



HATS FOR THE JIZOS

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?



Jizo



Oshogatsu



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 1st 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:

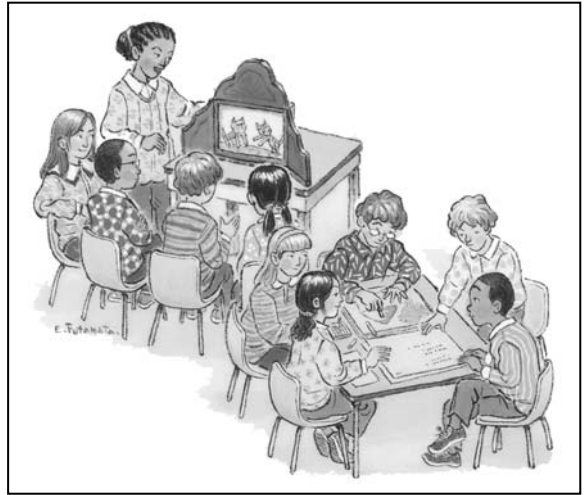
Japanese folktales often begin with the phrase, ***Mukashi, mukashi*** (moo-kah-she), freely translated as: *Once upon a time, long, long ago*. They often end with the word, ***Oshimai*** (oh-she-my), freely translated as "The End."

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.

USING KAMISHIBAI CREATED BY CHILDREN AS PART OF A SHARED, GUIDED AND INDEPENDENT WRITING PROGRAM

1. *Kamishibai* stories can be made individually, in pairs (one illustrator, one writer), in small groups or as a class project.
2. The sources for student-created *kamishibai* are unlimited: original ideas, topics related to the curriculum, the retelling of an existing story or some item of current events.
3. *Kamishibai* stories do not have to be a specific length.
4. Some children prefer to start by drawing illustrations; others by creating the text, either way works.
5. When composing the text for a *kamishibai* story, remember the characters use dialogue. The children can either write or dictate the story and dialogue.
6. Have the children divide the text into sections and make sketches for each one. Some children prefer working on and completing the illustrations before the text; either way works.
7. Check to see that the sketches correlate with the text. Reread and edit the text. Work on the final illustrations.
8. Arrange the illustrated cards in order and write the number for each card in sequence in the front, lower left-hand corner.
9. Tape the text for illustrated card #1 to the back of the last illustrated card. Tape the text for illustrated card #2 to the back of card #1 and so forth.
10. Now your children have their own *kamishibai* story. Children gain proficiency and fluency when they perform the stories they have created.



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.