

The Calabash Kids

Told by Aaron Shepard

Adapted by LHU Language Center

Characters:

Narrators 1–3, Shindo, Chieftain, Children 1–3, Woman

NARRATOR 1: Once there was a woman named Shindo. Her husband had died, and she had no children, so she was very lonely.

NARRATOR 2: And she was always tired too, for she had no one to help with the chores.

NARRATOR 3: At the end of each day, Shindo gazed up at the snowy peak and prayed.

SHINDO: Great Mountain Spirit! My work is too hard. Send me help!

NARRATOR 1: One day, Shindo was weeding her small field by the river. Suddenly, a noble chieftain appeared beside her.

CHIEFTAIN: I am a messenger from the Great Mountain Spirit. Plant these gourd seeds carefully. They are the answer to your prayers.

NARRATOR 2: Then the chieftain vanished.

SHINDO: (*skeptically, looking at the seeds in her hand*) What help could I get from a handful of seeds?

NARRATOR 3: Still, she planted and tended them as carefully as she could.

NARRATOR 1: In just a week, long vines trailed over the ground, and ripe gourds hung from them.

NARRATOR2: Shindo brought the gourds home, sliced off the tops, and scooped out the pulp. Then she laid the gourds on the rafters of her hut to dry.

NARRATOR 3: When they hardened, she could sell them at the market as calabashes, to be made into bowls and jugs.

NARRATOR 1: One fine gourd Shindo set by the cook fire. This one she wanted to use herself, and she hoped it would dry faster.

NARRATOR 2: The next morning, Shindo went off again to tend her field.

NARRATOR 3: But meanwhile, back in the hut,

NARRATOR 1: the gourds began to change.

NARRATOR 2: They sprouted heads,

NARRATOR 3: then arms,

NARRATOR 1: then legs.

NARRATOR 2: Soon they were not gourds at all.

NARRATOR 3: They were—

ALL NARRATORS: children!

NARRATOR 1: One boy lay by the fire, where Shindo had put the fine gourd.

NARRATOR 2: The other children called to him from the rafters.

CHILDREN:

Ki-te-te, come help us!
We'll work for our mother.
Come help us, Ki-te-te,
Our favorite brother!

NARRATOR 3: Kitete helped his brothers and sisters down from the rafters.

NARRATOR 1: Then the children started quickly on the chores.

CHILD 1: Clean the hut! Feed the chickens!

CHILD 2: Wash the clothes! Carry water!

CHILD 3: Cut the wood! Cook the meal!

NARRATOR 1: All joined in but Kitete.

NARRATOR 2: Drying by the fire had made the boy slow-witted. So he just sat there, smiling widely.

NARRATOR 3: When the work was done, Kitete helped the others climb back on the rafters.

NARRATOR 1: Then they all turned again into gourds.

NARRATOR 2: That afternoon, as Shindo returned home, a woman of the village called to her.

WOMAN: Who were those children in your yard today?

SHINDO: (*angrily*) What children? Are you making fun of me?

NARRATOR 3: But when she reached her hut, she was astounded.

NARRATOR 1: The work was done, and even her meal was ready!

NARRATOR 2: She could not imagine who had helped her.

NARRATOR 3: The same thing happened the next day. Once more, Shindo came home and was amazed to see the work all done. But this time, she decided to find out who were her helpers.

NARRATOR 1: The next morning, Shindo pretended to leave, but she hid beside the door of the hut and peeked in. And so she saw the gourds turn into children,

NARRATOR 2: with heads

NARRATOR 3: and arms

NARRATOR 1: and legs.

NARRATOR 2: And she heard the ones on the rafters call out,

CHILDREN:

Ki-te-te, come help us!
We'll work for our mother.
Come help us, Ki-te-te,
Our favorite brother!

NARRATOR 3: Kitete helped them down. As the children rushed out the door, they nearly ran into Shindo.

NARRATOR 1: She was too astonished to speak, and so were the children. But after a moment, they went on with their chores.

CHILD 1: Clean the hut! Feed the chickens!

CHILD 2: Wash the clothes! Carry water!

CHILD 3: Cut the wood! Cook the meal!

NARRATOR 2: When they were done, they started to climb back to the rafters.

SHINDO: (*urgently*) No, no! You must not change back into gourds! You will be the children I never had, and I will love you and care for you!

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NARRATOR 1: So Shindo kept the children as her own.

NARRATOR 2: She was no longer lonely.

NARRATOR 3: And the children were so helpful but Kitete, who stayed by the fire with his simple-minded smile.

NARRATOR 1: Most of the time, Shindo didn't mind.

NARRATOR 2: But sometimes, when she was tired or unhappy about something else, she would get annoyed and yell at him.

NARRATOR 3: One day, Shindo was out in the yard, cutting vegetables for a stew. As she carried the pot from the bright sunlight into the hut, she tripped over Kitete.

NARRATOR 1: She fell, and the clay pot shattered. Vegetables and water streamed everywhere.

SHINDO: (*getting up, screaming at him*) Stupid boy! Haven't I told you to stay out of my way? (*derisively*) But what can I expect? You're not a real child at all. You're nothing but a calabash!

NARRATOR 2: The very next moment, Kitete was no longer there.

NARRATOR 3: In his place was a gourd.

SHINDO: (*shrieking*) What have I done? I didn't mean what I said! You're not a calabash, you're my own darling son!

NARRATOR 1: The other children came crowding into the hut.

SHINDO: Oh, children, please do something!

NARRATOR 2: They looked at each other a moment.

NARRATOR 3: Then over each other they climbed, scampering up to the rafters.

NARRATOR 1: When the last child had been helped up by Shindo, they called out one last time,

CHILDREN:

Ki-te-te, come help us!
We'll work for our mother.
Come help us, Ki-te-te,
OUR FAVORITE BROTHER!

NARRATOR 1: For a long moment, nothing happened.

NARRATOR 2: Then slowly,

NARRATOR 3: the gourd began to change.

NARRATOR 1: It sprouted a head,

NARRATOR 2: then arms,

NARRATOR 3: then legs.

NARRATOR 1: At last, it was not a gourd at all.

NARRATOR 2: It was—

SHINDO & CHILDREN: (*shouting happily, as SHINDO hugs him*) KITETE!

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NARRATOR 1: Shindo learned her lesson.

NARRATOR 2: Ever after, she was very careful what she called her children.

NARRATOR 3: And so they gave her comfort and happiness,

ALL NARRATORS: all the rest of her days.