

Historical Background of Origami

Origami, the art of paper folding, is traditionally associated with Japanese culture. It originated, however, in first century A.D. China with the invention of paper. The forerunner of modern day origami served practical purposes for the Chinese, who made useful commodities such as vases, bowls, and boxes from folded paper. Almost 500 years after paper was invented, Buddhist monks brought the secret to Japan.

The Japanese quickly integrated paper into everyday life, first using it in architecture and for ceremonial functions. With foundations in such formal usage, origami slowly evolved to become what we recognize today as Japanese paper folding. Passed from generation to generation by oral tradition between mothers and daughters, designs remained simple until about 1797 when the first written instructions for paper folding designs were published. It is interesting to note that prior to 1880, Japanese paper folding was known as orikata (folding exercises), but as designs changed to become more playful and complex, the name became origami (to fold paper).

As origami entered the realm of creativity, as opposed to its original ideal of repetition of set designs, two men ([Akira Yoshizawa](#) and Sam Randlett) developed a system of lines and arrows that simplify written instructions. This system has been adopted worldwide and has opened the doors of paper folding to an unlimited audience. Generally starting with simple designs, origami books with Yoshizawa and Randlett's method systematically lead paper-folders from the novice stage to the expert stage.

No matter how intricate the final design, origami adheres to its original concept that the product must be achieved exclusively by folding paper (no glue, tape, staples, scissors, or other auxiliary aids). Contemporary origami techniques continue to develop into seemingly impossible feats of folding. Master folders produce objects such as recognizable, anatomically correct insects with segmented bodies and multiple legs.

References for Students:

Coerr, Eleanor, reteller. *Sadako and the Thousand Paper Cranes*. JACP/Dell Publishing Group. (True story of the girl who developed leukemia from the radiation of the atomic bomb, and whose classmates folded a thousand cranes to extend her life.)

Say, A. (1991). *Tree of cranes*. Boston: Houghton Mifflin Co.
(A young Japanese boy experiences a multicultural Christmas in Japan.)

References for Teachers

[Joseph Wu's Origami Page](#)

Kenneway, E. (1980). *Origami: Paperfolding for fun*. New York: Gallery Books.

Sakata, H. *Origami*. Available from Fascinating Folds, PO Box 2820-235, Torrance, CA 90509-2820.

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