

JAPANESE FOLKTALE: ISSUN-BOSHI – ONE INCH BOY

Long, long ago there lived a sweet old couple. Having no children but desiring one very much, they went to the shrine and prayed, "Please, please let us have a child, no matter how small." Eventually, a son was born to them. But small indeed was the child - no larger than a grown man's fingertip. The couple raised the child tenderly, and though he became a bright and well-respected young man, he did not grow at all. As a result, he became known as Issun-boshi (Issun is a unit measuring about 3 centimetres).



One day, Issun-boshi told his parents that he wanted to seek his fortune in the city. His parents were worried about their son but, trusting him, they sent him off with a sword made of a sewing needle, a sheath made of straw, and a boat made from a rice bowl with a chopstick for an oar. Issun-boshi walked along until he came upon the river that flowed towards the town. There he set his rice bowl in the water and paddled with the chopstick for days on end, until at last he reached the town.

Issun-boshi walked about town until he found himself in front of the stately mansion of the lord. At the gate he announced, "I have come to the city to work and train. I beg of you to make me a servant." But he was so tiny that the guard did not notice him. "I'm here, I'm here," Issun-boshi shouted. Finally the guard spotted him and lifted him up from the shadow of his geta (Japanese sandals). Issun-boshi was granted permission to see the lord and, in the palm of the lord's hand, he knelt, bowed, and pledged his loyalty. The lord took an instant liking to Issun-boshi and made him a retainer. Everyone in the mansion soon came to like the intelligent, charming Issun-boshi, but none more so than the lord's daughter. Before long, he became her personal attendant.

One afternoon the princess took Issun-boshi along and went to pay her respects at the Kiyomizu temple. Along the way, two ogres suddenly jumped out onto the road and blocked their path. Issun-boshi unsheathed his sword and instantly threw himself upon their attackers. But then suddenly one of the ogres swallowed him up in one gulp. In retort, he stabbed at the insides of its stomach. The ogre was so overcome with pain that it threw Issun-boshi up out of its stomach. Issun-boshi immediately jumped up on the other ogre's eyebrow and stabbed at its eye.



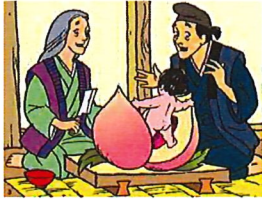
Defeated, the ogres fled away crying, and in the process, one of them dropped its magic hammer. The princess picked up the hammer and said, "If you wave this, anything you ask for - money or rice - will be yours." Issun-boshi replied, "I want neither money nor rice. All I want is to become full-sized." The princess nodded, then waved the hammer, singing, "Growww, growww." In an instant, Issun-boshi became a full-grown, handsome warrior. He married the princess and, together with his parents, they lived happily ever after.



JAPANESE FOLKTALE - MOMOTARO PEACH BOY

One day a giant peach is dropped from heaven into a river. By that river, unknowingly, an old woman washes her clothes. As she scrubs away, she notices the enormous peach floating down the stream. Excited to find a peach so big, she scoops it out to take home for supper.

Her husband arrives home after a hard day's work of cutting firewood in the mountains. Starved, and surprised to see an enormous peach, he prompts his wife to cut it open. The old woman takes out a big knife, but just before she starts to cut the peach, a voice from inside the peach yells out "Wait, don't cut me!"



Startled by the voice, the old woman warily leans backward. Her husband and she, anxiously watch the peach shake about as the thing inside pushes it open. The old couple gasp when the peach breaks apart into two, and a baby boy cheekily emerges.

It takes a moment for the old couple to shake their senses back, but once they do, both realise that the baby in front of them is a gift from heaven. They agree to raise the infant as their own son, and give him the name Momotaro – which means, Peach Boy in Japanese.

Momotaro grows up to be a respectful, kind, and strong boy. On his 15th birthday, he wakes up with a spiritual urge to vanquish the uprising of evil ogres on one of the country's distant islands.

Momotaro tells his father about the quest he will undertake. At first his father is saddened that Momotaro will leave on a dangerous journey, but at the same time, he is proud that his son is going to fulfil a heroic act. The father gives Momotaro his blessing, then gifts him a sword and armour to aid him on his quest.



Along the way, Momotaro, encounters a talking dog, monkey, and pheasant. At first, each of the animals are hostile to him, but after he tells them about his quest to fight the ogres, they immediately agree to aid him. For their courage in joining him, he rewards each animal a dumpling.

Once the group finally arrive at Ogre Island, they stare up at the giant fort, pondering how they will be able to enter it. The pheasant, being a smart thinker, flew over the fort and distracted the guards by pecking at their heads. Monkey was the best climber of the group, so while the ogres were distracted, he climbed the walls and opened the fort for Momotaro and the dog to rush in.

There were many ogres inside the fort, and it was a long battle, but eventually the heroic band of warriors were able to beat the ogres. After facing defeat, the ogres bowed in surrender to Momotaro, promised to never be evil again, and gave him all the treasure they had stolen. Momotaro was amazed by the treasure, he had never seen so much gold and silver in his life. He split the treasure up between his group, bid them farewell, and made his way back home to his parents.

After arriving home, he showed his parents all the treasure he had collected. Like Momotaro, they were surprised and happy to see so much gold and silver he collected. But most importantly, they were happiest to see that Momotaro had returned back to them safely. And that ends the tale of the notorious Peach Boy, Momotaro.



JAPANESE FOLKTALE – BUNBUKU CHAGAMA DANCING TEA KETTLE

One day, Jinbei the junkman was on his way home from town as usual with a cart full of junk he had bought that day. Suddenly, he heard loud, jeering voices, and he turned around to see several boys chasing around and bullying a girl. "Hey, boys! Stop being mean to her!" shouted Jinbei. The boys then ran off. When he turned to speak to the girl, though, she was nowhere to be found. "How odd. Where could she have gone?"

Jinbei walked on, and soon he came across the chief priest of the Buddhist temple that stands on top of a nearby hill. "Hello Jinbei," said the priest. "I've recently been looking for a teakettle. If you find a nice one, make sure to tell me. I'll buy it for a good price." The priest then walked off.



Back home, Jinbei started putting all the junk in order. He had a habit of buying even things that would never sell, and because of this, he always had a houseful of junk and was very poor. After a while, Jinbei discovered a very fine teakettle he had never seen before sitting in a corner of the room. "Hmm, when did I get this?" marvelled Jinbei. Then he remembered what the priest had told him, and so he set off for the temple carrying the teakettle on his back.

"Phew! This is pretty heavy," Jinbei muttered as he toiled up the hill. Just then he heard a voice from behind saying, "You're getting closer. Keep it up, keep it up." Looking back in surprise, Jinbei realized that what he was carrying was really a raccoon taking the shape of a teakettle. "I'm the girl you saved today. Let me help you in return," the raccoon said. The girl he had seen that day was also the raccoon in disguise.



Jinbei arrived at the temple and showed the teakettle to the priest. "This is beautiful!" exclaimed the priest. "I'll be happy to buy it." So the priest purchased the teakettle, not knowing its true form.

As he headed home Jinbei thought, "I've done a terrible thing to the priest, and I wonder if the raccoon will be OK." Meanwhile the priest, who was excited to have a new teakettle, decided to brew some tea and placed the teakettle over the fire. The raccoon tried with all her might to stay still, but soon she could bear the heat no longer. "Yikes!" she jumped up and yelped, then scurried out of the temple. The priest was so shocked at seeing the teakettle come to life that he fell over and hurt his back. "I've been cheated!" he steamed.

Jinbei was sitting at home worrying about the raccoon, when the raccoon came rushing into the house. "Ouch, ouch, what a terrible experience!" The raccoon clung onto Jinbei tearfully, and Jinbei saw that the raccoon had been badly burnt. "There, there, you poor thing. It's all my fault," he said.

Just as Jinbei was rubbing ointment on the raccoon's burns, the priest came stomping in with a red face and yelled, "Hey you! How dare you cheat me! You'd better give me back my money. And since I've been hurt too, all because of that raccoon, you'll also have to pay for my treatment." So Jinbei had to give the priest even more money than he had received for the teakettle.

The raccoon apologized to Jinbei as she lay in bed. "I'm so sorry, Jinbei. I meant to return your favour, but I've only caused you trouble. It's all gone wrong." But Jinbei replied, "No, no, that's all right. You just rest and get well soon. Don't worry about the money, because I've got a good idea." Jinbei apparently had something in mind.

Thanks to Jinbei's care, the raccoon's burns healed in no time. The raccoon, wanting to help Jinbei out somehow, asked, "The other day you said you had a good idea. What was it?" "Oh, that?" Jinbei answered. "You see, I was thinking that maybe you and I could perform on the street. I'll play the flute and drums, while you dance and walk the tightrope as you turn into different things. I'm sure we can draw a good crowd. What do you think?" The raccoon thought this was a great idea and said, "Yes, let's do it! But before that, we'll have to practice." And so the two began training hard.

After some time Jinbei and the raccoon started showing their tricks here and there. They became popular very quickly, and a big crowd would form wherever they went. In this way, not only was the raccoon able to return Jinbei's favour but the two of them also became very rich and lived together happily ever after.



JAPANESE FOLKTALE – KAGUYA HIME SHINING BAMBOO PRINCESS

Long, long ago in Japan, there lived a poor woodsman. One day, he was cutting bamboo in a grove when he came upon one stalk of bamboo glowing a bright, golden colour. Finding this mysterious, he approached it for a closer look.

To his amazement, inside the bamboo was an adorable, tiny little girl. Since the old man and his wife had no children of their own, he decided to bring the child home with him, where he and his wife raised her with love and care. They decided to name her Kaguya Hime. From that time forward, whenever the woodsman went back to work in the grove, gold coins would come pouring out from the bamboo he cut. As a result, the old couple became wealthy.



Amazingly, within just three months Kaguya Hime grew into a beautiful maiden. Her beauty soon became known throughout the country, and one young man after another came forth to ask her hand in marriage. Kaguya Hime refused all of her suitors, but there were five insistent young noblemen who refused to give up. In order to dissuade them, Kaguya Hime asked for a gift from each, and promised to marry the first one to bring her the gift she had requested. But these items were not things that could be found anywhere on this earth, and so the five young noblemen soon lost heart and gave up.



In the meantime the Emperor, who had heard of Kaguya Hime's beauty, also began courting the girl to become his wife and Empress. He too was refused. When the Emperor tried to force Kaguya Hime to come to the palace, she disappeared right before his eyes. The Emperor then realized that there was something unusual about Kaguya Hime, and so he too gave up.

Three years passed and Kaguya Hime became even more beautiful. Then, one spring, Kaguya Hime began to grow melancholy on moonlit nights. She would stare at the moon with tears streaming down her face. The old woodsman, worried, asked what was wrong. Gazing up at the sky, Kaguya Hime replied, "Actually, I come from the moon. I was sent to live on the earth by my King, but now I have been told that I must go home. I will miss everyone here on earth, and that is why I am sad."

The old man was shocked, and not wanting to let his beloved daughter go, consulted with the Emperor to devise a plan. On the night of the full moon, the Emperor's guards hid Kaguya Hime deep inside the woodsman's house and surrounded it. Suddenly, the night sky became bright. Messengers from the moon dressed in brilliant clothes came down from the sky and descended to the earth on a cloud. At this sight, the guards become petrified and lost their courage. The messengers placed Kaguya Hime onto a palanquin and dressed her in a feathered robe. Leaving the heartbroken old couple behind, Kaguya Hime took off to the moon.





JAPANESE FOLKTALE – KASA JIZO STRAW HAT STATUES

A long time ago in a small village in Japan there lived a poor old man and his wife. One day, as New Year's drew near, the wife looked in her rice chest and found that there was hardly any rice left. And with the snow so deep that they could not gather the leaves needed for weaving kasa (sedge hats) to sell, there was nothing else she could do but prepare hot water for cooking what was left of the rice.

Just then, a baby mouse appeared from a hole in the wall, crying, "Oh, I'm so hungry." The mother and father mice scolded their son, "This house is so poor that there are seldom any food scraps left to eat, and so you'll just have to bear with it."

"Poor baby mouse," said the old man. "We are so bad off that even the mice are hungry." Feeling sorry for them, he gave the mice a small portion of the last of their rice, which they used to make rice cakes, and together they dined.



The next morning, after eating a sparse breakfast of pickles and tea, the mice tramped out into the snow and gathered a generous pile of sedge, which they then brought back to the house. "This is in return for last night's rice." The old couple thanked the mice. If they could weave and then sell lots of hats in the town, they would be able to buy plenty of food for New Year's. So the old couple and the mice promptly got to work weaving hats. When they were finished, the old man shouldered his ware and went out in the snow toward the town.

When he reached the outskirts of the town, he noticed that the stone statues of Jizo-sama, the Buddha that protects the common people, had their heads covered with snow. "Jizo-sama," he said, "your heads look cold." The old man took the towel he wore around his own head and gently wiped the snow off each statue.

The town on New Year's Eve was bustling with people making their last minute New Year's preparations. The old man joined the throng, singing out, "Sedge hats, sedge hats. Who needs a sedge hat?" But nobody bought a hat from him. Before long, the streets grew empty and the night watch bell began to toll. The old man, having sold not even one hat, shouldered his load and trudged toward home. "I have nothing I can even offer to Jizo-sama," he thought dejectedly.

The old man made his way through the snow-filled streets and finally reached the outskirts of the town. There he noticed that snow had once again piled up on top of the heads of the Jizo-sama statues.

So again he took his towel and carefully wiped the snow from each one. Then he said to the statues, "I couldn't sell even one hat for money to buy dumplings, so I have no food to offer you. I'll give you my hats instead." With that, he placed a hat upon each statue's head. But there were six statues and only five hats. The old man thought for a moment and then took the towel and placed it gently on the sixth statue's head. Now completely empty-handed, he returned home.



When he arrived home, the mice looked at his empty back and excitedly thought that he must have sold all of the hats. "Forgive me. I couldn't sell even one hat," said the old man, and then preceded to relay the day's events to his wife and the mice. The old woman, listening, solaced her husband, "That was a kind thing you did. Let's have some pickles and warm water and welcome the New Year."

Just then, in the middle of the night, they heard loud voices cry, "New Year's Delivery! New Year's Delivery! Where is the house of the old hat seller?" Amazingly, the voices came from none other than the Jizo-sama statues, who came forth pulling a sleigh loaded to the hilt with rice, miso (bean paste), and many other delicacies. "Hat seller, thank you for your hats. We leave these gifts for you in return. Have a Happy New Year." With that, the Jizo-sama statues returned to the outskirts of the town.



Since there was more food than the old couple could eat, they had the mice invite their animal friends over, and everybody prepared the food together. Then the old man stacked the boxes of special New Year's food and rice cakes that they had made and took them to the Jizo-sama statues. "Jizo-sama. Now I can make you an offering. Thank you."

The old man returned home and, together with his wife, the mice, and their friends, welcomed in a festive and happy New Year.

WEBSITE SOURCE: <http://japanfolklore.blogspot.co.nz/2008/08/kasajizo.html>

WEBSITE SOURCE: <http://web-japan.org/kidsweb/folk/kasajizo/index.html>

JAPANESE FOLKTALE – KINTARO GOLDEN BOY

Once upon a time there was a boy who lived with his mother on Mt. Ashigara. His name was Kintaro, and he was very strong from the day he was born. Kintaro wore a red haragake (a kind of clothing worn by small children long ago) that his mother made for him emblazoned with the character "kin" (which means "gold") and often went outside to play.

Kintaro's friends were the creatures of the mountains, such as rabbits, monkeys, and wild boars. All of the animals liked Kintaro. They played sumo together, but no one could ever beat Kintaro. One bear who was very proud of his strength decided to take Kintaro on, saying, "I'll wrestle you," but Kintaro won.



One day Kintaro took a hatchet, climbed onto the bear's back, and went off into the mountains with his friends. On the way, they came to a cliff overlooking a big stream and found that there was no bridge across. "I'll knock a tree over and make us a bridge," said the bear. But even though he pushed and pushed, the tree didn't budge. "I'll give it a try," said Kintaro, and he began to push with all his might. When he pushed, the tree began to move, and with a loud crack it fell over and spanned the river. "Hooray!" shouted all of Kintaro's friends.

Just then a voice called out from behind, saying, "What incredible strength!" When Kintaro turned around to look, he saw a great samurai and his retainers. The samurai said to Kintaro, "Your strength is incredible! Won't you please become my retainer?" "Can I really become a warrior?" Kintaro asked. "Of course you can," said the samurai. "One day you'll become a magnificent warrior."

Kintaro went home and told his mother, "I really want to become a great warrior, too." His mother said to him, "I'm sure you'll be a splendid warrior. Actually, your father was a powerful warrior himself. Don't worry about me. Go ahead and go." Kintaro said goodbye to his mother and his animal friends before heading off into the mountains. "Mother," he said, "thank you for raising and taking care of me. I will never forget your kindness. I will come back and get you."

After Kintaro grew up, he became a powerful warrior called Sakata Kintoki and vanquished an ogre living on Mt. Oe. Kintaro then sent for his mother, and the two of them lived together happily ever after.



JAPANESE FOLKTALE: MIRROR OF MATSUYAMA

In ancient days there lived in a remote part of Japan a man and his wife, and they were blessed with a little girl, who was the pet and idol of her parents. On one occasion the man was called away on business in distant Kyoto. Before he went he told his daughter that if she were good and dutiful to her mother he would bring her back a present she would prize very highly. Then the good man took his departure, mother and daughter watching him go.

At last he returned to his home, and after his wife and child had taken off his large hat and sandals he sat down upon the white mats and opened a bamboo basket, watching the eager gaze of his little child. He took out a wonderful doll and a lacquer box of cakes and put them into her outstretched hands. Once more he dived into his basket, and presented his wife with a metal mirror. Its convex surface shone brightly, while upon its back there was a design of pine trees and storks.



The good man's wife had never seen a mirror before, and on gazing into it she was under the impression that another woman looked out upon her as she gazed with growing wonder. Her husband explained the mystery and bade her take great care of the mirror.

Not long after this happy homecoming and distribution of presents the woman became very ill. Just before she died she called to her little daughter, and said: "Dear child, when I am dead take every care of your father. You will miss me when I have left you. But take this mirror, and when you feel most lonely look into it and you will always see me." Having said these words she passed away. In due time the man married again, and his wife was not at all kind to her stepdaughter. But the little one, remembering her mother's words, would retire to a corner and eagerly look into the mirror, where it seemed to her that she saw her dear mother's face, not drawn in pain as she had seen it on her deathbed, but young and beautiful.

One day this child's stepmother chanced to see her crouching in a corner over an object she could not quite see, murmuring to herself. This ignorant woman, who detested the child and believed that her stepdaughter detested her in return, fancied that this little one was performing some strange magical art—perhaps making an image and sticking pins into it. Full of these notions, the stepmother went to her husband and told him that his wicked child was doing her best to kill her by witchcraft. When the master of the house had listened to this extraordinary recital he went straight to his daughter's room. He took her by surprise, and immediately the girl saw him she slipped the mirror into her sleeve. For the first time her doting father grew angry, and he feared that there was, after all, truth in what his wife had told him, and he repeated her tale forthwith.



Asia New Zealand
Foundation

When his daughter had heard this unjust accusation she was amazed at her father's words, and she told him that she loved him far too well ever to attempt or wish to kill his wife, who she knew was dear to him.

"What have you hidden in your sleeve?" said her father, only half convinced and still much puzzled. "The mirror you gave my mother, and which she on her deathbed gave to me. Every time I look into its shining surface I see the face of my dear mother, young and beautiful. When my heart aches—and oh! It has ached so much lately—I take out the mirror, and mother's face, with sweet, kind smile, brings me peace, and helps me to bear hard words and cross looks."

Then the man understood and loved his child the more for her filial piety. Even the girl's stepmother, when she knew what had really taken place, was ashamed and asked forgiveness. And this child, who believed she had seen her mother's face in the mirror, forgave, and trouble forever departed from the home.

WEBSITE SOURCE: <http://www.japanpowered.com/folklore-and-urban-legends/mirror-matsuyama>

REFERENCE F. Hadland Davis, *Myths and Legends of Japan* (London: George G. Harrap, 1917), pp. 196-198. James, K. *The Matsuyama Mirror*