

# Wren ★ Feathers

## Asian School Accessories

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I assume you have basic sewing knowledge and the explanation should suffice, but if you need help please email me!  
Quarter inch seams allowed unless otherwise specified.



Little Darling learns to write kanji

Chinese characters have had a far-reaching impact. They are not only used in China, but in Japan and Korea as well. Although Korea has its own system of writing called “Hangeul”, which is very logical and phonetic, for centuries, educated people were expected to be fluent in Chinese characters as well. Children today still study them and practice traditional calligraphy with Hangeul and Chinese characters.

Japan has, arguably, the most complicated writing system in use today. Students first learn 46 hiragana, a syllabary which developed from simplified Chinese characters. It’s beautiful, and phonetic, and can be used exclusively to write Japanese. Children’s books are written in it, and tiny hiragana are printed above kanji (characters) in books for older children to teach the meaning. To further complicate things, there’s yet another syllabary of 46 characters, used to write foreign names and loan words, plus, for a lot of science, math and foreign language learning, it’s also necessary to learn our 26 letters called romaji. “OK,” you’re saying, “So kids have to learn 92 characters plus our alphabet and then they’re set...right?” Nope, they also have to learn approximately 2000 Chinese characters (kanji) also. “But...kids in China have to learn lots more of them, right?” Well, for basic reading in China, it’s suggested about 2000 characters are necessary, and the Chinese ministry of education requires 3755 of them for a high school graduate. BUT hanzi were developed to represent Chinese, and they do that very well. When you learn a pronunciation of a character, it stays the same. Not so with Japanese! Trying to force a unique writing system from one language onto another one with completely different grammar is not as easy as you’d think. One thing that’s very difficult is that kanji have different pronunciations in different situations.

Take for example, 雪. In Chinese (Mandarin) it’s pronounced xuě and means “snow”. In Japanese, it’s “yuki” ...but not all the time! Pair it with the character for “big” 大 (dà in Mandarin) and you get heavy snowfall-大雪. Chinese logically reads them dàxuě but in Japanese? Taisetsu. Wait...what happened to yuki? That’s what I’m talking about. Even the most common, straightforward characters have a minimum of two readings in Japanese based on whether they’re standing alone or combined with another character. So, about 2000 kanji, with at least 2 pronunciations for each one, and then 92 syllabic characters? Yes, and then take into account that Chinese and Japanese grammar have nothing in common. So, hiragana have to be added to kanji for things like particles, verb endings and adjective modifiers. From a purely aesthetic standpoint, written Japanese can look “choppy” on the page, since you’re switching between at least two, but often three symbol sets in each sentence. Compare these sentences (It says, “My name is Jennie”)

Chinese: 我的名字是珍妮 Japanese: 私の名前はジェニーです

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In this example, yellow is hanzi/kanji, green is hiragana, purple is katakana.

Chinese: 我的名字是珍妮 Japanese: 私の名前はジェニーです

In this example, I highlighted the words that mean the same thing...the only characters the two have sort of in common are in green.

In any case, students in China, Japan and Korea spend a LOT of time learning characters, and a big part of that is learning about traditional calligraphy. Usually around age 8 or so, they are expected to have a calligraphy set (called “shuji” in Japan) and spend part of their school day or after school classes practicing calligraphy.

Traditional sets have ink in a stick form that you grind and mix with water. It's also available in bottled form, but for replicating with fimo, the stick is easier. If you can find one of those itty bitty individual-serving of soy sauce bottles sold for bento, however, it might work!

The major components are:

硯 Suzuri (ink grinding stone)

墨 Sumi (ink stick)

筆 Fude (brush)

Some sets also include other things like an underlay for the paper made of fabric, a long, thin, cylindrical paperweight made of metal (about the length of a chopstick but wider). Chinese calligraphy sets usually include a little blue and white porcelain bowl for water, and sometimes a brush holder shaped like a mountain. Both sets may possibly include red ink for a chop or "seal" you might stamp onto your work to sign it.

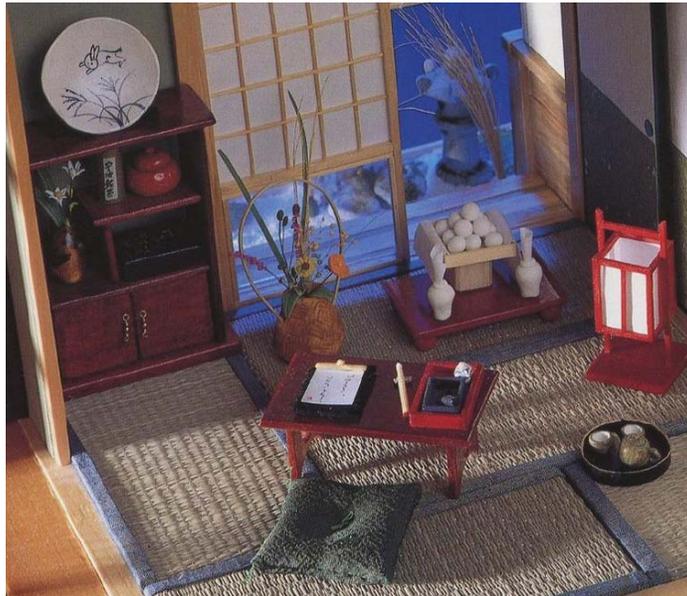
Search the web for images of: shuji, shodo, sumi, Chinese calligraphy set to see more examples.



Everything except the brush was formed out of polymer clay. For the suzuri, use a rectangle like a small (2 circle) Lego brick, press it in at an angle, to make one side deeper as a well for ink, then cut out the rest of the rectangle with an x-acto knife. The inkwell on the bottom left with the circular inside is less common, but could be easier to make if you can't find an appropriately sized rectangle. The bowl was formed around the handle of a large paintbrush, the ink is a cylinder pressed almost flat, and the brush holder was formed with the handle of the tiny paintbrush.



The tiny paintbrush was made from a bamboo skewer with a hold drilled in with a pin vise. Hairs were snipped off a real paintbrush and glued in.



A shuji set in a peaceful room setting from a Japanese dollhouse book ISBN 4939459611238

Of course your doll needs a workbook to practice her writing, and on the next page there's a printable one! Folding instructions for the kanji workbook are [here](#) scroll to the page that says: "Folding the magazines and diary". Note that Japanese books usually open opposite of ours, so technically this one could be considered not as authentic as possible, but I didn't realize my mistake until after the graphic was done, and it was too much trouble to change it.

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