

Karuta Cards

Nintendo "Karuta"

The Japanese discovered western playing cards through Portuguese trading ships during the late XVI century. They used the original word "carta" to name them, which they pronounced "karuta".

Although the rules for European games have, today, almost nothing in common with what they used to be at that time, the Japanese kept on using the word *karuta* when referring to a whole variety of local games based on wooden or paper cards (originally, nobles used to play a "pair matching game" with painted seashells). There are still two major types of *karuta* nowadays: *Iroha kuruta* and *Utagaruta*.



Karuta on animal names.



Old *karuta* illustrations dating from the early XX century



The *Iroha* *karuta* also deal with the richness of Japanese regional culture. Here is the Kyōto local variant.



In order to appeal to children, 1960-70's cards were based on themes close to their interests such as *Norimono* *kuruta* (transport) and *Nazo* *Nazo* *karuta* (riddles).



The *shōgaku* series was intended for school-children, and covered each year in primary school.

Fairy Tales Karuta

The most famous Nintendo *karuta* were inspired from Japanese fairy tales. The series based on the cartoon "Manga Nippon Mukashi banashi" (old Japanese fairy tales) was the most popular.

Karuta with moralistic content, inspired from Ikkū San the young monk series.

Karuta inspired from western fables and especially from la Fontaine.



Karuta displaying the famous moralistic sayings of the Edo era. Try to distinguish the "reading" card from the "catching" card. One of them bears a symbol meaning a dog that takes too much liberty gets the stick".