



## ***Kamishibai Man*** **Mini-Unit Plan**

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### **Meet the Designers:**

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### **Introducing the Mini-Unit:**

This unit is designed for grade 3 students of various abilities and backgrounds in the visual art classroom.

#### **Student Goals:**

- \* Students will participate in the reading of *Kamishibai Man* using the Whole Book Approach and Visual Thinking Strategies.
- \* Students will first create a small accordion book story. Later they will work in groups to create story panels to be shared in a presentation to classmates with a kamishibai stage.

## Contextualizing the Picture Book:

**Title:** Kamishibai Man

**Author and illustrator:** Allen Say

**Publisher:** Houghton Mifflin Harcourt

**Date of Publication:** 2005

**Genre(s):** Realistic fiction

### Summary:

The translation of *kamishibai* from Japanese is “paper theater, play or drama”. This type of storytelling accompanied by bold, engaging pictures goes back centuries, but became popular in the 1930s—probably as an antidote to the Great Depression. In Allen Say’s *Kamishibai Man* the main character, an elderly man at the outset, travels back and forth in time to tell his own story through Say’s beautifully painted and detailed illustrations. The story begins as the old man decides to once again take his bicycle-mounted stage with its story cards and his wife’s homemade candy into the city to see if anyone is interested in hearing his stories. The traffic and bustle of the city make it hard for him to navigate. Everything has changed. His memory takes him back in time to when crowds of happy children flocked to buy his candy and listen to his stories. But with the advent of television, fewer and fewer came, preferring electronic storytelling. At last, only one small, poor boy was left... A shout of “I was that boy!” snaps the old man back to the present, where he finds himself surrounded by an enthusiastic crowd of adults. The crowd clamors for his stories, which bring back fond memories of childhood and their kamishibai man. This prompts the old man to consider going out again the next day, and maybe the day after...

Source: <http://www.hmhco.com/shop/books/Kamishibai-Man/9780618479542>  
<http://www.kamishibai.com/history.html>

### About the author and illustrator:

Born in Yokohama, Japan in 1937, **Allen Say**’s early development as an artist was influenced by the fact that his family often moved, making it difficult to make friends. This encouraged the boy to turn to books and drawing for refuge. Following his parents’ divorce, Say lived with his grandmother, who allowed him to live on his own in an apartment at the age of 12. Imitating the grown-up practice of buying a newspaper Say discovered the work of his favorite cartoonist Noro Shinpei, to whom he later became apprenticed. In 1953 Say accompanied his father and new family to California. He briefly attended military school and then public high school, where he studied art; he later worked as a sign painter and a photographer. He was drafted into the army while continuing to pursue photography. Soon after, Say began a career as a fulltime author/illustrator.

### Additional information about the author:

Meet the Author/Illustrator Allen Say page on Houghton Mifflin Reading website:  
<http://www.eduplace.com/kids/hmr/mtai/say.html?grade=4>

Interview with Allen Say referencing his book *Drawing From Memory* that honors his artist sensei:  
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=HP0fY5BUrqA>

**Sources of inspiration for the author/illustrator:**

The author uses personal memories from childhood in Japan as inspiration for his illustrations and stories.

**Geographical region:** East Asia, Pacific, rural and urban Japan

**Time period:** 1950s-1970s/1980s-1990s

**Cultural themes:** Kamishibai, storytelling, connections to ancient Japanese scroll painting, rural home, bicycle transportation, street performance, styles of Asian calligraphy used in Japan, “series” or “cliff hanger” as marketing.

**History of kamishibai:** <http://www.kamishibai.com/history.html>

**Media of illustrations:** Watercolor, pen and ink.

**Awards and other recognitions:** The author has received awards for other books but he has not received any awards for this book.

**Analyzing the Picture Book**

Using the Whole Book Approach (WBA) by Megan Lambert (2015), we analyze the paratext.

**Jacket**

The jacket is the poster or advertisement for the book.

The front jacket has an illustration outlined in silver of a man with a fancy dresser. The dresser is mounted to a vintage style bicycle, and has a stage on top where a mirror might be. It appears to be a dresser because it has a drawer pulled out. The drawer contains colorful objects. There is also a cloth draped over the bicycle. The man looks to be an older person because he is hunched over and has grey hair. On the stage area of the dresser is an image within a wooden frame. The image is of an elaborately dressed character standing in front of a boat with animals, and contains Japanese writing—a good teaser for a story.

The back jacket shows a framed picture only, of happy children running toward the viewer—another clue as to what lies within. The same image on the back cover appears on the title page.

## **Spine**

The spine of the jacket has the same silver background color as the front and back jacket. The font is very similar to Times New Roman, straightforward and set in white. Information on the spine would not stand out in a bookcase. The title of the book, last name of the author, and logo and initials of publishing company are represented on the spine.

## **Cover**

The hard cover of the book is olive green with a darker, more intense green spine wrap; the text and font on the spine are the same, but set in gold leaf.

## **Format**

The shape of the book is a portrait by just an inch. It is almost square. Each page is a unit in itself, similar to a kamishibai (although kamishibai format is landscape).

## **Endpapers**

The end papers are the same green as the spine wrap. The color green is often associated with nature and considered calm and pleasing. Perhaps the color sets the stage for a calm and pleasing story.

## **Front matter**

The inside of the front cover begins with a quote from the book inviting the reader to the story. Then an introduction to the kamishibai art form and a hint to the nostalgic tone of the story. The title page has the same framed image as the back jacket, children romping with excitement. The forward explains the author's inspiration from personal memories of his childhood in Japan in an easy to understand way. It also explains the clever marketing of the kamishibai man to have a story stop before the end, so children would want to come back the next day to buy more candy and see the next scene. In the United States we call this a cliff hanger. The technique is used often in radio shows, television series, and books such as *Harry Potter*.

## **Gutters**

The gutters both separate pages of text on the verso side from the larger images, and also divide the pages that have smaller images with text below them. Where the action picks up in the middle of the book, each page has a smaller framed illustration with the text below. These images are composed in a first person point of view. In the spreads at the beginning and end of the book that are one page of text facing a page with a larger illustration, the illustrations are composed from a more distant, third person perspective and have a more "story-like" quality.

## **Typography**

The text flows a continuous story throughout the book with a consistent font style and size. Each illustration is framed with a thin outline. The illustrations become smaller in the middle of the story when the kamishibai man remembers his successful youth. The illustrations within this dream-like "flashback" sequence are warmed with a yellow hue, lending them the quality of an old photograph.

In this flashback section the text appears on the same page as the illustration it accompanies. These illustrations are more graphic and comic-like, with a simplified approach to detail and shapes represented as flatter areas of color with less range of value and depth. As the storyteller/narrator ages within his memory, the nature that surrounds him fades from the bright, abundant green leaves of spring to bare, autumnal trees against muted skies.

### **Medium**

Author/illustrator Allen Say creates subtle tones with watercolor inside contours of thin black lines. His use of the black outline and simple contoured shapes could be related to his early career as a comic book illustrator. His nuanced depiction of tone and value also echo his skills as a photographer. The subtle values bring a softness to the nostalgic tone of the story.

### **Themes**

There are several themes that emerge in the book. Memories contrast with present day reality, as the text and images change to reflect the story of the younger kamishibai man. At the end we might wonder if it was all a dream.

There is the contrast of country and city, and of traditional and modern. We see the kamishibai man and his wife living in the country in a traditional Japanese home. On page 19 the three scripts used in Japan are depicted in a city setting: Chinese Kanji representing the old, Japanese Katakana representing electronics or foreign things (like the shop where the television is on display), and Hiragana to represent a hotel or restaurant.

The first image in the story shows the characters looking sad and alone. In the last image, the characters are smiling, sharing a meal and conversation. The television is turned off and sits over to the side. It has become part of the traditional home yet perhaps not totally accepted, as indicated by the way it is partially cropped out of the image.

Contrast again emerges with tension between old and new. For example, on page 9 when the kamishibai man heads back to his familiar location in the older part of town, he is shown about to be overrun by a truck against a backdrop of bright modern city towers. Despite these differences, the story moves at a gentle pace in contrast to television programs and the hustle and bustle of the city.

One melancholy aspect of the story is the couple's childlessness. Knowing the importance of family and birth order in Japan, this evokes a sense of sadness. The children who loved the kamishibai man and his wife's candies may have filled the void for the couple.

Other interesting themes related to Japanese culture are how the seasons and seasonal change are portrayed during the kamishibai man's youth. The Japanese have a reverence for nature, which Say

demonstrates in his depiction of the seasonal transition from the lush leaves of spring to the bare trees of winter.

When the kamishibai man first sees the television that is attracting the interest of his former customers, the idea of change is reinforced by the range of Japanese signage appearing in the scene. The written language originating from Chinese advertises a Chinese restaurant, Katakana—used for foreign things—advertises the television or electronics store, and Hiragana advertises a traditional Japanese hotel/restaurant. This is a subtle reminder of how cultural evolution is often affected by outside sources.

### **Connecting Picture Book to Family, Community and Current Events/People:**

- \* Students might connect to the kamishibai man and his wife by thinking of older relatives, neighbors, or people in their community.
- \* Students might relate this story to similar activities or events in their community such as story time at the library, a ventriloquist or magician, a puppet show, the ice cream truck, buskers/street performers, parades, or fairs and carnivals.
- \* In recent history Viewmaster could be seen as an American adaptation of kamishibai and electronics.
- \* In modern culture, students have their own electronic devices to view movies or play games.

### **Juxtaposing Texts:**

*Father's Chinese Opera* by Rich Le, 2014, Skyhorse Publishing

A boy longs to perform as an acrobat in his composer/musician father's Chinese opera. The connection with the kamishibai man is that of the act of performing. Whereas the kamishibai man is a one-man show, dependent on his ability to attract an audience with his candies and his stories, here the boy's desire to perform requires much more practice and skill than he possesses. Both stories find resolution in the end—the kamishibai man's audience of children return as nostalgic adults, and the boy gets to perform in his father's opera in the much less demanding role of flag bearer.

*A Year in Japan: Folktales, Songs and Art for the Classroom* by Motoko Dworkin with Eshu Bumpus, 2nd Edition, 2012, Paradise Copies, Inc., Northampton MA

This book follows the Japanese elementary school calendar, highlighting each month with a short story, a song, and an appropriate art project. The companion CD includes each song in both Japanese and English, as well as solo piano accompaniment to which students could sing along—a truly multimedia experience. Any of the short folktales, such as *Tanabata, the Star Festival* or *The Rabbit in the Moon* celebrating the Moon Festival, would lend themselves to being interpreted as a kamishibai or a reader's theater presentation.

## Learning Experiences:

### Learning Experience Design #1: Introduce the Text

Introduce the text by showing the book cover and using the Whole Book Approach (WBA) by Megan Lambert (2015), to analyze the paratext. Pre-teaching might be required for the vocabulary of book anatomy. In addition, use Visual Thinking Strategies (Yentawine) to help students develop a relationship with the book.

Show the book cover front and back, and ask:

- \* What do you think is happening here?
- \* Why do you think that?
- \* What else do you see?

Add questions to link to students' own experience. Include new questions to foster critical engagement:

- \* How can you relate to this?
- \* What does it remind you of?
- \* How does this make you feel?
- \* Why do you think the author chose this?
- \* What is dream, fantasy, nostalgia, and reality?
- \* Does it matter in this book?

### Learning Experience Design #2: Read Aloud

Read the book aloud to students. Take a deep dive into the text by using the VTS strategies throughout the story.

For example, at pages 4 & 5 ask: Who are the characters? Where are they? Do they remind you of someone you know? How do the pictures relate to the text, and can you predict what will happen next? If you could give the book a different ending, what might that be?

### Learning Experience Design #3: Reader's Theater

Direct students to work in small groups to creatively dramatize sections of the text by using theatrical devices such as: pantomime, tableau, creative dramatization, and choral reading.

Photocopy the 18 pages of text and illustrations and divide sections of the book evenly between 4-6 groups, with 4-6 students in each group. Give the students 10-20 minutes to come up with their plan and rehearse. Then have students perform their parts, following the order of the book.

For example, the first part of *Kamishibai Man* might be performed by a group of four students playing the parts of Narrator 1, Narrator 2, Jiichan (the old man), and Baachan (his wife).

**Narrator 1:** Not so long ago in Japan, in a small house on a hillside, there lived an old man and his wife. Even though they never had children of their own, they called each other “Jiichan” and “Baachan.” Jiichan is Grandpa, and Baachan is Grandma.

**Narrator 2:** One day, Baachan said,

**Baachan:** Jiichan, you haven’t said a word in three days.

**Jiichan:** Umm, I’ve been thinking how much I miss going on my rounds.

**Baachan:** How many years has it been?

**Jiichan:** Umm, yes, quite a while... but my legs are good. And I’ve kept the bicycle in good order.

**Baachan:** I don’t know. But one day won’t hurt, I suppose. Should I make some candies?

**Jiichan:** That would be very nice.

**Narrator 2:** The next day, Jiichan rode his bicycle down the hillside in the first light of morning.

**Jiichan:** Umm, how many years has it been? And do I remember such a fine morning? All so fresh and young...Well, good morning to you, rickety old bridge, still going strong after all these years, um, mmm.

**Narrator 2:** He began to hum a tune that his mother used to sing when he was a small boy.

There are many resources available to facilitate performing reader’s theater with students, among them *Drama Notebook* which offers ready-made scripts based on children’s books (<https://www.dramanotebook.com/plays-for-kids/scripts-based-on-childrens-books/>).

Another source of plays based on books is *Reader’s Theater Scripts and Plays* (<http://www.teachingheart.net/readerstheater.htm>).

## **Learning Experience Design #4: Review and Expand**

Review and expand on the understanding of kamishibai to introduce summative experience.

Book trailer: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=wDIAe43F0Jc>

Source: Mooresville Public Library (Mooresville, Indiana) presents a book trailer featuring the children's picture book, *Kamishibai Man*, by Allen Say. May 25, 2014.

Paper theater: [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=v6URceEr\\_zc](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=v6URceEr_zc)

A brief introduction to the Japanese narrative art of kamishibai. Published on Sep 13, 2010. (Best to stop at 1:55 when showing to students.)



## Summative Learning Experience:



Students will create a small storyboard of their own in the form of a 6 x 24 inch accordion-folded paper, depicting episodes of a traditional or original story, fable, folk tale, or poem, similar to the art projects seen at the Eric Carle Museum of Picture Book Art.

To quote Allen Say, "Most people seem to be interested in turning their dreams into reality. Then there are those who turn reality into dreams. I belong to the latter group."

(Source: <http://www.eduplace.com/kids/bmr/mtai/say.html?grade=4>)

What do you think this statement means? Do you have dreams? Are they the kind of dreams you have when you are asleep, or are they hopes of what you would like to do?

Choose a dream and illustrate it in 3 panels you can show as a kamishibai. There should be a beginning, middle, and end, similar to a good essay.

## Creating Additional Multimodal and Interdisciplinary Opportunities:

- \* David Wiesner's Spot app by Houghton Mifflin Harcourt (as seen at the Eric Carle Museum at Hampshire College in Amherst Massachusetts).

David Wiesner is an author/illustrator. Authors of traditional paper-bound books now find they need to adapt their text to electronics such as eBooks. Wiesner illustrates wordless books. They are interactive in that the viewers must add their own narration. Wiesner has designed the Spot app to appeal to our desire to engage with digital media. We do not just move the pages but make the story our own by choosing where to zoom in and out of the images.

Demo with narration: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=7KxqUS72uks>

Published on Feb 26, 2015.

Press release announcing release of app: <http://www.hmhco.com/media-center/press-releases/2015/february/spot#sthash.9V1RGRs9.dpbs>

Published on Feb 19, 2015.

Link to download Spot from Smart Apps for Kids website:

<http://www.smartappsforkids.com/2015/02/top-pick-david-wiesners-spot.html>

- ✿ *Grass Sandals: The Travels of Basho* by Dawnine Spivak and illustrated by Demi  
For children to use to create a kamishibai sharing.  
“An evocative portrait of the great Japanese haiku poet describes Basho's many experiences as he traveled throughout his beloved native Japan, in a volume that also includes haiku written by Basho and Japanese characters that represent words from the verses.” (Source: Amazon)
- ✿ *Beyond the Great Mountains: A Visual Poem about China*, written and illustrated by Ed Young  
Use to introduce China as source of culture, particularly the origins of Japanese language.  
“Ed Young's spare prose, as lovely as a rice-paper painting, describes in measured detail the beautiful and mystical land that the author so clearly loves. The unique format and gorgeous paper-collage illustrations, highlighted with Chinese characters, combine to convey the many facets of China to form a poetic picture of the land's grace, depth, and majesty.” (Source: Amazon)
- ✿ *A Year in Japan: Folktales, Songs and Art for the Classroom* by Motoko Maeda-Dworkin with Eshu Bumpus  
An exceptional multimodal resource, in that it includes stories to read and possibly dramatize, songs to listen to and learn with the aid of the accompanying CD, and small theme-based art projects that provide hands-on activities.

### **Other Books Written and Illustrated by Allen Say:**

The Sign Painter

Under the Cherry Blossom Tree

El Chino  
Emma's Rug  
Stranger in the Mirror  
The Lost Lake  
A River Dream  
The Bicycle Man  
Tea with Milk  
Allison  
Grandfather's Journey  
Tree of Cranes

## **Standards:**

**The National Core Arts Standards addressed in this project include:**

Responding: Understanding and evaluating how the arts convey meaning.

Students will:

7. Perceive and analyze artistic work.
8. Interpret intent and meaning in artistic work

Creating: Conceiving and developing new artistic ideas and work.

Students will:

1. Generate and conceptualize artistic ideas and work
2. Organize and develop artistic ideas and work
3. Refine and complete artistic work

## **Bibliography:**

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Spivak, Dawnine, and Demi. *Grass Sandals: The Travels of Basho*. SRA/McGraw-Hill, 2005.

Young, Ed. *Beyond the Great Mountains: A Visual Poem about China*. Chronicle Books, 2005.

## Websites

1. <http://www.hmhco.com/shop/books/Kamishibai-Man/9780618479542>

About the book: A summary of the book, *Kamishibai Man* by Allen Say from Houghton Mifflin Harcourt Publishing Company.

2. <http://www.eduplace.com/kids/hmr/mtai/say.html?grade=4>

Meet the Author/Illustrator Allen Say: A brief biography including a list of the author's other books.

3. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=HP0fY5BUrQA>

An autobiographical YouTube video combining illustrations and live commentary by author, Allen Say

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

*Kamishibai—A Brief History*, article.

5. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=wDIAe43F0Jc>

A YouTube video featuring photos of actual kamishibai storytellers with their bicycles and attached stages. From the Mooresville Public Library.

6. [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=v6URceEr\\_zc](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=v6URceEr_zc)

Video demonstration of kamishibai in the classroom

7. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=7KxqUS72uks>

A Smart Apps for Kids demonstration of David Wiesner's interactive, wordless story Spot.

8. <http://www.hmhco.com/media-center/press-releases/2015/february/spot#sthash.9V1RGRs9.dpbs>

A Houghton Mifflin Harcourt article on David Wiesner's Spot.

9. <https://www.dramanotebook.com/plays-for-kids/scripts-based-on-childrens-books/>

Drama Notebook is a website featuring reader's theater scripts based on children's books.

10. <http://www.teachingheart.net/readerstheater.htm>

Teaching Heart also features Reader's Theater scripts and plays.