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UNGUIN ACTIVE READING

LEVEL 3

# Japanese Ghost Stories

Lafcadio Hearn



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### What's the book about?

- 1 Read about the stories on the back of the book. Then discuss the picture on the front cover.
  - a Where are these stories from?
  - b What do you think the cover story is about?
- 2 These words are all important in the stories. Check their meanings at the bottom of pages 1 and 2. Then put the right forms of the words in the story below.

blind ghost haunt pray priest spirit temple

A man was walking through a dark forest when, suddenly, he saw an old stone <sup>a</sup> ..... There was a stone buddha in the wall. A <sup>b</sup> ..... was on his knees, <sup>c</sup> ..... to the buddha. The man called the priest and the priest turned to him. The man saw that his eyes were closed. He was <sup>d</sup> ..... The man was afraid. He felt that there were <sup>e</sup> ..... cheering in the air around him. Was the temple <sup>f</sup> ..... ? He looked behind him. There were only dark trees. He turned back. The priest was gone. He wasn't a priest – he was a <sup>g</sup> .....! The man screamed and ran back into the forest.

- 3 Discuss these questions.
  - a You are in an old house with a friend. You go upstairs and see strange lights. Suddenly, there is a loud noise. What will you do?
  - b Do you believe in ghosts? Have you ever seen one? Tell the story.

### What happens first?

Read the words in *italics> on page 1, opposite, and look at the picture. What do you think? Tick (✓) the best answers.*

- 1 The listeners are listening to
  - a  a ghost story.
  - b  the story of a big fight.
- 2 They are crying wildly because
  - a  the story is so sad.
  - b  they are going to die.

## The Blind Musician

*All the listeners cried out together – a long, long cry of pain.  
They cried loudly and wildly and the blind man was frightened.*

More than 700 years ago there was a great fight at sea at a place called Dan-no-ura. It was the last great fight between two peoples – the Heiké and the Genji. All the Heiké fighters died there with their women and children, and their child **emperor**. His name was Antoku Tennō. And the Heiké **ghosts** have **haunted** that coast since that time.

The Heiké ghosts are quieter these days, but in earlier times they were a danger to ships. Ghostly lights circled around ships in the night as the **spirits** tried to pull them down under the water. They watched for swimmers and tried to pull them down too.

In a town on that coast – Akamagasaki – the people of the town built a Buddhist **temple** to try to please the Heiké spirits. The temple was called Amidaji. They built a garden for the dead too, near the beach. They put up



**emperor** /'empəɹəl/ (n) the head of government of a country, or a number of countries; these lands are his *empire*

**ghost** /gəʊst/ (n) the part of a person that lives after death. *Ghostly* places are visited by ghosts.

**haunt** /hɔ:nt/ (v) to visit a place often (used of ghosts and spirits)

**spirit** /'spɪrɪt/ (n) the part of a person that is believed to live after death

**temple** /'tempəl/ (n) a place where people practise their religion

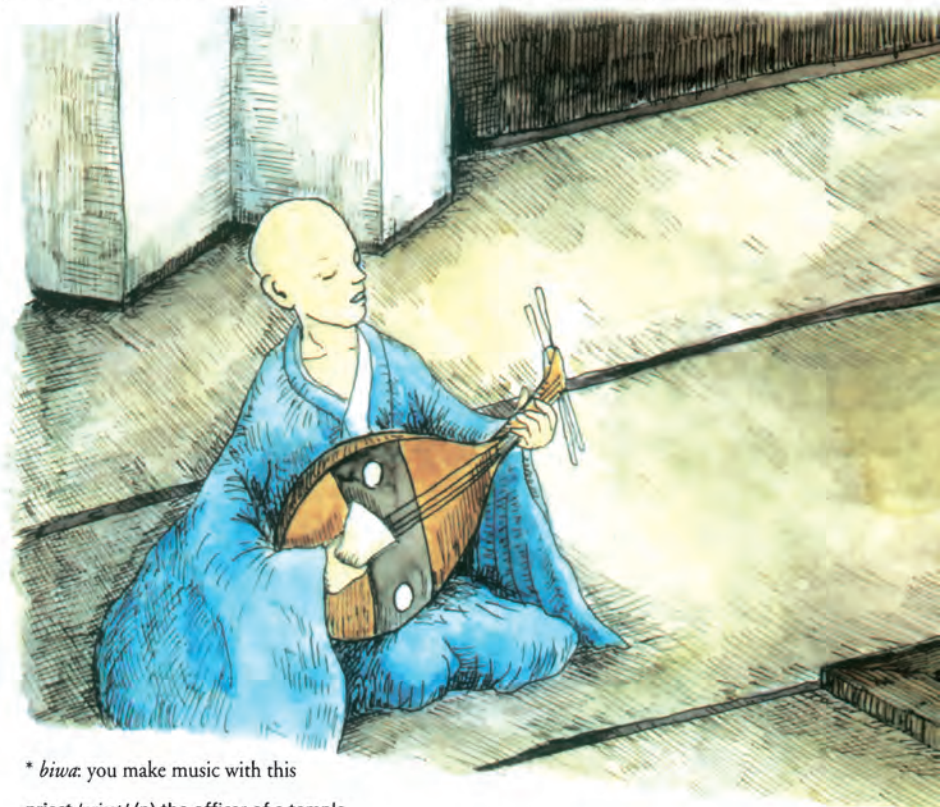


stones with the names of the child emperor and his great followers. A Buddhist **priest** said **prayers** for the spirits of the dead. After that, the Heiké were less trouble. But they did strange things at times; something was still worrying them.

At that time there lived a young **blind** man named Hōichi. He was famous for **performing** poems and playing the *biwa*\*. He learned both skills as a child, and he soon performed better than his teachers.

Hōichi grew up and became a professional *biwa* player, and his most famous performance was the history of the Heiké and the Genji. When he sang the song of Dan-no-ura, even the bad spirits cried.

At first Hōichi was very poor. Then he found a good friend at the Amidaji temple. The priest of the temple loved poems and music, and he often asked Hōichi to perform for him. He thought young Hōichi had wonderful skills. The priest invited Hōichi to live at the temple, and Hōichi accepted gratefully. In



\* *biwa*: you make music with this

**priest** /pri:st/ (n) the officer of a temple

**pray** /preɪ/ (v) to ask the Buddha for help. A *prayer* is the words that you say.

**blind** /blaɪnd/ (adj) unable to see

**perform** /pə'fɔ:m/ (v) to dance, sing or act in front of other people; to do

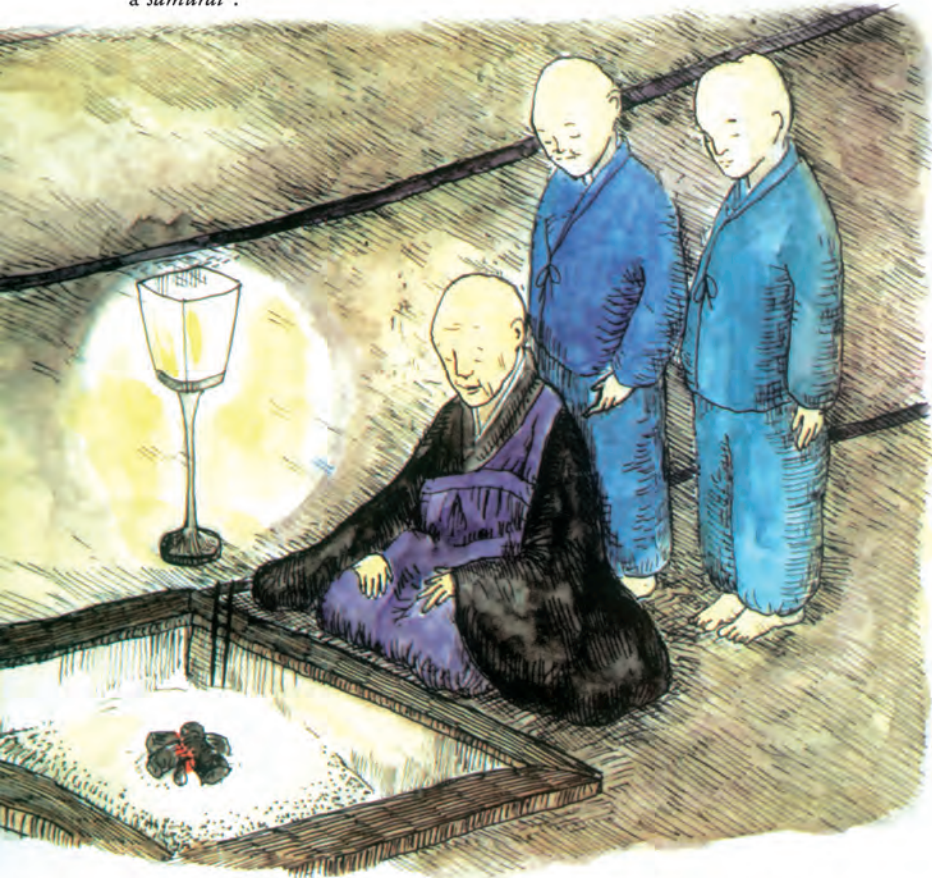
return for food and a bed, Hōichi only had to perform on two or three evenings each week.

One summer night, the priest was called away. His assistant went with him and Hōichi was left alone in the temple. It was a hot night and the blind man was too warm in his bedroom.

Behind his room was a small garden. Hōichi waited for the priest there and practised the *biwa*. Midnight passed and the priest did not return. But Hōichi stayed outside.

At last he heard some footsteps at the back gate. They came nearer. Somebody crossed the little garden and stopped in front of Hōichi ... but it was not the priest.

'Hōichi!' A deep, angry voice called the blind man's name. It was the voice of a *samurai*\*



\* *samurai*: a class of Japanese soldiers, seen as upper class from the late 1500s





Lafcadio Hearn

**British English**  
*Classic*

A blind musician plays to the spirits of the dead. A priest is attacked by heads that have left their bodies. An old man meets a woman who has no face. Read these and many more strange, ghostly stories from old Japan – and be afraid!

**Level 3**  
**1200 headwords**  
**Pre-intermediate**

*Number of words (excluding activities): 16,006*

*Series Editors: Jocelyn Potter and Andy Hopkins*

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