



# Heike Monogatari

## Classroom applications

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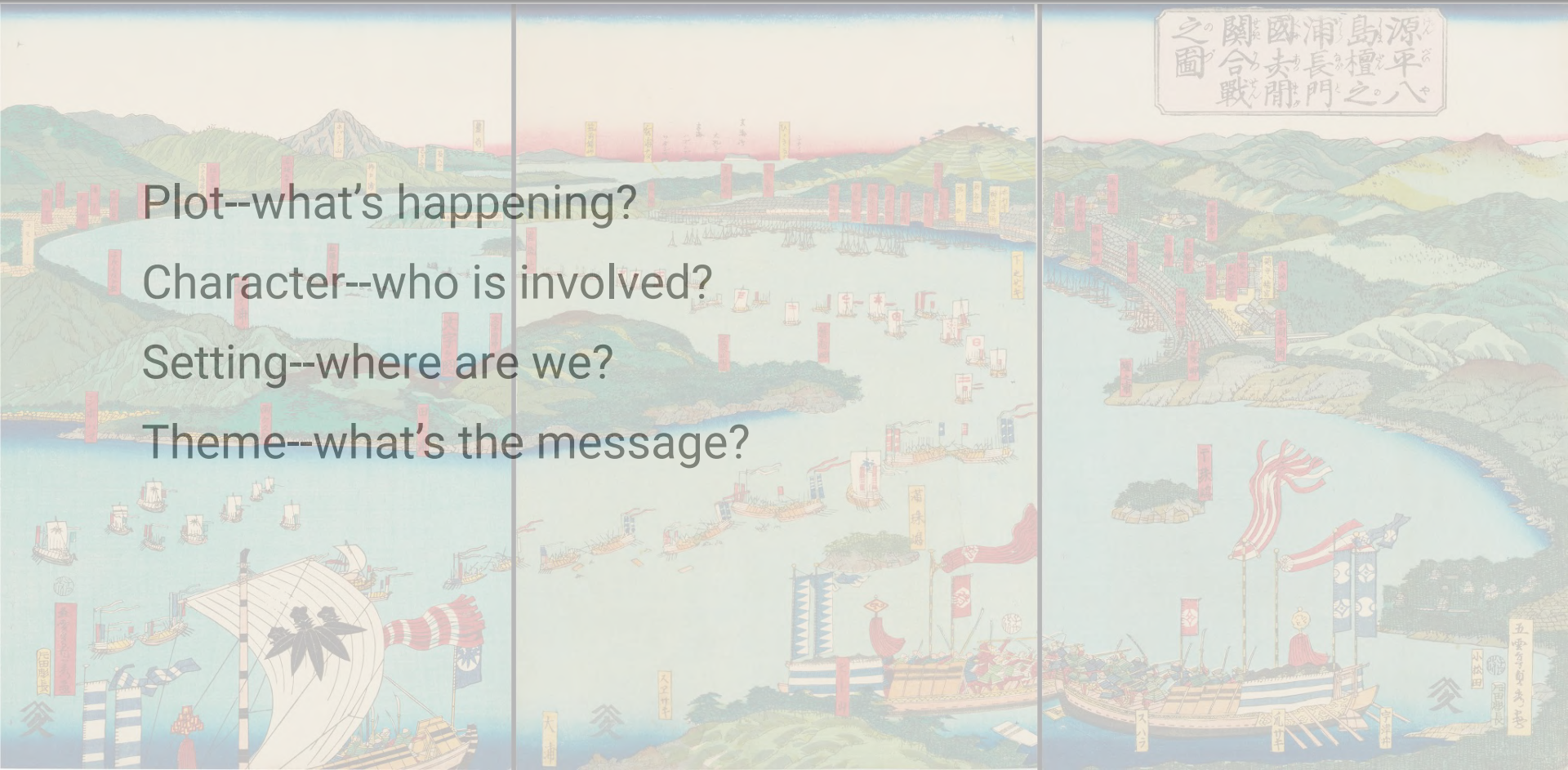
# A beginner's guide to reading Heike Monogatari

Plot--what's happening?

Character--who is involved?

Setting--where are we?

Theme--what's the message?



# A beginner's guide to reading Heike Monogatari

Selection of excerpts

Read aloud

Graphic Organizers

Connect to prior knowledge



# Some classroom approaches

Literary:

Themes: loyalty, morality and ethics in war, mono no aware

Form: episodic, waka, narrative perspective

Faith: Buddhism and Impermanence

History: Genpei War and modern/literary comparisons

Artistic media

# Literary study

Theme/message

Comparative

Form

Storytelling

Perspective/point of view

# Morality, faith, and war

## Purpose-setting questions

How and why do we wage war?

Does conducting oneself with honor, or conversely, with malice, matter during wartime?

Are villains punished and heroes rewarded?

What moral lessons can be interpreted by the reader?

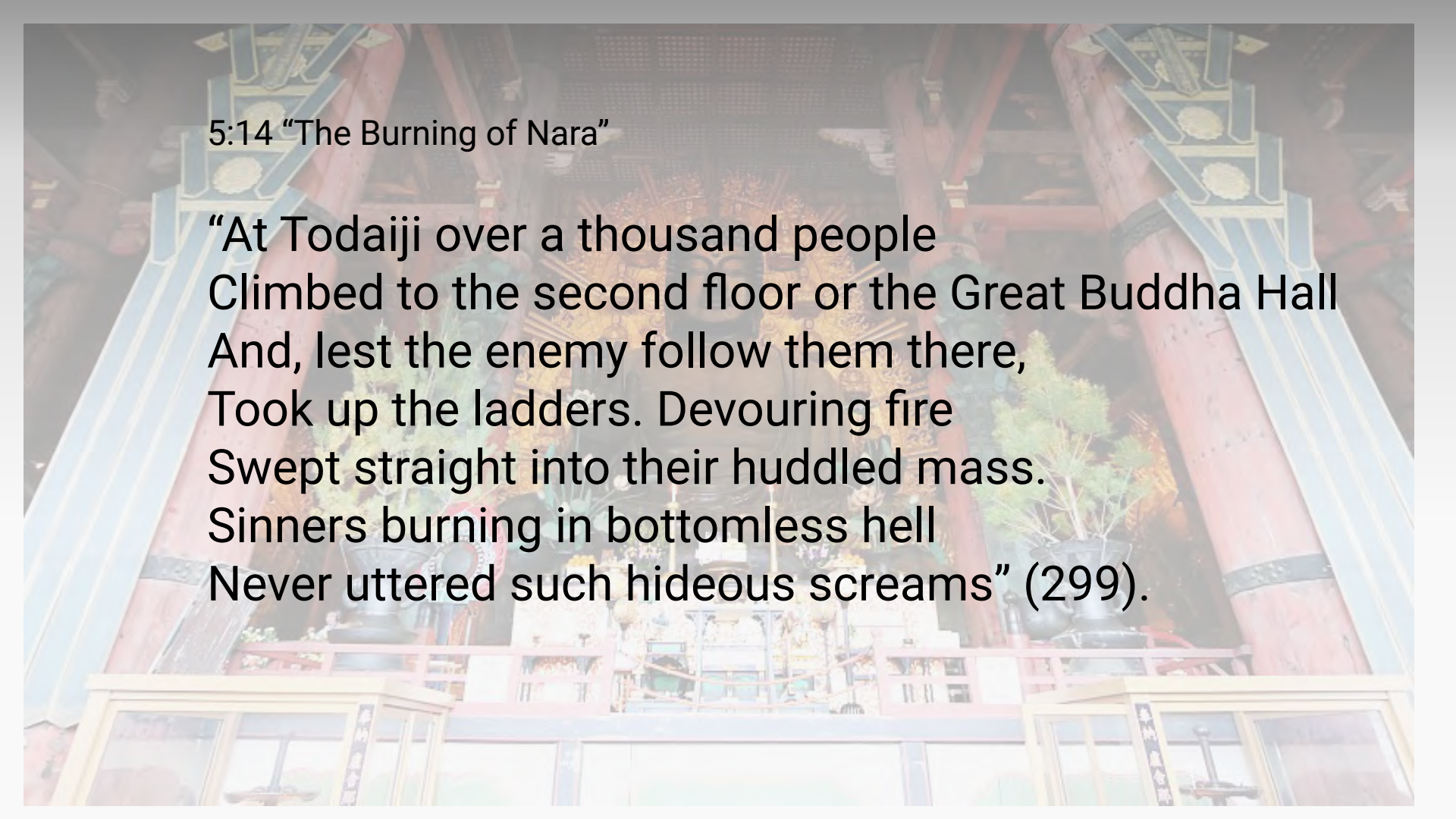
What is the role of the storyteller when relating tales of war?

# Morality, faith, and war

## Book 5:14 “The Burning of Nara”

“Another of the monk’s exploits was to make a big *mari* ball  
and call it Lord Kiyomori’s head. “Hit it! Kick it! they kept shouting (297)  
Lord Kiyomori was, after all...the reigning emperor’s grandfather.  
Carrying on like that about him,  
The Nara monks sounded like devils” (298)

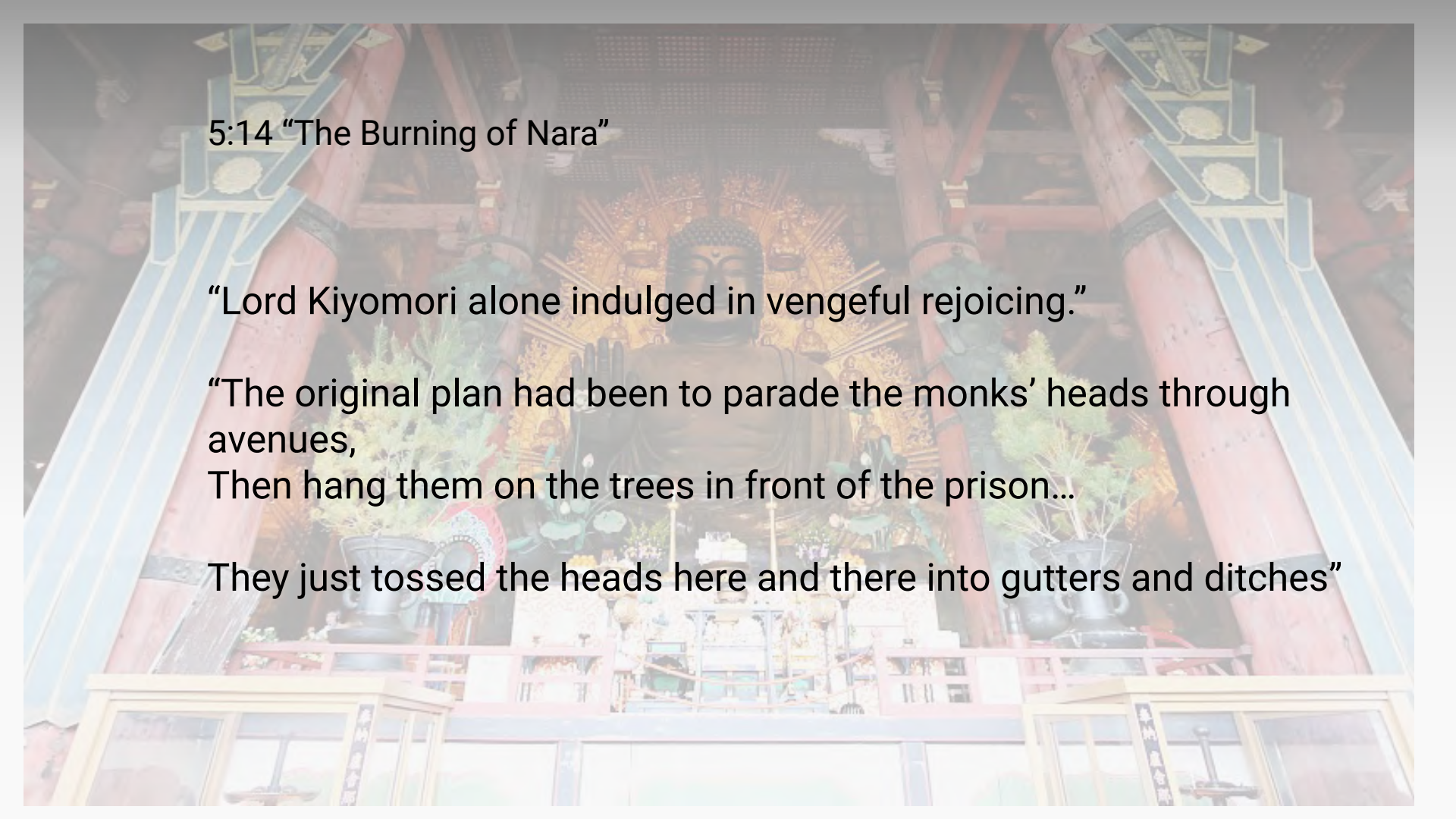
The monks attack the Taira; Lord Kiyomori gives the order to attack Nara; his son Lord Shigehira gives the order to start a fire in the temples.

The background image shows the interior of a traditional Japanese temple, likely the Great Buddha Hall at Todaiji. It features large, dark red wooden pillars supporting a complex wooden structure. In the center, a large, ornate Buddha statue is visible, surrounded by other religious artifacts and offerings. The lighting is warm, highlighting the intricate details of the architecture and the statue.

5:14 “The Burning of Nara”

“At Todaiji over a thousand people  
Climbed to the second floor or the Great Buddha Hall  
And, lest the enemy follow them there,  
Took up the ladders. Devouring fire  
Swept straight into their huddled mass.  
Sinners burning in bottomless hell  
Never uttered such hideous screams” (299).





5:14 “The Burning of Nara”

“Lord Kiyomori alone indulged in vengeful rejoicing.”

“The original plan had been to parade the monks’ heads through  
avenues,  
Then hang them on the trees in front of the prison...

They just tossed the heads here and there into gutters and ditches”

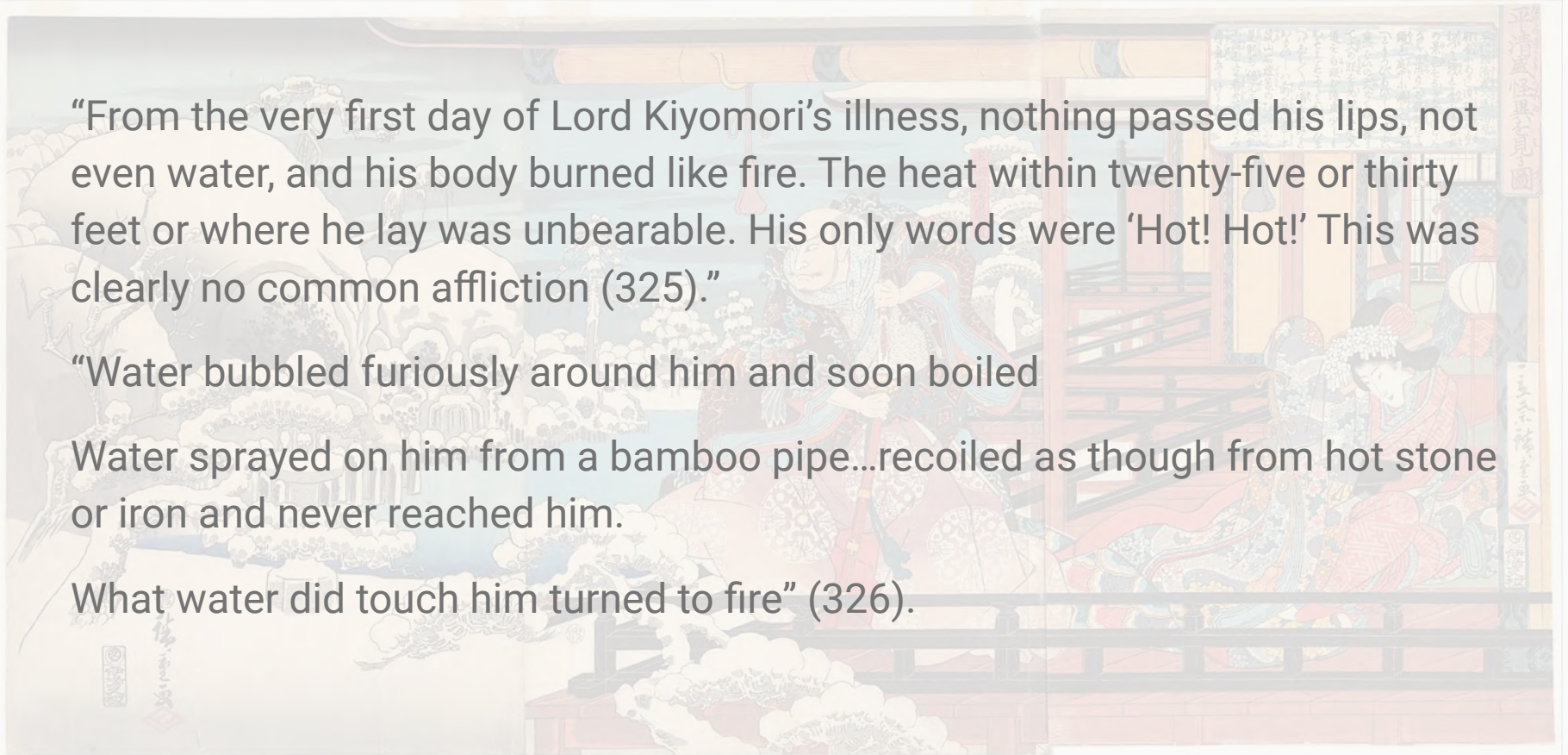
## 6:7 “Lord Kiyomori was unwell”

“From the very first day of Lord Kiyomori’s illness, nothing passed his lips, not even water, and his body burned like fire. The heat within twenty-five or thirty feet or where he lay was unbearable. His only words were ‘Hot! Hot!’ This was clearly no common affliction (325).”

“Water bubbled furiously around him and soon boiled

Water sprayed on him from a bamboo pipe...recoiled as though from hot stone or iron and never reached him.

What water did touch him turned to fire” (326).



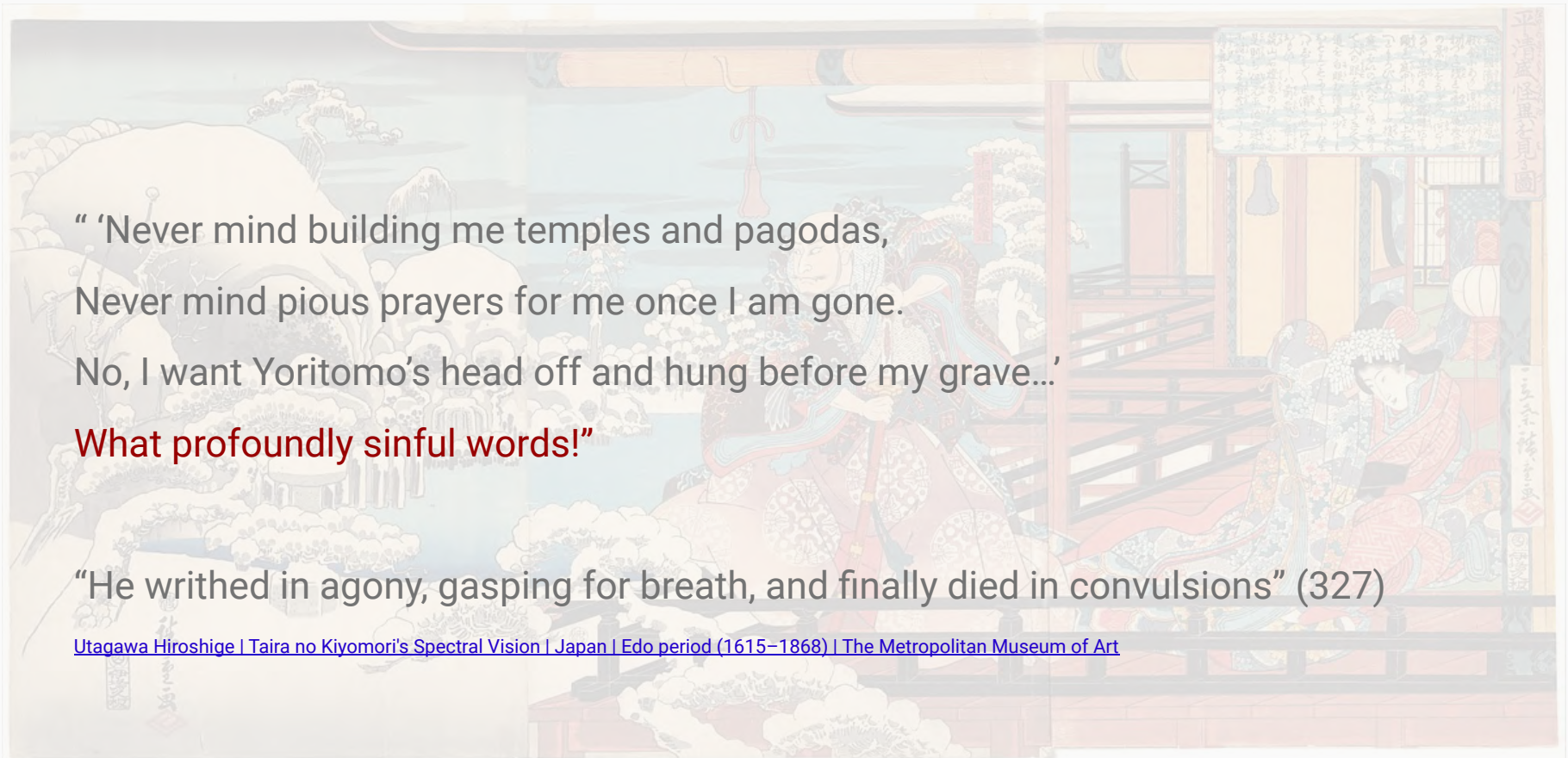
## 6:7 The Death of Kiyomori

“Never mind building me temples and pagodas,  
Never mind pious prayers for me once I am gone.  
No, I want Yoritomo’s head off and hung before my grave...”

**What profoundly sinful words!”**

“He writhed in agony, gasping for breath, and finally died in convulsions” (327)

[Utagawa Hiroshige | Taira no Kiyomori's Spectral Vision | Japan | Edo period \(1615–1868\) | The Metropolitan Museum of Art](#)



# Brief discussion

1. Does the narrator seem to guide the reader into judgement of either the Nara monks or the Heike warriors?
2. How can this episode be read as a way to discuss the realities of war?
3. What does the burning of the temples have to say about impermanence and attachment?
4. How can we interpret how Lord Kiyomori dies?

# Comparison Study: Heike and Modern War Stories

*Heike*: 9:16 “The Death of Atsumori”

Tim O’Brien, *The Things They Carried*: “The Man I Killed”

## Vietnam Civil War: “The Man I Killed” by Tim O’Brien

Our narrator, Tim, an American foot soldier during the Vietnam Civil war, mourns the death of a enemy soldier whom he killed. He essentially brings the soldier he killed back to life in the chapter “The Man I Killed” from the book *The Things They Carried*--imagines his love life, his budding academic career, his fear about going to war.

“He lay face-up in the center of the trail, a slim, dead, almost dainty young man. He had bony legs, a narrow waist, long shapely fingers (118)....

“Frail looking, delicately boned, the young man would not have wanted to be a soldier and in his heart would have feared performing badly in battle (121).”

## “The Man I Killed”

Fellow soldier Kiowa tells him:

“ ‘You want to trade places with him? Turn it all upside down--you want that? I mean, be honest...

“Tim, it’s a war. The guy wasn’t Heidi--he had a weapon, right? It’s a tough thing, for sure, but you got to cut out that staring” (120).

The narrator has remorse and compassion for the man he killed; his friend tries to comfort Tim--at least he is still alive.



Kumagai yells to  
Atsumori:

“ ‘My eyes tell me  
that you are a man  
of high rank. For  
shame, to turn your  
face from an enemy!  
Come back! Come  
back!’ ” (504)



# “The Death of Atsumori”

Astumori returns from the sea to face Kumagai:

“He beheld a youth in his sixteenth or seventeenth year, his face lightly powdered, his teeth blackened, and about the same age as Kumagai’s son, Kojirō” (504).



*The Death of Atsumori*, by Chikanobu Yoshu, 1885. Woodcut print.

“In tears, he took the head after all.”

Kumagai says,

“Had I not been born to a warlike house,  
never would I have known such sorrow!”  
(505)

“At dawn today, within the fortress,  
you could hear men making music,  
and obviously he was one of them!” (506)



Value or Belief	Example <i>Heike Monogatari</i>	Comparison/Analysis “The Man I Killed”
Strength and fighting prowess		
Respect for enemies	“He took off the young man’s <i>hitatare</i> , meaning to use it to wrap the head...” (506)	“Frail looking, delicately boned, the young man would not have wanted to be a soldier”
Battle gear, clothing, accessories	“[Atsumori] carried a lacquered, rattan-wrapped bow and rode a dappled gray with a gold-trimmed saddle.” (504)	

# Brief Discussion

1. What modern or ancient stories might you use in the classroom for comparison study?
2. While weaponry, geography, and politics change, what stays the same in warfare?
3. How might compassion and beauty be part of telling war stories?



# Mono no aware

## 9:19 Kozaishō Drowns

“But every glance at the little one  
Would only make me miss him more,  
And ever-growing melancholy  
Would leave me not a moment’s peace...”

# Structure

## 9:19 “He fell in love with Kozaishō at first sight”

Michimori's waka to Kozaishō:

*“All my devotion*

*Turns just as a simple log*

*Laid across a brook*

*Turns and re-turns underfoot,*

*Yielding nothing but wet sleeves.” (516)*

Her highness replies for Kozaishō:

*“Nonetheless, have faith,*

*For that simple log of yours,*

*Laid across the brook,*

*Turns again and gives footing.*

*Step forth: It is time to cross.”(517)*

# Brief discussion

1. How do you respond to Kozaisho's story? Is it a story of loyalty? Faith? Grief?
2. How does learning about the courtship between Michimoto and Kozaishō at the end impact the reading?
3. How does social class play a role in the interactions between Kozaishō and her nurse?
4. How does faith factor into Kozaishō's decision?



Activity: Tell the story of this image





# Questions for Teacher Discussion

1. What are the possibilities for using Heike in your classroom?
2. What are some reasons to teach it? Or not to teach it?
3. What aspects would be challenging for your students?
4. What strategies might engage/interest students?

# Teaching and Research Resources

[Atsumori and Kumagai - Chikanobu and Yoshitoshi Woodblock Prints - Claremont Colleges Digital Library](#)

[Utagawa Hiroshige | Taira no Kiyomori's Spectral Vision | Japan | Edo period \(1615–1868\) | The Metropolitan Museum of Art](#)

[The Army beneath the Waves | Toshidama Japanese Prints](#)

[Portraits - Heike Monogatari](#)