

Literature and Arts C-42, Constructing the Samurai
Week 6

Gikeiki Reading Guide

- (1) Pages 232-241 (SB): Minamoto no Yoshitsune meets Saito Musahibō Benkei. This meeting takes place before Yoshitsune is branded an enemy by his brother, Minamoto no Yoritomo.
- (2) Pages 242-243 (SB): The story picks up with Yoshitsune, his retainers and his girlfriend Shizuka in flight from Yoritomo's men.
- (3) Pages 243a/b-249 (SB): The story continues with the monks from the Sacred Peak of Yoshino in pursuit of Yoshitsune.
[note: pages 243a and 243b are not included in the SB—refer to the attached sheet]
- (4) Pages 250-253 (SB): Shirobyōe Fujiwara Tadanobu secretly returns to the imperial capital and makes inquiries of Yoshitsune with whom he parted at Yoshino. While in the imperial capital, Tadanobu becomes smitten with Kaya who later betrays him.
- (5) Pages 254-263 (SB): When the story picks up on page 254, Yoshitsune and his retainers arrive in Hiraizumi, where he seeks the protection of his old patron Fujiwara no Hidehira.

Izumi's Fortress Reading Guide:

- Hōgan = Yoshitsune (refer to footnote 13)
- Nishikido no Tarō = Fujiwara no Kunihiro (Hidehira's oldest son)
- Date no Jirō = Fujiwara no Yasuhira (Hidehira's heir)
- Izumi no Saburō = Fujiwara no Tadahira = Izumi no Saburō Tadahira (Hidehira's third son)

HOW TADANOBU REMAINED AT YOSHINO

Yoshitsune's men began to prepare for flight, each as he thought best. But along with the sixteen men there was another warrior of great renown, Shirobyōe Fujiwara Tadanobu, who was a descendant of the Minister of State Kamatari and Tankaikō, a grandson of Sarō Noritaka, and the second son of Shinobu Sarō Shōji. Of all that band, Tadanobu alone advanced into Yoshitsune's presence, knelt in the snow, and spoke.

"As things are going now, we are no more than sheep headed for the slaughter. A way must be found for you to retreat in safety. Let me delay the monks with arrows while you escape."

Yoshitsune thanked him warmly, but he refused his offer. "After your brother Tsuginobu was killed in my place by Lord Noto during the battle of Yashima, your presence made me feel that Tsuginobu was still alive. This year will soon end. If we both survive until the beginning of the next, come with me to Ōshū—see Hidehira and your family at Shinobu Village," he said.

"It is very kind of you to suggest it. When I left Michinoku in the autumn of the third year of Jishō [1179], Hidehira said to me: 'From today on, make a name for yourself by dedicating your life to your lord. If I hear that you have been killed by an arrow, I shall commission the services necessary for your happiness in the next life.'

If you perform honorably from time to time, His Lordship will reward you.' He said nothing about returning alive. When I left my mother alone in Shinobu, I warned her that we would not meet again. 'Someone else dies today; I die tomorrow'—that is a warrior's life. His Lordship is sentimental. Won't some one reason with him?'

'A warrior's words are like an imperial decree. Once spoken, they cannot be withdrawn. Bid him good-bye with a good grace,' Benkei advised.

After a short silence, Yoshitsune yielded. "However much I might protest, it would be useless. Do as you wish," he said. Well satisfied, Tadanobu prepared to remain alone in the wild mountains.

Even the proud Tadanobu, who considered himself a warrior equal to Sakanoue Tamuramaro and Fujiwara Toshihito, could not remain unaffected as he thought of saying a last farewell to the lord with whom he had shared so many starlit evenings, misty dawns, freezing winter nights, and sweltering summer mornings, never leaving his side for an instant day or night. His sixteen comrades, taking leave of him one by one, were so deeply moved that they scarcely knew where they were.

Yoshitsune called Tadanobu close. "When you become tired, you will find your present sword too long. A long sword is a handicap to an exhausted man. Fight your last battle with this." He handed him a gold-mounted weapon two and a half feet long, with a narrow groove running the length of its finely wrought blade. "It is short, but the blade is excellent. I have prized it almost as highly as my own life. It was originally a treasure owned by the Kumano Shrine. The abbot obtained permission from the gods to give it to me while I was finding ships to chase the Heike, and since then I have often wondered if my trust in the Kumano deities was responsible for my overthrowing the court's enemies and avenging my father in three years' time. This weapon, which has been as precious as life to me, I give to you now that you are exchanging your life for mine. Think that I am with you."

Tadanobu raised it solemnly to his face. "What a magnificent weapon! Look at it! When my brother Tsuginobu sacrificed his life for Yoshitsune at the battle of Yashima, the mount he received for his journey to hell was Tayūguro, a horse given to His Lordship by Hidehira of Ōshū. Now I, in my turn, have received a priceless sword. But

do not think that our lord is partial to me; he would do the same for any of you." They all wept to hear him.

"Is there anything troubling you?" asked Yoshitsune.

"My farewells have been said—there is nothing. Still—if it would not be out of place—I should like to mention one thing which might mar my reputation as a warrior."

"This is the end. Don't stand on ceremony,"

Sinking to his knees, Shirobyōe spoke: "I shall be staying here alone while you and the others flee. When the Yoshino monks arrive, they will ask, 'Is Lord Yoshitsune here?' If I admit that I am only Tadanobu, those arrogant clerics may turn back, saying, 'The leader is gone; why should we bother to fight a private battle?' Since that would be a disgrace I could never live down, I should like to make use of the name of Emperor Seiwa,⁷ just for today."

"What you ask is quite reasonable, but it would be bad enough for me to share the fate of Sumitomo and Masakado, who perished when they violated the will of heaven,⁸ without having people say spitefully, 'Yoshitsune couldn't get the ex-Emperor's approval for an attack on Yoritomo, and all his former friends deserted him. When everyone could see that he was desperate, he allowed someone to impersonate him while he ran away.'"

"We must do what the occasion calls for," said Tadanobu. "If the monks attack, I will shoot arrows as fast as I can until my quiver is empty and then rush in among them to fight with my sword. When I finally draw my dagger to kill myself, I will say, 'Although I wanted you to take me for Yoshitsune, I am Satō Shirobyōe, a retainer who borrowed his master's name to demonstrate his loyalty on the field of battle. Show my head to the Lord of Kamakura.' If I kill myself that way, nobody can criticize the use of your name."

"Of course such a last speech would leave no cause for concern," Yoshitsune agreed. He entrusted the name of his ancestor, Emperor Seiwa, to Tadanobu, who rejoiced to think that he would not only gain fame in the present world but would cut a creditable figure in the nether regions as well.

⁷ That is, to impersonate Yoshitsune, who was descended from Emperor Seiwa.

⁸ Rebelled against the government. According to Chinese political theory, emperors reigned by virtue of a mandate from heaven. Yoshitsune had been officially declared a rebel.