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TEACHING TUESDAY

KAIDAN

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Kaidan 怪談, commonly translated as ghost stories or mysterious tales, are some of the oldest traceable ghost stories in Japan, dating back to the Edo Period (1603-1868) with origins in Buddhist moral tales.

One of the first written collections of these supernatural tales, *Nihon Ryōiki*, conveyed Buddhist themes of suffering for misdeeds through avenging spirits who preyed upon those who harmed them during their time on earth. In modern Japanese horror, avenging spirits continue to be a popular theme to evoke terror in viewers.

Due to the political stability in the Edo Period, the religious qualities of *kaidan* were no longer needed, and *kaidan* progressively became more secular. In addition, the popularity of the ghost story telling game *Hyakumonogatari Kaidankai* prompted the collection of *kaidan* across the nation. This demand led to a depiction of *kaidan* through the newly created *ukiyo-e*, woodblock prints, thus creating the literary genre, *kaidan-shu*. Some of the most famous *kaidan* include, *The Story of Okiku*, *Yotsuya Kaidan (Ghost Story of Tokaido Yotsuya)*, and *Botan Doro (The Peony Lantern)*, which are still told to this day, often through kabuki.