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Dramatic Publishing

The Honorable Urashima Taro

by
COLEMAN A. JENNINGS

浦島太郎

Suggested by two Japanese tales
Urashima Taro, the Fisher Lad
and *My Lord Bag of Rice*



Dramatic Publishing

Woodstock, Illinois • England • Australia • New Zealand

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(THE HONORABLE URASHIMA TARO)

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For my wife, Lola, and our children
Adrienne and husband Jeff Hewitt
and
Coleman and wife Jill Jennings
and their children Ethan and Avery.

THE HONORABLE URASHIMA TARO

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Acknowledgments

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The creation of this 1999 revised version was made possible, in part, by the support of The Houston Endowment through a Jesse H. Jones Professorship in Fine Arts, Department of Theatre and Dance, The University of Texas at Austin.

Cover photograph from the premiere production of *Urashima Taro* at The University of Texas at Austin, 1970.

Critical Reactions to the Premiere Production

“This interesting new play had a most successful premiere at The University of Texas at Austin. The Department of Drama found it to be delightfully fresh and totally enjoyable. I recommend it very highly...”

Loren Winship, Professor, Drama Education
The University of Texas at Austin

“The University of Texas drama department continued its commendable and highly entertaining policy of producing top-grade theatre for young audiences... The show is the latest creation of director Coleman A. Jennings, who’s not only responsible for the lively, inventive staging but for the script itself... It’s all fine fare for youthful viewers, who can also pick up several worthwhile morals tucked in among the adventure.”

John Bustin, Amusement Editor
Austin American Statesman, 27 February 1970

“Coleman Jennings has caught the true flavor of an Asian myth in his charming dramatization...translated into the simple yet spectacular excitement of theatre...”

Kenneth L. Graham, Chair, Theatre Arts
University of Minnesota

“This imaginative and theatrical fantasy for young people is a much needed addition to the children’s theatre repertory.”

“The question of the play—to stay young forever or to grow old as nature dictates—gives the child a great deal to think about, but unlike *Peter Pan* and *Rip Van Winkle* which also address this problem, *Urashima Taro* gives an answer that is devoid of regret and neurosis, an answer that is an affirmation of human life.”

Lowell Swortzell, Professor of Educational Theatre
New York University

Premiere Production

THE UNIVERSITY OF TEXAS AT AUSTIN
THE DEPARTMENT OF DRAMA

presents

浦島太郎

Urashima Taro

Written and Directed by COLEMAN A. JENNINGS
Choreography by MEL FREELAND
Settings by RACHEL GARLAND GOODE
Costumes by PAUL D. REINHARDT
Lighting by CHARLES LOWN

CAST

Four Young Boys DENNY BARNES, JOHN DODSON,
LONNIE HIRSCH, JIMMY HOPSON
Old Turtle KENNON JACOBS
Urashima Taro HAROLD GOLDFADEN
Kimo BILL LEIGON
Michiko GAIL GERRARD
Sea Dancers TRICIA BLAKE, GHENT HOWELL,
ROBERT S. LOGAN, SHARRON MEANS
Sea Creatures TIMMY GOODWIN, SHEROD YANCEY,
SUSAN WEEMS, GAIL GERRARD, TOM SWINNEY,
TRISHA SPENCER
Sea Princess CAROLYN NORTON
Spring LINDA KETON

Summer.....	ANITA WILKINS
Autumn.....	PAMELA PUGH
Winter.....	MARY MITCHELL
Centipede.....	CARROLL RUE, DENNY BARNES, JOHN DODSON, LONNIE HIRSCH, JIMMY HOPSON
An Old Woman.....	TRISHA SPENCER
A Man.....	CARROLL RUE
Sentaro.....	TOM SWINNEY

Assistant to the Director — JACALYN SIMENSKY
Stage Manager — MAVOURNEEN DWYER

After the premiere production, the Centipede character was changed to a Sea Scorpion and upon publication of the script the title was changed from *Urashima Taro* to *The Honorable Urashima Taro*.

The Honorable Urashima Taro

A Play in One Act
For a minimum of 11 actors

CHARACTERS

OLD TURTLE

THREE YOUNG BOYS, ages 10 to 15

URASHIMA TARO, 28 years old

KIMO, Taro's 11-year-old son

MICHIKO, Taro's wife

THE SEA CREATURES

THE SEA PRINCESS

THE FOUR SEASONS

THE SEA SCORPION

A WOMAN

SENTARO, Taro's great-grandson, age 7

SETTING

The shore of Shikoku, an island of Japan, near a little fishing village and the mountains and valleys of the ocean depths.

TIME

Long ago.

Note: "Urashima Taro" is pronounced without accenting any of the syllables: oo-ra-shee-ma tah-ro.

DISCUSSION

Before attending the performance the students should hear a summary of the plot, either told or read. To reinforce what they have heard and to check comprehension, use some of the following questions in a discussion session following the story.

Questions for Understanding

Why is Taro angry with the boys on the beach?

How does Taro keep the boys from hurting the sea turtle?

What does Taro think about his own killing of fish as a fisherman?

Why has the turtle come near the beach where Taro lives?

Why did Taro go with the turtle?

What made Taro hesitate to go with the turtle?

What do the sea creatures want Taro to do?

Why do they need a human being to accomplish their task?

What happens the first time Taro fights the sea scorpion?

How does Taro finally defeat the sea scorpion?

How long does Taro stay in the undersea kingdom?

How long does he think he has stayed?

Why does he not know how long he has really stayed?

Why does Taro insist that he must return to the beach?

How does Taro discover that much time has passed since he left?

How does Taro discover that he is an old man?

What changes have taken place in his family?

Lead the children beyond understanding to analysis with questions from the following suggestions. Some will be as appropriate before they have seen a performance as after; others may be held for a post performance discussion.

Questions for Analyzing

What kind of person is Taro? Describe his character as you know it from the beginning of the play up until he leaves with the turtle.

Which of Taro's characteristics might be important to the turtle? Why?

What did you think would happen when Taro met the sea scorpion?

What clues show that much time passes while Taro is with the sea creatures?

Why does the princess give him the box?

How does Taro feel about having spent almost his entire life in the sea kingdom?

Why does Taro choose not to go back to the sea palace, where he could live forever as a young man?

How old is the princess? Why did she give Taro the box? Did she plan to trick him?

Explain what Taro means when he says, "But I cannot continue to live suspended."

The Honorable Urashima Taro is a fantasy, and the setting helps establish an unreal world. Explain how each of the following helps create the fantasy:

The time the play opens.

The world Taro visits underwater.

The time Taro returns home.

Defining Vocabulary

According to the academic level of the children, discuss selected words in relation to the characters and situations of the play. After defining the words match them with whom or what they describe.

tease	amazing	perish
gaze	mortal	courage
secrecy	victim	magnificent
pierce	tormenting	churn
sympathy	devour	warriors
plead	ancient	repay
reward	suspend	healing
accustomed	agony	terror
privilege	row out	glorious
rescue	compassionate	companion
eternal	earthy	coral
domain	gigantic	flaming
riddle	argument	measure
summon	accompany	
mysterious	old legend	

The next level of discussion requires thinking beyond the plot. Depending on the academic level and abilities of the class, choose questions from the following or create others to stimulate new conclusions and ideas. Questions of this kind may be used in discussions before and after the performance.

Questions for Extending

The sea has sometimes been said to enchant. What is it about the sea that enchants?

What are some of the imaginary creatures in the sea? Why did ancient people "create" these mysterious animals?

How did the designers of the scenery, costumes, properties and lights use their imaginations? In what ways were they asking the audience to use their imaginations?

When you think about the production you saw or the story of the play, which colors come to mind?

How would you describe the music used during the performance? How did it enhance the mood of the play? Of the setting?

With a small group of classmates, make up a story about someone for whom time passes without that person realizing it. For consideration, as you plan: the character is usually away from familiar surroundings when the time passes; there must be a reason why the character does not know time passes; the character must have a way to discover that time has passed, such as returning to a familiar place to find things have changed.

After having the children share one of their baby pictures and a current one, have them write down three important events that have happened in their lives between the time the two pictures were taken. In groups of two have them trade pictures and stories. One partner will then create imaginary events in the life of their partner between the two pictures. The partners will each have created a different life for the other which they share between themselves and then with the other groups.

In 1989, this play, *The Honorable Urashima Taro*, was included in the elementary school textbook, *Beginnings in Literature: America Reads*, edited by Alan L. Madsen, Sara Durand Wood and Philip M. Conors and published by Scott, Foresman. In the unit on playreading, the editors used the following categories for guiding the students in evaluating *Taro* and three other plays: THINK AND DISCUSS: Understanding, Analyzing, Extending.

The Honorable Urashima Taro can also be used in a unit of study in areas such as social studies and oceanography or marine life.

The World of the Play, Design Elements: Staging, Costumes/Makeup, Scenery, Lighting and Sound Design

Each producing organization should include the specifics of the directing and design approach for their production. Many directors and designers will find the approach used for the premiere production (detailed in the Production Notes) a valid one to use as a basis for their own interpretation.

Bibliography

The legends and folktales of the sea are an important part of the cultural heritage of Japan. The legend of Urashima Taro is a well-known and ancient one. Since its first appearance as a love poem in 717 A.D., the plot has been retold with many variations for both adults and children. A bibliography of the relevant books, Web sites and films consulted for the production should be included in the resource packet.

Audience Response Requested

Audience members, especially the children, should be encouraged to send their reactions to the producing organization. They should understand that letters and drawings are of particular value to producers as they evaluate their work and plan future productions.

The Honorable Urashima Taro

(Classic Japanese music is playing as the audience enters the theatre. There is no curtain, only screens up-stage, painted to suggest a beach locale. As the house-lights dim, the Japanese music cross-fades to ocean sounds. The TURTLE is "washed" ashore, settles at C, his back to the audience. The THREE BOYS run on stage, excited about going to the beach. The houselights fade out as the THREE BOYS speak.)

BOY 3. The boats will be back soon!

BOY 1. Hurry!

BOY 2. I'll race you to the water!

BOY 3. Look!

BOY 2. Look what's on the beach! *(The BOYS gather around the TURTLE.)*

BOY 1. I wonder how long he's been here?

BOY 3. He must have been washed ashore.

BOY 2. Look, how big he is!

BOY 1. Yes, he is.

BOY 3. Let's play with him.

BOY 2. Watch out!

BOY 1. Hit him!

BOY 3. Let's take him to the village.

BOY 1. No. No.

BOY 2 *(picking up a stick)*. Let me hit him!

BOY 1. Make him stick out his head.

BOY 2. Watch out, he'll bite you!

BOY 3. How old is he?

BOY 2. Who cares?

BOY 1. Let's kill him.

BOY 3. No, just turn him on his back.

BOY 2. Wait! Here comes a boat.

BOY 1. Who is it?

BOY 3. It looks like Urashima Taro.

BOY 1. It is Taro!

BOY 3 (*starting to leave*). Let's go!

BOY 2. Wait. I'm not afraid of Urashima Taro.

BOY 3. But he will be angry with us!

BOY 2. It's none of his business what we do. Who cares
what he says?

BOY 1. Does Taro own the sea or the beach?

BOY 2. No. No!

BOY 3. No, but he does care for the animals and sea crea-
tures!

(TARO and his son, KIMO, are now near the shore.)

BOY 2. If he is so kind to sea creatures, why does he catch
fish every day?

BOY 3. He catches fish for his family to sell in the market-
place.

*(TARO and KIMO leave their imaginary boat in the
shallow water and approach the BOYS.)*

TARO. Boys, what are you doing?

BOY 2. Nothing.

TARO. What do you have there?

BOY 2. A turtle we found on the beach!

TARO. But, what are you doing with it?

BOY 1. Nothing. Just playing!

TARO. You have a strange way of playing. Why are you so cruel?

BOY 2. We can do whatever we like! We found him. He's ours now.

TARO (*crossing to the TURTLE*). The turtle belongs to the sea.

BOY 2. He should stay in the ocean if he doesn't want to be caught. He belongs to us, and we can kill him, if we want.

TARO. Why would you be so unkind to a poor creature?

BOY 1. Look at your baskets! You catch and kill fish every day. Why shouldn't we kill an old turtle?

TARO. It is right to take the turtle if you are hungry, but you are teasing and hurting him.

BOY 1. Look at him; he's old. Who cares if he lives?

TARO. You needn't kill him just because he is old. Think what a wonder it is to live so long—maybe even as long as three men!

BOY 3. Yes, let's *not* kill him.

TARO. You do not need the turtle for food. Let's make a trade. We will give you some fish for him. Kimo, the fish.

(*KIMO brings a small net of fish to TARO.*)

BOY 1. We could use the fish.

BOY 2. Why are you listening to him? .

BOY 1. We will do what we please. Leave us alone.

BOY 2. Move out of the way!

(As the argument builds, BOY 2 attempts to strike the TURTLE with the stick. BOY 3 grabs his arm and holds him.)

TARO *(as he shields the TURTLE with his body)*. Wait!
You must not kill him!

BOY 2. Get away! He belongs to us!

TARO *(angrily)*. He belongs to no one. Now go home.
(Pause, then firmly, but kindly.) Boys! Here are fish for your family. *(Pause.)* Go on.

(BOY 2 puts the stick down and exits with BOY 1, without accepting any fish. BOY 3 remains with TARO and KIMO.)

BOY 3. I'm sorry. I hadn't meant to be so cruel. *(Turns to leave.)*

KIMO. I wonder how deeply he can swim.

BOY 3. Maybe he's been on this beach before.

TARO. Let's help him return to his home.

KIMO *(as they help the TURTLE into the "water")*. He is big.

(Note: The actors never touch the TURTLE. Keeping their hands approximately six inches from him, they create a stylized effect of grasping the shell. The TURTLE retains complete freedom of movement.)

TARO. Yes, my son, and he is handsome, too. Now he will be free. Be on your way, ancient one!

KIMO and BOY 3 *(to the TURTLE as he begins to exit into the sea)*. Goodbye.

TARO (*as BOY 3 starts to exit, calling him back*). Wait.
(*Offering him some fish.*) Take these to your family.

BOY 3. All of these?

TARO. Take them, and go along.

BOY 3. Thank you for the fish. Goodbye, Kimo. Goodbye,
Urashima Taro.

TARO & KIMO. Goodbye.

(*When TARO and KIMO are left alone, TARO starts
across to the boat area.*)

KIMO. How old was that turtle?

TARO. Over a hundred years old, I think. What a glorious
creature! Listen! I thought I heard him call. (*Pause.*) I
wonder why he came to this part of the beach.

KIMO. Do you think the turtle can swim out as far as we
were today?

TARO. Even farther. (*Returning to reality.*) Now, Kimo,
help me with the boat. (*As they begin to pantomime
pushing the boat ashore.*) Push, Kimo, push.

MICHIKO (*offstage*). Taro. Kimo.

TARO. We are here. (*To KIMO.*) Push harder.

(*MICHIKO enters.*)

MICHIKO. Why, Taro, you are late. Have you just now
returned?

TARO. Yes, Michiko.

MICHIKO. Where's Kimo?

KIMO. Here, Mother.

MICHIKO. I didn't see you. Were you a help to your fa-
ther today, Kimo?

KIMO. I hope so. Father and I rowed out farther than we've ever gone.

MICHIKO. Did you have a good catch?

TARO. Three baskets. The water was very clear and blue. We could almost see the bottom. It reminded me of the old legend about the Princess and the Sea Palace. Michiko, you remember that old story.

MICHIKO. You are a dreamer, my husband. You are more interested in legends of the sea than in catching fish for your parents to sell.

TARO. We always have enough fish.

MICHIKO. When you come home so late, everyone buys fish from the others. No one needs our fish. We must hurry. (*As she inspects the catch.*) Taro, this basket is almost empty.

TARO. I gave some to a boy.

MICHIKO (*looking around*). What boy?

TARO. He's gone.

MICHIKO. Why did you give him our fish?

TARO. He helped me return an old turtle to the sea.

KIMO. You should have seen that turtle. He was this big— (*Spreading his arms apart to indicate the length of the TURTLE.*) —and his feet were like huge oars. I would like to have him for a pet.

MICHIKO. You are so much like your father, always wanting to keep every animal you see. I suppose you'll soon be dreaming of ocean legends, too.

TARO. Try to understand ...

MICHIKO. I do understand. A boy helped you, and being a kindly man, you wanted to repay him. But we need every fish you can catch.

TARO. It is so.

MICHIKO. Hurry to the marketplace with these fish, Kimo. Your grandparents are waiting for them.

TARO (*as KIMO starts to leave*). Stay a moment. (*To MICHIKO.*) I need the boy to help me with the boat and the nets.

MICHIKO (*as TARO looks out into the ocean, as if listening to something*). Then I shall take some fish to them. (*She picks up the fish to go, but pauses as she notices TARO moving toward the ocean.*) Taro? (*Pause.*) My husband, what is wrong?

TARO (*ignoring MICHIKO*). Why did we send him away so quickly? Perhaps the Old Turtle had something to tell me. Old One! We're still here. Come back!

MICHIKO. Forget the ocean for a little while. You must stop this dreaming. Come home, now.

TARO. I think I can hear him now—pleading with me to come into the ocean. I must know why he came here. Turtle, Old Turtle!

MICHIKO. Taro? (*Pause. TARO continues to stare out into the ocean. To KIMO.*) I have never seen your father like this. Help him home. I will take these to the marketplace and then meet you at home.

KIMO. Yes, Mother.

MICHIKO (*to TARO, as she exits*). I will prepare something for us to eat. Try not to be late. (*TARO remains silent.*)

KIMO (*quietly*). Do you want to clear the nets now, Father?

TARO (*not moving*). What a magnificent creature he was!

KIMO (*still trying to reach TARO*). I'll help you with the boat.

TARO (*noticing KIMO again*). Yes...yes. (*Moving to the boat.*) Where is your mother?

KIMO. She took some of the fish to the marketplace. She will meet us at home.

TARO. Good. Help me with the boat and the nets.

KIMO (*as he helps pantomime pushing the boat ashore, and later straightening the nets*). Tomorrow, let's go out farther than we have ever been!

TARO. Perhaps. We'll see. We must clear the nets now.

KIMO. Remember the time you told me about the old legend you heard as a boy? Would you tell me again?

TARO. Your mother just told you—told us—we must stop thinking so much about those old stories.

KIMO. I can't help it. When we are so far out in the ocean, and it's quiet and still—the stories seem more real than ever.

TARO. Hand me the small net.

KIMO (*handing TARO the small net*). Sometimes I can almost see the evil sea scorpions of the ocean mountains. Which is more powerful, a sea creature or a man?

TARO. I don't know, Kimo.

KIMO. What if a man could really meet a sea scorpion? Do you think they would fight?

TARO. Perhaps, if the man thought his life were in danger.

KIMO. Remember that old story about how the man used water from his mouth to destroy the sea scorpion?

TARO. Yes.

KIMO. But how can water from a man's mouth be so powerful under the sea? Tell me that story again.

TARO. Not now. Tomorrow...when we are out in the boat. Get the fish.

TURTLE (*calling from offstage*). Taro. Taro.

TARO. Listen!

KIMO. What was that?

TURTLE. Taro. Urashima Taro!

KIMO (*frightened*). Who is that?

TARO. Who calls? (*Looking about on the beach.*) Who calls "Urashima Taro"?

(*TURTLE enters.*)

TURTLE. Taro! Out here in the ocean...

KIMO. The turtle! Over there! (*Pointing toward the TURTLE.*)

TURTLE. I'm the turtle whom you rescued a few minutes ago.

KIMO. How can that be?

TURTLE. Taro, those boys almost destroyed me.

TARO. I'm glad we found you in time. From now on, Old Turtle, you'd better remain in the sea.

TURTLE. I shall, but I've come back to thank you for saving me. You were very kind to help. When the boys caught me, I was on my way to find you.

TARO (*astonished*). Me?

TURTLE. Yes, we of the Palace of the Sea have often heard you speak kindly of us. Many times when you and your son were far out to sea, we heard you tell him the old ocean legends.

TARO. I have wondered about your world so much. Is it true that the Princess' Sea Palace is more glorious than any place in all of Japan?

TURTLE. It is lovelier than a thousand setting suns. Few men know anything of it. Would you like to see our world for yourself?

TARO. I cannot go. I am not a turtle or a sea creature who can swim so deeply under water.

TURTLE. That is true, but it will be different if you are with me. You'll be able to breathe under water as easily as you do now. Wade into the water, Taro, and climb on my back. I'll take you to the Sea Princess this very moment.

TARO. How I would like to go! (*TARO starts toward the TURTLE, but stops as KIMO calls.*)

KIMO. May I go, too?

TARO. My wife and parents are waiting for me to bring these fish to sell.

TURTLE. You may return as soon as you wish.

KIMO. Is he a real turtle?

TARO. Yes, he's real.

KIMO. Can't we go with him?

TARO. Just imagine—getting to visit the Sea Princess! Let me go to the marketplace first and tell my family. It will take only a few moments. The village is not far from here. (*TARO starts to exit.*)

TURTLE. A voyage to visit the Sea Princess would take even less time. Let the boy tell your family where you have gone.

TARO. What am I thinking of? I cannot go with you. I must stay here with them. Goodbye, Old One, and thank you for inviting me. (*TARO picks up nets to leave.*)

TURTLE. Urashima Taro, we need you to come to the sea kingdom. You are a good man, and we trust you. We must have such a man to help us. We live in dread fear of—

TARO. In fear of what?