



JAPAN INFORMATION
AND CULTURE CENTER
在米国日本大使館広報文化センター

TEACHING TUESDAY

RAKUGO

Rakugo (落語) is the 400-year old art of story-telling, and is sometimes called Japan's answer to stand-up comedy or sitcoms, where one person plays all the parts.

Originally called *karukuchi* (軽口), or falling words, rakugo began as part of Buddhist sermons, when Buddhist monks in the 9th and 10th century wanted to make their sermons more interesting. During the Edo period, street performers picked this style up and parodied the allegorical stories priests told in temples. At first, many different kinds of entertainers would perform the humorous monologues, but gradually specialists emerged and became known as *rakugoka* (落語家). Each rakugoka often specializes in a school, such as *hibaibanashi* (芝居噺) theatre discourse, *ongyokubanashi* (音曲噺) musical discourse, *kaidanbanashi* (怪談噺) ghost discourse, or *ninjōbanashi* (人情噺) sentimental discourse.

The rakugoka usually sits *seiza* on a platform, using nothing but a *sensu* folding fan and a small cloth as props as they tell humorous stories, depicting many different characters and ending with a punch line called an *ochi* (落ち) or *sage* (下げ). Although the actual performance of rakugo has not changed much since the 18th century, inclusion of modern slang and events is often used to keep tales interesting and up-to-date.