

Kamishibai Performance Tips

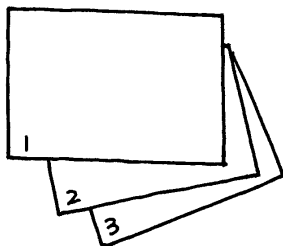
By David Battino and Hazuki Kataoka, Authors and Publishers, Storycard Theater

Kamishibai storycard dramas are easy to read and fun to watch. Here are some techniques we've found will make your performances even more enjoyable.

Basics

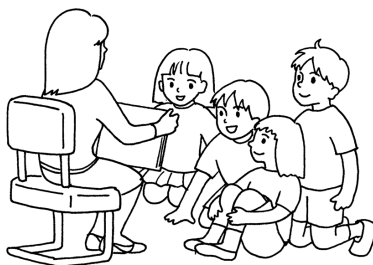
1. Sort

Before every performance, make sure the cards are in numerical order. (Each card is numbered on the front.) Practice the text enough to read it smoothly.



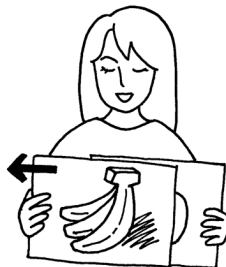
2. Position

Hold the stack of cards so the text faces you and the pictures face the audience. If you don't have a frame, you can rest the cards on your lap or a desktop.



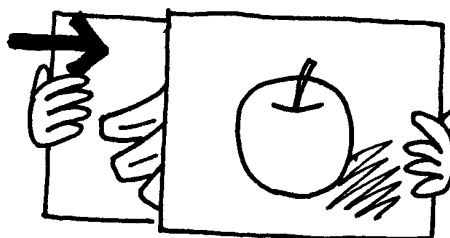
3. Read

With the cards stacked properly, the text on the card facing you will correspond to the picture on the card facing the audience. Read the text.



4. Exchange

When you finish reading a card, slide the card facing the audience to the side and move it to the back of the deck. At the end of the story, remain on the final card. That maintains the feeling of completion.



Advanced Tips

★ Like the traditional kamishibai storytellers, begin by clapping two sticks together, faster and faster. (Kids in the audience like to try this, too.) We use rosewood claves.

★ Don't hide behind the cards; make eye contact with your audience. Storytelling is all about interaction.

★ Using a presentation frame (*butai*) frees your hands to make dramatic gestures. For example, in *Momotaro*, we hold the claves on our heads to simulate the ogre's horns. During the chase scene in *Jack and the Beanstalk*, we lurch forward and pretend to grab an audience member.

★ Play musical instruments and make sound effects to set the mood or heighten the drama. Involve the audience in noisemaking too.

★ Using a different voice for each character can be effective. However, the International Kamishibai Association of Japan (IKAJA) cautions that overdoing voices can steal focus from the

artwork. So, perform in the way that makes you comfortable. Having fun is the key.

- ★ Vary the speed you slide the cards based on their content. The moment of transition is the joy of kamishibai for the audience. (Think of cinema—sudden cuts for surprise, dissolves for suspense.)
- ★ Try using the cards as cue cards rather than simply reading the text; improvising new words and even new storylines can be exciting.
- ★ Enjoy your performance!

Make Your Own Kamishibai

Making *kamishibai* storycards is a rewarding project for students because it teaches so many creative skills: writing, editing, illustration, presentation, and collaboration. Here are some insights we've developed while producing and performing our own *kamishibai*.

Materials Needed

Construction paper or posterboard; white paper; markers, paints, or photos; glue sticks or rubber cement to attach artwork; transparent tape to attach text.

Writing Tips

1. Emphasize dialog.
2. Write for the ear; write colloquially.
3. Divide the story into scenes, with each scene ending on a cliffhanger or at least leading into the next.
4. Don't duplicate the picture with the text. Because the picture is always in view, you don't have to describe what's going on.
5. Know your target audience; use shorter sentences and simpler words for younger audiences.
6. Use sensory words. ("The ogre fell to the ground like a stinky wet sock.")
7. Test and refine on your target audience. This is one of the best educational benefits of having students make their own *kamishibai*: They can practice iterative editing and get immediate feedback on its effectiveness. Which phrases were hard to read aloud? Which parts were confusing for the audience? Where did they lose interest? Which parts did they like?

Illustration Tips

1. Pick a moment in the scene that's dramatic but doesn't give away what's going to happen.
2. Use bright colors and clear pictures without excessive detail; pictures need to make sense from across a room. Students can download photos or cut them out of magazines; collages work well.
3. Create the artwork on a separate sheet and then paste that to the construction paper or posterboard when you're happy with the appearance. Using backing material that's larger than the artwork creates a frame effect that enhances the drama.
4. Follow this layout chart to match the art with the text. Use removable tape to attach the text to the cards at first; that allows you to modify the words (see Tip 7 above) and placement.

ART	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8
TEXT	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	1

Further Reading: *Kamishibai Man* by Allen Say

How to Perform Kamishibai: Q&A by Noriko Matsui

Kamishibai Story Theater: The Art of Picture Telling by Dianne de Las Casas

The Kamishibai Classroom by Tara M. McGowan

International Kamishibai Association of Japan: www.geocities.jp/kamishibai

Die for Japan: Wartime Propaganda Kamishibai (paper plays; 国策紙芝居): [YouTube.com](https://www.youtube.com)



Kamishibai Benefits

- ★ Easier to read (and watch) than conventional picture books.
- ★ Facilitates interactive storytelling.
- ★ More immersive than simply hearing a story, which is helpful for English language learners and special-needs students.
- ★ Facilitates picture-reading, an important step in learning to read text.
- ★ A fun way to experience foreign cultures, history, and languages.
- ★ Develops presentation skills.
- ★ An engaging, visual way to teach math concepts.