

Plays about Judge Oh-Oka

Judge Oh-Oka, who in the eighteenth century administered the law in court of *Edo*, the capital of Old Japan, was a popular folk hero. He was known throughout the country for his fairness and wisdom. There are many stories still told among Japanese people about how Oh-Oka solved unusual and difficult cases.

Biography of Oh-Oka

Oh-Oka Tadasuke (Oh-Oka is his family name) was born in 1677. His father was a *hatamoto*, the knight of *Shogun*, the military ruler of Japan. Little Oh-Oka loved reading and learning. When he was still a boy, Oh-Oka was adopted into his uncle's family. He missed his mother terribly, and his boyhood was not a happy one. It is said that because of this experience Oh-Oka was always kind to children, even later in his life as a public official.

When Oh-Oka became a young man, Shogun Tsunayoshi, a dictator well known for his hot temper and fickle character, suddenly sent his older brother into exile. His father lost his office, and the family was put to disgrace. Knowing that his brother was a man of integrity, young Oh-Oka began to question the *Shogun's* justice and wisdom. He left his uncle's house and lived from hand to mouth in the poor quarter of Edo. This experience, too, helped him in later years, because he knew the lives of common people.

Eventually he went back to his adoptive parents and devoted himself to the study of ancient books. He came the head of his own family, and was appointed Chief Justice of a city town named Yamada. There he became renowned for his abilities, prudence, and great sense of justice. When Yoshimune became the new *Shogun*, he appointed Oh-Oka to be the Mayor of Edo. Aside from administering the law, Oh-Oka worked hard to improve life in Edo. He formed a citizens' fire brigade, and built a hospital for the poor. Later, he was named Supreme Judge. He always spoke the truth and offered words of wisdom, not only to people of Edo, but also to the Shogun. In 1751 Oh-Oka died at the age of seventy-five.

Even today, Oh-Oka is a popular figure in samurai detective dramas on TV. Some stories about him have been published in English. All the stories, except for the last one, ("Oh-Oka and Pickpockets") were taken and adapted from **Ooka the Wise: Tales of Old Japan**, by I. G. Edmonds. (Linnet Books, 1994.) The last story was adapted from **Japanese Folktales: Stories about Judge Ooka**, by Venceslava Hrdlickova (Aventinum, Prague, 1993.)

The Case of the Stolen Smell

Characters

Judge Oh-Oka

Poor Young Man

His Friend

Shopkeeper

Shopkeeper's Wife

Narrator

Narrator: This is a story about Judge Oh-Oka, who was famous all over Edo, the capital of Old Japan, for his fairness and wisdom. Oh-Oka never refused to hear a complaint, even if it seemed strange or unreasonable. As a result, people sometimes came to his court with pretty unusual cases. The Case of the Stolen Smell was one of them. It all began when a poor young man decided to eat his lunch in front of a fried fish shop.

Shopkeeper: (*Frying fish*) Fried fish! Delicious fried clams! Shrimps!

Young Man: (*Enters, comes closer to the shop.*) Ah, a perfect place for lunch.

Shopkeeper: Hi, do you want to buy some fish? How about delicious fried shrimps?

Young Man: No, thank you. I don't have any money.

Shopkeeper: (*Disappointed*) Oh. (*Goes in. His Wife comes out.*)

Young Man: Ma'am, do you mind if I sat here under the tree and eat my lunch?

Wife: I don't mind at all. Go right ahead.

Narrator: The young man started eating his lunch of plain white rice. The wonderful smell of fried fish wafted toward him.

Young Man: (*Inhaling deeply*) Ah, this is delicious! (*Eats his rice*)

Narrator: Then his friend walked by.

Friend: Hey, what's up?

Young Man: Hi. I'm just sitting here enjoying my lunch. Have you eaten?

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Friend: No. All I have in my lunch box is plain white rice. It's depressing to be so poor you can't afford anything else.

Young Man: Hey, I'm the same way. That's why I'm eating here in front of the shop. Sit down here and join me.

Friend: What do you mean?

Young Man: Well, don't you smell this wonderful smell of fried fish? With this smell, my plain rice seems to have much more flavor. It's really the smell, you see, that makes things taste so good.

Friend: That's a great idea! Let me try it. (*Smells and eats his rice*) Ah, delicious. (*They laugh.*)

Narrator: The shopkeeper overheard this, and he was furious. He went inside to talk to his wife.

Shopkeeper: Wife! This is outrageous!

Wife: What?! What happened?

Shopkeeper: Those penniless young men out there stole the smell of my fish!

Wife: What are you talking about? You can't help it if people smelled your food. How could anyone steal a smell? (*laughs*)

Shopkeeper: You don't understand. (*Goes out. To the Young Man and His Friend*) Thief! I demand that you pay me for the smells you have stolen!

Young Man: A smell is a smell. Anyone can smell what he wants to.

Friend: Yeah, we'll pay nothing!

Shopkeeper: Then I'll take you to the court!

Wife: Husband, stop this foolishness!

Narrator: But the shopkeeper did not stop. He went to Judge Oh-oka's court and charged the young men with theft. Of course, everyone laughed at him, but to their surprise, Oh-Oka agreed to hear the case.

Oh-Oka: Everyone is entitled to their hour in court. If a man feels strongly enough about any injustice, it is my duty to listen.

Shopkeeper: Thank you, your Honor. These young men stole the smell of my wonderful fried fish. I demand that they pay.

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Young Man: We did not steal anything, your Honor. This man is a liar!

Friend: Yeah, he's so greedy, too!

Oh-Oka: Quiet! Now I deliver my verdict. *(Everyone quiets down.)* These young men are guilty. *(The young men gasp.)* Taking another person's property is theft, and a smell is no different from any other property.

Shopkeeper: Hooray!

Young Man: B-b-but your Honor, please wait. We are poor. If we pay, we won't even be able to afford plain rice!

Friend: And we won't be able to pay our rent!

Oh-Oka: How much money do you have?

Young Man: I only have five copper coins. *(Takes them out)*

Friend: I only have three. *(Does the same.)*

Oh-Oka: Let me see your money.

(He takes them in his hands. Extends his hands toward Shopkeeper. Shopkeeper reaches out, but Oh-Oka does not give the money. He merely drops the money from one hand to the other. Everyone hears the clinking of the coins. Oh-Oka hands the money back to Young Men.)

Oh-Oka: *(To Shopkeeper)* Now you have been paid. If you have any other complaints in the future, please bring them to the court.

Shopkeeper: But your Honor, I didn't get the money. You gave it back to those good-for-nothings!

Oh-Oka: It is the court's judgment that the punishment should fit the crime. I have decided that the price of the smell of food shall be the sound of money. Justice has prevailed as usual in my court.

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Oh-Oka and the Dog's Punishment

Characters

Judge Oh-Oka

Little Boy

His Mother

Dog

Merchant

Narrator

Narrator: Judge Oh-Oka was famous not only for his fairness and wisdom, but also for his kind heart. He was especially kind to children. This is a story of how he helped a little boy and his dog. The little boy's name was Kiyoshi. He lived with his mother and his dog.

Little Boy: Come here, puppy! Come! Here is a bone for you.

Dog: Bow-wow!

Mother's Voice: Kiyoshi! Come over here and help me with laundry!

Little Boy: Okay mom! (*exits*)

Narrator: Right next door lived a wealthy merchant. He was mean and did not like dogs.

(*The Merchant comes out. The Dog barks at him.*)

Dog: Bow-wow!

Merchant: Oh shut up and get out of my way! (*Kicks the dog and walks away. The dog whimpers.*)

Little Boy: (*Rushes out*) Are you okay, my little guy? (*Pats the dog*) That man is always so mean. I hate him.

Mother: (*Coming out*) Now don't say bad things about other people. Just make sure that your dog stays out of other people's way, okay?

Little Boy: (*sighs*) Okay.

Narrator: One day the Merchant was on his way home from the dress shop. He had just bought a brand new kimono, and was very proud of it.

Mother: Good afternoon, sir.

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Merchant: Good afternoon.

Mother: My, what beautiful kimono you are wearing. Such beautiful color!

Merchant: Yes. I just had it made especially for me. It is a new color developed by the dyer.

Mother: Oh, how nice!

(Goes inside. Little Boy and his Dog enter. They are hurrying home. Little Boy accidentally bumps into the Merchant. The Merchant falls on the ground.)

Merchant: Hey, look what you did!

Little Boy: I-I-I'm sorry, sir. I didn't mean to-----

Merchant: You made my new kimono all muddy! *(gets up and pushes the boy down. The boy starts crying.)* Ha, that will teach you a lesson. *(The Dog suddenly attacks the Merchant.)*

Dog: Bow-wow! Bow-wow! *(Rips the Merchant's new kimono.)*

Merchant: Ahhhhhhhh! You stupid dog!

Mother: *(comes out)* What is going on?

Little Boy: C'mon, dog, we gotta run away! *(Boy and Dog run off.)*

Merchant & Mother: Wait! Stop right there! *(Run off stage, chasing them.)*

Narrator: The boy and the dog had run several blocks, when the boy bumped into another old man. It was Honorable Judge Oh-Oka!

Little Boy: I'm sorry, sir, I-I, *(cries)*

Oh-Oka: Are you all right, little boy? Why are you crying? Are you hurt?

Dog: Bow-wow!

Oh-Oka: Is this your dog? What's wrong? Talk to me. *(Boy keeps crying.)*

Narrator: Judge Oh-Oka did not know what to say. Then the merchant and the little boy's mother caught up with them.

Merchant: There they are!

Mother: Kiyoshi, are you all right?

Merchant: *(To Mother)* You'd better pay for my kimono. *(To the Boy)* And your dog should be destroyed! *(Little Boy hides the Dog behind him.)*

Oh-Oka: Wait a minute. You'd better explain to me what's going on.

Merchant: Oh yeah? Who are you?

Oh-Oka: I am Judge Oh-Oka, the city magistrate.

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Merchant: (*Jumps back and bows*) Oh, Honorable Lord Oh-Oka. Please excuse me for not recognizing your Honor.

Oh-Oka: Now explain what happened.

Merchant: Yes, your Honor. I was coming home from the dress shop where they made this fine new kimono. It was very expensive. In front of my house, this rude boy from next door bumped into me, so I pushed him to teach him a lesson. Children must be taught manners, you know.

Oh-Oka: Well...Then what happened?

Merchant: The dog attacked me and tore up my kimono! He must be destroyed. That is the law.

Oh-Oka: (*To the Mother and the Boy*) And what do you have to say about this?

Mother: I know that is the law, but my son loves the dog very much. And he never meant no harm. The dog was just trying to protect him.

Little Boy: (*pointing to Merchant*) He is a mean man. He hates my dog. He always kicks him.

Narrator: Oh-Oka did not know what to do. According to the law, the merchant was right. Yet Oh-Oka felt sorry for the little boy. Suddenly, he had an idea.

Oh-Oka: (*To Merchant*) I have never seen kimono that color before. Is it a special color?

Merchant: Yes, it's a new color developed by a master dyer. It was very expensive.

Oh-Oka. I see. And what color kimono do you usually wear?

Merchant: Why, blue, your Honor. But what does that have to do with this?

Oh-Oka: Everything. I see it all clearly now. The dog is used to seeing you in blue kimono. Naturally he did not recognize you in your new colors. He thought you were a thief trying to enter your house. Being a good neighbor, he attacked you. It is your fault for changing the color of your kimono without telling the dog.

Merchant: But, your Honor! This is----

Oh-Oka: Wonderful, you mean? I think so myself. The dog must be rewarded. From now on, each time you pass him, pat his head instead of kicking him. You must also say a kind word to his master. I've heard that dogs are especially pleased when people are kind to their masters.

Narrator: The merchant was forced to do this, although it annoyed him very much. But after a while he found it was not so difficult after all. He eventually came to like the little boy and the dog, and in time all three became the best of friends.

The Real Mother

Characters

Judge Oh-Oka

Mother 1

Mother 2

Oh-Oka's Assistant 1

Oh-Oka's Assistant 2

Narrator

(You also need a baby doll, wrapped in cloth.)

Narrator: Judge Oh-Oka was famous throughout Old Japan for his fairness and wisdom. People in Edo, the capital, considered themselves lucky to have him as their magistrate. Sometimes Oh-Oka solved his cases in a clever, but unusual way. This story is an example. One day two young women came to his court with a baby boy.

Assistant 1: This is the office of Honorable Judge Oh-Oka. What can we do for you?

Mother 1: Uh...We have a problem.

Assistant 2: What kind of problem? There is nothing Lord Oh-Oka cannot solve.

Mother 2: Well, this baby here is my son, but this woman says he is her son.

Mother 1: He *is* my son. This woman is trying to steal my baby!

Mother 2: You liar! (*To the Assistants*) See how much he looks like me?

Assistant 1: Quiet! You must wait until Judge Oh-Oka sees you. Here, let me hold the baby.

Narrator: The Assistants went to Oh-Oka and reported the case.

Assistant 2: Your Honor, there are two women out there with a baby. They both claim to be his mother. You must decide which woman is the real mother.

Oh-Oka: Hmmm. Bring them over here.

(*The Assistants and the two women seat themselves in front of Oh-Oka.*)

Oh-Oka: Well, does either one of you have witnesses to testify that you are telling the truth?

Mother 1: Your Honor, we recently came to Edo from a faraway village. This woman used to be my neighbor, and we traveled together. Then she decided to take my baby away from me. But I have no family or friend in Edo to support my claim.

Mother 2: No, your Honor, this is my baby. He is so cute and this woman is jealous. That's why she wants him. But I have no witnesses either.

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Oh-Oka: Hmm. This should be simple. The baby should be able to recognize his own mother.

(To Assistant 1) Let each woman hold the baby, and we'll see who he likes best.

Assistant 1: Yes, your Honor. *(Hands the baby to Mother 1. The baby cries.)*

Mother 1: Ohhh, please stop crying. It's your mom!

Oh-Oka: Now give the other woman a chance. *(Assistant 1 hands the baby to Mother 2. The baby cries.)*

Mother 2: Oh my poor baby! It's me! Please calm down. *(To Oh-Oka)* I think he's hungry.

Oh-Oka: Ahh, he makes too much noise! Give him to me. *(Picks him up. The baby stops crying.)*

Assistant 2: The baby stopped crying!

Oh-Oka: That doesn't help, since I'm not his mother. *(The Assistants laugh. Oh-Oka glares at them. They stop. To the Women)* I have another test. Each of you must take hold of one of the baby's arms and pull as hard as you can. I am sure the real mother will have strength to win the struggle.

(The women get into position. The two Assistants go to the side and talk among themselves.)

Assistant 1: You see, the real mother would not pull hard because she wouldn't want to hurt the baby.

Assistant 2: Yeah, then we'll know who the real mother is. What a clever idea!

Narrator: But it did not work out as they expected. Both women knew the trick.

Mother 1: Your Honor, I cannot do this. If I pull hard, I will hurt my baby.

Mother 2: My baby, you mean? The last thing I want to do is to hurt my son, your Honor.

Assistant 1: Uh-oh. They are not pulling!

Assistant 2: Oh, no! How else would Lord Oh-Oka solve this case?

Oh-Oka: *(sighs)* All right. I must admit this is a very difficult case. *(To Assistants)* You two, come over here please.

Assistants 1&2: Yes, your Honor.

Oh-Oka: I need you to go into town and buy me a goldfish in a bowl, a comb, three bamboo sticks, and a book of fortune-telling.

Assistants 1&2: Yes, your Honor, right away.

(Both Assistants go off stage and come back with the objects requested.)

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Assistants 1&2: Here they are, sir.

Oh-Oka: Thank you. *(To the Women)* Obviously, I cannot solve this case by an ordinary means. But don't worry. I will reach the fair decision all the same. I am going to use these things to look into the future.

Assistant 1: *(On the side)* What does he mean? Fortune-telling is just a superstition, isn't it?

Assistant 2: Shhhh. Maybe he can't solve the case and he's embarrassed.

Oh-Oka: Now please be quiet. *(Consults the book.)* First, I must count the bubbles in the goldfish bowl and the teeth of this comb. *(Counts. Consults the book again.)* Next, I must see which way these bamboo sticks fall. *(Lets them fall on the floor.)* Now I must read your palms. *(Reads the Women's palms. Then closes his eyes)* I see very clearly the real mother with her son twenty years from now. The boy is very sick and can not work to earn money. His mother is working in the rice field to support him. *(Both women gasp.)* And the woman I see in my vision is....

Mother 2: Stop! It's not me! *(Oh-Oka opens his eyes.)* A child is supposed to take care of his parents when they are old, not the other way around.

Oh-Oka: *(To Mother 1)* And how do you feel about this?

Mother 1: It makes no difference, your Honor. I love my child. If he becomes sick, I will be happy to work and support him as long as I live.

Oh-Oka: Then this is really your true son. *(Gives her the baby.)* Oh, I forgot to finish my prophecy. I saw the child recover from the illness and become rich and famous. He, his mother, his fine wife and twelve children lived happily for many, many years.

Narrator: Strangely enough, Oh-Oka's prophecy came true. Everyone was surprised except the judge. He often said later..

Oh-Oka: If I had not become a judge, I would probably have made a pretty good fortune-teller.

The Honest Thief

Characters

Judge Oh-Oka

Old Woman 1

Old Woman 2

Goro, an Unemployed Laborer

Goro's Young Daughter

Narrator

Narrator: Judge Oh-Oka was loved and respected throughout Edo, for he always treated people with fairness and compassion. One day, two old women came to his office.

Oh-Oka: Good morning, ladies. What can I do for you?

Old Woman 1: We are sorry to bother you, Your Honor. My name is Oyoshi, and this is my sister, Oshin. Together we own a rice store downtown.

Old Woman 2: The trouble is, Your Honor, some of our rice disappears each night. It is a very small amount, so we hesitate to trouble you, but...

Old Woman 1: Even a huge mountain can be reduced to nothing if a single grain of sand was taken from it each day for centuries.

Oh-Oka: Yes, that's true. Also, it is just as dishonest to steal one grain of rice as it is to steal a large sack. Did you take proper steps to guard your property?

Old Woman 2: Yes, your Honor. I myself stand guard with the rice every night, but it still disappears!

Old Woman 1: I stood guard with her for the past two nights, but the rice vanished just the same.

Oh-Oka: Well, is it possible that you two fell asleep?

Old Woman 2: No. I am seventy years old, but I'm as alert as when I was seventeen!

Old Woman 1: And I am only eighty, as strong and healthy as any eighteen-year-old!

Oh-Oka: In that case I will watch with you tonight. I need to see this for myself.

Both Old Women: Thank you, your Honor.

Narrator: As he promised, Oh-Oka made his way to the old women's rice store that evening. He was sure that both women had fallen asleep and allowed the thief to sneak in and steal the rice. Before long, his suspicions were proven right. Both women fell asleep within ten minutes.

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Oh-Oka: I knew these old ladies would fall asleep. Now I will stay awake and catch the thief.

Narrator: A little past midnight, Oh-Oka heard a slight sound outside the building.

(Oh-Oka springs to his feet and starts to walk toward the sound. Goro enters, and sneaks around the building. They bump into each other. Both freeze.)

Goro: Who...Who are you?

Narrator: At once Oh-Oka recognized him as Goro, a laborer who had been out of work for some time. But he could not arrest Goro, since he had not seen him steal. Luckily Goro did not recognize the judge, so Oh-Oka decided to pretend he was another thief.

Oh-Oka: Don't worry. I came to steal some rice, too.

Goro: *(Relieved)* Phew! I thought you were a guard or something.

Oh-Oka: I'll do you a favor from one thief to another. I will pass the rice out to you. You don't need to risk coming in yourself.

Goro: Really? Oh, thank you. Thank you.

(Oh-Oka picks a large sack of rice and hands it to Goro.)

Goro: Oh, no! This is too much. I only want a few handfuls.

Oh-Oka: What do you mean? If you are going to steal, you may as well take a large amount. If you get caught, you'll be punished just the same.

Goro: That would be dishonest. I just take enough to feed myself and my daughter for a single day. Each day I hope I will find work and not have to steal anymore. When I do find work, I am going to return all I have taken. *(Takes a few handfuls of rice, bows, and runs away.)*

Oh-Oka: Hmmm. This is interesting. *(Gently shakes the old women.)* Oyoshi! Oshin! Wake up!

Old Woman 1: What... What happened?

Old Woman 2: Oh, no! We've been asleep!

Oh-Oka: It's okay. I met the thief. It is a man named Goro. He has been out of work.

Old Woman 1: Well, where is he, your Honor? Didn't you catch him?

Oh-Oka: No, I let him go, because I believe he is an honest thief.

Old Woman 2: How can a man be a thief and honest at the same time?

Oh-Oka: I never would have thought it was possible, but it's true. He only took enough rice to feed his family for one day, and said he would pay back as soon as he finds work.

Old Women: But, your Honor.....

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Oh-Oka: I have made my decision. Tomorrow I will give him a job that will be sufficient to feed his family and still leave some extra. We'll see if he keeps his promise and bring back the rice he stole.

Narrator: The plan was carried out according to Oh-Oka's wishes. Goro was given a job, without knowing that Oh-Oka was responsible. And, as the judge suspected, every night Goro brought back some rice to the store.

(Old Women are sleeping. Goro sneaks up, leaves a small bag of rice near them, and walks away. The Women wake up and finds the bag. They nod to each other.)

Narrator: Goro paid back little by little. Then one day, he was ready to make the final payment.

Goro: *(Comes to the store with his daughter. To his Daughter,)* Will you please give this bag of rice and this letter to the old ladies in that store? I'll be waiting out here.

(The girl runs to the Old Women and hands them the bag and the letter.)

Old Woman 1: Why, thank you, my dear. *(Reads the letter aloud.)* "I am sorry for what I did. It will never happen again." *(Both women smile.)*

Old Woman 2: What a lovely child! What is your name? How old are you?

Daughter: I'm Momo. I'm six years old.

Old Woman 1: Oh, how clever! Would you like some rice candies? *(hands some to the girl.)*

Daughter: Thank you.

Old Woman 2: Say, did your father give you this letter?

Daughter: Yes, he is waiting outside.

Old Woman 1: Would you please go and bring him in? We would like to thank him.

Daughter: Okay. *(Goes out and grabs Goro's arm. Pulls him inside.)*

Goro: Wha....I didn't mean to....

Old Woman 2: It is all right. Thank you for paying us back. We now know you are a very honest person.

Old Woman 1: And we want you to work for us in our store.

Goro: What? Me? You must be joking.

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Old Woman 2: No, we are serious. After all, my sister and I are getting old. A young man like you will be quite helpful. We would love to have your daughter around, too.

Goro: Thank you. Thank you. I'll be happy to work for you.

Narrator: So everything worked out well in the end, thanks to Judge Oh-Oka, who always treated people of Edo with kindness and compassion.

Oh-Oka and the Pickpockets

Characters:

Judge Oh-Oka

2 Assistants

Old Woman

Young Man

Child

5 Townspeople

5 Pickpockets

Narrator

Narrator: Many different kinds of people lived in the city of Edo, the capital of Old Japan. There were warlords and warriors, farmers, priests, laborers, and merchants. There were also artisans, teachers, beggars, and doctors. And there were thieves, robbers, and pickpockets. Judge Oh-Oka, who was famous for his fairness and wisdom, worked hard to keep the city a safe place. But crime was a constant problem in Edo.

(Townspeople mill about. Pickpocket 1 runs into the crowd, bumps into Old Woman, and runs away.)

Old Woman: (*Screams*) Help! That man stole all my money! Please catch him!

(All the Townspeople notice what happened. Some try to chase the Pickpocket, but he is gone.)

Young Man: I'm sorry, Grandmother, but he's gone.

Old Woman: My life savings were stolen! How am I going to live? (*weeps*)

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Townsperson 1: There are too many pickpockets in Edo!

Townsperson 2: And they never get caught!

Townsperson 3: I hear they even have their own guild and look out for each other!

Townsperson 4: I got robbed just yesterday! My whole day's earnings!

Child: A grownup stole my candy money last week!

Townsperson 5: Last month they took my tuition money. I had to quit school!

All Townspeople: WE CANNOT TAKE THIS ANYMORE!!!!

Narrator: Together the outraged people went to Judge Oh-Oka's office and demanded to see him at once.

Townsperson 1: Your Honor, you must do something about all the pickpockets in Edo.

Townsperson 2: Please, your Honor. We work hard to make an honest living. They are sucking our blood!

Townsperson 3: They even have their own guild. This is outrageous!

Townsperson 4: Penalties for theft are too low! Anyone who steals should be more severely punished!

Townsperson 5: If you don't do anything, we will take the law into our own hands!

Oh-Oka: Quiet! I understand your problem. You must give me three days, and I promise I will put things in order.

(Townspeople leave, some still complaining.)

Narrator: Oh-Oka had to think hard. He obviously could not catch every petty criminal in the city. Yet people counted on him. He did not eat or sleep for three days. On the third day, he finally came up with an idea.

Oh-Oka: *(Writes something down on a piece of paper and reads out loud.)*

"Attention! All Pickpockets of Edo!

We have been informed that members of the Guild of Pickpockets of Edo are carrying out their profession without paying any taxes. It is required by law that every guild member must pay taxes. Therefore it has been decided that any pickpocket who wants to work in Edo must carry an official license. The fee is five copper coins, and the owners of

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such a license will not be punished for their activities, even if caught. Whoever robs the honest citizens of Edo without a license will be beheaded without further trial as a warning to others. All members of the Guild of Pickpockets must pay the fee and collect their licenses at the court on the first day of the next month at nine o'clock in the morning. Ignorance of this notice is no excuse.

The Office of Supreme Judge Oh-Oka."

Assistants! (*Assistants enter. Oh-Oka hands them the paper.*) Make this an official public notice, and post it up throughout the city.

Assistants: Yes, your Honor, right away. (*Go around, posting up the notices.*)

Narrator: When people read the notice, they were shocked and confused.

Townsperson 1: What kind of nonsense is this? An official license for pickpockets?

Townsperson 2: So they can rob us anytime they want? This is insane!

Townsperson 3: Judge Oh-Oka has gone crazy!

Townsperson 4: Maybe the pickpockets bribed him!

Townsperson 5: Yes, I always say those in power are not to be trusted!

Narrator: But even more confused were the pickpockets themselves. Late one night, they quietly gathered at an old, deserted temple at the edge of the city to discuss what to do.

Pickpocket 1: Okay, guys, what should we do?

Pickpocket 2: This is a trap. Once we show up at the court, Oh-Oka will have us locked up, and we'll never get out.

Pickpocket 3: But he can't arrest us without a proof.

Pickpocket 4: Look, the notice clearly says if we rob without a license, we'll be beheaded. Who wants to be a head shorter, I'd like to know?

All Pickpockets: NOBODY!

Pickpocket 5: Shhhhhh, quiet! Listen, Oh-Oka is popular among people, because he is supposed to be fair. He wouldn't try to ruin his reputation by putting a lie in the public notice. I say we go along with what he says, and see what happens. (*Everyone nods.*)

Pickpocket 1: All right, then. We all will show up at the court.

Narrator: On the first day of the next month, the courthouse was crowded long before nine o'clock in the morning. Hundreds of pickpockets came, as well as many curious townspeople.

Assistant 1: Your Honor, they are all here.

Assistant 2: What a crowd! Who would have guessed there are so many pickpockets in Edo!

Oh-Oka: All right. Do everything as I told you.

Assistant 1: Yes, sir. *(To the Pickpockets)* Will all pickpockets applying for the license please line up!? *(They line up.)* Now each of you must pay five copper coins. *(Collects the money.)*

Assistant 2: Now each of you must sign this official document. It says, *(reads)* "I declare as of today I will always carry the official license. If I am caught without it in the act of stealing, I will be beheaded without a court hearing." Please sign here. *(Collects signatures.)*

Oh-Oka: Very well. *(To Assistants)* Now bring in the official licenses.

(Assistants bring in large, red, wooden signboards. The inscription reads, "Officially Licensed Pickpocket" in golden letters. They start to hang the signs around each pickpocket's neck.)

Pickpocket 1: What?! What is this?

Pickpocket 2: This sign is too big! How can we steal like this?

Pickpocket 3: You've tricked us!!

Pickpockets 4 & 5: We'd better get out of here!

(They try to run, but the Assistants block their way.)

Oh-Oka: Wait! Now that you signed the official document, you must obey the law. Good luck with your business! As for the tax we collected, it will be given to elderly citizens who have been robbed.

Narrator: When the townspeople saw the pickpockets with the big signs, they just laughed and laughed. All the pickpockets disappeared quickly not only from the courthouse, but also from Edo. Thanks to Oh-Oka and his wisdom, the city was free of them for a long time.