

8 The Snow Woman

an old story from Japan

Before You Read

Before you read “The Snow Woman,” go over the words below. Make sure you know what each word means. This will help you when you read the story.

forest: land that is covered with trees. He cut down a tree in the *forest*.

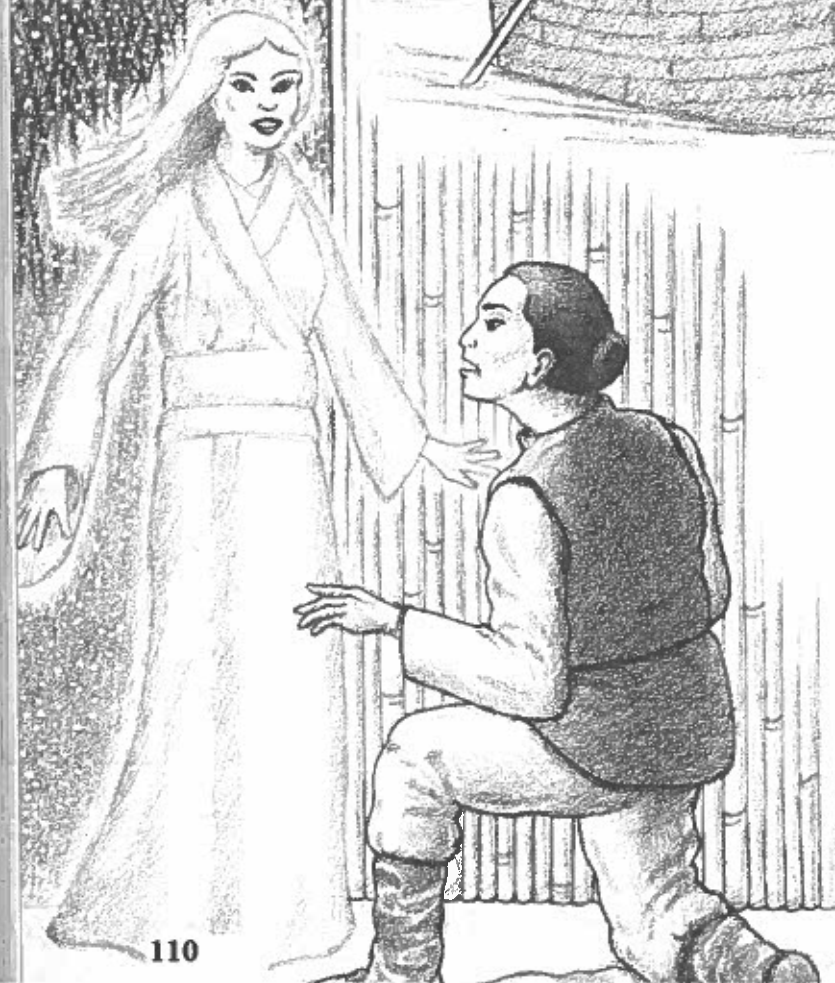
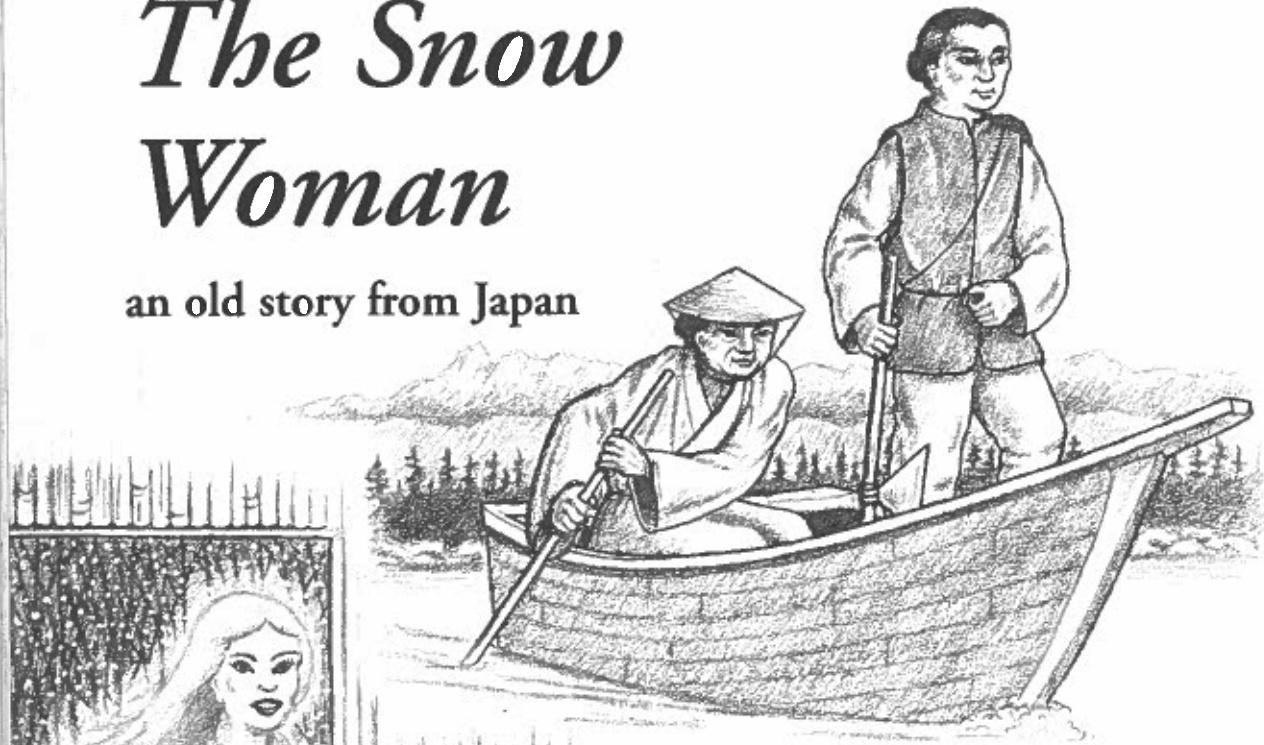
breath: the air that comes out of your mouth. On a cold day, you can see your *breath*.

smoke: something that comes from a fire when it is burning. Dark *smoke* came from the fire.

touch: to feel. Do not *touch* the animals in the zoo.

The Snow Woman

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This story is strange. It is also very old. It was told more than 100 years ago.

This is the story of Niki. Niki was a woodcutter. He was 18 years old. He lived in a village in Japan.

One morning Niki went off to cut wood. He had to go to a forest. It was far from the village.

Niki walked for a long time. Then he came to a river. There was a man at the river. The man had a boat. The man took Niki across the river.

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Niki worked all day. Evening came. Then Niki started for home. It had been snowing since noon. Now it was snowing very hard.

Niki thought, "What shall I do? I cannot swim across the river. I must find someplace to stay."

Niki looked around. He saw a very small house. It was made of wood. It was really just a hut. But it was better than nothing at all.

Niki hurried to the hut. He pushed open the door. No one was there.

Niki went inside. He pulled the door shut. The hut was so small, he could not make a fire. There was not even a window.



Niki lay down to rest. He thought, "It will stop snowing soon. The man with the boat will come back. Then he will take me across the river."

Niki could not sleep. He listened to the wind. It was very loud. He could also hear the snow. It kept hitting the hut.

Then Niki began to get cold. He got colder and colder. He had never felt so cold! Soon he fell asleep.

Suddenly Niki woke up. He felt snow against his face. The door of the hut was open. Snow was blowing in.

Niki saw a woman. She was walking through the snow. She was coming toward the hut.

Niki was surprised. He looked at the woman. She was a woman in white! She was as white as the snow. She seemed to be made out of snow. She was like a snow woman.

Now she was standing next to him. She was tall. Breath came out of her mouth. The breath looked like white smoke. Niki did not like the white smoke. He did not want it to touch him.

He thought, "The smoke must not touch me. If it does, I will die."

Niki saw that the woman was beautiful. But he was afraid of her.

She did not say a word. She kept looking at him. Then she said, "You are young. You are very young. I feel sorry for you."

She said softly, "I will not hurt you now. I will let you live. I will not let you die."

She went on, "But you must never talk about this. You must never say a word. Do not even tell your mother."



The woman turned to go. She said, "Remember! If you tell anyone about me, I will know. I will come back. And then you will die!"

The woman moved away from Niki. She went out the door.

At first Niki could not move. His legs were like stone. But soon he was able to walk. He went to the door. He looked out.

Where was the woman in white? Niki did not see her.

The snow was blowing hard. Niki closed the door. He put his back against it. Had it all been a dream? Had he really seen a woman in white? Or had he been looking at snow? Niki did not know.

Suddenly it stopped snowing. The sun began to shine. Niki went outside. He waited near the river. The man with the boat came back. The man took Niki across the river. Then Niki went home.

Niki felt ill. He got into bed. He stayed there for two days. Then he felt better. He started working again. He got up every morning. He went to the forest to cut wood. He did not say a word about the woman in white.

A year went by. One evening, Niki was going home. He saw a young woman. She was walking along the road.

"Good evening," Niki said.

"Good evening," she answered.





The woman was tall. Niki thought she was pretty. He walked next to her.

They began to talk. Her voice was very sweet. It was like the song of a bird. Niki liked her at once. And she seemed to like him.

She said, "My name is Olan. My mother and father are dead. I am going to Yedo. My grandmother lives there. I will live with her. She will help me find work."

Niki said, "You must be tired. You have walked for a long time. Come to my house. You can rest there for a while. My mother will make supper for you."

Olan thought about that. Then she said, "All right."

Niki's mother made supper for Olan. The two women got along very well. Niki's mother liked Olan very much. She said to Olan, "Stay here for a while. You can have your own room. You can work around the house. You can go to Yedo later. It is far away from here."

Olan said she would stay. She never did go to Yedo. She and Niki fell in love. A little later they got married.

Ten years went by. Niki and Olan were very happy. They had four children. They had two girls and two boys.

Everyone liked Olan very much. A neighbor said, "Olan is very good. She is a good mother. She is a good wife. She is very kind to Niki's mother. But Olan is not like us. All of us get older. But Olan does not. Olan stays the same. She looks as young as she was the day she came here."



One night the children were asleep. Olan was sitting in a chair. She was reading.

Niki sat next to her. He suddenly said, "Olan. I have been looking at you. Your face is so beautiful. It makes me think of something. It happened a long time ago. I was only 18 years old. I saw someone then. She was as beautiful as you."

Niki stopped talking. He was looking at Olan. "Yes," he said. "She was also tall. She was very much like you."

Olan did not say a word.

Niki went on. He told her about the time in the hut. He told her about the woman in white. He called her "the snow woman."

He said, "She was the only woman I ever saw who was as beautiful as you. But she was only a dream. I mean . . . I *think* she was a dream. I have never been sure."

Suddenly Olan threw down what she was reading. She stood up. She was very angry. She said, "That was no dream! It was I! I was the woman in the snow! I told you never to say a word about that! Remember? I said you would die if you did!"

Niki looked at Olan. She was angry. But she also looked sad.

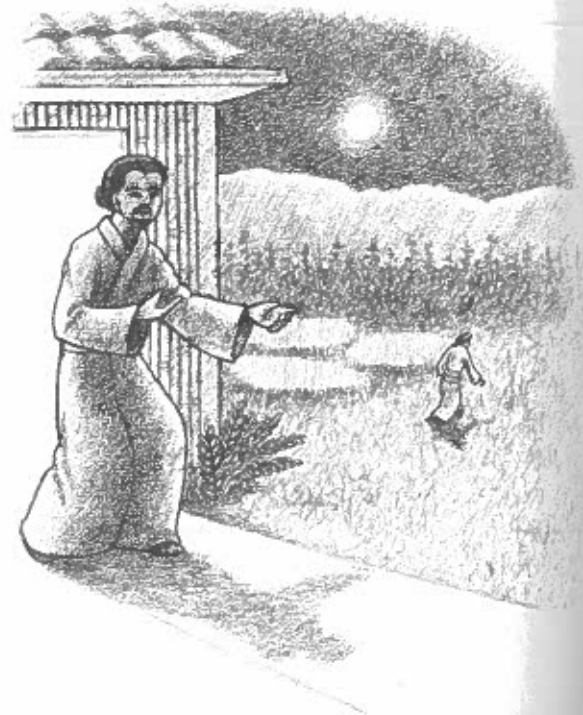
Olan said, "I should not let you live. I gave my word."

She kept looking at Niki. She said softly, "But I love you very much. And I love our children. What should I do?"

Then she said, "There is only one thing to do. I must leave you now. I must leave our home. I must leave our children."

Niki was very surprised. He could not talk. He could not say a word.

Olan moved to the door. Then she went outside. Niki found his voice. "Wait, Olan!" he cried. Niki hurried to the door. He looked around. But Olan was gone. He never saw her again.



TELL ABOUT THE STORY.

Put an X in the box next to the right answer. Each answer tells something (a *fact*) about the story.

- Niki went to the forest to
 - a. hunt animals.
 - b. cut wood.
 - c. look for a lost friend.
- The woman in white seemed to be made out of
 - a. stone.
 - b. glass.
 - c. snow.
- The woman in white said that Niki should
 - a. tell his mother what happened.
 - b. never say a word about what happened.
 - c. go home at once.
- Olan told Niki that she
 - a. was the woman in the snow.
 - b. would never leave him.
 - c. did not love their children.

x 5 =
NUMBER
CORRECT

x 5 =

YOUR
SCORE

END EACH LINE.

Finish the lines below. Fill in each empty space with one of the words in the box. Each word can be found in the story. There are five words and four empty spaces. This means that one word in the box will not be used.

There are places where it snows all the _____. But there are also places where it never snows at _____. Are you used to seeing snow fall from the _____? Or are you one of the many people who have never seen _____?

sky	colder
all	snow
time	

SHOW WHAT WORDS MEAN.

The words below are printed in **dark letters** in the story. You may look back at these vocabulary words before you answer the questions. Put an X in the box next to the right answer.

1. Niki pushed open the door of the hut. What is a *hut*?
 a. a big building
 b. a small house
 c. a little boat
2. Did it happen, or was it a dream? A *dream* is
 a. a long night.
 b. a lot of snow.
 c. what you see when you are sleeping.
3. The sun began to shine. The word *shine* means to
 a. be bright with light.
 b. get very dark.
 c. fall slowly.
4. Niki was ill and stayed at home. When you are *ill*, you
 a. work hard.
 b. feel well.
 c. do not feel well.

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NUMBER CORRECT		YOUR SCORE

THINK ABOUT THE STORY.

Here is how to answer these questions. First think about what happened in the story. Then work out the right answers. This is called *critical thinking*.

1. The snow woman did not kill Niki because
 a. he ran away from her.
 b. it was too cold.
 c. she felt sorry for him.
2. Which one is true?
 a. Olan was very short.
 b. Olan did not seem to get older.
 c. Olan lived with her grandmother.
3. Olan was angry at Niki because he
 a. told her about the snow woman.
 b. was not a good father.
 c. did not love her.
4. If Niki had not told Olan about the snow woman, Olan would have
 a. gone away.
 b. made him tell her the story.
 c. stayed with him.

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NUMBER CORRECT		YOUR SCORE

SPOT PARTS OF A STORY.

Stories have **characters**, a **plot**, and a **setting**. (See page 3.) Put an X in the box next to the right answer.

1. What happened last? (**Plot**)
 a. Niki's mother made supper for Olan.
 b. Niki saw the woman.
 c. Olan said, "I must leave our home."
2. Which best tells about Olan? (**Character**)
 a. She did not get along with Niki's mother.
 b. She was beautiful and different from other people.
 c. The neighbors did not like her.
3. Where does the story take place? (**Setting**)
 a. in Japan
 b. in England
 c. in the United States
4. When does the story take place? (**Setting**)
 a. a year ago
 b. 10 years ago
 c. many years ago

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NUMBER CORRECT		YOUR SCORE

THINK SOME MORE ABOUT THE STORY.

Your teacher might want you to write your answers.

- Why do you think the snow woman let Niki live?
- A neighbor said that Olan was "not like us." How was she different?
- Why did Olan go away at the end of the story?

Write your scores in the box below. Then write your scores on pages 122 and 123.

<input type="text"/>	+	TELL ABOUT THE STORY
<input type="text"/>	+	END EACH LINE
<input type="text"/>	+	SHOW WHAT WORDS MEAN
<input type="text"/>	+	THINK ABOUT THE STORY
<input type="text"/>	+	SPOT PARTS OF A STORY
<input type="text"/>	=	TOTAL SCORE: Story 8

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