

Ooka and the Stolen Smell

by I. G. Edmonds



Jn the days of old Yedo, as Tokyo was once called, storytellers told wonderful tales. Many of the stories were about the wit and wisdom of Ooka Tadasuke.

Ooka was a famous judge. He never refused to hear a complaint. It did not matter if it seemed strange. It did not matter if it seemed foolish. People came to his court with the most unusual cases. But Ooka always agreed to listen to them. And the strangest case of all was the famous "Case of the Stolen Smell."

It all began when a poor student rented a room over a tempura shop. That is a shop where fried food is sold. The student was a poor, young man. Everyone liked him. But the shopkeeper was a miser. He suspected one and all of trying to get the better of him. He thought everyone was trying to cheat him.

One day, he heard the student talking with one of his friends.

The friend complained, "It is sad to be so poor that one can afford to eat only plain rice."



"Oh," said the student, "I have found a very fine answer to that problem. Every day, I eat my rice at the same time that the shopkeeper downstairs fries his fish. The smell floats up. That makes my humble rice seem to have much more flavor. It is really the smell, you know, that makes things taste so good."

The shopkeeper was **furious**. To think that someone was enjoying the smell of his fish for nothing!

"Thief!" he shouted to the student. "I demand that you pay me for the smells you have stolen."

"A smell is a smell," the young man answered. "Anyone can smell what he wants to. I will pay you nothing."

The shopkeeper went into a rage. He rushed to Ooka's court. There he charged the student with theft. Of course everyone laughed at him. For how could anyone steal a smell? They thought that Ooka would surely smile and



send the man away. But to everyone's surprise, the judge agreed to hear the case.

"All people must be given their hour in court," Ooka explained. "This man feels very strongly about the smells of his food. He feels strongly enough to make a complaint. It is only right that I, as chief judge of the city, should hear the case."

The people in the court smiled. They were amused. But Ooka only frowned at them.

Ooka took his place on the bench. Then he listened very carefully to the evidence. Finally he said, "I have made my decision. There is no doubt that the student is guilty. This is quite clear. Taking another person's property is **theft**. And I cannot see that a smell is different from any other property."

The shopkeeper was delighted. But the student was very upset. He was quite poor. And now he owed the shopkeeper for three months' worth of smelling. He would surely be thrown into prison.

"How much money do you have?" Ooka asked him.

"Only five mon, Your Honor," the boy answered. "And I need that to pay my rent, or I will be thrown out into the street."

"Let me see the money," said the judge.

The young man held out his hand. Ooka nodded. Then he told him to drop the coins from one hand to the other.

The judge listened to the pleasant clink of the money as it bounced from hand to hand.

Then Ooka said to the shopkeeper, "Now you have been paid. If you have any other complaints in the future, please bring them to the court. It is our wish always to be fair."

"But, Your Honor," the shopkeeper protested, "I did not get the money! The thief dropped it from one hand to the other. See. I have nothing! See!" He held up his empty hands.

Ooka looked at him very closely. Then Ooka said, "This court believes that the punishment should fit the crime. I have decided that the price of the *smell* of food shall be the *sound* of money. Therefore, you have been paid. **Justice**, as usual, has been done in my court."

GETTING THE MEANING OF THE STORY. Complete each of the following sentences by putting an *x* in the box next to the correct answer. Each sentence helps you get the meaning of the story.

1. The shopkeeper demanded that the student pay him for the
 a. rice he had eaten.
 b. smells he had stolen.
 c. fish he had bought.
2. Everyone thought that Ooka would
 a. decide that the student was wrong.
 b. send the shopkeeper to prison.
 c. refuse to listen to the case.
3. Ooka asked the student to
 a. drop some coins from one hand to the other.
 b. give some money to the shopkeeper.
 c. stop stealing the smells in the future.
4. The judge decided that the price of the smell of food is
 a. five mon.
 b. a handful of coins.
 c. the sound of money.

× 5 =
NUMBER CORRECT YOUR SCORE

REVIEWING STORY ELEMENTS. Each of the following questions reviews your understanding of story elements. Put an *x* in the box next to the correct answer to each question.

1. What happened first in the *plot* of the story?
 a. A student rented a room over a shop where fried food was sold.
 b. The judge listened very carefully to the facts.
 c. The shopkeeper rushed to Ooka's court to complain about the student.
2. In this story, the *conflict* is between
 a. two students.
 b. a shopkeeper and a student.
 c. a judge and a student.
3. Which sentence best *characterizes* Ooka?
 a. He tried to be helpful, but he did not understand the law very well.
 b. He was lazy and foolish.
 c. He was wise and clever.
4. What is the *setting* of the story?
 a. China, today
 b. Tokyo, years ago
 c. India, at the present time

× 5 =
NUMBER CORRECT YOUR SCORE

EXAMINING VOCABULARY WORDS. Answer the following vocabulary questions by putting an *x* in the box next to the correct answer. The vocabulary words are printed in **boldface** in the story. If you wish, look back at the words before you answer the questions.

- The shopkeeper was furious and went into a rage. What is the meaning of the word *furious*?
 - a. delighted
 - b. very smart
 - c. very angry
- The judge said, "Taking another person's property is theft." The word *theft* means
 - a. spending.
 - b. stealing.
 - c. finding.
- The shopkeeper was a miser; he tried to charge the student for smelling his fish. A *miser* is a person who
 - a. is very cheap and loves money.
 - b. is friendly and helpful to others.
 - c. never complains about anything.
- Ooka believed that justice, as usual, had been done in his court. Which of the following best defines (gives the meaning of) the word *justice*?
 - a. fair play
 - b. silly actions
 - c. high hopes

	× 5 =	
NUMBER CORRECT		YOUR SCORE

ADDING WORDS TO A PASSAGE. Complete the following paragraph by filling in each blank with one of the words listed in the box below. Each of the words appears in the story. Since there are five words and four blanks, one word in the group will not be used.

Rice is the main _____ of many people around the world. In some countries in Asia, for example, the people _____ rice three times a day. In those nations, the _____ eat an average of 200–300 pounds of rice each year. In the United States, the average is much less. It is 6–7 pounds of _____ a year for each person.

people food

room

rice eat

	× 5 =	
NUMBER CORRECT		YOUR SCORE

THINKING ABOUT THE STORY. Each of the following questions will help you to think critically about the selection. Put an *x* in the box next to the correct answer.

- It is fair to say that Ooka did not wish to
 - a. listen to strange or unusual cases.
 - b. punish the student for his crime.
 - c. be fair to the shopkeeper.
- The people in the court probably thought that
 - a. the student should have been thrown into prison.
 - b. the shopkeeper should have been given some money.
 - c. the shopkeeper got what he deserved.
- When did the student eat his rice?
 - a. whenever he got hungry
 - b. when the shopkeeper fried his fish
 - c. as soon as he arrived home from school
- At the end of the story, the shopkeeper probably felt
 - a. amused.
 - b. pleased.
 - c. unhappy.

	× 5 =	
NUMBER CORRECT		YOUR SCORE

Thinking More about the Story. Your teacher might want you to write your answers.

- If you were the judge, would you have let this case come to your court? Give reasons to support your answer.
- Did you agree with what Ooka decided? Explain your answer.
- What lesson or lessons can be drawn from this story? Think of as many as you can.

Use the boxes below to total your scores for the exercises.

	+	G ETTING THE MEANING OF THE STORY
	+	R EVIEWING STORY ELEMENTS
	+	E XAMINING VOCABULARY WORDS
	+	A DDING WORDS TO A PASSAGE
	+	T HINKING ABOUT THE STORY
	▼	Score Total: Story 11