

# Toshidama Gallery

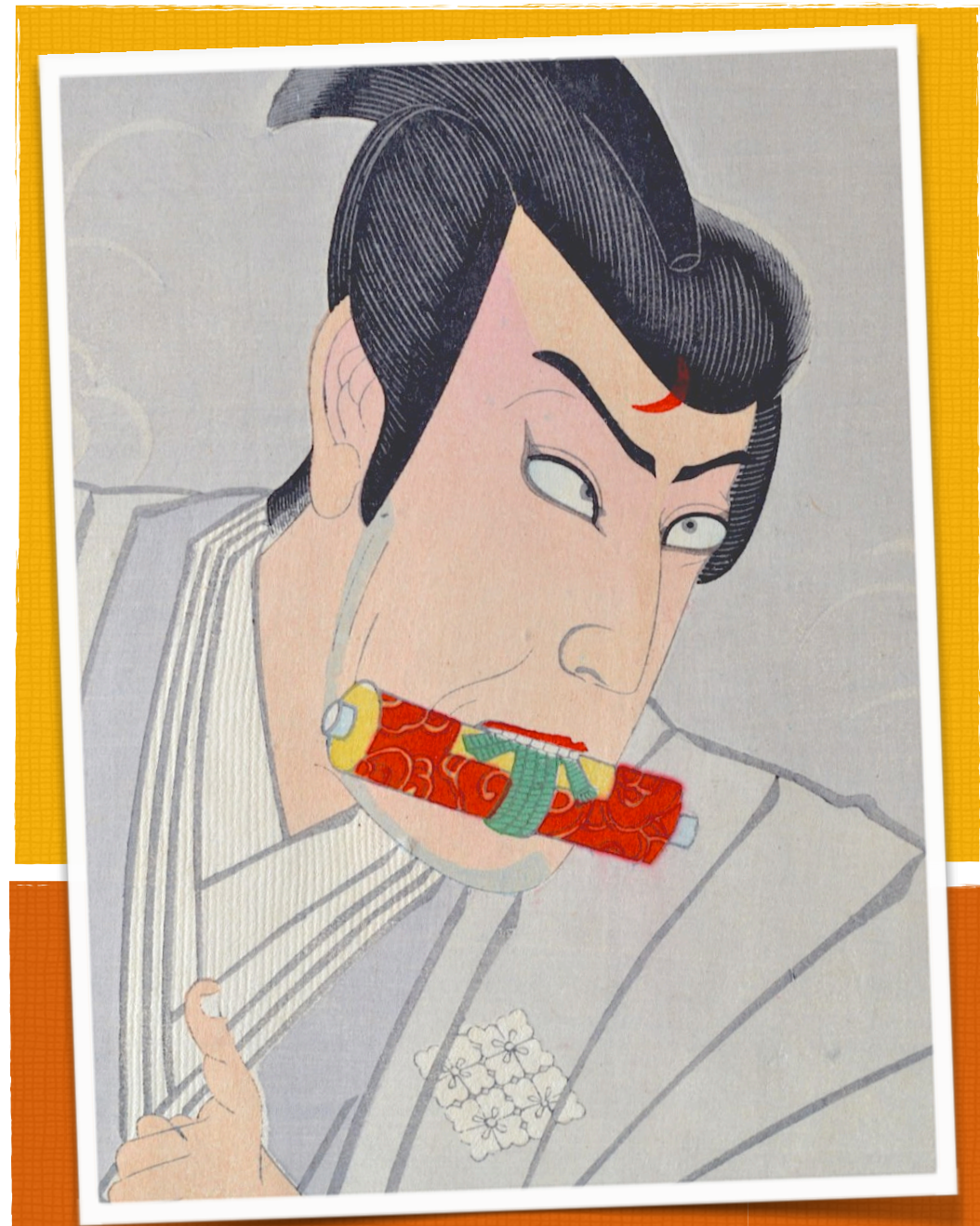
Nikki Danjo

Play: Meiboku Sendai Hagi

Nikki Danjo is the most reviled of kabuki's 'pantomime' villains: a conspirator and magician who can transform into a rat. The character appears in different guises and in different plays, but the play *Meiboku Sendai Hagi* is the most commonly performed. The plot tells the story of a palace intrigue and is based on real events involving the Date clan in the 1660's.

A child (Tsuruchiyo) has become head of the Date clan. He is kept in the women's quarters and looked after by a nurse maid (Masaoka) for fear of assassination. The palace chatelaine and her brother the evil Nikki Danjo plot to kill the young prince. In a moving scene Masaoka's young son is killed in error but such is her devotion to her master, she shows no emotion and continues the fiction that it is in fact Tsuruchiyo who lies dead. As a result she is handed a scroll with the names of the conspirators. Her true loyalty is finally discovered and a fight ensues which sees a gigantic rat appear on stage and run off with the scroll in its teeth.

The final scene is a classic of *kabuki* drama. A servant spots the rat and attacks it; it escapes but dramatically re-emerges through a trapdoor in the *hanamichi* (the stage extension into the theatre audience) in the true form of Nikki Danjo and carrying the scroll in his mouth. He exits the stage as if walking magically on clouds. Danjo is almost always shown in grey robes, often in the shadow of a rat and often clutching a brightly coloured scroll.



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*Illustrated, Nikki Danjo in Meiboku Sendai Hagi, 1901, by Hosai Baido*