

Blackbird Karate Manual



The Blackbird's Method

Our school name can translated into English as the Subtle Crow's School of Karate Technique. The Japanese name is Shinpi Karasu Ryu Karate-Jutsu. The Japanese regularly name their martial traditions after elements of nature that they admire, and I have followed that example.

The blackbird is seen in the folklore and mythology of virtually every culture, but it fills many different roles depending on the location. In Norse Mythology, for instance, the great god Odin has two ravens as companions, Huginn and Muninn: thought and memory. In Japanese mythology, creatures with the heads of blackbirds serve the Daitengu, great mountain spirits of chaos often associated with swordsmanship.

My favorite literary presentation of the blackbird is found in a piece by the great Modern poet Wallace Stevens. I have reproduced a few of my favorite stanzas below. Note that the poem has the effect of Japanese haiku in many places, the sparse language conveying more through a subdued expression than it could through exuberance. It is Stevens' expression that has given words to my vision for this art: subtle, simple (and complex), universal, secret, thoughtful, and quiet: a blackbird cleaning his feathers in the winter wind.

Thirteen Ways of Looking at a Blackbird (Excerpts) by Wallace Stevens

I

Among twenty snowy mountains,
The only moving thing
Was the eye of the blackbird.

IX

When the blackbird flew out of sight,
It marked the edge
Of one of many circles.

XIII

It was evening all afternoon.
It was snowing
And it was going to snow.
The blackbird sat
In the cedar-limbs.

History and Vocabulary

System History and Influences

Our style is a gendai bujutsu system. "Gendai" means that it is a modern creation (gendai: lit. "new"; that is, founded after the Meiji Restoration of 1868). "Bujutsu" means, roughly, warrior's (bu) method or technique (jutsu). The base of our system is my evolving understanding of our kata practice: I believe that a sophisticated understanding of classical kata will produce extraordinary results. I have chosen the kata that, in my opinion, best teach and explain my understanding of how the human body moves and fights. These kata are selected from Japanese and Okinawan traditions and teachings, so it is fairest to call this a "karate" system, a term used by both the Okinawans and the Japanese.

Basic Vocabulary

Techniques and Performance:

- Aiki: blending with force or energy
- Bunkai: a practical application of a kata technique
- Karate: literally means empty or open hand
- Kata: a form or prearranged series of techniques
- Kiai: to concentrate or focus force or energy (commonly thought of as the "shout")
- Kihon: fundamental techniques
- Kumite: fighting (lit. "grappling hands")
- Kuzushi: off-balancing technique or "disrupting the foundation"
- Nage: person who applies a technique
- Rei: bow
- Seiza: a seated/kneeling position
- Uke: person who receives a technique

Concepts:

- Dan Ranks: black belt ranks
- Dojo: place where the way is practiced, school

- Gi: training uniform
- Kime: focus
- Kyu Ranks: ranks beneath black belt; colored belt ranks
- Seika-no-itten: center, “one point,” center of gravity in the human body
- Sensei: literally “person born before another”; a teacher
- Waza: technique
- Zanshin: literally “remaining spirit” or “abiding mind”; awareness that exists after the execution of a technique; a sense of alert domination

Kyu Ranks

Grade	Pronunciation	Japanese
10 th Kyu (1 st White)	<i>Jukkyū</i>	10級 / 十級
9 th Kyu (2 nd White)	<i>Kūkyū</i>	9級 / 九級
8 th Kyu (1 st Yellow)	<i>Hachikyū</i>	8級 / 八級
7 th Kyu (2 nd Yellow)	<i>Shichikyū</i>	7級 / 七級
6 th Kyu (1 st Green)	<i>Rokkyū</i>	6級 / 六級
5 th Kyu (2 nd Green)	<i>Gokyū</i>	5級 / 五級
4 th Kyu (3 rd Green)	<i>Yonkyū</i>	4級 / 四級
3 rd Kyu (1 st Brown)	<i>Sankyū</i>	3級 / 三級
2 nd Kyu (2 nd Brown)	<i>Nikyū</i>	2級 / 二級
1 st Kyu (3 rd Brown)	<i>Ikkyū</i>	1級 / 一級

Testing Requirements

For White Belts (Jukyū) testing for 2nd Degree White Belt (Kyūkyū)

Stances:

- Yoi (preparation stance)
- Zenkutsu-dachi (front stance)

Strikes:

- Oi-zuki (front punch) from Zenkutsu-dachi
- Ganmen Shuto-uchi (outside knifehand) from Zenkutsu-dachi
- Gyaku Shuto-uchi (inside) from Zenkutsu-dachi

Blocks:

- Gedan Barai (low block) from Zenkutsu-dachi
- Age Uke (high block) from Zenkutsu-dachi

Kicks:

- Mae Geri (Front Kick)

Ippon Kumite:

- None at this rank

Kata:

- None at this rank

Jujutsu:

- Katate Dori (same side grip), Little Circle/Big Circle
- Gyakute Dori (cross grip), Little Circle/Big Circle
- Ryote Dori (two hands grabbing both wrists), Little Circle, Big Circle
- Morote Dori (two hands grabbing one wrist), Pull Release
- Ushiro Tekubi Tori (both wrists grabbed from behind), Step Back Release

Ukemi Waza:

- Articulate what it means to tap out, and when one should do so

Sparring:

- None at this rank

For 2nd White Belts (Kūkyū) testing for Yellow Belt (Hachikyū)

Stances:

- Kokutsu-dachi (back stance)

Strikes:

- Uraken (backfist) from Zenkutsu-dachi
- Haito Uchi Jodan (ridgehand) from Zenkutsu-dachi
- Haito Uchi Gedan (upward ridgehand) from Zenkutsu-dachi

Blocks:

- Shuto Uke (knifehand block) from Kokutsu-dachi
- Shuto Uke Gedan (low knifehand block) from Kokutsu-dachi
- Soto Uke (outside middle block) from Kokutsu-dachi

Kicks:

- Mawashi Geri (Roundhouse Kick)

Ippon Kumite:

- #1: Soto Uke + Punch
- #2: Shuto Uke Gedan

Kata:

- Heian Shodan

Jujutsu:

- Two-finger Choke Release
- Elbow Smash
- Push Together, Pull Apart

Ukemi Waza:

- Side Fall
- Front Fall

Sparring:

- None at this rank

For Yellow Belts (Hachikyū) testing for 2nd Yellow (Shichikyū)

Stances:

- Hanmi + Hanmi Walk

Strikes:

- Nukite Chudan (mid-level spearhand) from Zenkutsu-dachi
- Nukite Jodan (high-level spearhand) from Zenkutsu-dachi

Blocks:

- Fan Block from Kokutsu-dachi
- Haiwan Uke (framing block) from Kokutsu-dachi
- Uchi Uke (block from inside) from Kokutsu-dachi

Kicks:

- Yoko-geri Keage (Side Snap kick)
- Yoko-geri Kekomi (Side Thrust kick)

Ippon Kumite:

- #3: Yoko-Geri Keage
- #4: Shuto Uke

Kata:

- Heian Nidan

Jujutsu:

- Yoko Kubi Jime (side headlock) release and Throw

Ukemi Waza:

- Zenpo Kaiten (Front Roll from kneeling)
- Ushiro Kaiten (Rear Roll from kneeling)

Sparring:

- Not tested at this rank

For 2nd Yellow (Shichikyū) testing for Green (Rokkyū)

Stances:

- Kiba-dachi (Horse Stance)
- Half Kiba-dachi

Strikes:

- Tetsui-uchi (hammerfist) from Kiba-dachi

Blocks:

- Morote Uke (double-handed block) from Zenkutsu-dachi

Kicks:

- Ushiro Geri (back kick)
- Mikazuki Geri (outside crescent kick)

Ippon Kumite:

- #5: Morote Uke
- #6: Palm block, Nukite Chudan

Kata:

- Heian Sandan

Jujutsu:

- Katate Tori Nikkyo
- Ushiro Tekubi Tori Nikkyo
- Hammer Lock Release

Ukemi Waza:

- Zempo Kaiten (Standing Front Roll)
- Ushiro Kaiten (Standing Rear Roll)

Sparring:

- Not tested at this rank

For Green (Rokkyū) testing for 2nd Green (Gokyū)

Stances:

- Kosa-dachi (Crossing Stance)

Strikes:

- Mae Empi Uchi Jodan – Elbow strike to the front from Zenkutsu-dachi
- Age Empi Uchi – Rising elbow strike from Zenkutsu-dachi

Blocks:

- Juji Uke Gedan – Low (“X” block) from Zenkutsu-dachi
- Kakiwaki Uke (double forearm press) from Kokutsu-dachi

Kicks:

- Hiza Geri (knee kick)

Ippon Kumite:

- #7: Block/inv. spear to throat (open frame bl.), elbow to face (dbl. chamber)
- #8: Double chamber, kote gaeshi (low x), strike (morote uke) – H. Yondan 3&4

Kata:

- Heian Yondan

Jujutsu:

- Katate Tori Ikkyo
- Gyaku Shuto Uchi Hiji Kime Osae (Rollover Arm Bar)
- Kote Gaeshi on Hikite (chamber or pulling hand)
- Ryote Tori Gyaku Kote Gaeshi

Ukemi Waza:

- Rolling Breakfall

Sparring:

- Not tested at this rank

For 2nd Green (Gokyū) testing for 3rd Green (Yonkyū)

Stances:

- Neko Ashi-dachi (cat stance)

Strikes:

- Teisho Uchi Gedan (palm strike to groin) from Zenkutsu-dachi

Blocks:

- Juji Uke Jodan – High (“X” block) from Zenkutsu-dachi
- Manji Uke (high-low block) from Kokutsu-dachi

Kicks:

- Yoko-geri Kokomi Tenkan (yoko-geri kokomi, turning variation)

Ippon Kumite:

- #9: Gedan Barai Throw
- #10: Manji Uke Throw

Kata:

- Heian Godan

Jujutsu:

- Bear hugs, all directions: stance disruption
- Mae Dori (bear hug from front, arms free): head tip to drop
- Mae Dori (bear hug from front, arms pinned): high bridge
- Full Nelson, katate osai

Ukemi Waza:

- Breakfall over uke

Sparring:

- Not tested at this rank

For 3rd Green (Yonkyū) testing for Sankyū (Brown with 3 stripes)

Stances:

- Musubi-dachi (informal attention stance)

Strikes:

- Overhand Punch from Kokutsu-dachi
- Koko Uchi (tiger's mouth strike) from Neko ashi-dachi
- Koken Uchi (bow wrist strike) from Neko ashi-dachi

Blocks:

- Zenwan Sokomen Uke (Forearm Block, inside and outside) from Kiba-dachi
- Osae Uke (up/down pressing block) from Zenkutsu-dachi

Kicks:

- Nami-Gaeshi (leg check, lit. "returning wave")

Ippon Kumite:

- #11: Kokyu Nage (initial move from Tekki Shodan)
- #12: Overhand Punch

Kata:

- Tekki Shodan

Jujutsu:

- Ushiro Tekubi Tori Sankyo, grip from the rear
- Ushiro Dori (bear hug from rear, arms pinned): haiwan uke to sankyo
- Ushiro Dori (bear hug from rear, arms free): gooseneck restraint
- Mae Dori (charging tackle): Tekki Shodan defense
- Ryote Tori Tenchi Nage

Ukemi Waza:

- Diving front roll

Sparring:

- Evaluation of your sparring strategy and performance

For Sankyū testing for Nikyū (Brown with 2 stripes)

Stances:

- No new stances

Strikes:

- Yama-zuki (mountain punch)

Blocks:

- Koken Uke (bow wrist block) from Kokutsu-dachi
- Wedge Block (rotating forearm fan block) from Kokutsu-dachi

Kicks:

- Stepping Hook Kick

Ippon Kumite:

- #13: Low Block + Punch Variation #1: step back switch step
- #14: Low Block + Punch Variation #2: jumping switch step

Kaeshi Ippon Kumite:

- #1

Kata:

- Bassai-Dai

Jujutsu:

- Katate Tori, Shiho Nage Irimi (entering variation)
- Katate Tori, Shiho Nage Irimi (declining plane variation)
- Yokomen Uchi, Shiho Nage Tenkan (turning variation)
- Yoko Wakare (low bridge)

Ukemi Waza:

- Diving Breakfall

Sparring:

- Evaluation of your sparring strategy and performance

For Nikyū testing Ikkyū (Brown with 1 stripe)

Stances:

- No new stances

Strikes:

- Ura Nukite (inverted spearhand) from Zenkutsu-dachi

Blocks:

- Ryo Ude Mawashi Uke (circular technique from Kanku Dai)
- Double Brush Parry from Kokutsu-dachi

Kicks:

- Mae Tobi Geri (Jumping Double Front Kick)

Ippon Kumite:

- #15: Shuto Uke Gedan x 2
- #16: Irimi Nage
- #17: Double Brush Parry

Kaeshi Ippon Kumite:

- #2
- #3

Kata:

- Kanku Dai

Jujutsu:

- Ushiro Kubi Shime Dori (rear choke), kuzushi, turn, and throw
- Shomen Uchi Irimi Nage
- Yoko Kubi Jime Ushiro Otoshi (side headlock, rear drop)

Ukemi Waza:

- Breakfalls from selected throws

Sparring:

- Evaluation of your sparring strategy and performance

For Ikkyū testing for Shodan (1st Degree Black Belt)

The emphasis at this rank is on polishing technique while expanding our understanding of current knowledge, putting a fine edge on hard-won skills. It will also require, for the first time, the use of your interpretive powers in analyzing the art as a portion of your examination.

Kata:

- Performance of Tekki Shodan, Bassai-Dai, Kanku Dai, and Enpi

Ippon Kumite:

- Presentation of 3 kata-based *ippon kumite* of your own development

Kaeshi Ippon Kumite:

- Presentation of all five of the *kaeshi ippon kumite*

Jujutsu:

- Performance of seven jujutsu techniques you select from the previous curriculum with appropriate *atemi* added to the performance. You will choose the techniques to be performed, as well as the *atemi* that accompanies them.

Sparring:

- Evaluation of your sparring strategy and performance

Teaching:

- At the black belt rank, you will be certified with a beginning teaching license and the authority to promote students up to the rank of yonkyu. In preparation for this, you will write a paper (5-page minimum; double spaced with 12-point font) on the Theory-Model-Practice-Coaching method of training and explain your own method of grading and evaluating student performance throughout the ranks.

Miscellany

I have added several resources to the school web site for your review: www.blackbirdkarate.com. This includes:

- General information about the school and style
- Media, such as videos and recommended reading
- A store that has shirts, hats, mouse pads and so on with our logo

Uniforms and Supplies

I stock uniforms and sparring gear, and I sell them at wholesale rates to keep them affordable for all. You are welcome to use your own supplies as long as they meet my standards. Uniforms must fit well and be white in color. No patches or decorations of any kind will be allowed, and it must be a traditional Japanese-style uniform: no Korean V-neck tops, Chinese frog buttons, etc. I will give you a belt to wear.

Care of Uniforms and Belts

Your uniform must be clean and free of odors when you arrive to class: wash it as often as it takes to make sure this is always the case. I recommend that you do not wash your belt, however. Additionally, your belt should not be set on the floor or tossed around carelessly. Please do not wear your belt or uniform outdoors (excepting martial arts events).

Sparring Gear (Required at Yellow Belt)

All students of sparring rank must acquire the following gear and bring it to class every week.

- Hand Protection
- Foot/Instep Protection
- Fitted Mouthpiece (the kind you boil in water and mold to your teeth)
- All males must wear a groin cup.

In Closing

Martial arts provides a life-long exploration of personal growth, physical activity, psychological study, and working with a group toward a common goal. Welcome to the Blackbird Martial Arts family. We hope you find a happy home here.