

Selected and annotated by Kate Rojas
December 2014

Interested in reading or telling tales that originated in Japan? Interested in learning more about Japanese culture? This compiled list includes a mix of legends, folktales, and stories along with a few picture books that will intrigue and entertain a young audience.

Brenner, Barbara. *Chibi: A True Story from Japan*; illus. By June Otani. Clarion, 1996. 64p. 4-8 yrs.

This is a true story about what happened when a duck flew in and settled into a pool in Tokyo. She laid ten eggs. Ten ducklings hatched, including a very tiny baby duck named Chibi. The duck family captured attention from the residents of Tokyo and media reporters, and the family became famous and beloved. The residents protect the ducks by saving them from traffic and rescuing them from storms.

Bodkin, Odds. *The Crane Wife*; illus. by Gennady Spirin. Gulliver/Harcourt, 1998. 32p. Gr. 3-6. An unmarried sail maker named Osamu finds an injured white crane near his home. He takes care of it, and the bird flies off after a full recovery. Not too long after, a beautiful woman named Yukiko enters his life. They fall in love and marry. Times are tough financially for the couple, and Yukiko offers to create a magic sail to sell so long as he will never ask her to create another one. Despite his promise, Osamu makes additional requests and eventually realizes the truth behind his wife's existence.

Hearn, Lafcadio. *The Wave*; ad. from Lafcadio Hearn's *Gleanings in Buddha-Fields* by Margaret Hodges; illus. by Blair Lent. Houghton, 1964. 45p. 3-5 yrs.

Hodges' adaptation of this Japanese folktale is rich in detail, telling the story of a wise old man Ojiisan and his grandson Tada who live on a mountain overlooking a town. Ojiisan has the respect of all of the villagers, and many ask him for advice. One day, Ojiisan has a feeling that something bad is impending, and he must gather the villagers to safely immediately. He takes a torch and sets fire to the rice fields. When everyone begins to think that he has lost his mind, a tsunami hits, and he is respected once again.

Hodges, Margaret. *The Boy Who Drew Cats*; illus. by Ai Sogabe. Holiday House, 2002. 32p. 6-9 yrs.

The youngest child of a family of farmers is quite clever but is weak and small in comparison to his older siblings. His parents send him away to a priest to study to enter the priesthood. While under the priest's care at the temple, the boy is very obedient; however, he finds himself drawing cats constantly – all over the walls, in books, and on pillars. Hodges' adaptation of this folktale is toward younger audiences, and the colorful, strongly lined, and cat-friendly illustrations add appeal.

Kajikawa, Kimiko. *Tsunami!*; illus. by Ed Young. Philomel, 2009. 32p. 6-9 yrs.

This story is another adaptation from Lafcadio Hearn's, tale of a wise old man who burns down a town's supply of rice in order to save the residents from an incoming tsunami. Faster-moving

than *The Wave*, annotated above, this retelling, with its dramatic and detailed artwork, will make a compelling readaloud.

Levine, Arthur A. *The Boy Who Drew Cats: A Japanese Folktale*; illus. by Frédéric Clément. Dial, 1994. 26p. 5-9 yrs.

Another adaptation of the folktale about the boy who is sent away to study for the priesthood but ends up drawing cats all over the screens in the temple, this retelling has a darker tone than Hodges' story, and the illustrations have a stylistic sophistication

Long, Jan Freeman. *The Bee and the Dream*. Dutton Children's Books, 1996. 40p. 6-9 yrs.

This story reflects upon the old Japanese saying “When you see a bee fly from someone's nose, good fortune will be yours.” Two peasants, Tasuke and Shin, head up the mountain to gather materials for firewood. They take a break, and Tasuke falls asleep. When he is sleeping, Shin notices a bee fly out from his friend's nose. After awakening, Tasuke explains his dream about the garden of the richest man in town of Naniwa and finding a pot of gold. Shin takes the dream literally and sets out to Naniwa to find his fortune.

MacDonald, Margaret Read. *The Boy from the Dragon Palace: A Folktale from Japan*; illus. by Sachiko Yoshikawa. Whitman, 2011. 32p. 6-9 yrs.

A poor flower seller offers a gift of flowers to the dragon king. A beautiful lady appears with a young boy, who acquires the nickname of “snot-nose” because of his runny nose. Before disappearing, the lady tells the flower seller that he must cook shrimp for the boy to eat each day. The flower seller realizes that his wishes become granted when the boy sneezes, and he soon becomes very wealthy. Yet, the greedy flower seller no longer wishes to cook shrimp for the boy, and he sends him away.

McAlpine, Helen and William. *Japanese Tales and Legends*. Walck, 1959. 212p. Gr. 6-9.

This collection of 28 tales includes Japanese epics, legends, folktales, and fairy tales, making it useful for readers and practitioners seeking a collection of traditional materials.

Meshon, Aaron. *Take Me Out to the Yakyu*. Atheneum, 2013. 40p. Gr. 1-3.

Here we find a Japanese-American boy who compares baseball in America to baseball in Japan. Each colorful spread compares specific aspects of baseball culture that sports fans will surely recognize (food, fan gear, seventh inning stretch/ritual). Sports lovers will surely appreciate learning about the differences in fan culture in this text that will work as readaloud or readalone.

Richard, Françoise. *On Cat Mountain*; illus. by Anne Buguet. Putham, 1994. 32p. 5-8 yrs.

Beautiful collage illustrations place the viewer into ancient Japanese times in this book that tells the story of Sho, a young woman whose love for cats surpasses all. However, Sho's mistress despises cats. When Sho befriends a black cat named Secret, her mistress finds out and demands that Secret leave. A fortune teller informs Sho that Secret is now at the place called Cat Mountain, a place where no human has returned alive until Sho journeys there and her love for Secret makes her journey successful.

San Souci, Robert D. *The Snow Wife*; illus. by Stephen T. Johnson. Dial, 1993. 32p. 5-8 yrs.

This legend features an elderly woodcutter and his apprentice becoming trapped in a chilling

blizzard on a mountain. The young apprentice encounters the “Woman of the Snow,” who spares his life only after he promises to never mention her existence to anyone. One year later, he meets a young woman while traveling on the mountain path. They fall in love and start a family. Before long, he is reminded of the spirit and informs his wife. She then becomes the “Woman of the Snow” and leaves him. Will the loving husband be able to gain her affection again?

Say, Allen. *Under the Cherry Blossom Tree.* Walter Lorraine Books/Houghton, 1974. 32p. 5-8 yrs.

This Japanese tale features a mean old landlord who accidentally swallows a cherry pit. The cherry pit goes all through his body, eventually going up to the top of his head. He awakes the following morning and realizes that he has a cherry tree growing on his head. His neighbors, especially the children, marvel at the tree. Despising the attention, he uproots the tree, leaving a hole in his head. Then, a pond begins to develop, and fish start swimming around in it. What will he do?

Sierra, Judy. *Tasty Baby Belly Buttons;* illus. by Meilo So. Knopf, 1999. 40p. 4-7 yrs.

An elderly couple is distraught by their inability to have a child, but, luckily, they find a lovely young baby girl within a melon that is floating down the river. The girl, named Uriko, is spunky and ambitious and rises to take action at the age of five when evil monsters known as the oni begin kidnapping babies in her town. The oni are very hungry, and their favorite foods are baby belly buttons. Uriko takes along the family dog and arms herself with tasty dumplings to save the innocent babes.

Uchida, Yoshiko. *The Magic Purse;* illus. by Keiko Narahashi. McElderry, 1993. 32p. 5-7 yrs.

An ancient Japanese tale tells the story of a poor young farmer who longs to travel with his friends to the Iseh shrine. He manages to save a few coins each month for the venture, but the amount is not enough. Regardless of his savings, he chooses to leave anyway. During his journey, he meets a young maiden living in a dangerous swamp and promises to fulfill her request. His kindness and compassion for the beautiful maiden eventually lead him to obtaining abundant riches in the form of a magical purse that refills with gold coins each morning.

Uchida, Yoshiko. *The Sea of Gold and Other Tales from Japan;* illus. by Marianne Yamaguchi. Scribner, 1965. 136p. 4-6 yrs.

This collection of twelve Japanese folktales includes the story of the fisherman who became known as “Slowpoke” (“The Sea of Gold”), a story of a wine-seller who encounters a monkey (“The Grateful Monkey's Secret”), and another retelling of “Two Foolish Cats,” annotated below.\

Uchida, Yoshiko. *The Two Foolish Cats;* illus. by Margot Zemach. Margaret K. McElderry Books, 1987. 32p. 5-7 yrs.

Meet Big Daizo and Little Suki, two cats who live in a forest. Although they differ in size, they both invoke fear in the animals of the forest, especially the tiny mice. They find two rice balls in the woods, but one is larger than the other. They fight each other for the largest rice ball but are advised by the old badger to visit the wise monkey for guidance. This so-called guidance ultimately results in a surprise ending. Colorful watercolor illustrations by legendary illustrator Zemach enhance the appeal of this retelling.

Waite, Michael P. *Jojofu*; illus. by Yoriko Ito. Lothrop, 1996. 32p. 5-8 yrs.

Jojofu is a white dog of Takumi, a hunter. He has many other dogs, but he considers Jojofu his eyes and ears because she is smart, brave, and resourceful. Jojofu is a master of detecting unexpected dangers, knowing the location of hidden cliffs, landslides, and serpents. Takumi might disbelieve her from time to time but her senses are always spot-on. The story, based on Japanese folklore, will intrigue animal lovers while maintaining a sense of suspense throughout.

Watanabe, Etsuko. *My Japan*. Kane/Miller, 2009. 32p. 4-7 yrs.

A young Japanese girl describes growing up in Japan. Illustrations with headings show features of her house, her school, annual holidays, and modes of transportation. This text will serve as a great additional resource for children who are curious about life in Japan, and it's a lively way to discuss cultural comparisons.

Watkins, Yoko Kawashima. *Tales from the Bamboo Grove*; illus. By Jean and Mou-sien Tseng. Bradbury, 1992. 53p. Gr. 3-5.

In this collection of Japanese folktales, Watkins documents the stories that she heard growing up as a child, such as "Dragon Princess, Tatsuko," "The Fox Wife," and "The Grandmother Who Became an Island."