

CHILDREN'S DAY AT SHOFUSO

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KAMISHIBAI "PAPER THEATER"

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An extremely popular form of illustrated storytelling in the early to mid 20th century, kamishibai consists of a series of large illustrated cards that are pulled one by one inside a wooden frame, as a narrator reads a story written on the back of the cards.

The video portion of this lesson is a dramatic reading of Shofuso's very own kamishibai story, telling the long tale of friendship between Japan and Philadelphia stretching back to the 1876 Centennial Exposition!

LESSON 4



SHOFUSO
JAPANESE CULTURAL CENTER

A BRIEF HISTORY OF KAMISHIBAI



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Kamishibai 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. 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 and later anime.

