

How to Read Kamishibai

Kamishibai stories are read from the back of illustrated cards. However, you can also tell the story from memory or even improvise a little to add to the story.

Move the front card to the back after you finish one part of the story. The text now showing will be the story for the card that is at the front.

The text for the title image (card 1) goes on the back of the last card, so when showing the title image to the audience, you can read the corresponding text without turning the card around.

When you finish the story for card 1, move it to the back of the pack. The story for card 2 which is on the back of card 1 will now be at the back for you to read. Once you have told that part of the story, you move this card to the back and again the story for the card 3 will now be at the back for you. You continue this for each part of the story until the end.

Remember, the text on the back of a card does not correspond to the illustration on its front!



Onikko

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Onikko

Story by Kazuko Hohki
Illustrations by Aya Burbanks



story text for card 2

He thought about his family, for example. His dad has horns and long canine teeth, but Kanta can't say that he's evil. He has a bad habit of secretly eating all the steamed buns at night after everyone else has gone to bed, but that seems pretty tame compared to the evil things that other oni do in books and on TV.

His mum has a mischievous side, especially when she is trying to trick his dad - once she put a lot of chilli inside the steamed buns, and Kanta saw her evil face and heard her evil laugh while she was doing it. But was that *really* evil? Kanta heard his dad's loud scream in the middle of the night, but it felt like great entertainment rather than a horrible crime.

His big sister Marumi is the most evil of all, but then again her evilness only seems to be directed at Kanta, and she is always very protective of him in an emergency.





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story text for card 3

On one Setsubun night, Kanta was chased by some village kids, who threw pebbles at him rather than beans (beans are painful enough, but pebbles - ouch!). Marumi jumped in front of Kanta to shield him. The kids were so scared by her face that they ran off. Marumi can look very scary when she sticks her canine teeth out.

Kanta dreads the Setsubun Festival. It's the day just before spring arrives, when the villagers throw beans out of their houses to get rid of any evil spirits. Traditionally, the evil spirits are represented by oni. So when they're throwing beans they shout, "*Fuku wa uchi, oni wa soto!*" which means, 'Luck in, oni out!'. The villagers know Kanta's family don't cause any harm, but they're still oni. That's why some people take advantage of the festival to taunt them.





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story text for card 4

Dad loves Setsubun though. He volunteers at Kanta's old nursery, dressing up in a red onesie so he looks like one of the oni on TV. When other villagers dress up as oni for Setsubun they wear a mask, but of course Dad doesn't need it. The children throw fake beans, made of paper, at him. In the end, Dad pretends he is so hurt that he promises never to be evil again and they all sit down together to eat ehomaki sushi.

Kanta can't understand why Dad wants to be persecuted like this, but it was good fun to throw fake beans at him, so Kanta didn't mind when he was at the nursery. Marumi had hated it and she never joined in, apparently. She thought it was so undignified. Dad says it's important community work which builds bridges between the oni and the villagers. It's true that the volunteering has made Kanta's dad popular among mothers in the village; Mum is not very happy about this.





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story text for card 5

Kanta's family have been in this little village at the foot of a big mountain for a long time. There were more oni here in the past. In fact, a long, long time ago there were only oni. When the humans arrived, they took over everything, built fences and claimed the land was theirs. Oni didn't know how to build fences and were not very well prepared because they believed in sharing the land. Some oni moved inside the mountain to live. The humans felt guilty and were so scared of revenge that they began to feel that the oni in the mountain were dangerous when they were not. That's how oni got a bad reputation.

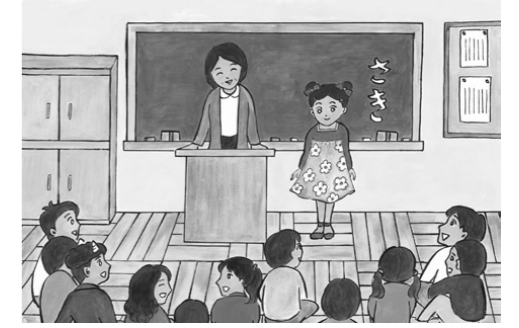
Kanta learned this history from his grandmas and grandpas, the school in their village doesn't teach it. Even so, Kanta loves school. Nobody at school takes much notice of the fact that he is an oni. Now and then some kids ask him to open their crisp packets with his canine teeth, or hang their bags from his horns while they're playing, but most of the time they seem to forget that he is different.





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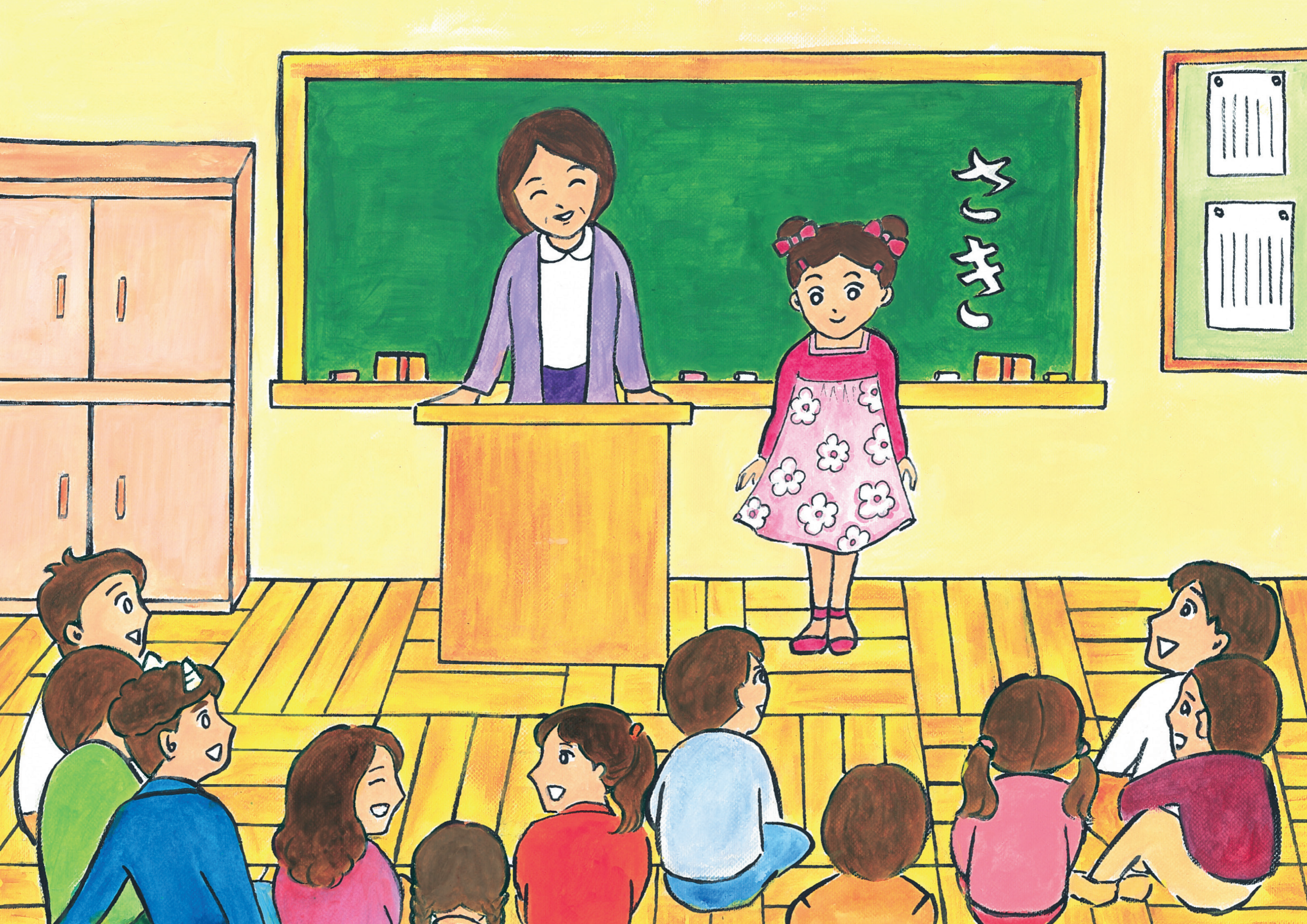


story text for card 6

That is, until Saki arrived...

Saki joined Kanta's class at the beginning of winter term. She and her family were newcomers to the village. It was rare to have a new student and the children in the school were all very excited, including Kanta. When Saki stood at the front to be introduced by their teacher, Ms Yamamoto, Kanta thought Saki was very pretty, with her fashionable hair buns and a confident smile on her face.

She sat in the seat Ms Yamamoto allocated to her and looked around, still smiling confidently. Then she noticed Kanta and her expression changed. Her face filled with fear. Ms Yamamoto noticed and said to her, "Kanta is a bit different from us, but we all love him." Then she looked at the class and said, "Don't we?" She didn't get much response, but she just carried on teaching.





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story text for card 7

From the start Saki was horrible to Kanta. She refused to sit or eat next to him, or play with him at lunch. She even refused to be his partner on a school trip. What made Kanta really sad was that his other classmates had also changed since Saki came; one by one, they started to avoid him. Nobody asked him to open their crisp packets or hang their bags from his horns any more. Kanta felt more and more lonely.

At first he couldn't understand why Saki was acting this way, then he began to realise it was because he was an oni. Mum and Dad noticed he was unhappy, but when he told them about Saki, they shrugged their shoulders and said, "Not everyone is used to different kinds of people; we have to be patient."

Marumi, however, was furious. She wanted to beat Saki up, but Kanta's parents said it would only make things worse. They thought it was best to ignore Saki. Marumi tried to help Kanta at school as much as possible, but she was in a different class so it wasn't that easy. Kanta started to hate going to school.





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story text for card 8

Things got worse and worse. One day Kanta found a dead frog in his bag. He screamed and when he dropped his bag, the frog's body flew out. Saki triumphantly said, "I thought oni like to eat that kind of thing. I was trying to be generous!"

Everybody laughed and Kanta started to cry. Marumi rushed over to comfort him. She stared at Saki and asked harshly, "What is the matter with you?" Saki didn't say anything, but Marumi glared at her. Finally she said, "Who are you?" Saki hesitated. She looked away. Then she composed herself and walked away arrogantly, without looking back. The others followed.

It was almost the end of January and Setsubun was getting closer. Kanta was always a little anxious about Setsubun, but this year was worse - he dreaded what Saki might do. He hated being an oni. When he told Marumi how he felt she looked at him and said, "Don't worry, you're a strong oni boy. There's something strange about Saki and I'm going to find out what. Just hold on." She sounded very determined.





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story text for card 9

Kanta didn't know what Marumi meant, but for the next few days she seemed very busy and often came home late from school. She told Mum she was researching something important, so he thought it must be a school project.

Then one day just before Setsubun, Ms Yamamoto came into the classroom and announced they were going to have a special history lesson. Marumi and her friends were stood at the front and when Marumi opened the school's big old kamishibai frame there was a burst of grand music from the melodica and the drum. The story began; it was the history of oni which Kanta had heard from his grandmas and grandpas! It was a tremendous performance and, seeing his classmates engrossed in the story, Kanta started to feel proud of Marumi and also his oni heritage.

But one person was not pleased. Saki looked increasingly uncomfortable during the performance, in contrast to the amused faces all around her. While all the other kids were laughing and enjoying themselves, her face was twisted in a dark expression.



鬼の歴史



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story text for card 10

Finally she stood up. She shouted, “Stop! It’s all a lie! Oni are evil. You’re just making stuff up! You can’t fool us!” She looked around for support, but nobody responded.

Then she looked at Kanta fiercely. He felt the same fear he always had when Saki looked at him, but when he glanced at Marumi he could almost hear her saying, “You are a strong oni boy.” Kanta gathered his courage. He stood up and said, “You’re wrong. Just because we’re oni, doesn’t mean we’re bad.”

Saki’s face turned red with fury. She jumped out of her seat and ran to attack Kanta. He scrambled to get up, but in his panic he stumbled and started to fall backwards. Trying to regain his balance, he stuck both his arms out in front of him and grabbed the two buns on Saki’s head, which came loose. When Saki realised what was happening she tried to put her hair back, but it was too late. When Kanta released his hands everybody saw them - two little horns sticking out.

Saki ran towards the door, but Marumi’s friends were blocking the entrance. Saki burst into tears and collapsed onto the floor. Marumi came over and crouched beside her. “We knew. It’s ok.” she said gently.





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story text for card 11

After school, Ms Yamamoto, Marumi and Kanta took Saki back home. Her parents were very welcoming and they all had tea and cake. Saki didn't eat or say anything, but she didn't leave the room either. Now and then, Marumi smiled at her showing her shining canine teeth. At first Saki quickly looked away, but Kanta noticed her looking for longer each time.

It turned out that Saki had been adopted when she was a tiny baby. Her parents hadn't realised she was an oni until she started to grow horns and teeth. They were surprised, but still they loved her dearly. However, Saki just wanted to be the same as all the other girls. To make her feel better, her parents got dentists to shorten her canine teeth, but they couldn't do anything about the horns; it was dangerous to operate on them.

Saki hated being an oni and grew to hate all oni. Her parents thought moving to Kanta's village might help; Saki might become more at ease with herself if she got to know other oni and made friends.





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story text for card 12

When they were leaving, Marumi told Saki, “Tomorrow is Setsubun and my Dad will be doing his famous Setsubun performance at our old nursery. It’s good fun. Would you like to come and watch it with us?” Saki’s parents were delighted and urged her to go. Saki didn’t say anything but she looked at Marumi. Kanta thought he saw a little nod.

On the way back home, Kanta said to Marumi, “I thought you hated Dad doing that at the nursery. You said it was so undignified.”

Marumi looked at Kanta wickedly and said, “It’s community work. I will sacrifice my personal feelings in order to build bridges. Besides, after my performance at school I realised acting is really good fun. Maybe I’ll join Dad next year!” And they both laughed heartily, showing all their shining canine teeth.





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story text for card 1

Kanta is an oni. It means he has two horns and long canine teeth.

And he's evil.

Hang on! Well yes, he does have two short horns on top of this head, and I suppose his canine teeth *are* rather long...but is he evil? Okay, he knows oni have a bad reputation, and he has seen oni doing evil things when watching cartoons on TV. But then again, he's seen many evil things on the news and those were done by humans, not oni.

So, Kanta has been wondering if it's really true that he's evil. This question has been bothering him for a long time.

About the festival

Setsubun literally means 'division of the seasons' and therefore the Setsubun Festival marks the end of winter and the beginning of spring according to the old lunar calendar. It's celebrated in Japan in early February (usually February 3, but occasionally on February 2 or 4).

One of the most common traditions associated with Setsubun is bean throwing, called *mamemaki* in Japanese. During *mamemaki*, dried soya beans are thrown at someone dressed up as an oni as a symbolic (and fun!) way of driving away bad luck.

The Japanese words in this story are:

Setsubun: a Japanese festival celebrated in February

Oni: a creature from old Japanese folklore, often translated as demon, ogre, or troll. The story title means 'oni child'.

Ehomaki: a long and thick sushi roll, eaten for good luck during Setsubun

Kamishibai: a traditional form of storytelling using large picture cards