

A Brief History of *Kamishibai*



Kamishibai (kah-mee-shee-bye) or “paper-theater” evolved from a form of vibrant street storytelling that was extraordinarily popular throughout urban Japan from the 1920’s to the 1950’s. Before there were television and movies for children in Japan, special storytellers, called “*Kamishibai* Men” would bring stories to children on a bicycle.

Each *Kamishibai* man was also a candy seller. Riding a bicycle equipped with a large box attached on the back, he would enter a neighborhood and loudly strike together two wooden clappers called *hyoshigi* (hyoh-shee-ghee). The sound was a signal for children to run from their homes and gather around for an exciting story and candy snacks.

There were drawers in the big wooden box on the back of the bicycle filled with sweets. The children who bought some got to stand nearest to the wooden stage attached to the top of the box, and those who didn’t had to stand in the back. The *Kamishibai* man would insert the story cards into the stage and then, in a dramatic manner, deliver episodes of two or three *kamishibai* stories. These were suspenseful serials, and the *Kamishibai* man always concluded at a cliffhanger, leaving the children impatient for his next visit.

The introduction of television in 1953 led to the gradual disappearance of *Kamishibai* men from Japan’s streets. The artists who had made their living writing and illustrating *Kamishibai* turned to more remunerative ventures such as the creation of *manga* (Comic books) and later *anime*. (Animated cartoons)

In recent years, however, *kamishibai* stories have enjoyed a renaissance in Japanese schools, libraries and cultural centers.

The renowned author, illustrator and Caldecott Medalist, Allen Say grew up in Japan during *Kamishibai*’s spirited heyday. His recent highly acclaimed book, *Kamishibai Man*, recreates through exquisitely detailed watercolors and simple text, the excitement and pleasure that *kamishibai* stories convey.

The Meaning of the Lotus Flower in Buddhism



The lotus flower represents one symbol of fortune in Buddhism. It grows in muddy water, and it is this environment that gives forth the flower's first and most literal meaning: rising and blooming above the murk to achieve enlightenment. The second meaning, which is related to the first is purification. **It resembles the purifying of the spirit which is born into murkiness.** The third meaning refers to faithfulness. Those who are working to rise above the muddy waters will need to be faithful followers. A closed lotus flower represents the time before a Buddhist follower found Buddha or enlightenment.. The mud shows us who we are and teaches us to choose the right path over the easy one.

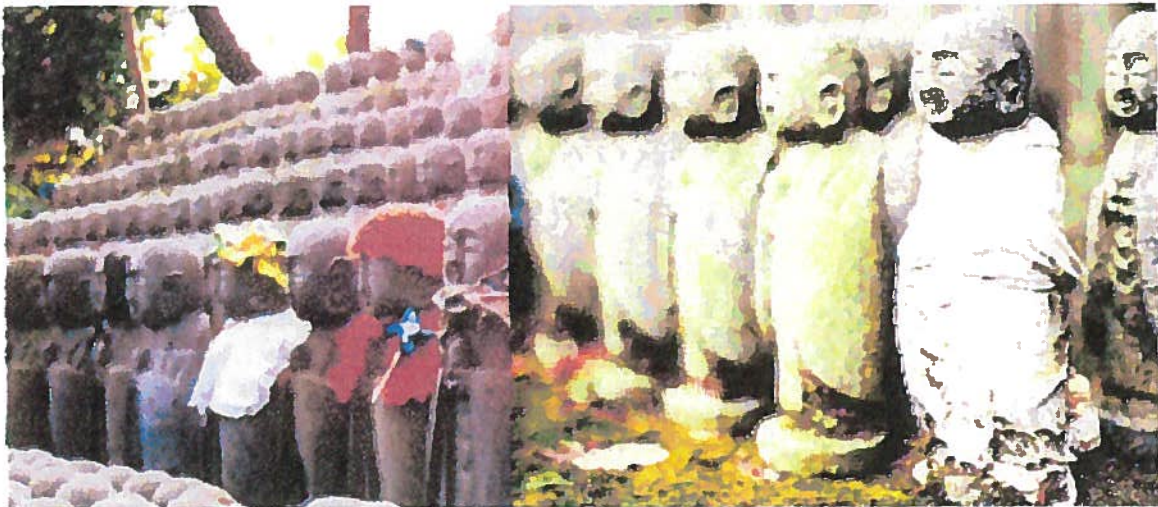
Finally, the lotus flower represents rebirth, both in a figurative and a literal sense. The rebirth can be a change of ideas, an acceptance of Buddha where there once was none, the dawn after one's darkest day, a renaissance of beliefs or the ability to see past wrongs. In a literal sense, the meaning of the lotus flower in Buddhism represents rebirth as a reincarnation, such as in the Buddhist religion, when a soul leaves this world in its present form to be reborn in another.

Iconography of Jizo



Jizo usually appears as a shaved-head monk, with a staff in one hand and a wish-fulfilling gem in the other. The monk's staff has six metal rings at the top, which jangle as the monk walks, announcing his presence, warding off predators, and scaring away small animals that might inadvertently be crushed underfoot. In early statues, instead of carrying this staff, Jizo often held his hand in either the mudra of giving with open hand extended, or the mudra of fearlessness, with arm held up, palm facing forward, to calm and reassure.

In contemporary Japan small stone Jizo statues appear frequently alone or in clusters at temples, in small shrines, along many city streets, and on country roadsides to protect travelers. Stone Jizos are often placed at crossroads, riverbanks, on the seashore, and at other transitional spaces. Often these stone Jizos are given red cloth bibs as offerings to the spirits of deceased children.



HATS FOR THE JIZOS And the Kamishibai Tour

By Gayle Sanders

On New Year's Eve, a poor old man goes to town hoping to sell a piece of hand-woven cloth so he can buy some special food to celebrate the New Year. But no one is interested in buying the cloth. He meets another man who has unsuccessfully been trying to sell straw hats; they decide to exchange the cloth for the straw hats. On the way home, it begins to snow. The old man sees six statues of the deity Jizo, looking cold. He decides to cover their bare heads using the five straw hats and his own scarf. When the old man arrives home, he tells his wife what has happened. They celebrate the New Year with the simple food they usually eat, go to bed early and awaken to a surprise....a pile of gold coins, gems, beautiful kimono and delicious foods: a reward from the Jizos for the old man's generous sacrifice.

The centerpiece of the **Kamishibai Tour** is the story summarized above. As many of you know, Docent **Ivor Kraft** has acted the role of the traditional story teller/candy seller for many years. When he dons his special cap and other props, second graders listen enraptured as he spins the tale accompanied by the sixteen illustrations. Speaking in beguiling tones, Ivor keeps the children spellbound as he pulls the panels one by one from the frame mounted on the back of his bicycle, just as story tellers had done in the pre-TV days in villages and neighborhoods all over Japan. The purpose of the traditional storyteller was to encourage children to buy candy from him so a bag of candy is given to the teacher to distribute at an appropriate time.



Being a great lover of stories myself, I decided I would give this tour a shot even though I knew I was, as they say, no Ivor! I noted that some other docents had also been taking part and found that encouraging. First I took home photocopies of the text that is printed on the back of the cards. Then I tried memorizing the story but didn't find it so easy to coordinate the story and the cards...especially without the bicycle. I even practiced in front of Yuka, my student from Japan. (Kamishibai was before her time, but she remembered the story from kindergarten!) That was last year, and after signing up again this year, I knew I needed to review and polish my delivery, so I rehearsed with the actual bicycle along with **Mary Rhine**, another docent new to the tour. We did not memorize the story, which can include singing and chanting, but after telling it several times, we were able to combine telling, reading, and chanting/singing in our dramatic presentation. At the end when the children burst into applause, it felt so good! Either they enjoyed it or they were glad it finished and were happy they would be getting the candy.

The story is told in the area just in front of the pond of the Chinese garden and usually takes between ten and 15 minutes. Then we have just a little time to walk around the pond before moving on. The entire tour is one hour, divided into three segments of 20 minutes. Other galleries include galleries 20 and 21, comprising the arts of Japan, and galleries 18 and 19, Shinto and Buddhism. In the Buddhist gallery, the main focus is the actual statue of Jizo, which takes on a deeper meaning for the children once they know the story.

HATS FOR THE JIZOS

TEACHER GUIDE

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SHI
BAI

FOR 1809



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SUMMARY OF STORY:

On New Year's Eve, an old man goes to town hoping to sell a piece of cloth so he can buy some special food to celebrate the New Year. But no one is interested in buying the cloth. He meets another man who has unsuccessfully been trying to sell straw hats; they decide to exchange the cloth for the straw hats.

On the way home, it begins to snow. The old man sees six statues of the deity *Jizo* (jee-zoh), looking cold. He decides to cover their bare heads using the five straw hats and his own scarf. When the old man arrives home, he tells his wife what has happened. They celebrate the New Year with the simple food they usually eat, go to bed early and awaken to a surprise.

THEMES:

Unselfishness

Compassion

Kindness rewarded

READING SKILLS DEVELOPMENT:

Children always have impromptu responses, start by discussing them. In addition, the following questions will help develop the children's vocabulary, sequencing skills and comprehension of the story.

1. Why does the old man go to town?
2. Why was he reluctant to sell the cloth?
3. Who did the old man meet in town? What did they decide to do? What do you think of their idea?
4. What did the old man do on his way home? Why do you think he did that?
5. What did the old man and his wife do on New Year's Eve?
6. What happened during the night?
7. How does the story end?

CURRICULUM CONNECTIONS:

Hats for the Jizos can be an introduction to the theme of one good deed deserving another. In discussion or written form, the children can relate their experiences as both recipients and providers of good deeds as well as their ideas about good deeds that they would like to receive or to provide to others.

Hats for the Jizos also can be used effectively in a study of New Year celebrations in different cultures, or as part of a more general study of holidays.

CULTURAL BACKGROUND:

JIZO (jee-zoh) is one of the most popular saints in Japanese Buddhism. Jizo is usually represented as a monk with a jewel in one hand and a staff in the other. He is considered the patron saint of children. One sees him everywhere – in the city, in the country, at crossroads, at temples. There he stands, carved in stone. Sometimes he has been given a red cloth hood or bib.

NEW YEAR'S, (OSHOGATSU) (oh-sho-gah-tsu) is Japan's biggest and most elaborate holiday. In recent years, New Year's festivities have been officially observed from January 1st through January 3rd, during which time all government offices and most companies are closed. There are family gatherings, special foods, outings to shrines or temples and formal visits to relatives and friends.

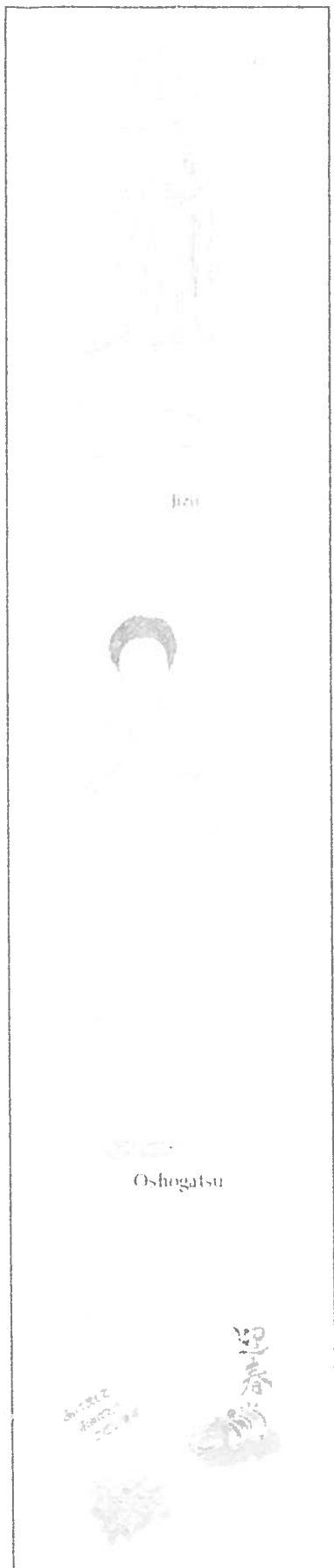
A part of the Japanese New Year's custom is to make and send **NEW YEAR'S CARDS (NENGAJO)** (nen-gah-joh) post cards to family and friends. On the morning of January 1,st hundreds of thousands of greeting cards are delivered to almost all households and companies throughout Japan. No matter how many cards per household there may be or how remote the residence, the first delivery of *nengajo* has to be accomplished on the morning of January 1. To make this difficult task possible, more than half a million workers, regular staff plus student "part-timers," are involved in this huge, countrywide exchange of New Year's greetings.

STORYTELLING NOTES AND RESOURCES:

Japanese folktales often begin with the phrase, *Mukashi, mukashi* (moo-kah-she), freely translated as: *Once upon a time, long, long ago*. They often end with the word, *Oshimai* (oh-she-my), freely translated as "The End."

Oshogatsu (New Year's Day): Popular Japanese children's song found in *Let's Sing! Japanese Songs for Kids*. The book and accompanying CD are published by Kamishibai for Kids.

How the Years Were Named. One of our kamishibai selections that explains why the years are named for animals in East Asia.



File:Netsuke-p1030001.jpg

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Full resolution (1,200 × 1,168 pixels, file size: 211 KB, MIME type: image/jpeg)

Français : Dessin d'une *netsuke* maintenant une boîte à médecine dans le *obi*

English: drawing of a *netsuke* blocking a medicine box in a *obi*

Summary

Description **English**:

Date

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Author Rama

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