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Document 46: “Their previously sullen faces turned into smiling ones.” Music teacher Tamura Torazō, describing his own efforts to promote child-friendly music education at the end of the 19th century.

This writer became aware of the unsuitability of a large part of this teaching material for elementary school children, . . . Its song texts as well as its melodies, due to their being by far too advanced and elevated, were unsuitable for elementary school children. That is to say, all the song texts are stiffened by successive instances of archaisms and precious phrasings. . . . They are literary masterpieces of adults, by no means pieces for children’s minds, the melodies as well being slow-moving in an adult-like manner, so that they, just like the songs as a whole, are after all not something that appeals to the thought and feeling of elementary school children. . . .

I obtained some kinds of English, American, German and French elementary school songbooks in the autumn of 1896 and tried to examine their content in detail. Thereupon it struck me at once that, with regard to their song texts and melodies, *there is children’s poetry for children, and this is likewise the case regarding melodies*. That is to say . . . , in melody and also in text there really are *simple* matters only. To this I gave some thought. At least for small children one ought to write pieces that are based on their conversational every-day language. And then the idea took shape that one ought to grasp those matters that are in the minds of small children. And that, regarding their tunes, one has likewise to consider how to handle their intervals and voice range and to let them proceed in clear, elating rhythms and melodies when singing. Then I composed two or three *Genbun-itchi* (writing that uses colloquial language) song

texts of different kinds by myself, set fitting melodies to them . . . and cautiously tried to teach them to the children. . . . The children welcomed this greatly, their previously sullen faces turned into smiling ones, and they sang with shining eyes and in a cheerful mood. This, in fact, took place at the end of 1899. At this point I gained strong self-confidence and concluded that, well, come what may, these were the best children's songs for the lower school grades. And then I went on like this thinking that the writing of children's songs, including their melodies, is something that ought to be done by persons who have some actual connection with the education of small children.

“Momo kara umareta Momotarō” (Momotarō, born in a peach), one of Tamura's songs:

From the inside of a peach was Momotarō born,
Good and kind, so was his heart, strong and forceful too.
To attack Demon's Island he determined was,
In high spirits off he went, left his home behind.

Japan's First and Foremost Dumpling, made of millet grain,
He gave to the Dog and Monkey who did follow him.
Pheasant too did receive one, also joined with them.
Hurry up, come, all of you, do not stay behind.

Fierce and bitter was the battle, great the victory.
They did Evil Demon's Island ambush and attack.
What reward, precious treasure, did they take away?



Silver, gold and corals red, silk and fine brocade.

On a cart they piled and loaded precious treasures high,

And the dog he started pulling, hey, hey-ho, hey-ho!

From behind pushed the monkey, hey, hey-ho, hey-ho!

Pheasant strongly pulled the rope, hey, hey-ho, hey-ho!

Source: Ury Eppstein. *The Beginnings of Western Music in Meiji Era Japan*. Lewiston, NY: The Edwin Mellen Press, 1994, 82-87.

Context.

Debates over what path Japan should take to modernity extended into every area of life in the Meiji period (1868-1912), including the schools' music curriculum. Educators introduced Western style music to children in the early Meiji years, then, after the 1890s, shifted directions, attempting increasingly to make music instruction relevant (and enjoyable) for children and to use songs that aligned with Japan's own traditions. This recollection by the influential music educator Tamura Torazō shows the careful thought that went into music education.

Traditionalists criticized Tamura's approach, insisting that children should learn more "high-toned" songs, but by 1902 he had published ten volumes of the new music and the criticism had become "like a dead fire."



Questions.

1. Why did children not respond well to the early-Meiji approach to teaching music?
2. What about the era's general tone might have prompted Tamura to go to Western models when he wanted to find more effective ways of teaching music?
3. Why might children have liked the Momotarō song? What lessons would they have learned from it?

Terms.

1. *Genbun-itchi*. After the 1890s, there was widespread agitation to have schools, newspapers, and other public materials written in colloquial language rather than in the hard-to-read classical styles that long had dominated written language. The movement was controversial, but by the early 1900s, colloquial styles had been adopted in the schools. Newspapers and officials eventually followed suit.
2. *Momotarō*. One of Japan's most popular folktales was that of Momotarō (Peach Boy), a lad who was discovered inside a peach by an old woman out washing clothes. He grew up very quickly, then went off with a monkey, a dog, and a pheasant to attack the devils on Demon's Island, where he captured great treasures for the old woman and her husband.