

literature, out of print but worth finding in a library.

Say, Allen. *Grandfather's Journey*. Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1993. In pictures and prose, reflections on the emigration of the author's grandfather from Japan to the U. S., and then his return to Japan.

*The Seventh Sister*. Retold by Cindy Chang. Illustrated by Charles Reasoner. Troll Associates, 1994. A Chinese version of the tale of the cowherd and the weaving maiden, particularly useful when paired with versions from other countries.

Shea, Pegi Deitz. *The Whispering Cloth*. Illustrated by Anita Riggio. Honesdale, PA: Boyds Mills Press, 1995. A Hmong refugee girl in Thailand comes to the U. S. in a story illustrated with drawings and photographs of her story cloth.

*Social Education*, "1996 Notable Children's Trade Books," special supplement to volume 60, number 4 (April/May 1996). Updated annually, an annotated bibli-

ography keyed to social studies themes.

*A Song of Stars*. Retold by Tom Birdseye. Illustrated by Ju-Hong Chen. New York: Holiday House, 1990. Another Chinese version of the herdsman and weaving maiden story.

Stanford Program on International and Cross-Cultural Education. *Cooperation in Japan*. Stanford: Stanford Institute for International Studies, n.d. A teaching unit which demonstrates how fiction, in this case a Japanese children's story, can be used to teach an important concept about a country.

Stanford Program on International and Cross-Cultural Education. *Rabbit in the Moon: Folktales from China and Japan*. Stanford: Stanford Institute for International Studies, n.d. Folk tales and guidance for the teacher concerning ways to use them to deepen students' understanding.

Staples, Suzanne F. *Shabanu: Daughter of the Wind*. New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1989. A novel exploring the options avail-

able to the second daughter of a family in Pakistan.

*Sun & Moon: Fairy Tales From Korea*. Retold by Kathleen Seros. Illustrated by Norman Sibley and Robert Krause. Elizabeth, NJ: Hollym International, 1993. Seven fairy tales from Korea with bright folk-art inspired illustrations.

*Thai Tales: Folktales of Thailand*. Retold by Supaporn Vathanaprida. Edited by Margaret Read MacDonald. Englewood, CO: Libraries Unlimited, 1994. Many folk tales organized in categories and supported by extensive background notes, but no illustrations.

*The Woodcutter and the Heavenly Maiden/The Firedogs*. Retold by Duance Vorhees and Mark Mueller. Illustrated by Pak-Mi-son. Elizabeth, NJ: Hollym International, 1990. Two Korean folk tales paired in a bilingual edition. ■

## Kamishibai, Japanese Storytelling The Return of An Imaginative Art

by Elaine Vukov

Many older Japanese have pleasant memories of the neighborhood storyteller whose tales of adventure and noble deeds brightened the lives of children everywhere in Japan. American children can now enjoy this imaginative activity. *Kamishibai* (paper drama) is a traditional form of Japanese storytelling that uses large color pictures to accompany a dramatic narration. This type of storytelling is enjoying a renaissance in Japan and has recently become available in English for use in schools and at home. The narratives are written in both Japanese (hiragana) and English.

Each *kamishibai* story consists of twelve to sixteen beautifully colored cardboard illustrations, a teacher's guide, and instructions on how to use the story boards. The boards measure 10 1/2" x 15", allowing even a large group of children gathered around a teacher or parent to easily see the pictures. The teacher's guides are particular-

ly helpful, giving a story summary, themes, ideas for initial activities, discussion questions, the cultural background to each story and follow-up activities. Each story is illustrated by a different artist. Although machine printed on cardboard, the illustrations look like bold watercolors, woodblock prints, or even brush and ink paintings.

The twenty-three stories currently available include an excellent sampling of ancient and contemporary tales appropriate for children two years old and up. For the youngest audience, there are stories such as *Nya-on the Kitten*, a story of a kitten so fascinated by the moon she tries to catch it. *Tadpole Number 101* is a contemporary *kamishibai*



A *kamishibai* man telling stories in postwar Japan.

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## ESSAYS



"But I'm not going to let you get away!" Saying this, the witch pushed the apprentice out the door. (From *How The Witch Was Eaten Up.*)



The ogres sniffed all around Jizo-sama, twitching their noses. (From *The Magic Rice Paddle.*)

that tells the story of a mother frog teaching her large brood of tadpoles the meaning of cooperation. The collection also includes a tale dating from the late tenth century, *The Bamboo Princess*, in which an elderly couple finds a beautiful baby girl in a stalk of bamboo. They raise her as their own child and later learn she is a princess from the moon. This story, familiar to all Japanese, is also known in English as *The Bamboo Cutter* or *The Shining Princess*. *Urashima Tarō*, one of the most familiar Japanese stories to American audiences, is a folk tale of a fisherman who is rewarded by a mother tortoise for saving the life of her baby. After visiting the Dragon King's palace at the bottom of the sea, Urashima Tarō returns to his village and discovers that 300 years have passed. Resembling such Western tales as *Sleeping Beauty* and *Rip Van Winkle*, *Urashima Tarō* explores themes of the passage of time, kindness, and adventure. *A Spider's Thread* adapts a short story by Ryunosuke Akutagawa, an early twentieth century intellectual and author noted for his polished stories, essays, and poems. The story, which addresses forgiveness, greed, and retribution, is appropriate for older students. The hiragana Japanese narratives could be used in advanced Japanese language classes.

*Kamishibai* is part of a long tradition of oral folk literature in Asia. In Japan, as early as the twelfth century, the recitation of stories with accompanying pictures was used in temples to explain Buddhist deities and relate the histories of the temples. Shadow puppets, large two-dimensional figures attached to long sticks, and magic lantern projections were other methods of storytelling used at various periods of Japan's history.

*Kamishibai* in its current form became popular during the 1920s, reaching its peak in the 1950s with more than 3,000 storytellers in Tokyo alone. Each day, the *kamishibai* man would make the rounds of various neighborhoods on a bicycle with about three different stories. Stopping at a convenient corner, he would announce story time by beating on a drum and sounding wooden clappers. After selling candy to the neighborhood children, he would allow his best customers to stand in the front of the group. The story boards were enclosed in a framed wooden box that opened on one side to resemble a stage mounted on the back of

the *kamishibai* man's bicycle. As the story progressed, he would pull the story boards out to reveal the next scene. He would stop at an exciting part of the story and announce that the story would be continued the next day.

During the 1930s, *Ōgon Batto* (*The Golden Bat*) enjoyed phenomenal popularity. Resembling a caped Phantom of the Opera with a grimacing skeleton head and holding aloft a gold sword, the Golden Bat fought for peace and justice. His superhuman powers included the ability to fly through the air. *The Golden Bat* continued into the 1950s, fighting a mad Nazi scientist who had escaped Germany at the end of the war and was bent on destroying humankind. The original series, written by a 25-year-old and illustrated by a 16-year-old, captivated children all over the country.

Beyond its interesting historical lineage, *kamishibai* is a wonderful addition to the classroom. It introduces children to types of Japanese characters such as river spirits (*kappa*), wily foxes, and gentle Buddhist deities (*Jizō*). Bringing *kamishibai* to an American audience is a labor of love for two American women, Donna Tamaki and Margaret Eisenstadt, who became friends in 1967 as students at Columbia Teachers College. Tamaki, the translator of the stories, moved to Kyōto twenty-five years ago and now teaches English language and folk literature at Dōshisha Women's College. Eisenstadt, a resident of New York City, became fascinated by *kamishibai* after seeing them during a one-year stay in Hokkaidō in northern Japan in 1969. She brought *kamishibai* with her and found that the stories and pictures brought together the very diverse group of students she taught on the Lower East Side of Manhattan. Thanks to the perseverance and ingenuity of these two educators, young people in this country can also enjoy the return of this appealing form of Japanese traditional storytelling. ■

For more information, contact:

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*Kamishibai* for Kids

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One *kamishibai* costs \$35.00; five for \$150.00; a wooden box-stage costs \$105.00. In Japan, *kamishibai* are published by Dōshinsha.



Finally, the stories about the Bamboo Princess reached the Emperor's ears. (From *The Bamboo Princess*.)



At night, the Bamboo Princess would look up at the moon with tears in her eyes. (From *The Bamboo Princess*.)

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