

Hi, everyone. It's been a few weeks since I've written a journal, and I've had a lot of things to say! But this week I want to write about children's stories. You probably all know the stories of *Momotaro*, *Urashima Taro* and *Kaguya Hime*, but I didn't know them until the past few weeks.

It all started with the exchange student at Tsu Nishi High School. Before Alex went home to Ecuador (just last week) she had a Japanese lesson with an English teacher in my office every Tuesday. As a fun way to learn Japanese, the teacher taught Alex some children's songs like *Kaeru no uta* and *Zou-san*. With the other ALT at my school and Alex, the three of us had fun learning children's songs for a few weeks, so the teacher moved on to some Japanese folk stories.

First we learned *Momotaro*. The teacher told us the story in Japanese, and asked us to retell the story until we were more comfortable with the new words and expressions. Then we learned the *Momotaro* song. It was fun, but I went home from school and didn't give it another thought. Later that night I was cleaning up and found the box from some omiyage that I had gotten from Okayama prefecture. I saved the box because it had some cute drawings on the side, but I didn't know what they were until I heard the story. After hearing *Momotaro*, I knew what kibidango were, and realized that I had gotten some as omiyage just the week before. I could appreciate the illustrations of the dog, the monkey, the pheasant and all the characters in the story that were on the box I had saved. I also realized that *Momotaro* was on the string to turn off the light in my bedroom. I always knew it was a boy in a peach, but it wasn't until hearing the story that I understood the reason why. Just hearing this one story made my life so much more interesting!

After *Momotaro*, we learned the story of *Urashima Taro*. I had heard of the story before, but didn't know the details very well. It was perfect timing because only a few days after I learned that story in our Japanese lesson, I was going to Hotel Urashima with my friends in Wakayama. We learned the story, and the song, of course, and I was happy to be able to explain it to my friends on the car ride to Wakayama. Even though my friends didn't speak Japanese so well, they were excited to learn the meaning of the song in Japanese and be able to appreciate the place that we were visiting. Although I had been to that hotel before, I could appreciate small details from the story that were incorporated into the hotel's theme and decorations. I even found *Urashima Taro* Hello Kitty as a going away present for Alex.

On the surface it seems silly that an adult would be interested in children's stories and children's songs, but not only is it a good way to learn the Japanese language, but it has helped me appreciate smaller details of Japanese culture so much more. It even brings people together! Although I have mastered the first verses of

these two songs, I was singing it while cleaning up after a recent tea ceremony and the other women I was with were helping me with the following verses. They probably thought it was funny that I knew them in the first place. These are stories and songs that most people in Japan know, whether they think about them all the time or not. Learning them has been a nice break from my kanji textbook and another way for me to appreciate the smaller details of my life in Japan.