



2002

### The Crane Wife

Elizabeth Moss

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Carlisle, Barbara. *The Crane Wife*. Anchorage Press, 1994. \$40. 34 pp.

Reviewer: Elizabeth Moss

Reading Level: Primary; Intermediate

Rating: Excellent

Genre: Folklore; Plays; Fairy Tales;

Subject: Drama--Reviews; Folklore--Japan--Juvenile drama; Weaving--Japan--Juvenile drama;

Theme: Learn what is most important in life. Family, not money, leads to happiness.

Production Requirements: Simple sets and costumes, Japanese in style.

Acts: 1

Run Time: 45 min.

Characters: 1 female, 3 males, 5+ m/f

Cast: Adults

Time Period: Long ago

Based on the Japanese folktale, this is the story of a simple but honest peasant named Kokuro. Kokuro saves the life of a crane and in return, the crane, unbeknownst to Kokuro, turns into a beautiful woman and becomes Kokuro's wife. The Crane wife weaves exquisite cloth for Kokuro, but she will not do it often and Kokuro is commanded never to watch her weave. Kokuro asks his wife to weave the cloth three times. During the third time, Kokuro looks at his wife and discovers that she is a crane who has been plucking out her feathers to use as she weaves. The crane wife flies away, and Kokuro is left rich but unhappy.

This play is told with four characters and then a chorus, dancers, and narrators. As such, most of the action that occurs during the stage is told by the narrators and chorus rather than visually told, except for a few scenes. This tends to slow the pace of the play down. However, if it is done in an authentic Japanese style, it could be an interesting exploration of culture. The Japanese language is interwoven into the script with all definitions defined by context. The characters are stock characters but they are more symbolic than stock, in fitting with the culture. There is a violent image of the crane wife who, with her beak, plucks out her feathers one by one until her body is naked and bleeding. Though not seen on stage, the action is described by the narrators, it is a powerful image nonetheless but might be too violent. This piece would be a good exploration into Japanese theatre.