

# **Children's Books on Japan**

## **Kindergarten through 8<sup>th</sup> grade**

**Book list compiled by Japan Society**

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“Literature on Japan for Elementary and Middle School Students,”  
by Elaine Vukov and Kazuko Minamoto. Excerpt, *Education About Asia*, spring, 2000.  
Reprinted with permission of the Association for Asian Studies. (pp. 4-6)

\* = **HIGHLY RECOMMENDED**

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## **KAMISHIBAI\***

Traditional Japanese picture storytelling that uses large color pictures to accompany a narration. All of the kamishibai sets are highly recommended.\*

## **Introduction**

“Kamishibai, Japanese Storytelling,”

by Elaine Vukov. Excerpt, *Education About Asia*, spring, 1997. Reprinted with permission from the Association for Asian Studies. (pp. 33-4)

The Bamboo Princess\*  
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Best-Loved Children's Songs From Japan  
Let's Sing-Japanese Songs for Kids

## Literature on Japan for Elementary and Middle School Students

Many excellent books on Japan have been published during the past decade. In fact, there are so many interesting and useful resources available that a teacher or librarian acquiring items for a school with a limited budget might well wonder where to begin. This article offers some guidance for those educators who want to acquire new materials on Japan for elementary and middle school students.

By profession, elementary and middle school educators are generalists--faced with the daunting task of selecting materials for a multitude of world cultures about which they may have little specialized knowledge. Their charge is to find material of high visual and literary quality that is also historically and culturally accurate, for though there are many good books on the market, there are also others with clichéd, misleading or incorrect information. It is virtually impossible for one person to have the expertise to pass judgement on the flood of materials coming to their attention at book fairs, through catalogues and over the Internet.

What can a teacher do to ensure that he or she is not using outdated or flawed information about Japan? If they are not Japan experts, how can they judge whether a book and its illustrations are realistic or accurate? Here are some practical guidelines for approaching the process of selecting good materials without having a total command of Japan's history and culture.

### **Signposts to the integrity of a work**

Some factors are not directly related to the content of the material but are very helpful as signposts to its quality. These signposts include the backgrounds of both the author and the illustrator; the nature and history of the publishing company or catalogue offering the material for sale; and the publication date and/or copyright notice--all elements already familiar to educators. Now, consider how these signposts can be applied exclusively to the selection of Japanese materials.

Examine all of the biographical information about the author. If the authors are not Japanese, do they have long-term experience living in Japan? Has an author written many books about Japan? Do they have any formal training in Japanese culture or language? Did they spend time studying in Japan as a student or in their professional career? A Japanese name does not always ensure that the writer knows about Japan. A second- or third-generation Japanese American may be seeing Japan from the same vantage point as other non-Japanese speakers. If the author is a Japanese native, it does not necessarily mean that their story has anything to do with Japan or Japanese culture. If there are terms or phrases in Japanese in a story, is a note or glossary provided?

Review the biographical information for the illustrator as closely as that of the author. The illustrations in children's literature are as important as the story, and have a tremendous impact on the way students view an unknown country. One of the most common problems is illustrations with exaggerated "Asian-type" facial features that are not Japanese, and may not, in fact, portray the features of any Asian at all. There is often confusion between Chinese and Japanese clothing, hairstyle, architecture, home interiors and other physical features. There may be erroneous visual details or a mixing of historical periods. Comic-like illustrations are common among some Japanese illustrators who grew up with comic books or *manga*. This trend can be regarded as an authentic product of Japanese culture, and should not be underestimated, since manga has influenced and shaped the contemporary Japanese art form. Educators must rely on the expertise of the illustrators in these situations.

It is difficult to steer one's way through all of the pitfalls of purchasing cultural materials. One thing to be wary of are sets of books offered by publishing companies that purport to cover several Asian cultures but are all written by the same author or a group of children's literature professionals. Such authors may not have any background in Asia at all. These sets can look very attractive on the shelf, but might be assemblages of other outdated materials with little or no first-hand research. In such sets there may be no biographical data on the author--a warning sign in and of itself to stay away.

The publishing company and copyright date of the materials also offer an indication of the quality of the work. Is the publisher known for works on Asia and Japan? If the work is listed in an educational clearinghouse, the publishing company or the copyright date may not be noted. In these cases, order the materials only if they are returnable and examine them carefully after delivery. Some publishers recycle out-of-print materials with a new copyright date.

### **Cultural themes found in literature on Japan**

The literature of every culture has major themes that are particular to it and set forth its fundamental characteristics. The predominate social and historical themes reflected in literature on Japan written for students include folk tales, stories about life in Japan, poetry, biography, and the atomic bombings of Hiroshima and Nagasaki.

Let's examine folk tales as a major literary form familiar to most teachers and children. Japanese folk tales may be a child's introduction to Japanese culture and a key to further explorations into Japanese literature. Folk tales allow students to immerse themselves directly in the world of Japanese legends without viewing Japan as a distant country. Original folk tales, such as "Momo Taro" ("The Peach Boy") and "Kaguyahime" ("The Bamboo Princess"), widely known by children in Japan, offer an attractive starting point. These tales can be found in compilations of famous Japanese folk tales, and are often beautifully illustrated.

In addition to conventional picture books, there is *kamishibai*, a traditional form of Japanese storytelling that uses large color picture-boards with accompanying narration, available in both Japanese and English. This is a good alternative for telling stories to groups of younger children. The majority of stories used in *kamishibai* are selected from folk tales that have been told and read throughout many generations in Japan.

Like most folk tales from around the world, Japanese folk tales may be found in more than one version. Depending on where the story has been told and by whom, there will be variations in content. This diversity is a hallmark of the orally transmission of such literature.

Caution should also be taken with "Japanese folk tales" that are "adapted" or new. Adapted folk tales may be older stories specially re-created to appeal to readers outside of Japan. The adaptation may cleanse the tale of cultural references or even change the meaning of the original story. Authentic Japanese folk tales often express particular emotions or moods rather than communicating a moral, a story-telling feature common in the tradition of many European tales. Stories created as new "folk tales" may actually have little Japanese content but are packaged in such a way as to make them appear to be part of a famous folk tale canon. Such stories may be intriguing and entertaining, but they also lose the very essence that is Japanese.

Another well-defined genre in Japanese literature is the bombings of Hiroshima and Nagasaki. Teachers may wonder why books about such awful events are available for young readers and worry whether the

subject is appropriate for their age group. But materials are abundant and many of them are carefully written and formatted for young readers. The stories focus on the tragedy of war and the severity of the atomic bombs as seen through the eyes of young narrator-victims. Although these stories rarely address the political and military realities from a historical point of view, they are successful in appealing to children emotionally--indirectly but earnestly calling for peace and denouncing war. The books can be applied in social studies classrooms as a supplement to reinforce awareness and understanding of war. They promote critical thinking of how countries are interrelated, and how the life of an individual is shaped by historical events. They also enable young readers to see how children on the other side of a conflict view the same events.

### **Japan in American History**

In addition to considering Japan as a separate and foreign culture, it can also be seen as part of the cultural heritage of the United States. These themes come to mind most readily: Japanese immigrants and their descendants' coming to terms with life in the United States; the experience of Japanese Americans in the internment camps during World War II; and the cultural and political relations between the U.S. and Japan over the past 150 years.

Stories that appeal to young readers often deal with Japanese American youngsters born in the U.S. who are searching for identities that are intertwined but radically different from their parents. Readers whose families immigrated to the U.S. can easily relate to the experiences of the Japanese characters. But books about Japanese Americans are not limited to a comparison between the two countries. Another genre that has recently become an important theme in children's literature deals with the internment camps where more than 100,000 Japanese Americans were forced to live during World War II. Stories narrated from the viewpoint of children who were in the camps are readily available and, for the most part, very well written. These can be particularly effective in social studies class after a careful examination of American history.

There are other genres not fully considered here, such as poetry, biography and recently written stories about contemporary life in Japan, to which the same guidelines can be applied. The literature on Japan available for young readers has grown immensely in recent years and promises to continue expanding. With foresight and careful examination, educators can bring the best of this literature to students.

**by Elaine Vukov and Kazuko Minamoto. Excerpt, *Education About Asia*, spring, 2000. Reprinted with permission of the Association for Asian Studies.**

## FOLKTALES AND LEGENDS

**The Bee and the Dream: A Japanese Tale.** Retold by Jan Freeman Long, illustrated by Kaoru Ono. New York: Dutton Children's Books, 1996, hardcover \$15.99, 32 pages.

**Type of work:** folktale

**Grade level:** K-4

**Library of Congress #:** PZ8.1.L943

**Summary:** An adapted version of a Japanese folktale about a young man who pays for his friend's dream about a buried treasure. After becoming the "owner" of the dream, the protagonist embarks on a journey to find the treasure and encounters difficulties along the way.

**Comments:** Various versions of this folktale exist in different parts of Japan. The common theme, dreams, leads to interesting classroom discussions.

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**The Boy of the Three-Year Nap\*.** Retold by Dianne Snyder, illustrated by Allen Say. Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1988, hardcover \$15.95, 32 pages.

**Type of work:** folktale

**Grade level:** 1-3

**Library of Congress #:** PZ8.1.S66Bo

**Summary:** Set in old Japan, this adapted folk tale is about Taro, a boy so lazy that he could nap for three years if no one awakened him. In order to make some money without working, he tricks the wealthiest merchant in town into letting him marry his daughter.

**Comments:** The illustrations of the characters are amusing, and the scenes of everyday life in the Edo Period (1600-1868) are portrayed with vivid colors. **\*Highly recommended.**

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**The Crane Wife.** Retold by Odds Bodkin, illustrated by Gennady Spirin. New York: Harcourt Brace (Gulliver Books), 1998, hardcover \$16.00, 32 pages.

**Type of work:** folktale

**Grade level:** K-3

**Library of Congress #:** PZ8.1.B58835Cr

**Summary:** A retelling of a folktale about a poor sail maker who marries a beautiful and mysterious stranger with magical weaving abilities. When he discovers that his wife is really a crane he once saved, she turns back into a crane and flies away.

**Comments:** This well-known folktale teaches about obligation and trust. The illustrations are quite beautiful but unfortunately contain inaccuracies, such as the beautiful woman wearing shoes in the house and the poor sail maker living in a large home. Less obvious to non-Japanese readers is that the names, Osamu and Yukiko, are quite contemporary, not usually used in folk tales.

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**The Funny Little Woman\***. Retold by Arlene Mosel, illustrated by Blair Lent. New York: Puffin Books, 1972, hardcover \$5.99, 32 pages.

**Type of work:** Folk tale

**Grade level:** K-3

**Library of Congress #:** PZ8.1.M8346Fu

**Summary:** An adapted version of a Japanese folk tale about the funny little woman who falls into a hole while chasing a dumpling. Her search leads to her capture by demons (*oni*) who force her to make dumplings for them using a magic paddle. But her ability to make the demons laugh enables her escape.

**Comments:** The author adapted the folk tale retold by Lafcadio Hearn. This funny, adventurous story teaches young readers that laughter, not violence, can be used to triumph over the "bad guys."

**\*Highly recommended.**

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**The Girl Who Loved Caterpillars.** Adapted by Jean Merrill; illustrated by Floyd Cooper. New York: Philomel Books, 1992. Hardcover \$16.95, paperback \$5.99, 32 pages.

**Type of work:** Folk tale

**Grade level:** K-6

**Library of Congress #:** PZ7.M5357Gi

**Summary:** Izumi, a free-spirited daughter of a highly respected provincial inspector, refuses to compromise her independence by giving in to the expectations of behavior for a court woman in 12<sup>th</sup> century Japan. Rather than keeping up with fashion, she loves caterpillars and prefers the company of boys who collect insects for her.

**Comments:** This book could be used most effectively to teach children self-respect rather than Japanese culture. The unfinished ending allows the reader to continue the story and imagine what happens to Izumi. It is important for educators using this book to address the differences between 12<sup>th</sup> century Japan and contemporary Japan.

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**The Greatest of All.** Retold by Eric A. Kimmel; illustrated by Giora Carmi. New York: Holiday House, 1991. Hard cover: \$4.95, 32 pages

**Type of work:** Folk tale

**Grade level:** K-2

**Library of Congress #:** PZ8.1.K567Gr

**Summary:** Chuko, a pretty girl mouse, asks Father Mouse for his permission to marry a mere field mouse, Ko Nezumi. Father Mouse disapproves of the marriage and sets off on a journey, hoping to find the perfect match. After visiting the sun, the cloud, the wind, the wall, and the Emperor, Father Mouse finally discovers the best match for his daughter.

**Comments:** Houses and clothing are quite fanciful, not Japanese but a mixture of "exotic Oriental" and Beatrix Potter. In the story, the emperor should be called "Osama," not "Osama san." The name of the folktale is usually translated as *The Mouse's Wedding*. **Not recommended.**

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**I Once Was a Monkey – Stories Buddha Told.** Retold and illustrated by Jeanne M. Lee. New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1999. Hardcover \$16.00.

**Type of work:** Folk tale

**Grade level:** 3-6

**Library of Congress #:** PZ8.JL

**Summary:** A young monkey, caught in a storm, runs into other animals hiding in a cave. A statue of Buddha tells them six stories called Jakatas, or “birth stories,” that illustrate Buddha's teachings, such as compassion, tolerance, honesty and endurance.

**Comments:** Some of the essential teachings of Buddha are presented effectively in the form of animal stories. Young readers may find this book a good introduction to the basic Buddhist philosophy. This book is not Japan-specific, but may be used in a variety of ways to teach about Buddhism.

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**Japanese Children's Favorite Stories.** Edited by Florence Sakade, illustrated by Yoshisuke Kurosaki. Rutland: Charles E. Tuttle Company, 1958, hardcover \$16.95

**Type of work:** folktale

**Grade level:** 2-4

**Library of Congress #:** PZ5.S186

**Summary:** A collection of well-loved Japanese folktales. The selection includes 20 famous stories such as *Peach Boy*, *The Magic Teakettle*, and *The Grateful Statues*.

**Comments:** The animals and imaginary figures featured as characters stir young readers' imaginations. This is a classic, inexpensive collection of tales that follow the original Japanese versions fairly closely, although Sakade usually closes each translation with an explanation of the tale's meaning, something not usually included in the Japanese original.

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**Japanese Fairy Tales.** Edited by Philip Smith; illustrated by Kakuzo Fujiyama. New York: Dover Publications, 1992. Paperback \$1.00, 90 pages.

**Type of work:** Folk tales

**Grade level:** K-3

**Library of Congress #:** PZ8.J2625

**Summary:** A compilation of Japanese five famous folk tales and stories, including *Momotaro*; *The Tongue-Cut Sparrow*; *The Story of Princess Hase*; *The Story of Urashima Taro, the Fisher Lad*; *The Ogre of Rashomon*.

**Comments:** “Folktales” would be a more accurate term than “fairy tales” to use in describing these stories. This collection was originally put together in 1903 for a British audience. The translations are stilted and “Europeanized,” and there are few illustrations in this small, inexpensive edition of classic tales. **Not recommended.**

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**Japanese Fairy Tales, Volume 1 and 2.** Retold by Keisuke Nishimoto; translated by Dianne Ooka  
Illustrated by Yoko Imoto. Torrance, CA: Heian International, 1999. Hardcover: each volume \$12.95,  
32 pages.

**Type of work:** Folk tale                      **Grade level:** Pre-K – 2nd grade                      **Not Available in Library of Congress**  
**Summary:** These two excellent collections contain some of Japan’s most cherished tales. The stories  
are well-told with very appealing and adorable illustrations. These tales seek to teach children about  
living a good life, achieving happiness, and the price to be paid for cruelty and greed in a light-hearted,  
quintessentially Japanese way.

**Stories in Vol. 1:** “The Old Man who made the Flowers Bloom,” “Mouse Wrestling,” “Kitty’s New  
Vest,” “Kintaro,” “The Crane’s Gift.” **Stories in Vol. 2:** “The Straw Millionaire,” “The Contest,” “The  
Bouncing Rice Ball,” “The Monkey’s Statue,” “Little One-Inch Boy,” “Tail Fishing.”

**Comments:** These are good, inexpensive collections for very young children.

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### **Japanese Tales and Legends**

Retold by Helen & William McAlpine; illustrated by Joan Kiddell-Monroe  
New York: Oxford University Press, 1958  
Paperback: \$12.95, 212 pages

**Type of work:** Folk tale                      **Grade level:** 6-8                      **Library of Congress #:** PZ8.1.M12

**Summary:** The first half of this collection contains stories and folk tales from *Kojiki (Record of Ancient  
Matters)*, the oldest extant chronicle in Japan dating from the early 8<sup>th</sup> century. *Tale of Heike*, an epic  
that chronicles the fall of the warrior Taira family in the 12<sup>th</sup> century, is also featured in the first half.  
The second half of the book contains seven famous folk tales, including *The Peach Boy (Momotaro)* and  
*The Young Urashima (Urashima Taro)*.

**Comments:** This volume is an excellent collection of folktales, history and mythology for the young  
reader. The folktales selected are typical and widely read by young children in Japan. Some stories  
introduce readers to Japan's creation myths, and these can be compared to mythologies found in other  
countries/regions. Students may need historical background of *Tale of Heike*, which is briefly explained  
at the end of the book.

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**Kintaro's Adventures and Other Japanese Children's Stories.** Edited by Florence Sakade; illustrated  
by Yoshio Hayashi. Rutland: Charles E. Tuttle Company, 1958 Paperback \$9.95, 60 pages.

**Type of work:** Folk tale                      **Grade level:** 2-4                      **Library of Congress #:** PZ5.S187

**Summary:** A collection of six famous folk tales: “The Rolling Rice-Cakes,” “How to Fool a Cat,” “The  
Princess and The Herdboy,” “Saburo - The Eel Catcher,” “The Singing Turtle,” and “Kintaro’s  
Adventures.”

**Comments:** These are popular children's stories with illustrations rendered in a traditional Japanese style. Most of the illustrations in this inexpensive edition are black-and-white with one color illustration per story.

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**Kwaidan - Stories and Studies of Strange Things.** Retold by Lafcadio Hearn. Tokyo, Japan: Charles E. Tuttle Company, 1971 Paperback \$ 11.50. 240 pages (no illustrations).

**Type of work:** Folk tale

**Grade level:** 6-8

**Library of Congress #:** PS1917.K8

**Summary:** This work is a collection of seventeen well-known "kwaidan," or ghost stories, from Japan, collected and retold by Lafcadio Hearn, who lived in Japan in the early 1900s. It features "Hoichi the Earless," "The Woman of the Snow," and other famous stories. In addition to these are three of Hearn's essays about insects.

**Comments:** Each story is about five to ten pages long and easy to read. Many of the stories are about women and children, and they illuminate the cultural values, practices, and beliefs of Japanese society in the past, all of which continue to influence contemporary Japanese society.

**Related works:** Several of the stories are beautifully presented in the film (available of video) *Kwaidan* by Masaki Kobayashi, Janus Films, 1964. See other works by Hearn.

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**Lily and the Wooden Bowl.** Adapted by Alan Schroeder; illustrated by Yoriko Ito. New York: Delacorte Press, 1994. Hardcover \$14.95, 32 pages.

**Type of work:** Folk tale

**Grade level:** 3-6

**Library of Congress #:** PZ8.S3125Li

**Summary:** A Japanese tale about a young woman's journey to find true love by hiding her beautiful face. She overcomes harsh trials to find true love and happiness.

**Comments:** Reminds one of a story of "Cinderella" in which true beauty comes to light because of the trust and love of a steadfast prince. Beautiful illustrations.

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**The Loyal Cat.** Retold by Lensey Namioka; illustrated by Aki Sogabe. San Diego: Browndeer Press, 1995. Hardcover \$15.00.

**Type of work:** Folk tale

**Grade level:** K-3

**Library of Congress #:** PZ8.N123Lo

**Summary:** A story about a small Buddhist temple in northern Japan called "Cat Temple." The cat of a poor but gentle priest uses his magical power to try to help his master become rich and famous. The cat soon learns that his friend prefers a simple life.

**Comments:** Beautiful paper-cut illustrations on every page allow the reader to see how a Japanese temple and priest may have appeared 400 years ago.

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**The Magic Peach: A Story from Japan.** Retold by Janet Palazzo-Craig; illustrated by Makiko Nagano. Troll Communications, 1996. Paperback \$4.95, 32 pages.

**Type of work:** Folk tale

**Grade level:** K-2

**Library of Congress #:** PZ8.1

**Summary:** A very famous old Japanese story about a boy born from a peach. The boy, Momotaro, grows up very quickly and sets out on a journey to fight evil ogres. He befriends several animals along the way who join him in battling the ogres.

**Comments:** Written and formatted for young readers with amusing, colorful illustrations.

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**Mysterious Tales of Japan.** Retold by Rafe Martin; illustrated by Tatsuro Kikuchi. New York: G.P. Putnam's Sons, 1996. Hardcover \$19.99, 74 pages.

**Type of work:** Folk tale

**Grade level:** 4-6

**Library of Congress #:** PZ8.M985

**Summary:** Ten Japanese folktales characterized by the mysterious spiritual powers of the leading characters. Several stories are based on folktales collected and retold by Lafcadio Hearn. Each tale is presented with a haiku in the beginning, one black-and-white drawing, and one color illustration.

**Comments:** Each tale draws readers into an eerie, ghostly world that is influenced by Shinto and Buddhist views of life. The author's notes at the end of the book provide readers with the principal sources of his inspiration.

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**One Hand Clapping: Zen Stories for All Ages.** Retold by Rafe Martin and Manuela Soares; illustrated by Junko Morimoto. New York: Rizzoli International Publications, 1995 hardcover \$?.

**Type of work:** Folk tale

**Grade level:** 3-6 and up

**Library of Congress #:** BQ9265.6.M37

**Summary:** A collection of thought-provoking short stories selected from Zen Buddhist teachings.

**Comments:** The tales are rewritten in simple and enjoyable ways that allow children to appreciate and learn about Zen Buddhist principles. The colorful illustrations add flavor to the book. Excellent as discussion material.

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**The Paper Crane.** Adapted and illustrated by Molly Bang. New York: Greenwillow Books, 1985. Hardcover, \$16.00, 32 pages.

**Type of work:** Folk tale

**Grade level:** K-3

**Library of Congress #:** PZ7.B2217 Pap

**Summary:** An old man repays a generous restaurant owner for the gift of a free meal by giving him a magical paper crane. When the crane comes alive and dances, more and more people come to the restaurant and business thrives.

**Comments:** A beautifully illustrated traditional Japanese tale in a modern setting, and also a lovely

story about paying back a good deed in a wondrous way. This is an excellent introduction to origami, or paper-folding, and also to the significance of cranes in Japanese culture. **Highly recommended.**

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**Peach Boy and Other Japanese Children's Favorite Stories.** Edited by Florence Sakade; illustrated by Yoshisuke Kurosaki. Rutland: Charles E. Tuttle Company, 1958. Paperback \$9.95, 58 pages.

**Type of work:** Folk tale

**Grade level:** 2-4

**Library of Congress #:** PZ5.S188

**Summary:** A collection of nine famous folk tales: "Peach Boy," "The Magic Teakettle," "Monkey-Dance and Sparrow-Dance," "The Long-Nosed Goblins," "The Rabbit in the Moon," "The Tongue-Cut Sparrow," "Silly Saburo," "The Toothpick Warriors," "The Sticky-Sticky Pine."

**Comments:** Popular children's stories with illustrations rendered in a traditional Japanese style. Most of the illustrations in this inexpensive edition are black-and-white with one color illustration per story.

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**The Samurai's Daughter.** Retold by Robert D. San Souci; illustrated by Stephen T. Johnson. New York: Dial Books for Young Readers, 1992. Hardcover \$15.99, 32 pages.

**Type of work:** Folk tale

**Grade level:** 4-6

**Library of Congress #:** PZ8.1.S227

**Summary:** A folk tale about a brave daughter of a samurai warrior and her journey to be reunited with her exiled father on one of the Oki Islands in the Inland Sea of Japan. Set in medieval Japan during the Kamakura Period (1185-1333).

**Comments:** A thrilling tale. It is unique because the young female protagonist has the physical strength and courage usually attributed to the boy of a warrior's family. The introduction tells the readers that this is an ancient tale but the Japanese source is not given.

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**A Song of Stars.** Retold by Tom Birdseye; illustrated by Ju-Hong Chen. New York: Holiday House, Inc., 1990. Hardcover \$14.95, 32 pages.

**Type of work:** Folk tale

**Grade level:** K-3

**Library of Congress #:** PZ8.1.B534So

**Summary:** Chauchau, a weaver, and Newlang, a herdsman, indulge themselves in love but neglect their work. The angry Emperor of the heavens punishes them by sending the couple to the opposite sides of the Milky Way and allows them to reunite only once a year, the seventh of July.

**Comments:** This Chinese folk tale, known as *Chi Hsi*, Festival of the Milky Way (thus the names of the characters are Chinese), is well-known and celebrated in Japan as *Tanabata*, the Star Festival. The illustrations beautifully capture the romantic mood of the story. See the author's note at the end of the book for an explanation of how Tanabata is celebrated in China and Japan.

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**Tsubu the Little Snail.** Retold by Carol Ann Williams; illustrated by Tatsuro Kiuchi. New York: Simon & Schuster Books for Young Readers, 1995. Hardcover \$15.00, 32 pages.

**Type of work:** Folk tale

**Grade level:** K-3

**Library of Congress #:** PZ8.1.W649

**Summary:** A poor farmer and his wife pray for a baby but instead are given a baby snail. Receiving love and care from his parents, the snail grows into an intelligent boy who helps his aging father with farm work. A young woman marries the snail, but the true test of love awaits her when they go to the temple together.

**Comments:** Very realistic illustrations of farmers' clothing, rice paddies and landscape. The interior of the house depicted in the book teaches readers about the simple lifestyle of Japanese villagers in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century. Aspects of the story, such as the system of the yearly rice tax, may be confusing to readers, so teacher guidance is necessary. Excellent as a comparison with western stories of the same theme.

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**Under the Cherry Blossom Tree.** Retold and illustrated by Allen Say. New York: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1974. Hardcover \$13.95, 32 pages.

**Type of work:** Folk tale

**Grade level:** 3-6

**Library of Congress #:** PZ8.1.S27

**Summary:** One day in spring, when all the people in the village are enjoying the abundant cherry blossoms, a wicked landlord accidentally swallows a cherry pit that begins to grow into a tree from the top of his head. This incident causes him a great deal of trouble, but the poor villagers are led into a happy and wondrous world because of it.

**Comments:** Very funny, recommended for young readers. Illustrations are very vivid and lively.

**Related works:** All of Say's works are highly recommended, including *The Bicycle Man* and *Grandfather's Journey*.

## Juvenile Literature

**The Big Wave.** Written by Pearl S. Buck. New York: Harper Trophy, 1948. Paperback \$4.50, 57 pages.

**Type of work:** Juvenile literature

**Grade level:** 3-7

**Library of Congress #:** PZ7.B879

**Summary:** A giant wave from the ocean swallows Jiya's village, including his entire family and his house. As he struggles to overcome his sorrow, he learns to be brave and finds a way to accept what nature brings while appreciating life.

**Comments:** Although this is a very touching story by the famous novelist Pearl S. Buck, there are too many inconsistencies for it to be recommended for use in today's classroom. It seems to contain a mixture of Christian ideas, Chinese ethics and Japanese aesthetics. **Not recommended.**

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**Bon Odori Dancer.** Written by Karen Kuwamoto McCoy; illustrated by Carolina Yao. Chicago: Polychrome Publishing Corporation, 1999. Hardcover, \$14.95, 32 pages.

**Type of work:** Juvenile literature

**Grade level:** K-3

**Library of Congress #:** PZ7.M47841447Bo

**Summary:** Clumsy Keiko has a hard time practicing the traditional bon-dance for the upcoming festival. Her classmates are frustrated at first, but with the instructor's encouragement, other girls start helping Keiko and then all of them perform well at the festival.

**Comments:** Although this story teaches young people about the importance of patience and teamwork, it contains inaccurate and confusing cultural information about Japan. The history of the o-bon festival as a means of honoring one's ancestors is not explained, nor are the costumes or dance steps accurate. **Not recommended.**

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**A Carp for Kimiko.** Written by Virginia L. Kroll; illustrated by Katherine Roundtree. Watertown: Charlesbridge Publishing, 1993. Hardcover \$14.95, paperback \$6.95, 32 pages.

**Type of work:** Juvenile literature

**Grade level:** K-3

**Library of Congress #:** PZ7.K9227

**Summary:** Carp-shaped kites are flown outside of a house with male children in the family on Children's Day in Japan. Because she is a girl, Kimiko cannot have a carp decoration, but she wants to

be included, just as she has included her brother in the all-girl Doll's Day celebration. Kimiko's sympathetic parents find a way to make the day special for her.

**Comments:** The author and illustrator obviously spent a great deal of time and effort on this book. Unfortunately the text is stilted and the illustrations are not appealing. Not an authentic Japanese story. **Not recommended.**

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**Chibi - A True Story from Japan.\*** Written by Barbara Brenner and Julia Takaya; illustrated by June Otani. New York: Clarion Books, 1996. Hardcover \$14.95, 63 pages.

**Type of work:** Juvenile literature

**Grade level:** K-3

**Library of Congress #:** QL696.A52B735

**Summary:** Based on actual events set in the center of Tokyo, this story follows a mother duck and her ten baby ducklings as they search for a place to settle down. This cute duck family immediately captures the heart of many Tokyo residents including an elderly photographer who risks his life to stop traffic for the duck family's journey.

**Comments:** This story closely resembles "Make Way for Ducklings," which was set in Boston and offers a good comparison. The watercolor illustrations are very charming. **Highly recommended.**

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**Colors of Japan.** Written by Holly Littlefield and illustrated by Helen Byers. Minneapolis: Carolrhoda Books, 1997. Hardcover, \$5.95, 24 pages.

**Type of work:** Juvenile Literature

**Grade level:** K-2

**Library of Congress #:** DS821.L57

**Summary:** Ten colors are used to introduce readers to various aspects of Japan. Double pages for each color include a drawing in that color, the Japanese word for the color, and a brief explanation about history, daily life, traditions, population, school, etc.

**Comments:** This is an interesting idea for introducing readers to Japan, but it is not entirely successful. Japanese terms, such as *ikebana* (flower-arranging) or *tatami* (grass mats used in houses), are well-explained in the text, but in some cases the text is not associated with the color at all. There are other inconsistencies: the term used for tan, "kikashoku-iro," is incorrect, and Mt. Fuji should be called Fuji-san, not Fujiyama. In addition, the watercolor illustrations are not very attractive. **Not recommended.**

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**Count Your Way Through Japan.** *Written by Jim Haskins and illustrated by Martin Skoro.* Minneapolis: Carolrhoda Books, Inc., 1987. Hardcover, \$price, 24 pages.

**Type of work:** Juvenile literature

**Grade level:** K-2

**Library of Congress #:** DS821.H349

**Summary:** Each number is used to introduce an aspect of Japanese life and culture. The Japanese word for each number is given along with a brief explanation about chopsticks, kimono, sumo, etc.

**Comments:** Many of the illustrations are inaccurate and do not necessarily portray Japan. For example, the chopsticks presented in this book are Chinese, not Japanese. **Not recommended.**

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**Crow Boy\***. Written and illustrated by Taro Yashima. New York: Viking, 1955. Hardcover \$16.99, 32 pages.

**Type of work:** Juvenile literature

**Grade level:** K-3

**Library of Congress #:** PZ7.Y212Cr

**Summary:** Afraid of teachers, teased by his classmates for being different, and unable to make friends, Chibi spends most of his time alone in school. But a friendly new teacher, Mr. Isobe, discovers a remarkable talent of Chibi's and encourages him to share it with his classmates.

**Comments:** This heartwarming story beautifully depicts how a shy child learns to use an unusual talent to grow into a confident individual thanks to the kind, open-minded guidance of a teacher. This is a Japanese story with universal appeal. **Highly recommended.**

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**Dorobo The Dangerous.** *Written by Marcia Vaughan and illustrated by Kazuko Stone.* New Jersey: Silver Burdett Press, 1995. Hardcover, \$10.95, 32 pages

**Type of work:** Juvenile literature

**Grade level:** K-2

**Library of Congress #:** PZ7.V452 Do

**Summary:** A sly fox, Dorobo the Dangerous, steals Crane's fish from his pond. Crane gets advice from a wise monkey and help from various things: a hot rock, a slick snail, a broken sword, a rotten egg and a piece of cherry bark. All of them help him solve his problem for good.

**Comments:** Although the illustrations are typical of Japanese tales and the animal characters have significant meaning in Japanese society, this story is not based on a Japanese folk tale or legend. There is no glossary to explain what *dorobo* (thief) and *hibachi* (brazier) mean, but these words may be understood by looking at the pictures. Not highly recommended.

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**The Drums of Noto Hanto.** Written by J. Alison James; illustrated by Tsukushi. New York: DK Publishing, 1999. Hardcover \$16.95, 36 pages.

**Type of work:** Juvenile literature

**Grade level:** K-3

**Library of Congress #:** PZ7.J15412Dr

**Summary:** A wealthy coastal village on the Noto Hanto (Noto Peninsula) is under threat of invasion by a powerful warlord who wants to claim their riches. The villagers have no weapons, but they use the overwhelming sound of drums and terrifying-looking masks in order to scare away the warlord and his *samurai* warriors.

**Comments:** This story is based on an incident that happened in 1576. Since then, the people of Noto Hanto still celebrate their ancestors' victory annually. This book is a delightful retelling of how a local Japanese festival came to be. The dynamic and dramatic illustrations, filled with collages, perfectly complement the story. The most effective way to use this book is to read it out loud to get the sense of the throbbing pulse of the drumbeat. **Highly recommended.**

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**Faithful Elephants - A True Story of Animals, People and War.\*** Written by Yukio Tsuchiya; Translated by Tomoko Tsuchiya Dykes; Illustrated by Ted Lewin. Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1988. Hardcover \$14.95, 32 pages.

**Type of work:** Juvenile literature

**Grade level:** K-4

**Library of Congress #:** PZ10.3T87Fai

**Summary:** A true story about three elephants in Tokyo's Ueno Zoo that had to be killed during World War II because people feared they would escape during the bombings of the city. The elephants' trainer, who loves the elephants as if they were his own children, struggles to carry out this cruel mission and is saddened by his inability to save their lives.

**Comments:** It is a heartrending story, first published in Japan in 1951. Young readers learn how war affects the lives of people and animals. The tone of the watercolor illustrations matches the feelings of sadness and hopelessness that accompany this tale. **Highly recommended.**

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**The Fox Maiden.** Written by Elsa Marston; illustrated by Tatsuro Kiuchi. New York: Simon & Schuster Books for Young Readers, 1996. Hardcover \$16.00, 32 pages.

**Type of work:** Juvenile literature

**Grade level:** 2-6

**Library of Congress #:** PZ7.M356755

**Summary:** This original tale is a story about a young fox who uses magic to turn into a human girl. The disguised fox lives among the humans in a village and works as a servant to the richest man in the village. By the end of the story, the fox learns that being true to one's self is the best way to live.

**Comments:** This can lead to discussion about Shinto and the symbolic meanings of some animals in Japan, particularly the fox. This could also be interpreted as a coming-of-age story. In conjunction with this tale, educators may like to introduce students to Japanese folk tales in which the main characters are foxes. The author and illustrator have taken great care in creating this lovely tale, inspired by Japanese folklore.

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**Girl From The Snow Country.** Written and illustrated by Masako Hidaka . New York: Kane/Miller Book Publishers, 1984. Hardcover \$13.95, 32 pages.

**Type of work:** Juvenile literature

**Grade level:** K-3

**Library of Congress #:** PZ7.H53164Gi

**Summary:** A little girl, Mi-chan, who lives in northern Japan, makes bunnies out of snow but she needs something to use for their eyes. With the help of a friendly deity and a lady at the market, Mi-chan finds berries that she uses for their eyes.

**Comments:** A charming story with beautiful illustrations, originally published in Japan. For non-Japanese readers, Jizo, a Buddhist deity thought to be the protector of children, may need some explanation.

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**Grandpa's Town.** Written and illustrated by Takaaki Nomura. New York: Kane/Miller Book Publishers, 1991. Paperback \$7.95.

**Type of work:** Juvenile literature

**Grade level:** K-3

**Library of Congress #:** PZ7.N73

**Summary:** A young Japanese boy visits his grandfather's house, worried that he might be lonely after his wife's death. The boy accompanies his grandfather to the public bath where he finds out that his grandfather has many friends in the neighborhood and is not lonely at all.

**Comments:** An excellent book to introduce life in a small Japanese community in which all the neighbors and shopkeepers know each other. Students may need background on the role of the public bath in Japan. The book contains both Japanese and English text; it was originally published in Japanese in 1989. **Highly recommended.**

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**If I Lived in Japan.** Written by Rosanne Knorr; illustrated by John Knorr. Atlanta: Longstreet Press, Inc., 1995. Hardcover, \$14.95, 40 pages.

**Type of work:** Juvenile literature

**Grade level:** 1-3

**Library of Congress #:** PL685. K535

**Summary:** Through a series of unconnected illustrations, this book supposedly explains what life would be like for a child in Japan. The book uses many Japanese words and common phrases.

**Comments:** The illustrations are misleading and do not accurately represent Japanese life.

**Not recommended.**

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**Japanese Boys' Festival.** Written by Janet Riehecky; illustrated by Krystyna Stasiak. Chicago: Children's Press, 1994. Paperback \$3.95.

**Type of work:** Juvenile literature

**Grade level:** 1-3

**Library of Congress #:** GT4803.A2R54

**Summary:** A story about two brothers celebrating Boy's Day. It illustrates how boys in Japan celebrate the day with decorative carp streamers and figures of warriors. The young boys learn about the important values of courage and strength.

**Comments:** This book introduces young readers to the significance of Boy's Day and the traditional and typical ways of celebrating the holiday.

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**Jiro's Pearl.** Written and illustrated by Daniel Powers. Cambridge: Candlewick Press, 1997. Hardcover, \$15.99, 25 pages.

**Type of work:** Juvenile literature

**Grade level:** 1-3

**Library of Congress #:** PZ8. P865Ji

**Summary:** An old woman asks her grandson, Jiro, to take the last of their rice to a village to buy her medicine. He loses it along the way, but with the help of a mysterious fish, he gets a large pearl from the deep water. He ends up giving the pearl to a beggar, but his generosity restores his grandmother's health and brings his family treasures.

**Comments:** Although the story captures the feeling of a typical Japanese tale in some ways, the characters often look Chinese or Western, and the story's development is not authentically Japanese. Japanese words are not clearly defined. **Not recommended.**

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**Katie and the Dream-Eater.** Written by Her Imperial Highness Princess Takamado; illustrated by Brian Wildsmith. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996. Hardcover \$18.95, 28 pages.

**Type of work:** Juvenile literature

**Grade level:** K-3

**Library of Congress #:** PZ7.PT3

**Summary:** A young girl named Katie meets and befriends Baku, a creature that eats bad dreams so that everyone can sleep soundly. Baku inadvertently stays in Katie's human world rather than in her dreams and Katie has to help him find his way back to the world of dreams.

**Comments:** The story does not contain content regarding Japanese culture but was written by a member of the Japanese imperial family, Princess Takamado. The illustrations are quite beautiful. Although it is not mentioned in the book the word “baku” may be derived from the Japanese phrase “*baku baku taberu*” which means, “to eat ravenously,” a description of the fantastic creature's habit in the story.

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**Lulie the Iceberg.** Written by Her Imperial Highness Princess Takamado; illustrated by Warabe Aska. New York: Kodansha America, 1998. Hardcover \$17.00, 41 pages.

**Type of work:** Juvenile literature

**Grade level:** K-3

**Library of Congress #:** PZ7.PT1

**Summary:** A story about an iceberg named Lulie. Describes how the iceberg journeys from the Arctic to the South Pole. Includes descriptions of birds and animals of the Arctic and Antarctica.

**Comments:** The book does not contain content regarding Japanese culture, but was written by a member of the Japanese imperial family, Princess Takamado, who is very committed to environmental issues. The illustrations are beautiful. An extensive glossary can be used effectively for supplementing geography and environmental studies classes.

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**The Magic Fan.** Written and illustrated by Keith Baker. New York: Harcourt Brace & Company, 1989. Hardcover, \$14.95, 24 pages.

**Type of work:** Juvenile literature

**Grade level:** K-3

**Library of Congress #:** PZ7. B17427Mag

**Summary:** Yoshi, a young man who loves to build things, wants to create something special. One day, he finds a fan floating in the sea. Whenever he opens the fan, he sees a picture of something marvelous to build, including a giant bridge that arches over his village. When a *tsunami* (tidal wave) hits the town, Yoshi loses his fan, but his new task is easy to see—he must rebuild his town.

**Comments:** Neither the story's sensibility nor the illustrations of the people and houses are completely Japanese. It seems that elements of several Asian cultures are mixed together. The book is quite beautiful but the content does not authentically represent Japanese culture. **Not recommended.**

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**The Master Puppeteer.** Written by Katherine Paterson; illustrated by Haru Wells. New York: Harper Trophy, 1975. Paperback \$4.50, 180 pages.

**Type of work:** Juvenile literature

**Grade level:** 6-8

**Library of Congress #:** PZ7.P273

**Summary:** A thirteen year-old boy describes the poverty and discontent of eighteenth-century Osaka and the world of puppeteers in which he lives.

**Comments:** Although this book is not an authentic Japanese tale, it is an exciting and historically accurate book that introduces young readers to life in the Tokugawa Period (1600-1868) and the world of traditional bunraku puppet theater. This work could be used as the starting point for a more in-depth study of Japan.

**Related works:** A film/video clip of traditional bunraku theater would be very helpful for children not familiar with this genre of Japanese theater. One such video: *The Tradition of Performing Arts in Japan - The Heart of Kabuki, Noh and Bunraku*, from the series titled, *Nippon: The Land and Its People*, produced by Shin-ei, Inc., Tokyo 1989.

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**Noguchi the Samurai.** Written by Burt Konzak; illustrated by Johnny Wales. Toronto: Lester Publishing Limited, 1994. Hardcover \$16.95, 32 pages.

**Type of work:** Juvenile literature

**Grade level:** 3-6

**Library of Congress #:** PZ8.BK

**Summary:** Noguchi the samurai, believing that he is the strongest warrior, terrorizes his fellow passengers on a ferry. When he accidentally drops his pipe into the sea, his fierce attitude intensifies and terrifies the passengers. Then, an old samurai named Michihara steps in to show how one can win a battle without a sword.

**Comments:** This kind of story has been used to teach young students ethics and the philosophy of martial arts. While this story is not an original Japanese tale, the author and illustrator have taken great care in creating a delightful story set in Tokugawa Japan (1600-1868). Both the story and the illustrations are very well done.

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**Of Nightingales That Weep.\*** Written by Katherine Paterson. New York: HarperCollins Publishers, Inc., 1974. Paperback \$4.95, 170 pages.

**Type of work:** Juvenile Literature

**Grade level:** 9-12

**Library of Congress #:** PZ7.P273Of

**Summary:** In 12<sup>th</sup> century Japan, Takiko's samurai father dies in battle, and Takiko's mother remarries an ugly potter living in the country. Takiko yearns to escape to a place and position befitting her birth. When a travelling merchant hears her beautiful koto playing, Takiko has the opportunity to join imperial court life as an attendant, and there she becomes wrapped up in the drama of court life during wartime.

Her search for beauty and “something better” throughout the book takes her on a long journey that ends in a strange, but somehow fitting place.

**Comments:** Gracefully written and imagined, supported by accurate historical detail of the late 12<sup>th</sup> century struggle between the Genji and Heike clans, this book is a wonderful starting point for older students interested in learning about Japan. Paterson has mastered the art of writing educational and fascinating stories for young adults free from condescension. **Highly recommended.**

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**One Bird.** Written by Kyoko Mori. New York: Fawcett Juniper Book, 1995. Paperback \$4.50, 244 pages.

**Type of work:** Juvenile literature

**Grade level:** 9-12

**Library of Congress #:** PZ7.M826

**Summary:** A teenaged girl, Megumi, is devastated when her mother abandons her family to return to her native village. Megumi feels isolated while living with her paternal grandmother who forbids her from contacting her mother. After she meets Dr. Mizutani, a young, independent veterinarian, Megumi finds peace and faith in herself while caring for sick birds.

**Comments:** A great coming-of-age novel recommended for all young adults. While the story is set in Japan, the theme of the book is universal. Young readers in any country can easily identify with the teenager's fear, struggle and growth while going through her parents' divorce.

**Related works:** Kyoko Mori's first novel, *Shizuko's Daughter*, is the story of a girl whose mother commits suicide. *Dream of Water* is Mori's memoir of her own mother's suicide. Both books are very moving, well-written works that are highly accessible to younger readers. Mori has also published poetry and short stories.

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**The Sea Maidens of Japan.** Written by Lili Bell; illustrated by Erin McGonigle Brammer Nashville: Ideals Children's Books, 1996. Hardcover \$14.95, 32 pages.

**Type of work:** Juvenile literature

**Grade level:** 4-6

**Library of Congress #:** PZ7.B38925 Se

**Summary:** Female sea divers who retrieve shellfish from the ocean are called *ama* in Japan. A girl named Kiyomi is encouraged by her mother to follow her family's tradition and become an *ama*, but it is a struggle for her to choose between ordinary life in the city and life as an *ama*.

**Comments:** While this is not an authentic Japanese tale, the story beautifully portrays the relationship between nature and human beings as well as the mother-daughter relationship. The illustrations are beautiful but a bit somber. The author's note about the terms and their pronunciations is for readers who are not familiar with this little-known aspect of Japanese culture.

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**Village of the Vampire Cat.** Written by Lensey Namioka. Hillsboro: Blue Heron Publishing, Inc., 1981 Paperback \$8.95, 158 pages.

**Type of work:** Juvenile literature

**Grade level:** 6-8

**Library of Congress #:** PZ7.N1426

**Summary:** Two unemployed samurai warriors (*ronin*) discover that bandits and a murderer are terrorizing their teacher's village. They decide to rescue the village.

**Comments:** Set in medieval Japan, this story offers young readers a mixture of fantasy and history. It can be used as a supplemental reading when teaching about historical Japan, but educators need to supply sufficient background.

## Japanese American Encounters

**Baseball Saved Us.\*** Written by Ken Mochizuki; illustrated by Dom Lee. New York: Lee & Low Books, 1993. Hardcover \$14.95, paperback \$6.95.

**Type of work:** Juvenile literature

**Grade level:** 2-6

**Library of Congress #:** PZ7.M71284

**Summary:** A Japanese American boy learns to play baseball when he and his family are forced to live in an internment camp during World War II. Baseball helps the boy cope with the hardships in the camp as well as with the discrimination he faces after the war is over.

**Comments:** Recommended for supplementing a lesson about the Japanese American experience in the U.S. during World War II. Also a good discussion point about baseball, one of the favorite sports for Japanese children today. **Highly recommended.**

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**The Bicycle Man.** Written and illustrated by Allen Say. Oakland: Parnassus Press, 1982. Hardcover \$14.95, 38 pages.

**Type of work:** Juvenile literature

**Grade level:** 1-4

**Library of Congress #:** PZ7.S2744Bi

**Summary:** The story takes place in a small village in Japan during the post-World War II occupation era. Elementary school children enjoy their Sports Day festivities and encounter two American soldiers who perform bicycle tricks for them.

**Comments:** The book successfully depicts the post-war atmosphere of a rural school in Japan. Teachers can discuss the yearly Sports Day festivities that continue today, and for advanced students, discuss the reactions of the Japanese characters to the American soldiers.

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**The Bracelet.** Written by Yoshiko Uchida; illustrated by Joanna Yardley. New York: The Putnam Berkley Group, 1993. Hardcover \$5.95, 32 pages.

**Type of work:** Juvenile literature

**Grade level:** 2-4

**Library of Congress #:** PZ7.U25Br

**Summary:** The book begins with a Japanese American girl, Emi, saying good-bye to her home and her best friend, Laurie. Laurie gives Emi a bracelet as a symbol of their friendship before Emi and her family leave for an internment camp. After Emi settles into her new “home,” she realizes that she has lost her bracelet. Emi comes to realize that their friendship is greater than this memento.

**Comments:** Like many other books by Uchida, this story is based on her own experience as a Japanese American interned in a camp during World War II. The realistic watercolor illustrations vividly depict the author’s wrenching experience before and during internment. **Highly recommended.**

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**Chopsticks From America.** Written by Elaine Hosozawa-Nagano; illustrated by Mazayuki Miyata. Chicago: Polychrome Publishing Corporation, 1994. Hardcover, \$16.95, 62 pages.

**Type of work:** Juvenile literature

**Grade level:** 6-8

**Library of Congress #:** PZ7.H795Ch

**Summary:** This story involves two Japanese American children, Tiffany and Kevin, who move to Japan when their father is transferred. They must adjust to life in a new country, as well as deal with the trials and tribulations of growing up.

**Comments:** This story provides an excellent introduction to life in Japan and Japanese culture through the eyes of Japanese American children. The illustrations using *kiri-e*, cut-outs, are strikingly beautiful. **Highly recommended.**

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**Grandfather's Journey.** Written and illustrated by Allen Say. Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1993. Hardcover \$16.95, 32 pages.

**Type of work:** Juvenile literature

**Grade level:** K-2

**Library of Congress #:** PZ7.S2744Gr

**Summary:** The author describes his Japanese grandfather's journey to America in the pre-World War II years and his return to Japan. The book describes the grandfather's intercultural experience of living in Japan and in America, and his longing for one country while in the other.

**Comments:** The book poignantly describes the feeling of longing that many Japanese Americans feel toward both Japan and America. This book can be effective in teaching children of any ethnic background. Beautifully illustrated. **Highly recommended.**

**Related works:** All of Say's works are recommended, including *The Bicycle Man*.

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**How My Parents Learned to Eat.** Written by Ina R. Friedman; illustrated by Allen Say. Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1984. Paperback \$5.95, 32 pages.

**Type of work:** Juvenile literature

**Grade level:** K-3

**Library of Congress #:** PZ7.F8975Ho

**Summary:** A story told by a Japanese American girl whose parents met in Japan and eventually married. Her father, an American sailor stationed in Japan (c. 1960s), courts her Japanese mother. In an effort to familiarize themselves with each other's culture, they learn in secret each other's way of eating.

**Comments:** Celebrates the double heritage of being Japanese and American through the discussion of the different eating styles.

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**Obon.** Written by Ruth Suyenaga; illustrated by Yoshi Miyake. Cleveland: Modern Curriculum Press, 1994. Paperback , 23 pages.

**Type of work:** Juvenile literature

**Grade level:** K-6

**Library of Congress #:** PZ7.S96913

**Summary:** A Japanese American girl from Massachusetts visits her relatives in Hawaii to celebrate the Obon festival. In Hawaii, she learns of the many traditions associated with Obon, summer festivities that celebrate and honor ancestors, and befriends her cousin who is closer to her Japanese background.

**Comments:** An informative book about Obon, a very important family tradition for families in Japan. Teachers must note that the Obon celebrated in this book takes place in Hawaii; therefore, some of the foods mentioned in the book (such as the guava cake) are typically Hawaiian. Nevertheless, students will understand that many Japanese Americans, especially in Hawaii, keep Japanese traditions and festivities alive in their community.

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**So Far From the Sea.** Written by Eve Bunting and illustrated by Chris K. Soentpiet. New York: Clarion Press, 1998. Hardcover \$15.00, 32 pages.

**Type of work:** Juvenile literature

**Grade level:** 3-6

**Library of Congress #:** PZ7.B91527 Slh

**Summary:** In this story, a Japanese American family visits the internment camp where the father was interned for three and a half years and the grandfather died during World War II. The story starts in the present but moves in and out of the past as the family traverses the camp.

**Comments:** Simple text and rich, large illustrations comprise this tale of one family's history. The realistic illustrations successfully capture the mood of a dark moment in American history. There is a helpful "Afterword" that gives the background for Executive Order 9066 which ordered the relocation of thousands of Japanese Americans to internment camps during World War II.

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**Tea with Milk.** Written and illustrated by Allen Say. New York: Houghton, Mifflin Company, 1999. Hardcover \$17.00, 32 pages.

**Type of work:** Juvenile literature

**Grade level:** 6-8

**Library of Congress #:** PZ7.S2744Te

**Summary:** A young woman, Masako, who was born in the U.S., moves with her parents to their home country, Japan, where she soon feels lost and homesick. Struggling between her feelings for both countries, she tries to find a way to live out her own life in the city of Osaka, where she finds a job and then her future husband.

**Comments:** This book clearly shows Masako's struggle to adapt herself into the formality of Japanese life, and it serves as a tribute to the author's parents, who had to find the path to their true home. Watercolor illustrations very vividly depict the emotions of the characters. Teachers can discuss women's roles in Japan and other countries. **Highly recommended.**

**Related Stories:** All of Say's books are highly recommended, including *Grandfather's Journey*.

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**Thanksgiving at Obaachan's.** Written and illustrated by Janet Mitsui Brown. Chicago: Polychrome Publishing Corporation, 1994. Hardcover \$14.95, 36 pages.

**Type of work:** Juvenile literature

**Grade level:** K-4

**Library of Congress #:** PZ7.M69957Th

**Summary:** A young Japanese American girl describes her Thanksgiving holiday at her Grandmother's. This little girl does not speak Japanese and her grandmother does not speak English, but they know how to share the joy of a celebration.

**Comments:** This book is unfortunately marred by poor illustrations that exaggerate facial features and fail to portray important details clearly. **Not Recommended.**

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**Tree of Cranes.** Written by and illustrated by Allen Say. New York: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1991. Hardcover, \$17.95, 32 of pages.

**Type of work:** Juvenile literature

**Grade level:** K-4

**Library of Congress #:** PZ7.S2744Tr

**Summary:** A little boy learns about Christmas from his mother.

**Comments:** A good story that illustrates a blending of cultures. The author was born in Japan but his Japanese mother was raised in California. She shares her custom of celebrating Christmas as a time of peace with her young son. **Highly recommended.**

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**Two Mrs. Gibsons.** Written by Toyomi Igus; illustrated by Daryl Wells. San Francisco: Children's Book Press, 1996. Hardcover \$14.95, 32 pages.

**Type of work:** Juvenile literature

**Grade level:** K-4

**Library of Congress #:** PZ7.126TW

**Summary:** A young girl describes the two strikingly different Mrs. Gibsons in her life: her grandmother, an elderly African-American woman, and her mother, a young Japanese woman. What the two Mrs. Gibsons have in common is their love for this young girl.

**Comments:** This is a heartwarming story about growing up in a bicultural family, told through the eyes of a young girl.

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**Yoko.** Written and illustrated by Rosemary Wells. New York: Hyperion Books for Children, 1998. Hardcover \$14.95.

**Type of work:** Juvenile literature

**Grade level:** K-3

**Library of Congress #:** PZ7.W46843Yo

**Summary:** When Yoko, a Japanese American kitten, brings sushi to school for lunch, her classmates make fun of her. Yoko's teacher attempts to stop the teasing by setting up International Food Day, but even this fails to entice anyone to try sushi. But one hungry, curious friend makes all the difference.

**Comments:** Adorable animals represent children in this accurate portrayal of a child's emotional world. While the content is not directly related to Japan, it offers educators an opportunity to talk to children about the importance of respecting each other's culture.

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**Yoshiko and the Foreigner.** Written and illustrated by Mimi Otey Little. New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1996. Hardcover \$16.00, 36 pages.

**Type of work:** Juvenile literature

**Grade level:** 4-6

**Library of Congress #:** PZ7.L7235Yo

**Summary:** Well-behaved Japanese women in the 1950s were not supposed to talk to strangers, much less to foreigners. Nonetheless, Yoshiko takes pity on Flem, a young American Air Force officer who is lost on a train, and helps him find his way. Their encounter turns into love, but it must be kept hidden from her family.

**Comments:** This book effectively provides the details of Japanese custom and tradition. Its main theme is about bridging cultural differences and respecting each other's way of life, which will lead to lots of classroom discussions. The watercolor illustrations reflect the mood of characters well. This book could be used as an introduction to post-war Japanese history.

## World War II Related Stories

**The Angry Jizo.** Written by Yuko Yamaguchi; illustrated by Goro Shikoku. Tokyo: Yamaguchi Shoten, 1982. Paperback: \$4.00, 32 pages.

**Type of work:** Juvenile literature    **Grade level:** 4-8, with a teacher's discretion    **Library of Congress #:** PZ5Y1

**Summary:** When the atomic bomb is dropped on the city of Hiroshima, a smiling statue of Jizo witnesses the suffering and pain of people burned in front of him. When he cannot take the terrible spectacle any longer, his smiling face turns into the angry face of Deva.

**Comments:** This book was originally written in Japanese for Japanese children. Explanations of the Buddhist deity, Jizo (compassionate bodhisattva believed to protect children) and the fierce Indian god, Deva, are necessary for non-Japanese readers. The illustrations and the story of the aftermath of the atomic bomb vividly portray the suffering of the victims.

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**Hiroshima No Pika.** Written and illustrated by Toshi Maruki. New York: Lothrop, Lee & Shepard Books, 1980. Hardcover \$16.00, 48 pages.

**Type of work:** Juvenile literature    **Grade level:** 2-6 with a teacher's discretion    **Library of Congress #:** D767.25H6M2913

**Summary:** A heartrending story of seven-year old Mii and her family during the “pika,” the flash of the atomic bomb that destroyed the city of Hiroshima.

**Comments:** The book, originally published in Japan, is a strong indictment of nuclear arms. The story is carefully written and formatted to introduce young readers to this historical event. **Highly recommended.**

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**The Lunch Box.** Written by Tatsuharu Kodama; illustrated by Yasushi Nagasawa. Tokyo: Chart Institute, 1995. Paperback \$ 3.50, 32 pages.

**Type of work:** Juvenile literature    **Grade level:** 2-6 with a teacher's discretion    **Library of Congress #:** PZ5.T2

**Summary:** A grandmother tells her two grandchildren about her son who was killed when the atomic bomb was dropped on Hiroshima. Her son, Shigeru, left home for work that morning with the lunch she made for him. In her search for him after the bombing, she finds his blackened lunch box where he used to work.

**Comments:** Excellent material for teaching young readers about how the atomic bombing of Hiroshima affected the lives of ordinary people. This is one of many stories about Hiroshima told through the eyes of victims or their families. The illustrations are carefully done but do give children some idea of the

destructiveness of war. The story focuses on victims' emotional and physical suffering rather than on the historical facts behind the bombing.

**Note:** A child's lunch box, burned in the Hiroshima bombing, is on display in the Peace Museum in Hiroshima City.

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**On the Wings of Peace.** Compiled by Sheila Hamanaka. New York: Clarion Books, 1995. Hardcover \$21.95, 144 pages.

**Type of work:** Essays, poetry, prose

**Grade level:** 5-8

**Library of Congress #:** PZ5.O57

**Summary:** Distinguished authors and illustrators present a collection of prose and poetry exploring aspects of peace, from issues of personal and community violence to international conflict, the bombing of Hiroshima and Nagasaki, and the environmental dangers of nuclear proliferation.

**Comments:**

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**Puppe's Story.** Written by Anne Hoshiko Akabori as told by Hiroki Sugihara. *Illustrated by Andrea Fong.* Sacramento: Edu-Comm. Plus, 1996. Hardcover \$17.95, 28 pages.

**Type of work:** Juvenile literature

**Grade level:** 1-3

**Library of Congress #:** PZ7.A

**Summary:** The true story of Chiune Sugihara, a Japanese diplomat in Lithuania, who saved the lives of 6,000 Jewish refugees during the Holocaust by issuing them transit visas. The narrator of the book is Hiroki Sugihara, Sugihara's oldest son, who tells his story from a five year-old's point of view.

**Comments:** Excellent book for young readers learning about the Holocaust. The epilogue and glossary are helpful. The historic family photographs bring the story to life.

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**Sadako and the Thousand Paper Cranes.** Written by Eleanor Coerr; paintings by Ronald Himler. New York: Dell Publishing, 1977. paperback \$3.50.

**Type of work:** Juvenile literature

**Grade level:** 2-4

**Library of Congress #:** RJ416.L4C63

**Summary:** A story about a young girl named Sadako who died from leukemia as a result of being exposed to the atomic bomb dropped on Hiroshima during World War II. Sadako believed that she would be able to recover if she successfully folded a thousand origami cranes. Although she was not able to complete this feat before she died, she is remembered as one of the heroic victims of the atomic bomb. Based on a true story.

**Comments:** There are abundant supplementary materials for teaching about Sadako, the atomic bomb, and the Pacific War. This is a good book for discussing the tragedy of war and the effects of war on children. For a full account of this true story see *Children of the Paper Crane* by Masamoto Nasu.

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**Shin's Tricycle.** Written by Tatsuharu Kodama; illustrated by Noriyuki Ando. New York, Walker and Company. Hardcover, \$15.95, 32 pages.

**Type of work:** Juvenile literature   **Grade level:** 2-6 with teacher's discretion   **Library of Congress #:** D767.25 H6S51315

**Summary:** This story is a father's recollection of his young son who died in the atomic bombing of Hiroshima. His son, Shin, finally received a tricycle as a present from his uncle and was riding it that day. Many years later Shin's father discovers the buried tricycle and decides to donate it to the Museum of Peace in Hiroshima.

**Comments:** Excellent material for teaching young readers about how the atomic bombing of Hiroshima affected the lives of ordinary people. This is one of many stories about Hiroshima told through the eyes of victims or their families. The illustrations are carefully done but do give children some idea of the destructiveness of war. The story focuses on victims' emotional and physical suffering rather than on the historical facts behind the bombing.

**Note:** A child's tricycle, burned in the Hiroshima bombing, is on display in the Peace Museum in Hiroshima City.

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## Poetry/Haiku

**Cool Melons - Turn to Frogs! The Life and Poems of Issa.** Written by Matthew Gollub; illustrated by Kazuko G. Stone. New York, Lee & Low Books, 1998. Hardcover, \$16.95, 36 pages.

**Type of work:** Poetry

**Grade level:** K-3

**Library of Congress #:** PL797.2.Z5G65

**Summary:** A biography and introduction to the work of the Japanese haiku poet, Kobayashi Issa (1763-1827), whose love for nature finds expression in the more than thirty poems included in this book. Issa grew up lonely and abandoned by his family and faced enormous sadness as an adult. His kindhearted nature is expressed in this poetry.

**Comments:** This is an excellent, thoughtfully constructed book; the illustrations and calligraphy throughout are charming. The author's notes at the end of the book enable readers to further understand the poetry. **Highly recommended.**

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**Grass Sandals: The Travels of Basho.** Written by Dawnine Spivak; illustrated by Demi. New York: Atheneum Books for Young Readers, 1997. Hardcover \$16.00, 36 pages.

**Type of work:** Poetry

**Grade level:** 1-4

**Library of Congress #:** PL794.4Z50487

**Summary:** A simple retelling of the travels of seventeenth-century Japanese poet, Matsuo Basho (1644-1694), across his island homeland. Includes some of the haiku verses he composed.

**Comments:** A charming book. Good as supplemental reading when teaching about haiku.

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**Haiku Picturebook For Children.** Edited by Keisuke Nishimoto and illustrated by Kozo Shimizu. New York: Heian International, Inc., 1998. Hardcover, \$13.95, 32 pages.

**Type of Work:** Poetry

**Grade level:** 1-4

**Library of Congress #:** Not Available in Library in Congress

**Summary:** A collection of haiku written by some of Japan's most famous poets, such as Yosano Buson and Matsuo Basho. The works are arranged in a seasonal pattern along with the original versions in Japanese.

**Comments:** An excellent book to introduce readers to Japanese haiku. Each English translation has a brief interpretation of the poem alongside the original version in Japanese. Beautiful illustrations accurately capture the four seasons in Japan. **Highly recommended.**

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## ***Kamishibai*, Japanese Storytelling: The Return Of An Imaginative Art**

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 12 to 16 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 teachers' guides are particularly helpful, giving a story summary, themes, ideas for initial activities, discussion questions, cultural background to each story and follow-up activities. The stories are illustrated by various artists. Although machine- printed on cardboard, the illustrations look like bold watercolors, woodblock prints, or even brush and ink paintings.

Over twenty stories are currently available including an excellent sampling of ancient and contemporary tales appropriate for children 2 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 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 10th century, *The Bamboo Princess*, in which an elderly couple discover 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 Tarô*, 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 Tarô returns to his village and discovers that 300 years have passed. Resembling such Western tales as *Sleeping Beauty* and *Rip Van Winkle*, *Urashima Tarô* explores themes of the passage of time, kindness and adventure. *A Spider's Thread* adapts a short story by Ryunosuke Akutagawa, an early 20th- 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 12th-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, *Ôgon 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 (*Jizô*). 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 Kyoto in the early 1970s and now teaches English language and folk literature at Doshisha Women's College. Eisenstadt, a resident of New York City, became fascinated by kamishibai after seeing them during a one-year stay in Hokkaido in northern Japan in 1969. She brought kamishibai with her when she returned home and found that the stories and pictures appealed to a very diverse group of students she taught on the Lower East Side of New York City. 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.

**By Elaine Vukov. Excerpt, *Education About Asia*, spring, 1997. Reprinted with permission from the Association for Asian Studies.**

**For more information about kamishibai, contact Margaret Eisenstadt, telephone and fax: 212-662-5836. In Japan, kamishibai are published by Dôshinsha. Kamishibai for Kids, P.O. Box 20069 Park West Station, New York, NY 10025-1510.**

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## Select List of Kamishibai

**The Bamboo Princess (Kaguya-hime).** Retold by Kyoko Iwasaki; illustrated by Teruyo Endo; translated by Donna Tamaki. New York: Kamishibai for Kids, 1995. Kamishibai, \$35.00, 16 picture sheets.

**Type of work:** Folk tale

**Grade level:** 4-8

**Summary:** An old bamboo cutter finds a tiny baby girl in a bamboo stalk. He and his wife have been childless, and they are overjoyed with this wonderful gift. They name her "Kaguya-hime"(Bamboo Princess), and raise her as their own child. As Kaguya-hime grows, she becomes renowned for her beauty and attracts many suitors, to all of whom she assigns a difficult task and then refuses to marry them when they fail. Even the Emperor cannot convince her to marry him. One day she tells the old

couple that she must return to the moon on a night when it is full. Despite every effort the couple and soldiers make to keep her, Kaguya-hime returns to the moon, her original home.

**Comments:** This famous story, made in the early eighth century, is believed to be the oldest tale in Japan. The beginning of the story, in which a child is given to an old, childless couple, is common among many folk tales and can also be seen in *One-Inch Boy* and *Momotaro*. Compare the ending of the story with that of *One-Inch Boy* and *Momotaro*. The watercolor illustrations illuminate and match the mood of the story. **Highly recommended.**

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**Hats for the Jizos (Kasa Jizoo).** Retold by Miyoko Matsutani; illustrated by Fumio Matsuyama; translated by *Donna Tamaki*. New York: Kamishibai for Kids, 1995. Kamishibai, \$35.00, 16 picture sheets.

**Type of work:** Folk tale

**Grade level:** K-2

**Summary:** On New Year's Eve, a poor old man goes to the village, hoping to sell a piece of cloth his wife wove to make some money for the New Year's holiday. He meets a man who is trying to sell straw hats, and he exchanges the cloth with the man's five hats. On the way back home in the snow, the old man spots six stone statues of *Jizo* (a Buddhist deity of compassion), looking cold. This kind, old man covers their heads with the five straw hats and his own scarf. He returns home with empty hands but his wife is happy for what he has done. During the night of New Year's Eve, the six *Jizos* reward the couple for their unselfish generosity.

**Comments:** This heart-warming story teaches children compassion and kindness. Ask students how they celebrate the New Year's holiday and other significant holidays. Explain that it is the most important holiday in Japan. With the teacher's guide, students will be able to see how Japanese people celebrate the holiday. The teacher's guide also explains what a *Jizo* is and what it means to the Japanese people. The teacher's guide would be much more helpful if it listed more activities, such as *takoage* (flying kites), *hanetsuki* (playing a battledore), and *koma-mawashi* (spinning a top), all of which children in Japan play on the New Year's holiday. **Highly recommended.**

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**How The Witch Was Eaten Up.** Retold by Miyoko Tatsutani; illustrated by Eigoro Futamata; translated by Donna Tamaki. Tokyo: Doshinsha Co, Ltd, 1992. Kamishibai, \$35.00, 16 picture sheets.

**Type of work:** Folk tale

**Grade level:** K-3

**Summary:** A young apprentice in a temple meets an old woman who says they are related. She invites him to her home to enjoy chestnuts that evening. The boy decides to visit her house despite the priest's warning that she may be a witch. The priest gives the boy 3 paper charms to protect him. It turns out that she is a witch and the young boy uses the charms to escape. When the witch follows him to the temple, the priest saves the boy by making the witch turn into a bean.

**Comments:** Charming illustrations. They effectively depict how people live or lived in Japan by showing *futon*, *irori* (an old fashioned hearth) and chopsticks. Compare the traditional Japanese housing style with those of Western countries using the teacher's guide. **Highly recommended.**



**How The Years Were Named.** Retold by Chizuko Kimichi; illustrated by Yuko Kanazawa; translated by Donna Tamaki. New York: Kamishibai for Kids, 1999. Kamishibai, \$35.00, 12 picture sheets.

**Type of work:** Chinese folk tale

**Grade level:** K-3

**Summary:** The story tells how animals of the Chinese zodiac were chosen. The great wizard chooses twelve and holds a race to decide the order of the names. There is a wild boar, a tiger, a horse, an ox, a sheep, a dog, a cock, a rabbit, a monkey, a snake, a mouse and a dragon. Who gets first place?

**Comments:** This is one of the traditional versions of the story that tells how the years of the twelve-year cycle used in East Asia were named after twelve animals. Discuss the traits of each animal and have your students decide the order of the animals. Ask your students which other animals they'd choose for each of the 12 years and why. **Highly recommended.**

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**Kon and Pon (Parts One and Two).** Retold by Masako Matsuno; illustrated by Eigoro Futamata; translated by Donna Tamaki. Tokyo, Doshinsha Co. Ltd., Kamishibai, \$49.00, 24 picture sheets.

**Type of work:** Folk tale

**Grade level:** K-2

**Summary:** Kon, a little fox, befriends Pon, a little raccoon dog, but their family members do not get along and discourage them from seeing each other. One day, Pon and Kon magically turn into each other, and trade lives for a while. Pon goes to Kon's house, Kon goes to Pon's house, and each ends up helping the other's family. Finally, their compassion and friendship bring the two families together.

**Comments:** This double-set story teaches children to have mutual respect for different groups of people. Teachers can begin with the cultural significance of foxes (kitsune) and raccoon dogs (tanuki) which are regarded as animals possessing supernatural powers, such as the ability to turn themselves into other forms of life and play tricks on people. The teacher's guide includes paper-holding techniques, cultural background, and songs. **Highly recommended.**

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**The One-Inch Boy (Issun-Boshi).** Retold by Joji Tsubota; illustrated by Hisao Suzuki; translated by Donna Tamaki. New York: Kamishibai for Kids, 1995. Kamishibai \$35.00, 12 picture sheets.

**Type of work:** Folk tale

**Grade level:** K-3

**Summary:** Childless old couple's wish is granted and a one-inch boy is born to them. This son, named Issun-boshi, never grows any taller. When he grows up, he goes off to the capital city in order to prove himself. Issun-boshi demonstrates his courage and strength and wins the heart of the Lord's daughter when he rescues her from an *oni*, a giant ogre.

**Comments:** This story's beginning is typical of Japanese folk tales, which often begin with a childless old couple who wish to have a baby, such as in *Momotaro*, the Peach Boy, or *Kaguyahime*, The Bamboo Princess. The teacher's guide provides cultural background for teachers and students to discuss the bowl, chopsticks, wooden clogs, ogres and magic mallet used in the story. **Highly recommended.**

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**The Story of Tanabata.** Retold by Shin Kitada; illustrated by Yukihiro Mitani; translated by Donna Tamaki. New York: Kamishibai for Kids, 1995. Kamishibai, \$35.00, 12 picture sheets.

**Type of work:** Chinese folk tale

**Grade level:** K-3

**Summary:** A young herdsman, Hikoboshi, and a weaver princess, Otohime, fall in love and then marry. After their marriage, they are so infatuated with each other that they neglect their herding and weaving duties. This angers the ruler of the Heaven. To punish the couple, he sends them to opposite sides of the Milky Way but allows them to meet once a year, on the seventh day of the seventh month.

**Comments:** The Japanese festival called Tanabata or Star Festival in Japan is based on a Chinese legend. On July 7, children write their wishes on strips of colored paper and decorate a bamboo tree with various-shaped paper ornaments in much the same way as Westerners now decorate Christmas trees. These activities and traditions are explained in more detail in the teacher's guide. The guide also includes the song of the Star Festival. The wood block print illustrations are vivid and charming. **Highly recommended.**

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**Urashima Taro.** Retold by Ichiro Wakabayashi; illustrated by Saburo Nishiyama; translated by Donna Tamaki. New York: Kamishibai for Kids, 1995. Kamishibai, \$35.00, 16 picture sheets.

**Type of work:** Folk tale

**Grade level:** 2-4

**Summary:** A young, kind fisherman, Urashima Taro, saves a baby tortoise from bullies. As a reward, he is invited to the Dragon's Palace at the bottom of the sea where he is lavishly entertained by the Dragon King's daughter. But Taro grows homesick for his mother and decides to leave the Palace. The princess gives him a beautiful box to take with him but warns him not to open it if he ever wants to meet her again. He returns to his village, only to find that everything has changed. Bewildered and despairing, Taro opens the box, instantly turns into an old man, and discovers that three hundred years have passed.

**Comments:** Illustrations are uniquely presented in a beautiful combination of wood block prints, watercolor, and rice paper. The main theme in this story is the passage of time. Teachers can ask their students whether they can think of other stories that have this theme (Sleeping Beauty or Rip Van Winkle). In addition, when talking about the passage of time, teachers can explain the concept of the four seasons and the significance of a tortoise (symbol of longevity) in Japanese society. **Highly recommended.**

# Japanese Songs for Children

## Recommended collections of children's songs

### **Best-Loved Children's Songs from Japan**

By Yoko Imoto

Torrance, CA: Heian International, 1996

Originally published in Japan by Kodansha International, 1986

\$12.95

Fifteen songs with music score. English and Japanese lyrics. Endnotes give background to the songs. Beautifully illustrated.

### **Let's Sing – Japanese Songs for Kids**

By Janet and Maren Sono

NY: Kamishibai for Kids, 1998

\$24.00 includes CD

Fourteen songs with music score and compact disc. English and Japanese lyrics. Background notes for each song.