JETs or Japanese people! Also be sure to read Japanese social cues (understanding Hon'ne and Tatemae) so that you can quickly adapt to your new work environment.

Brenda Falk:
3 years as ALT

Favorite Memory: Connecting with Students

Post JET plans: Travel and re-connect with family

Advice: Make your situation what you want it to be, with positivity and friendliness

Samuel Howes:
1 year as ALT

Favorite Memory: Playing table tennis with students

Post JET plans: Working as Public Servant

Advice: This job is what you make it. Put time into the things that are meaningful to you and your students, and don't be afraid to say no to the things that drain you.

Additional Responses/Information:

Favorite Memories:

I was very lucky to be able to travel to 35 prefectures while on JET. I have so many fond memories of travelling with my friends and family to so many amazing places. My favourite memories in my town include being given home grown produce by farmers and enjoying meals with them.

Plans Post JET:

I will become an elementary school teacher in my home country. I'm excited to have my own class to teach and use the experience I've gained in Japan.

Advice/additional information:

Be adventurous and say yes to everything.

Japanese weather is wild.

When your coworkers are gathering for socials or drinks. GO. I won't say you NEED TO imbibe, but I would recommend going to these gatherings and having a few drinks, even if its just a humble ginger ale/oolong tea, grabbing a bite, and chatting with...anyone and everyone. This is Japanese culture, and is how I personally got close, or at least on friendly terms with everyone in the staff room. The workplace in Japan can be rather cold or indifferent on an ordinary day. People are busy all the time, and when they are not, they are dead tired. However I guarantee, in the social setting, everyone behaves differently. You, and them tbh, will be surprised at what they can end up communicating in English (even if they never speak it ordinarily). You will likely also be surprised at how much you can communicate and talk about in Japanese as well, even if you only just started to learn.

Events in Okayama

第25回 おかやま桃太郎まつり「烏城夏まつり」

The 25th Okayama Momotaro Festival "Karasuki Summer Festival"

Date: August 2nd and 3rd

More Info: [日本語](#)

Location: Okayama Castle Area

*No parking (bicycles and cars) visitors are asked to use public transit

Time: 18:00 - 21:30

Admission: Free



児島港ENNICH2025

Kojima Port Ennichi Summer Festival



Date: August 9th and 10th

More Info: [日本語](#)

Location: Kojima Tourist Port Area

Time: 16:00 - 21:00

Admission: Free

第47回津山納涼ごんごまつりIN吉井川

The 47th Tsuyama Summer Festival in Yoshiigawa

Date: August 2nd and 3rd

More info: [日本語](#)

Location: Yoshii Riverside Green Park

Advised to use public transit, as parking is extremely limited.

Time: 18:00 - 21:00

Admission: Free



瀬戸内ハンドメイドマルシェ2025 Setouchi Handmade Marche 2025



Date: August 2nd and August 3rd

More info: [日本語](#)

Location: Convex Okayama

Time: 10:00 - 16:00

Admission: 500 yen for same day tickets, 400 yen for advance tickets

第34回 吉備高原「鬼伝祭」～ふるさとの夏祭り～

The 34th Kibi Plateau Oniden Festival ~ Hometown Summer Festival

Date: August 30th

More info: [日本語](#)

Location: Kibi Plateau City Sun Sun Square

Time: 15:00 - 21:00

Admission: Free



第37回和文字焼きまつり

The 37th Japanese Character Yaki Festival



Date: August 16th

More info: [日本語](#)

Location: Wake Town, Yoshii River Park

Time: 18:45 - 21:30

Admission: Free



Difficulty: Medium

Monthly Sudoku

JULY 2025

8	5	2	3	1	9	6	4	7
1	3	7	5	4	6	8	9	2
4	6	9	8	2	7	5	3	1
5	9	6	4	7	3	1	2	8
3	8	4	1	5	2	9	7	6
2	7	1	6	9	8	3	5	4
6	2	8	7	3	5	4	1	9
7	4	5	9	6	1	2	8	3
9	1	3	2	8	4	7	6	5

Fill in the puzzle so that every row across, every column down and every 9 by 9 box contains the numbers 1 to 9.

クロスワードパズルだよ！ 全部書けたら、㊦～㊩の文字を使って言葉を作ってね。

ヒント：きみの学校にもある？

答え 七不思議

	① 職		② 追		③ 不		④ 一		⑤ 直	線
⑥ 全	員	参	加		安		⑦ 朝	飯	前	
	会			⑧ 指	定		一			
	議		⑨ 気	圧		⑩ 七	夕	⑪ 祭	り	
					⑫ 道	草		日		⑬ 文
		⑭ 提	案		路		⑮ 未		⑯ 招	集
⑰ 思	い	出		⑱ 目	標	達	成		待	
考		⑲ 物	価		識		⑳ 年	賀	状	

タテのかぎ

- ① 学校の先生方の会議。
- ② あとから何かたす事。
- ③ バランスが悪く、くずれそうな状態。
- ④ 少ない時間。○○○○では出来ない。
- ⑤ すぐ前の事。○○になってやめる。
- ⑧ ツボをおす、マッサージの一種。
- ⑩ 全部言えるかな？ 春と秋の○○。
- ⑪ 神社や宮中の祭りの日。
- ⑫ 安全のため道路に立てられたしるし。
- ⑬ 作文などをまとめた物。卒業○○。
- ⑭ ○○○は、必ず期限までに出すように。
- ⑮ 成人前の人。○○○者は飲酒禁止です。
- ⑯ 「来てね！」って内容の手紙やカード。
- ⑰ あれこれ考え、頭を働かせる事。○○力。
- ⑤ まっすぐな線。
- ⑥ すべてのメンバーが加わり、何かする事。
- ⑦ たやすい事。それぐらいは○○○だ。
- ⑧ 学校○○の運動着と上ばき。
- ⑨ 台風は熱帯低○○に変わりました。
- ⑩ 7月7日は○○○○りの日。
- ⑫ 下校と中で○○を食っては、いけません。
- ⑭ 「こんなのはどうか？」って意見を出す事。
- ⑯ 人をよび集める事。図書委員を○○する。
- ⑰ 卒業まで、よい○○い○○をたくさん残そう。
- ⑱ あと一さつで年間読書の○○○○だ！
- ⑲ 品物やサービスのねだん。○○が高い。
- ⑳ 年始のあいさつを書く手紙。

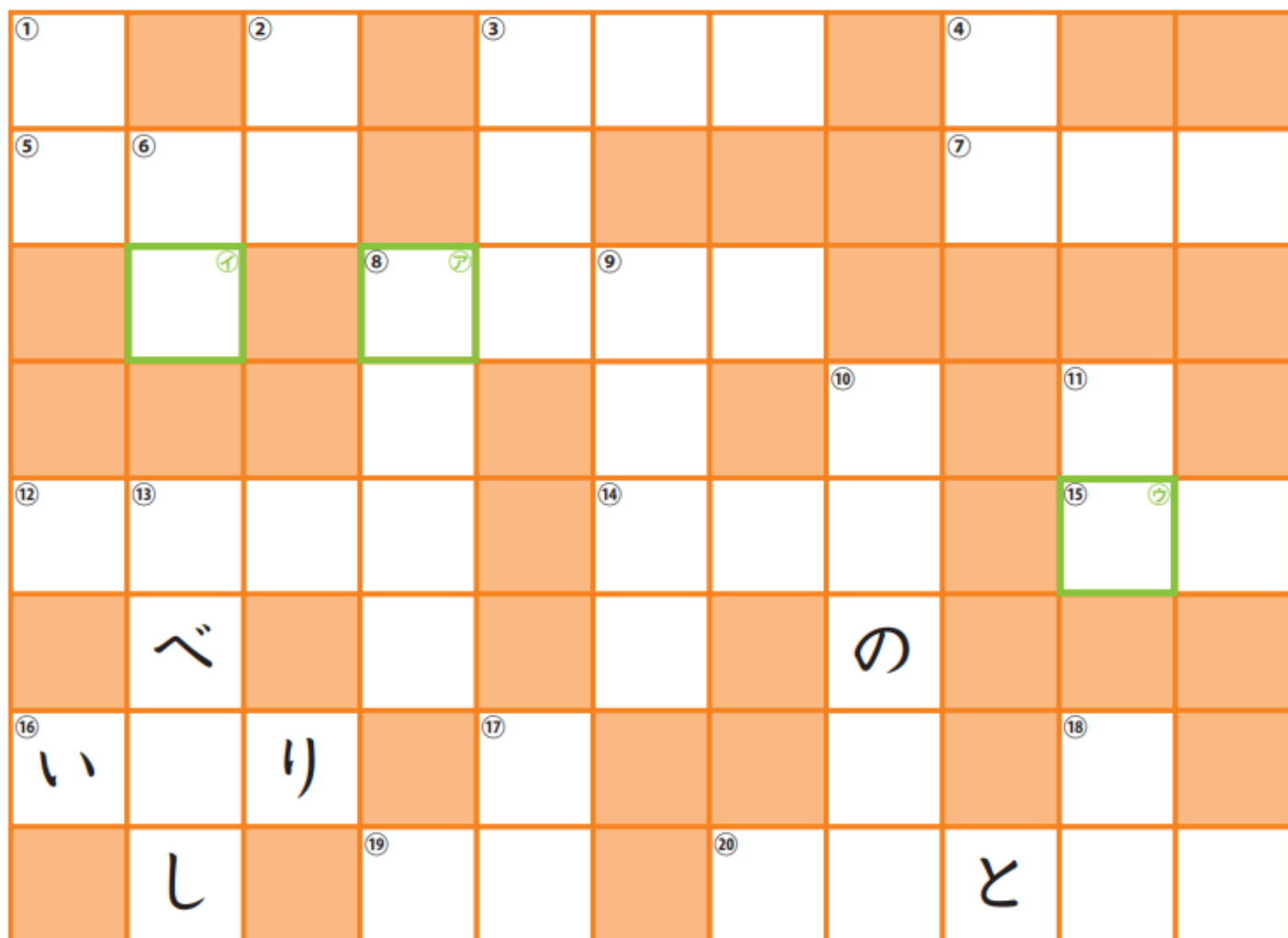
ヨコのかぎ

名前

クロスワードパズルだよ！全部書けたら、㊦～㊵の文字を順にならべて、言葉を作ってね。

ヒント：ピチピチしてるよ

答え



タテのかぎ

① 家庭科の〇〇実習。

② 学校で勉強をする部屋。

③ 外で体育のじゅ業をする所。

④ 大きい小さい。

⑤ 国語、算数、理科、社会…。

⑥ 〇〇〇〇順にならんで下さい。

⑦ 候ほ者が、自分をせん伝したり、

⑧ 周りがおうえんしたりする、活動。

⑨ 児童会役員選の〇〇〇〇。

⑩ 会の最初に言うのは？

⑪ 学級費の〇〇袋。

⑫ 給食を〇べ〇しては、いけません。

⑬ 小学校六年間の最後は、〇〇式。

⑭ 日の丸は〇〇の旗です。

ヨコのかぎ

⑮ スクールバスの〇〇〇さん。

⑯ 実験したり、標本があったりする。

⑰ 小学校の生徒。

⑱ リレーの〇〇〇〇は整理して下さい。

⑲ 食べ物運んだり、配ったり。

⑳ 赤組、白組どっちもがんばれ！

㉑ 学校に行くのは、月〇〇日。

㉒ 宿題を忘れて、い〇〇勉強。

㉓ 学期の終わりは、〇〇式。

㉔ 朝顔の〇〇と〇〇。

Want to be part of the Newsletter?

We are always looking for new talent and help at the newsletter, so if you have a writers itch you want to scratch, or have some ideas for the newsletter look, please contact us at our email!

newsletter@okayama-ajet.com



Additionally, if you have any suggestions or feedback for our newsletter, please fill out the form below!

Newsletter Feedback/Suggestion Form



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