

Toshidama Gallery

Ishikawa Goemon

Play: Sanmon Gosan no Kiri

Goemon is one of the enduring heroes of Japanese folklore and kabuki drama... consequently he is also one of the most frequently illustrated characters in ukiyo-e. Probably based on a real character from the seventeenth century, he first appears in kabuki in 1778 in *The Temple Gate and the Paulownia Crest*, a performance that sees the sardonic and vengeful bandit Goemon sitting astride the famous red gate at Nanzen-ji temple declaiming, 'The spring view is worth a thousand gold pieces, or so they say, but it is too little, too little. These eyes of Goemon rate it worth ten thousand!'

His life was devoted to avenging the death of his father at the hands of the tyrannical shogun Hideyoshi. He turned first to banditry and then to vengeance. He was caught, and according to folklore, boiled in oil with his young son whom he saved by holding the child above his head until he himself succumbed. This gruesome scene and the scene of Goemon on top of the tall red gates of the temple are the most frequently illustrated. He is generally pictured with a bushy wig with hair that stands on end like a chestnut burr and gold brocade robes, often smoking an oversized silver pipe.

Illustrated, Goemon in Sanmon Gosan no Kiri, 1851 by Kunisada



**Ishikawa
Goemon**