

# *Educator's Guide to* **Christmas Stories**

From  
**CALABASH STORIES**  
by Jeffrey J. Higa



**Educator’s Guide to “Christmas Stories”**  
**by Jacquelyn Chappel, Ph.D.**

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Jacquelyn Chappel earned her B.A. from Dartmouth College and holds an M.A. in English and a Ph.D. in Curriculum & Instruction from the University of Hawaii at Manoa. She taught middle school and high school English for ten years and recently published a book *Engendering Cosmopolitanism through the Local* on teaching global literature. She is currently at work on her next book on strategies to teach essay writing. Her work focuses on English Education, particularly on decolonizing pedagogies. She currently teaches at Leeward Community College’s Teacher Education Program.

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## Introduction

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This guide has been developed as an instructional aid for the teaching of “Christmas Stories” one of the short stories found in Jeffrey J. Higa’s *Calabash Stories*. It is our hope that educators will find this guide a useful tool to understanding the story and encouraging classroom discussion. Hawaii state standards addressed in this guide include the following:

### **HAWAII STATE GRADE 11-12 READING LANGUAGE STANDARDS**

<b>11-12.RL.1</b>	Cite strong and thorough textual evidence to support analysis of what the text says explicitly as well as inferences drawn from the text, including determining where the text leaves matters uncertain.
<b>11-12.RL.4</b>	Determine the meaning of words and phrases as they are used in the text, including figurative and connotative meanings; analyze the impact of specific word choices on meaning and tone, including words with multiple meanings or language that is particularly fresh, engaging, or beautiful. (Include Shakespeare as well as other authors.)
<b>11-12.RL.6</b>	Analyze a case in which grasping point of view requires distinguishing what is directly stated in a text from what is really meant (e.g., satire, sarcasm, irony, or understatement).
<b>11-12.RL.10</b>	By the end of grade 11, read and comprehend literature, including stories, dramas, and poems, in the grades 11–CCR text complexity band proficiently, with scaffolding as needed at the high end of the range. By the end of grade 12, read and comprehend literature, including stories, dramas, and poems, at the high end of the grades 11–CCR text complexity band independently and proficiently.

## About the Author

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**Jeffrey J. Higa** is the author of *Calabash Stories*. His great-grandparents came from Okinawa to work on the sugar plantations of Hakalau on the Big Island of Hawaii. Over the next generation, the family would leave the plantation and move to Oahu to work in the growing tourism industry. Jeffrey would be born on an Air Force base and would live all over the United States before graduating from Mililani High School. After high school, he earned his Bachelor of Science degree from Rensselaer Polytechnic Institute in Troy, New York. He says his interest in writing began when he lived in an apartment above a used bookstore, where paperbacks could be bought for a quarter. He pursued his interest in writing by attending graduate school in creative writing and graduated with a Master of Arts. Since then, he has written plays, essays, and fiction. He has won recognition for his work locally and on the mainland. He currently lives in Honolulu with his wife, his daughter, and the good dog Tim Tam.

# Christmas Stories

## Background

Following the outbreak of the Civil War in the US (1861-1865), the Hawaiian sugar industry expanded to meet increased demand for sugar. Laborers from all over the world— including Chinese, Portuguese, Puerto Ricans, Koreans, Germans, Russians, Spaniards, Norwegians, and Japanese—immigrated to Hawaii to work the sugarcane fields.

Of all the groups brought in, the largest came from Japan. By 1900, over 80,000 Japanese immigrated to Hawaii. Like the Chinese and Hawaiians plantation workers before them, the Japanese complained of backbreaking working conditions, low pay, harsh treatment by overseers, and strict rules.

The family in this story lived and worked on the Hakalau Sugar Plantation, a real life sugar plantation on the Big Island of Hawaii.

## Summary

Jeffrey Higa’s “Christmas Stories” tells the story of Masa, a 10-year old boy of Japanese descent whose father until recently worked as a laborer on a sugar plantation. In an attempt to save money to achieve the American dream, Masa’s father gets a job as a gardener for a rich *haole* family. On Saturdays, Masa helps out.

One day, the woman of the rich household gives Masa some of her son’s old clothes. At first, Masa’s father refuses to accept this gift but he eventually capitulates and accepts them. In return for the old clothes, Masa’s father gives the son a *koa* sculpture of a carp that had been given to the family when Masa was born. Because the son of the rich *haole* family, Walter, is suffering from a fatal illness, the carp is a symbol of the boy’s fight and strength.

When Masa goes into the house to give the gift to Walter, Walter tells Masa about Christmas, which fascinates Masa. Masa wants to tell Walter a similar story. When they meet a second time, Masa tells Walter the story of “Momotaro, Peach Boy,” a famous Japanese folktale, and the two boys make plans to “play Momotaro.”

After Christmas, however, Masa’s father abruptly tells Masa that Walter has died. By the end of the story, Masa’s father has opened up a restaurant and Masa is an adult who tells his children about Walter and the events of this story.

## Characters

*Write a brief description of each character. (Allow student answers to vary slightly.)*

- **Masa:** 10-year old boy, son of a former plantation laborer of Japanese descent.
- **Walter:** 10-year boy, son of a wealthy *haole* (white) family; suffers from an unknown terminal illness.
- **Mrs. VanHarding:** Walter’s mother who manages Masa’s father is portrayed as a friendly upper class woman.
- **Father:** Former laborer at Hakalau Sugar Plantation, Mrs. VanHarding’s gardener.
- **Mother:** Playing a minor role in the story, Masa’s mother believes the VanHarding house is “*ichiban*” (which means #1 in Japanese). Her teachings spur Masa to be especially polite.

# Christmas Stories

## Vocabulary

Find the definition for the following words. (The following definitions come from Merriam-Webster.)

- **fatalism:** a doctrine that events are fixed in advance so that human beings are powerless to change them
- **morbidity:** an attitude, quality, or state of mind marked by excessive gloom (“I was used to this kind of traditional morbidity, but my father’s fatalism was different.”)
- **specter:** a visible disembodied spirit (“He embellished his specters, animating them and seizing my imagination...”)
- **inscribe:** to write, engrave, or print as a lasting record (“...where we came from was too deeply inscribed on his memory.”)
- **gala:** a festive celebration especially a public entertainment marking a special occasion (“he usually spent his Saturdays there, preparing the grounds for some kind of gala event”).

## Setting

Where and when does the story take place?

**Where:** Hawaii, the island of Oahu, in the neighborhoods of Manoa and Palama.

**When:** 1923

## Themes

Friendship

Race

## Literary Terms

**Dramatic irony:** a literary technique by which the full significance of a character’s words or actions are clear to the audience or reader but unknown to the character.

**Answer:** There are many examples of dramatic irony in the story. Masa’s views of Christmas (“There’s a tree in your house”) and Japanese culture (“Thank you for your generosity to our family”) are examples of dramatic irony. Masa’s telling Mrs. VanHarding, “This gift is worthless and of poor quality” is another example of dramatic irony as the gift is actually valuable to the family.

# Christmas Stories

## Literary Terms (cont.)

**Symbolism:** a thing that represents or stands for something else, especially a material object representing something abstract.

In Japanese culture, the carp is a symbol of strength and courage, full of energy and power to fight its way up rapidly-flowing streams. Carp are traditionally associated with boy's day, historically celebrated on the fifth day of the fifth month. Re-read the description of the koa carp on p. 16. What is the koa carving of a carp a symbol of in this story?

**Answer:** Answers will vary. The hand-made koa carp that Masa gives to Walter in return for Walter's old clothes is a poignant reminder of the class differences between Walter and Masa. While Mrs. VanHarding has given the family her son's old clothes, the wooden carving of a carp was given to Masa's family to commemorate Masa's birth. Although Masa does not realize the significance of the memento, it is likely a family heirloom and one of the family's most prized possessions ("We knew that we could not afford to buy him anything that would be as fine as the clothe she had given me"), representing Masa himself as he fights upstream against the poverty he has grown up in. The carp may be a symbol of the health and strength Masa's family wishes to give to Walter as he fights his illness ("my father thought it was an appropriate gift for a sick boy like Walter"). Because it is associated with Boy's Day, the carp symbolizes each of the two boys.

## Check for Understanding

*Small groups will allow students to clarify the events of the story. Allow student answers to vary slightly. Correct misreadings.*

- 1. What is Masa's and Masa's father's relationship to the VanHardings?** Masa's father is the VanHarding's gardener. Mrs. VanHarding calls Masa the "yard boy." While Masa's family has left the plantation for the third time with the hopes of saving money in order to one day achieve the American Dream, the VanHardings live in the biggest house on the neighborhood and are preparing the house for a gala event for a "new industrial pioneer" or a "private charity" event.
- 2. What is wrong with Walter?** Walter has a terminal illness, which is not disclosed. Mrs. VanHarding tells Masa and his father that the doctors predict this will be Walter's last Christmas, which turns out to be true.
- 3. Why does Masa lie to his father that Walter wants to learn Japanese?** Masa does not say why he lies to his father, but the reader can infer that Masa says that Walter wants to learn Japanese, because Masa wants to spend more time with Walter.
- 4. Why does Masa keep saying, "Thank you for your generosity to our family" (p. 14)?** Masa says he does not know how to react, so he parrots what his mother and father have said in previous situations. Masa's exaggerated deference through these repeated lines can be read as humorous, because they show how Masa is caught between two cultures and doesn't know how he's supposed to act.
- 5. When he gives the koa carving of a carp to Mrs. VanHarding, why does Masa say, "This gift is worthless and of poor quality"?** Masa belittling of his own gift is another Japanese act of deference. This line can also be read as humorous, because Masa doesn't really understand why he's saying these things.
- 6. Why is there a tree growing in the VanHarding's house?** The tree, which shocks Masa at first, is a Christmas tree.

# Christmas Stories

## Questions for Discussion

*Student groups may discuss one question and share their thoughts with the rest of the class.*

### 7. Japanese Culture

Reread the passage where Masa's father attempts to give back Mrs. VanHarding's gift (from "No," she said. 'Please take them.' on p. 15 to 'How your son? Good, yes?' on p. 16). What is the "Japanese reason" Masa's father does not want to accept the gift from Mrs. VanHarding? What is the reason Masa's father finally capitulates and accepts the gift?

**Answer:** Masa's father does not want to accept Mrs. VanHarding's gift out of pride. Masa's reference to "some Japanese reason" suggests that pride is an important part of Japanese culture. The reader can infer Masa's father does not want to be beholden to the VanHardings for their gift, which he perceives as lavish, because his household does not have such high quality materials. He appears to change his mind when Mrs. VanHarding says, "It will make my son very happy if your son would accept this gift from Walter." With this statement, Mrs. VanHarding suggests that Masa's father is the one doing them a favor and that it is the wish of the son's, not Mrs. VanHarding's.

### 8. Christmas Stories

Masa tells us, "I wanted to tell Walter a story like the one he told me: a story where animals had magical powers and good things happened to children, and at the end of the story everyone was happy." Why does Walter like Walter's description of Christmas? Why does Masa want to tell Walter a story too? What is the significance of the title "Christmas Stories"?

**Answer:** Masa likes Walter's description of Christmas for its magical details, which he is unfamiliar with. Masa says he also appreciates the happy ending of Walter's description of Christmas. Although he has trouble trying to come up with a similar story at first, Masa eventually remembers the story of Momotaro, the Peach Boy, a famous story in Japanese culture. The two "stories" are emblematic of the two boy's differing cultures. The "stories" might also be a reference to the story of Walter, who dies a week after Christmas, a story Masa eventually shares with his own children at Christmas time.

### 9. The American Dream

Why is Masa's father saving money in the bank? What is his dream of the future?

**Answer:** Unlike 10-year old Masa who dreams of owning a "radio," "icebox," "automobile," and "house," Masa's father is saving most of his income to someday make a better life for his family off the sugar plantation. The family has attempted to leave the plantation twice before only to return, so at the outset of the story it is unclear whether they will succeed, but by the end of the story, the reader learns Masa's father started his own business, a restaurant called the Palama Inn.



# Christmas Stories

## Questions for Discussion (cont.)

### 10. Whiteness

This story features a “white house,” “white lace,” a gift of “white shirt and a pair of white shorts,” Walter’s “white clothes” and “advancing whiteness [Walter’s hair].” How is “whiteness” characterized in this story? Allow students to find instances of “whiteness” in the story and interpret each mention.

**Answer:** Masa, Masa’s father, and Masa’s mother each have differing attitudes toward “whiteness.” Overall, the story portrays “whiteness” as both desirable and in decay.

Masa’s mother regards the “white house” as “ichiban,” which means #1 in Japanese.

Masa regards Mrs. VanHarding as “intoxicating” and “soothing.” For Masa, the VanHarding house is a place full of new sights and sounds he is interested in.

Masa’s father, however, views the “white house” as impractical and haunted. He says the house needs to be repainted if its paint chips and he views the house as an “obake” (ghost) house. Masa senses his father’s version of the house the second time he visits Walter and comments, “the house did not seem so wonderful, just confusing and forbidding.”

In addition to the ample descriptions of the white house, the VanHardings also give Masa a “white shirt and a pair of white shorts,” emphasizing their whiteness.

Meanwhile, Walter, who is sick in bed, wears “white clothes.” “Even his hair,” Walter comments, looks like it might be turning white soon. These descriptions of a dying Walter as “white” emphasize the decaying nature of the VanHarding’s “whiteness.”

### 11. Themes

What does the story say about the themes of friendship and race? Do Walter and Masa become friends?

**Answer:** Although Walter and Masa’s “friendship” is awkward at first, Masa is interested in Walter, and Walter is likewise interested in Masa. Masa strives to tell a story as good as Walter’s and when Masa tells his story of Momotaro, Walter says it’s a “good story.” The two make plans to “play Momotaro” one day, just like Masa does “with [his] friends at home,” but that day never comes because Walter dies soon after. Masa feels an acute guilt about never following through on his promise. In the story, he says, “I thought of the promise I had made Walter and then abandoned. And as that wave of guilt sucked me out into the ocean of remorse, I turned away from my father, confused.” The fact that Masa shares the story of Walter with his children at Christmastime suggests that Walter left a big impact on him. [The story’s treatment of Walter and Masa’s friendship is ambiguous. Allow students to share their differing opinions and back up their ideas with quotes from the story.]

### 12. Plantation Life

How does Masa’s father’s experience on the plantation inform the story? What questions do you have about plantation life in Hawaii?

**Answer:** Hawaii’s plantation history and the unfair, unequal working conditions on the plantations comprise the subtext of the story. At the outside of the story, Masa’s family has just left the Hakalau Sugar Plantation for the third time, which shows that although he didn’t want to work there, they may have returned to the plantation because Masa’s father could not find other work. The vivid description of the plantation like “death” in the first paragraph emphasizes Masa’s father’s distaste for life on the plantation.

# Christmas Stories

## Close Readings

### **White House** (pp. 12-13)

*“My mother used to call it the ichiban white house, because although the other haole families had white houses, the VanHarding house was the biggest, the whitest, and the cleanest. My father, however, had another name for it: the obake house—ghost house. “Too white,” he would say. “No more anybody there during the day. Just like one ghost house.” Shaking his head, he would go on, “Why anybody want a white house in the first place? So unnatural, like that. And hard for take care, every time chip and gotta repaint.” He would conclude by spreading his arms and saying, “More better have one house like this. If little bit chip, little bit dirty, no matter. Brown paint anyway.” Every time he said that I would look at our house and think how poor it looked next to the Vanharding’s, like newsprint next to linen, and I would hunger even more for what I thought cleanliness and whiteness could buy: prosperity and satisfaction.”*

What are Masa’s, Masa’s father’s, and Masa’s mother’s views on the VanHarding house? How do they differ?

**Answer:** See previous page #10.

### **Mrs. VanHarding** (p. 13)

*“It never occurred to me to be scared of Mrs. VanHarding. She was one of those haole ladies with a big bust, but the dresses she wore made her look soft, like an overstuffed futon pinched too tightly in the middle. Her dresses were fringed in layers of white lace, more pace, I imagined then in all the dry goods shops on King Street. And she was always powdered and perfumed, even for just staying at home. As she took the bunches from me, I stood close to her and inhaled, and was instantly transported to the plumeria tree in our yard, wet with dew and still riffing in the morning breeze. It was an intoxicating but soothing fragrance, and once I was there, I didn’t want to be anywhere else.”*

What is Masa’s attitude toward Mrs. VanHarding? How does it inform his attitude toward “whiteness” in the story?

**Answer:** This passage shows Masa’s attraction to whiteness. Words like “bust,” “soft,” “close,” “wet,” “intoxicating,” and “soothing” also suggest a sexual attraction to Mrs. VanHarding.

### **“Christmas Stories”** (pp. 20, 22)

*“I didn’t remember that part as much as the story about decorating trees and the flying animals and the fat haole man with the white beard and how he came through a hole in the ceiling instead of the door and gave you present, everything you wanted if you were good and had listened to your parents that year.”*

*“I wanted to tell Walter a story like the one he told me: a story where animals had magical powers and good things happened to children, and at the end of the story everyone was happy. However, I did not know a story like that. . . . every story turned out to be a thinly disguised version of the Christmas story, except with a fat Japanese man or flying mongoose.”*

Why does Masa like the Christmas story that Walter tells him? Why is this story so important to Masa?

**Answer:** Masa’s description of Christmas shows that he regards the details of Christmas as preposterous and fantastical. His description demonstrates Masa’s innocence to a story regarded as common knowledge today. Masa seems to regard the Christmas story as distinctly Euro-American, which may be a reason he is attracted to it.

# Christmas Stories

## Project Ideas

1. **Dramatization:** Dramatize the scene in which Masa gives Walter the koa carp (2 students).  
Optional: video record your dramatization.
2. **Drawing:** Using the details from the story, draw a picture of the VanHarding house.
3. **Writing:** Write a prequel to “Christmas Stories” describing life on the Hakalau Plantation for Masa and his father and mother.
4. **Research:** Come up with a list of questions you have about life on the sugar plantations. Using the resources below and other reputable sources, write a paper describing life on Hawaii’s plantations during the early 1900s.

## Additional Resources

### Momotaro, Peach Boy

A tongue and cheek video about Momotaro.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=yTt4cwVVKSY>

### Hakalau Sugar Plantation

Website of the actual Hakalau Sugar Plantation.

<https://www.hakalauhome.com/1880s-detail.html>

### History of Labor in Hawaii (University of Hawaii West Oahu)

This authoritative source offers a comprehensive overview of strikes and union activity on Hawaii’s plantations.

<https://www.hawaii.edu/uhow/clear/home/HawaiiLaborHistory.html>

### Labor Strikes

This website offers a compendium of archival newspaper articles on union activity.

<https://sites.google.com/a/hawaii.edu/ndnp-hawaii/Home/subject-and-topic-guides/labor-strikes>

### Whiteness

Smithsonian National Museum of African American History & Culture, Talking about Race: Whiteness

<https://nmaahc.si.edu/learn/talking-about-race/topics/whiteness>

### Readers’ Guide to Calabash Stories and Other Resources (*audio*)

The author’s website has streaming and downloadable recordings of Christmas Stories, a general readers’ guide for all the stories in the collection, and other teaching resources.

<https://www.jeffhiga.com/readers-guides-resources>

# *Student Reading Guide*

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## Christmas Stories

## Christmas Stories

### Background

Following the outbreak of the Civil War in the US (1861-1865), the Hawaiian sugar industry expanded to meet increased demand for sugar. Laborers from all over the world— including Chinese, Portuguese, Puerto Ricans, Koreans, Germans, Russians, Spaniards, Norwegians, and Japanese—immigrated to Hawaii to work the sugarcane fields.

Of all the groups brought in, the largest came from Japan. By 1900, over 80,000 Japanese immigrated to Hawaii. Like the Chinese and Hawaiians plantation workers before them, the Japanese complained of backbreaking working conditions, low pay, harsh treatment by overseers, and strict rules.

The family in this story lived and worked on the Hakalau Sugar Plantation, a real life sugar plantation on the Big Island of Hawaii.

*Write a brief description of each character*

### Characters

Masa

Walter

Mrs. VanHarding

Father

Mother

*Find the definition for the following words*

### Vocabulary

fatalism

morbidity

specter

inscribe

gala

*Where and when does the story take place?*

Setting

When

Where

*What are the main themes of the story?*

Themes

*Find examples of the following terms*

**Dramatic irony:** a literary technique by which the full significance of a character's words or actions are clear to the audience or reader but unknown to the character.

**In this story, Masa doesn't understand a lot of what is happening around him. He doesn't know about Christmas. He doesn't understand the culture of the white household. He barely understands Japanese culture. Can you find examples of dramatic irony in the story—moments where you understand what is happening better than even the narrator Masa does?**

Literary Terms

**Symbolism:** a thing that represents or stands for something else, especially a material object representing something abstract.

**In Japanese culture, the carp is a symbol of strength and courage, full of energy and power to fight its way up rapidly-flowing streams. Carp are traditionally associated with boy's day, historically celebrated on the fifth day of the fifth month. Re-read the description of the koa carp on p. 16. What is the koa carving of a carp a symbol of in this story?**

*Please answer the following questions*

*Check for Understanding*

1. What is Masa's and Masa's father's relationship to the VanHardings?

2. What is wrong with Walter?

3. Why does Masa lie to his father that Walter wants to learn Japanese?

4. Why does Masa keep saying, "Thank you for your generosity to our family" (p. 14)?

5. When he gives the koa carving of a carp to Mrs. VanHarding, why does Masa say, "This gift is worthless and of poor quality"?

6. Why is there a tree growing in the VanHarding's house?

*Please answer the following questions*

*Questions for discussion*

**7. Japanese Culture**

Reread the passage where Masa's father attempts to give back Mrs. VanHarding's gift (from "No," she said. 'Please take them.' on p. 15 to 'How your son? Good, yes?' on p. 16). What is the "Japanese reason" Masa's father does not want to accept the gift from Mrs. VanHarding? What is the reason Masa's father finally capitulates and accepts the gift?

*Please answer the following questions*

*Questions for discussion*

### 8. Christmas Stories

Masa tells us, “I wanted to tell Walter a story like the one he told me: a story where animals had magical powers and good things happened to children, and at the end of the story everyone was happy.” Why does Walter like Walter’s description of Christmas? Why does Masa want to tell Walter a story too? What is the significance of the title “Christmas Stories”?

### 9. The American Dream

Why is Masa’s father saving money in the bank? What is his dream of the future?

### 10. Whiteness

This story features a “white house,” “white lace,” a gift of “white shirt and a pair of white shorts,” Walter’s “white clothes” and “advancing whiteness [Walter’s hair].” How is “whiteness” characterized in this story?

### 11. Themes

What does the story say about the themes of friendship and race?

### 12. Plantation Life

How does Masa’s father’s experience on the plantation inform the story? What questions do you have about plantation life in Hawaii?



**Please answer the following questions****White House** (pp. 12-13)

*“My mother used to call it the ichiban white house, because although the other haole families had white houses, the VanHarding house was the biggest, the whitest, and the cleanest. My father, however, had another name for it: the obake house—ghost house. “Too white,” he would say. “No more anybody there during the day. Just like one ghost house.” Shaking his head, he would go on, “Why anybody want a white house in the first place? So unnatural, like that. And hard for take care, every time chip and gotta repaint.” He would conclude by spreading his arms and saying, “More better have one house like this. If little bit chip, little bit dirty, no matter. Brown paint anyway.” Every time he said that I would look at our house and think how poor it looked next to the Vanharding’s, like newsprint next to linen, and I would hunger even more for what I thought cleanliness and whiteness could buy: prosperity and satisfaction.”*

**What are Masa’s, Masa’s father’s, and Masa’s mother’s views on the VanHarding house? How do they differ?**

**Mrs. VanHarding** (p. 13)

*“It never occurred to me to be scared of Mrs. VanHarding. She was one of those haole ladies with a big bust, but the dresses she wore made her look soft, like an overstuffed futon pinched too tightly in the middle. Her dresses were fringed in layers of white lace, more pace, I imagined then in all the dry goods shops on King Street. And she was always powdered and perfumed, even for just staying at home. As she took the bunches from me, I stood close to her and inhaled, and was instantly transported to the plumeria tree in our yard, wet with dew and still riffing in the morning breeze. It was an intoxicating but soothing fragrance, and once I was there, I didn’t want to be anywhere else.”*

**What is Masa’s attitude toward Mrs. VanHarding? How does it inform his attitude toward “whiteness” in the story?**

*Please answer the following questions*

“Christmas Stories” (pp. 20, 22)

*“I didn’t remember that part as much as the story about decorating trees and the flying animals and the fat haole man with the white beard and how he came through a hole in the ceiling instead of the door and gave you present, everything you wanted if you were good and had listened to your parents that year.”*

*“I wanted to tell Walter a story like the one he told me: a story where animals had magical powers and good things happened to children, and at the end of the story everyone was happy. However, I did not know a story like that. . . . every story turned out to be a thinly disguised version of the Christmas story, except with a fat Japanese man or flying mongoose.”*

**Why does Masa like the Christmas story that Walter tells him? Why is this story so important to Masa?**

### Project Ideas

1. **Dramatization:** Dramatize the scene in which Masa gives Walter the koa carp (2 students).  
Optional: video record your dramatization.
2. **Drawing:** Using the details from the story, draw a picture of the VanHarding house.
3. **Writing:** Write a prequel to “Christmas Stories” describing life on the Hakalau Plantation for Masa and his father and mother.
4. **Research:** Come up with a list of questions you have about life on the sugar plantations. Using the resources below and other reputable sources, write a paper describing life on Hawaii’s plantations during the early 1900s.

### Resources

**Momotaro, Peach Boy:** A tongue and cheek video about Momotaro.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=yTt4cwVVKSY>

**Hakalau Sugar Plantation:** Website of the actual Hakalau Sugar Plantation.

<https://www.hakalauhome.com/1880s-detail.html>

**History of Labor in Hawaii (University of Hawaii West Oahu):** This authoritative source offers a comprehensive overview of strikes and union activity on Hawaii’s plantations.

<https://www.hawaii.edu/uhwo/clear/home/HawaiiLaborHistory.html>

**Labor Strikes:** This website offers a compendium of archival newspaper articles on union activity.

<https://sites.google.com/a/hawaii.edu/ndnp-hawaii/Home/subject-and-topic-guides/labor-strikes>

**Whiteness:** Smithsonian Museum of African American History & Culture, Talking about Race: Whiteness

<https://nmaahc.si.edu/learn/talking-about-race/topics/whiteness>