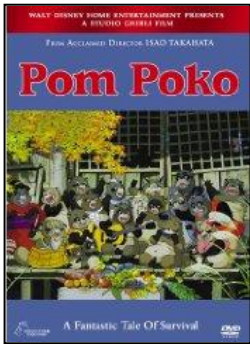


Pom Poko

Heisei tanuki gassen pom poko, 1994, Japan

Film Overview



Director Isao Takahata and the acclaimed Japanese animation studio Ghibli are the creative forces behind this environmental fable. In the woods near a rapidly growing city, a group of *tanuki* (Japanese raccoon-dogs) live in relative peace, until the development of the town begins to intrude on their land. The *tanuki* are faced with a dilemma regarding the human beings, for their homes are being destroyed, but the *tanuki* also rely on the human community for scavenged food and goods. They decide to try using their powers of illusion and shapeshifting to scare the humans back to the central city and sabotage further building, but will their efforts come too little, too late? *Pom Poko* uses the figure of the *tanuki*, an important animal in Japanese folklore and often attributed with the powers seen in the film, to comment on the nature of their society's geographic expansion and the subsequent impact on the natural world. *—Adapted from a review on Yesasia.com*

Cultural Notes

- **Tanuki** Though both the dub track and the subtitles refer to the animals as raccoons, they are actually raccoon dogs (Japanese: *tanuki*), a completely separate species of animal which is more closely related to dogs or wolves. They are common in Japanese folklore, often characterized as mischievous and jolly masters of disguise and shapeshifting, but somewhat gullible and absent-minded. The placing of leaves on their heads to allow them to transform is also a reference to folklore. Prominent testicles are an integral part of *tanuki* folklore, and they are shown and referred to throughout the film, and also used frequently in their shapeshifting. This remains unchanged in the DVD release, though the English dub (but not the subtitles) refers to them as "pouches." Teachers may want to exercise caution in showing the film for this reason. *—Adapted from Wikipedia*
- **Tanuki and teakettles** In the film, the *tanuki* hone their skills by transforming into teakettles. This is a reference to a Japanese folktale in which a monk frees a *tanuki* from a trap. In gratitude, the *tanuki* transforms into a teakettle that the man can sell to earn some money. However, when the monk who bought the teakettle tried to heat some water in it over the fire, the *tanuki* can't stand the heat and sprouts legs to run away. Then, depending on the telling, he either returns to the man who saved him and makes him money as a "tightrope-walking teakettle" or he stays with the monk, who donates him to a temple out of alarm, and the temple becomes famous for its "dancing teakettle."
- **Foxes** Foxes in Japanese folklore are also well-known for their ability to transform and play tricks on humans. Unlike the *tanuki*, however, foxes are generally sly and occasionally malicious.
- **Demon Parade** The parade that the *tanuki* put on as part of Project Poltergeist contains many different traditional Japanese demons. Among them are *oni* (ogres), *tengu* (long-nosed demons), dragons, and the seven lucky gods, popular Japanese gods of fortune. *—imdb.com*
- **The Tale of the Heike** The scene in which an old *Tanuki* transforms into a samurai on horseback is a reference to a scene from *The Tale of the Heike*, a classic Japanese epic detailing the struggle between the Heike and Genji clans. At the battle of Yashima, Heike lost the battle and fled the island by ships. One of the women of Heike then attached her fan to a pole and raised it, challenging the Genji Samurais to shoot it. But since it was too far from the shore and the target was constantly moving, the Genji Samurais hesitated. Then, to protect the honor and the pride of Genji, a young Samurai, Nasu no Yoichi, stepped forward. He successfully shot the hinge of the fan, separating it from the pole. Everyone, both Genji and Heike, cheered for this master archer. The old *tanuki* (999 years old!) is from Yashima, and he saw this battle with his own eyes. That's why the other *Tanukis* asked him to recreate this scene.

<http://www.nausicaa.net/miyazaki/pompoko/faq.html>

