

# Materials for Teaching Japanese Visual Culture (K-12)

Introduction

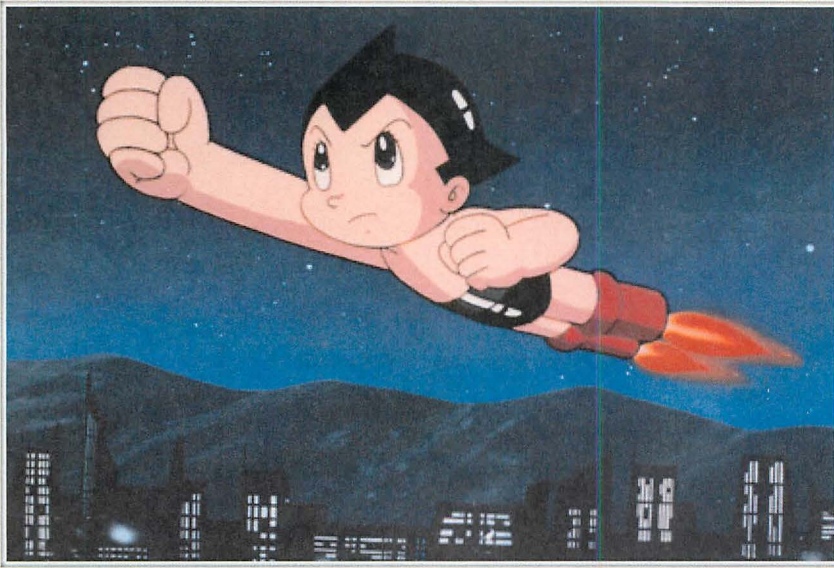
Early Photography

Kamishibai

Animé

Web 2.0

Resources



## Teach the World

Your students are probably more comfortable with many products from Japan—the car their parents drive might be Japanese, the camera they own could be, and many of the cartoons that they have seen are either Japanese animations (anime) dubbed and edited for an American audience (Astroboy, Speed Racer, Pokemon, to name a few) or American animation influenced by the Japanese (Avatar). But although your students may feel familiarity with the cultural products of Japan, learning about their specific origins and receptions in Japan can help your students gain insight into another culture and become more globally aware.

The idea is simple. Draw on that which is familiar to teach the unfamiliar.

This website is divided into four units spanning prominent popular visual cultures of the modern period of Japan from the late 19th century to today.

1. Early Photography, 2. Picture Storytelling, 3. Animé, 4. Web 2.0 social networking

Developed for the *Teaching Asia Workshop* and  
*Teaching the Globe:*

*Opportunities and Challenges to Teaching Global Topics in the 21st Century*

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## Objectives

1. to enhance content knowledge of other cultures in order to help thinking about our place in the world.
2. to foment observation and reflection on differences and similarities in cultural representation and use of media.
3. to learn to evaluate and critique a media-saturated culture.



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## A picture is worth a thousand words

Japan is a nation often associated with photography. Today, most of our cameras are produced by Japanese companies. One of the prevalent images of Japanese people abroad is that of a tourist holding a camera or a group of Japanese tourists posing in front of a famous place for a “memorial photo” (kinen shashin).

This unit looks at the early moments of photographic technology spreading to Japan at first as recorders of foreign mainly Westerners trips to the hitherto unknown land, later as a source of income for Japanese entrepreneurs catering to the tourist boom, and finally as an artcraft and product of Japanese culture.

### Useful Resources:

Brief History of Photography in Japan from PhotoguideJapan/Photohistory

<http://www.photojpn.org/HIST/hist1.html>

Allen Hockley, “Foreigners on the Tourist Circuit in Meiji Japan,” MIT Visualizing Cultures

[http://ocw.mit.edu/ans7870/21f/21f.027/gt\\_japan\\_people/gal\\_essay01.html](http://ocw.mit.edu/ans7870/21f/21f.027/gt_japan_people/gal_essay01.html)

More Photos of Old Japan

<http://www.old-japan.co.uk/librarysearch.asp>

Enami

<http://www.flickr.com/photos/24443965@N08/collections/>

Portraits of Modern Japanese Historical Figures

<http://www.ndl.go.jp/portrait/e/>

### DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

How is technology indicative of historical change? How are technology and culture intertwined? How do we present ourselves?



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When new media arrive in our lives we often do not know how to deal with them. Why do I need a phone in my pocket I already have one at home, why do I need a camera on my phone I already have one, why do I need email and text? When the TV first appeared in Japan one of the ways it was described was as “an electric kamishibai.”

This unit presents the unique mode of story telling that flourished in Japan before the advent of television—the kamishibai (picture storytelling). Though telling stories with pictures has been around since the age of cave dwellers, different formats and platforms for telling stories have risen and fallen during that time. Kamishibai (literally “Paper Play”) became an industry in the 1920s in Japan.

History FROM “KAMISHIBAI FOR KIDS” Homepage

<http://www.kamishibai.com/history.html>

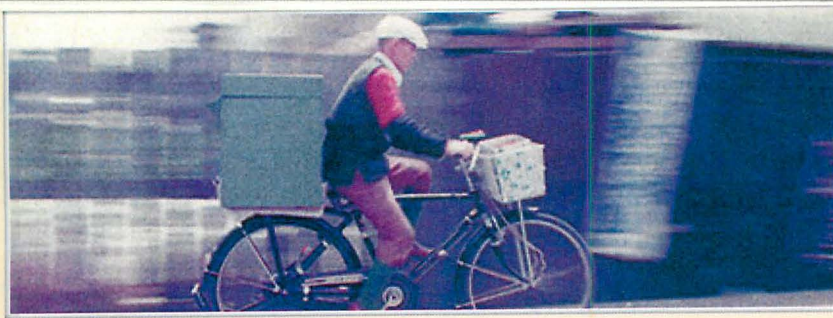
etoki (picture-tellers) adopted methods from scroll picture storytelling to tell more secular stories. Throughout the Edo period (1603-1867) and on into the Meiji period (1868-1912), a variety of street performance styles evolved, using pictures and narration.

The stages used for these early precursors of kamishibai were not as easily transportable as the form that developed in the late 1920s and came to be what we know as kamishibai today. The kamishibai performer made a living by selling candy, and he could strap the small wooden stage onto his bicycle with the illustrated cards and his wares and carry them easily from town to town. Typically, the stories were told in serial fashion and were so suspenseful that audiences came repeatedly to buy candy and to hear the next episode of the story.

## DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

How do stories circulate in our culture? What media carry the stories? How have they circulated in the past?





## Kamishibai=Paper Plays

Kamishibai is, if anything, poor-man's theater, and it flourished during a time when Japan experienced extreme financial hardship. In the 1930s, Japan suffered from an economic depression that sent many people onto the streets looking for a way to live from one day to the next, and kamishibai offered an opportunity for artists and storytellers to make a meager living. During and after World War II, kamishibai became an ever more integral part of the society as a form of entertainment that could be transported easily even into bomb-shelters and devastated neighborhoods. At this time, it was entertainment as much for adults as for children.

By the 1950s and the advent of television, kamishibai had become so popular that television was initially referred to as denki kamishibai, or "electric kamishibai." But as Japan became increasingly affluent, kamishibai became associated with poverty and backwardness. Eventually kamishibai as a street-performance art all but disappeared. The artists who had made their living with kamishibai turned to more lucrative pursuits, notably the creation of manga (comic books) and later anime, but they never entirely forgot their roots in kamishibai. In fact, kamishibai is often seen as a precursor of manga, and its influence can still be felt in the distinguishing features of these later media.

### KAMISHIBAI

Teachers Guide available at

[http://www.kamishibai.com/teachers\\_guide.html](http://www.kamishibai.com/teachers_guide.html)

More Guides at

<http://www.storycardtheater.com/>

See a sample story at

<http://www.janm.org/janmkids/kamishibai.php>

More on Kamishibai

<http://www.kamishibai.org/index.htm>

International Kamishibai Association of Japan America Club

<http://www.geocities.jp/kamishibai/index-e.html>

Cards available for download at

<http://www.glasswings.com.au/sensual/pastel/history.html>

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We often associate particular media with particular contents. So TV produced sitcoms. Videogames produced first person shooters. Internet produced blogs. But differing media can open up more avenues for expression. We see this most clearly when we look at how other cultures use media. In Japan, TV dramas are a mainstay and sitcoms are hard to find. Videogames are dominated by roleplaying. Internet is still generally accessed via cell phone rather than computer.

In our culture, we tend to associate animated films with Disney (mickey Mouse) and Warner Brothers (Bugs Bunny) or superheros and Saturday morning cartoons developed to occupy children while parents slept. So animated films have typically been viewed with some circumspection by adults and young adults. In Japan no such stigma was cultivated. In fact taking the early lead of American pioneers like Disney, Japanese animators have tried to make films that have consistently dealt issues that impact a broad age range. Animated films from Japan can approach some serious issues in ways that are in fact better tuned to their subject than live action films.

Animated films of war have a particular power that does not distract with violent images in the same way that live action films do because of their issues of special effects and realism.

Film Clips from *Barefoot Gen* and *Grave of the Fireflies*

Astro Boy=Mighty Atom clips and website:





## Animation is not just for kids...

<http://www.colorado.edu/cas/TEA/curriculum/imaging-japanese-history/late-20th-century/index.html>

Younger classes might enjoy Totoro, Kiki's Delivery Service, or Laputa.

### Useful Links for Teaching Animé

Tezuka Osamu and Astro Boy

<http://www.colorado.edu/cas/TEA/curriculum/imaging-japanese-history/late-20th-century/index.html>

The Teacher's Companion to the Anime Companion

<http://www.koyagi.com/teachers.html>

### A Parent's Guide to Anime

A web page set up to help parents better understand anime and choose titles for their children. The quality of the reviews is mixed but this is still a handy resource. Be aware that the "Intended for Mature Audiences" section of the reviews is not limited to sexual or violent content. This section includes anime that may be complex and difficult for children to understand.



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## Connecting Anonymously

<http://www.nicovideo.jp/>

\*use YouTube to find videos posted  
search for “niconico”

\*What is nico nico douga

<http://d.hatena.ne.jp/metagold/20080513/1210650303>

## Cool Media---Nico nico Dōga vs. YouTube

From the website “So what is Nico Nico Douga?”

<http://d.hatena.ne.jp/metagold/20080513/1210650303>

Nico Nico Douga is a video-sharing platform – a genre that is in the West nowadays predominantly associated with YouTube. Nico Nico Douga was originally created as a mash up of Youtube and 2-channel – the latter is Japan’s most popular BBS (bulletin board system).

The most spectacular innovation of Nico Nico Douga is the way comments are made. Users of Nico Nico Douga can write directly on the moving image. They comment while they watch videos, and add the comments directly on top of the video. All following users can see comments of former users as part of the video (most comments scroll into the frame of the moving image from right to left, and remains visible for some 4 seconds).

Users comment the videos that are streaming in the background, as well as each other’s comments. Sometimes you find only one of two comments scrolling over the video. At other moments the whole screen is full (this is called a “Danmaku”). When the amount of comments on a video exceeds a certain limit, old comments make space for new comments.

NicoNico Douga

\*The site (Japanese only)