

AI-Generated Graded Readers

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About This Edition

This book is a simplified English adaptation created for extensive reading practice.

The text was translated from Japanese into English and simplified using ChatGPT for intermediate English learners as part of an educational project.

Target reading level: CEFR A2-B1

The adaptation aims to improve readability while preserving the narrative content and spirit of the original work.

Source Text

Original work: Gongitsune (ごん狐)

Author: Niimi Nankichi (新美南吉)

Source: Aozora Bunko (青空文庫)

<https://www.aozora.gr.jp/>

Original Japanese text available at:

<https://www.aozora.gr.jp/cards/000121/card628.html>

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Niimi Nankichi, *Gon, the Little Fox [Gongitsune]* (Simplified Edition, Adapted and Simplified from the Japanese by ChatGPT)

Part 1

This is a story that I heard when I was a child. An old man in our village told it to me many years ago, and I have never forgotten it since then. He spoke in a quiet voice, as if the story still lived somewhere in the hills around us. Even now, when I think of those days, I can almost hear his voice again and see the places he described.

Long ago, near our village, there was a place called Nakayama. In that place, there stood a small castle, and a lord called Nakayama-sama lived there. The people in the village spoke of him with respect, and the land around the castle was quiet and peaceful. Not far from that place, deep in the mountains, there lived a little fox whose name was Gon.

Gon was a young fox, and he lived all alone. There was no family with him, no other foxes nearby, and no one to talk to. He had made a small hole for himself in a thick forest where ferns grew everywhere. The forest was dark even during the day, and the ground was soft with fallen leaves. It was a lonely place, and Gon spent his days and nights there by himself.

Because he was alone, Gon often came down to the village. He did not come to make friends with the people, but to play tricks on them. He enjoyed doing things that would surprise or trouble others, and he did not think about the results of his actions. Sometimes he went into the fields and dug up sweet potatoes, throwing them around without eating them. At other times, he set fire to bundles of dried plants that farmers had carefully prepared. He also stole red peppers that were hanging behind people's houses and ran away with them.

These actions made the villagers angry, but Gon did not understand their feelings. To him, it was only a way to pass the time. The days were long, and there was no one to share them with. So he continued his mischief, moving lightly through the grass and the shadows, always watching, always thinking of the next

thing he could do.

One autumn, it rained for several days without stopping. The rain fell heavily on the forest, and the ground became wet and cold. During those days, Gon could not go outside. He stayed inside his hole, sitting quietly and waiting for the rain to end. The sound of the rain filled the forest, and the world outside seemed far away.

At last, the rain stopped. The sky became clear, and the air felt fresh again. Gon came out of his hole and stretched his body. He felt relieved to be free, and he looked around with bright eyes. From somewhere nearby, the sharp cry of a bird rang out again and again, clear in the clean air. The world seemed alive once more, and Gon decided to go down toward the village.

Part 2

Gon walked down toward the village, moving along a small path that led to the river. The ground was still soft from the rain, and his feet sank slightly into the mud as he went. All around him, the tall grasses shone with drops of water, and each drop caught the light of the clear sky. The air smelled fresh, and everything seemed brighter than before.

When he reached the bank of the little river, Gon stopped and looked around. The river was usually quiet and shallow, but now it was full of muddy water from the long rain. The water flowed quickly, carrying pieces of grass and broken branches with it. The plants along the edge of the river were bent down, pushed over by the strong current, and their leaves were covered in yellowish water.

Gon began to walk along the riverbank, stepping carefully so that he would not slip. The path was wet and uneven, and sometimes his feet made small splashing sounds as he moved. He followed the river downstream, looking here and there, enjoying the feeling of being outside again after being trapped in his hole for so many days.

After a while, he noticed something strange. In the middle of the river, there was a person standing in the water. The person seemed to be doing something

with his hands, moving them again and again in a steady rhythm. Gon became curious, but he did not want to be seen, so he quietly moved into a place where the grass grew thick and high.

From there, he lay low and watched carefully. He pushed aside a few blades of grass and looked through the small opening. The man in the river wore old, worn clothes, and he had rolled them up so that the water reached his waist. On his head, he wore a cloth tied tightly, and his face looked serious as he worked.

“That must be Hyoju,” Gon thought to himself as he watched. He had seen the man before in the village. Hyoju was a poor farmer, and he often came to the river to catch fish. Now, he was holding a kind of net and shaking it in the water, trying to gather fish inside it. Gon stayed very still, his eyes fixed on the man, waiting to see what would happen next.

Part 3

Hyoju moved the net slowly through the water, then lifted it a little and shook it again. The net was wide at the mouth and narrow at the end, like a long bag, and it caught whatever was pushed inside by the current. He worked with care, watching the flow of the river and choosing the best places to move his net. The muddy water swirled around his legs, and now and then he leaned forward to keep his balance.

After a short time, Hyoju lifted the back part of the net out of the water. Inside, there were many things mixed together. There were pieces of grass, roots, and small bits of wood, all tangled together in the net. But among them, there were also shining white shapes that caught the light.

Gon narrowed his eyes and looked more closely. The white shapes were the bellies of fish. There were thick eels, long and smooth, and also larger fish that glimmered as they moved. Hyoju reached into the net and took them out one by one, throwing them into a basket at his side. He did not separate them from the dirt and grass but dropped everything together into the basket.

When he had finished, Hyoju tied the end of the net again and pushed it back

into the river. Then he climbed up onto the bank, carrying the basket with him. He set it down on the ground and looked around for a moment, as if he had remembered something. Without taking the basket, he began to run upstream, leaving it behind.

Gon watched him go, his tail twitching slightly. When Hyoju had disappeared from sight, Gon slowly came out from the grass. He moved lightly over the wet ground and quickly reached the place where the basket had been left. There was a playful look in his eyes, and he could already feel the beginning of a new trick in his mind.

“I will have a little fun,” he thought, and he stepped closer to the basket. Inside, the fish lay together in a heap, still wet and shining. Gon reached in with his paw, grabbed one of the fish, and tossed it toward the river. It fell into the muddy water with a soft sound and disappeared at once.

He did it again and again, taking fish from the basket and throwing them into the river. Each time, the fish slipped back into the water and vanished below the surface. Gon felt a small excitement as he worked, moving quickly and carelessly, not thinking about what would happen after Hyoju returned.

Part 4

Gon continued throwing the fish one after another into the river. Each time he grabbed one, it slipped in his paw, wet and smooth, but he managed to toss it away with quick movements. The muddy water swallowed them all, and soon the basket began to look empty. Gon felt pleased with himself, as if he had done something clever and amusing.

At last, only one fish remained in the basket. It was a large eel, thick and shining, its body twisting slowly as if it still had strength left. Gon reached in to grab it, but the eel slipped away from his paw at once. It was too smooth and too strong, and he could not hold it tightly.

Gon grew impatient. He tried again, but the eel twisted and slid away each time. “This is annoying,” he thought, and his ears flicked with frustration. Then he

pushed his head into the basket and bit the eel near its head, trying to catch it with his teeth instead.

The moment he did so, the eel moved suddenly and wrapped itself around his neck. Its long body tightened like a rope, and Gon felt it press against him. He was surprised and tried to shake it off, but it held on tightly, and he could not free himself at once.

Just then, a loud voice came from upstream. "You thief of a fox!" Hyoju shouted as he ran toward him. Gon was so startled that he jumped into the air. He tried to run away at once, but the eel was still wrapped around his neck, making it hard for him to move freely.

Gon rushed away as fast as he could, leaping sideways and then forward, his body low to the ground. The eel still clung to him, and he felt its weight and movement as he ran. He did not look back, but he could hear Hyoju's voice behind him, full of anger.

When he reached the trees near his hole, Gon finally stopped and turned around. He looked carefully, but Hyoju was no longer following him. Feeling a little safer, Gon bit down hard on the eel and at last managed to tear it loose from his neck. He threw it onto the grass outside his hole and stood there for a moment, breathing quickly, not yet knowing how much trouble his small trick had caused.

Part 5

About ten days passed after that day. Gon went about his usual wandering, moving quietly along the paths near the village. As he passed behind the house of a farmer named Yasuke, he saw Yasuke's wife sitting under a fig tree. She was carefully putting black dye on her teeth, working slowly as if she were preparing for something important.

Gon tilted his head and watched her for a moment. Then he moved on and passed behind the house of a blacksmith named Shinbei. There, Shinbei's wife was combing her hair with care, looking into a small mirror. She, too, seemed to be getting ready for something unusual.

“Hmm,” Gon thought, pausing for a moment. “Something is happening in the village.” He looked around, trying to understand what it might be. “Is it a festival? If it were a festival, I would hear drums or flutes. And there should be flags at the shrine.” But there was no music, and the village felt quiet in a different way.

Thinking about this, Gon walked along and soon came to the front of Hyoju’s house. It was a small, worn place with a red well standing in front of it. Inside the house, many people had gathered. Women in clean clothes were standing near the stove outside, cooking something in a large pot that bubbled and steamed.

Gon watched from a distance, his eyes moving from one person to another. The air felt heavy, and the people did not speak loudly. After a moment, he understood what he was seeing. “Ah,” he thought, “this is a funeral.” The quiet movement, the careful preparation, and the serious faces all told him the same thing.

“But who has died in Hyoju’s house?” Gon wondered as he stepped back. He did not go closer but turned away and began to think about it as he walked. The village felt different now, and even the air seemed to carry a kind of sadness that he could not ignore.

Later that day, after the sun had passed noon, Gon went to the village graveyard. He hid himself behind a group of small stone statues and waited. The sky was clear, and far away he could see the roof tiles of the castle shining in the sunlight. Red flowers bloomed all around the graves, spreading like bright cloth across the ground, and the place felt both quiet and still.

Part 6

After a while, a clear sound came from the village. It was the slow ringing of a bell, and it echoed across the fields and the hills. Gon listened carefully, and he understood that it was the signal for the funeral to begin. He stayed hidden behind the stone statues, his eyes fixed on the path that led into the graveyard.

Soon, the people of the village began to appear. They were dressed in white clothes, and they walked in a quiet line, moving slowly and carefully. Their voices were low, and the sound of their steps mixed with the soft ringing of the bell. As

they entered the graveyard, the red flowers were pressed down under their feet, and the bright color seemed to fade beneath them.

Gon raised his head a little higher so that he could see better. Among the people, he saw Hyoju walking at the front. Hyoju wore formal clothes, and in his hands, he carried a wooden tablet. His face looked very different from usual. It was pale and tired, and the strong expression he once had was gone.

“So it is his mother,” Gon thought quietly as he watched. He lowered his head again, feeling something heavy inside him. The scene before him was not like the lively village he had known. Everything was slow, quiet, and full of sorrow, and Gon did not feel like moving or playing tricks anymore.

That night, Gon stayed in his hole and thought about what he had seen. He lay still in the darkness, and the memory of the funeral came back to him again and again. “Hyoju’s mother must have been ill,” he said to himself. “She must have wanted to eat eel. That is why Hyoju went to the river to catch fish.”

Gon closed his eyes and continued thinking. “But I played a trick and threw the fish away. Because of me, he could not bring the eel back to her. And so she died without eating what she wanted.” The thought grew stronger in his mind, and he felt a deep regret that he had never felt before.

“Ah,” Gon whispered softly, “if only I had not done that. If only I had not played that trick.” He turned over in his small space, unable to rest. For the first time, he began to understand that his actions had caused something serious, something that could not be undone.

Part 7

The next morning, Gon came out of his hole and went toward the village again. The sky was clear, but he did not feel the same lightness as before. His steps were slower, and his eyes were more thoughtful. He kept thinking about Hyoju and the lonely house that now had no mother inside it.

When Gon reached the place near Hyoju’s house, he hid himself behind a storage shed and looked carefully. Hyoju was there by the red well, washing

barley in a wooden bowl. He worked alone, moving his hands quietly in the water, and there was no one beside him to speak to. The house looked empty, and even the air around it felt still.

“He is alone now,” Gon thought. “Just like me.” The thought surprised him, and for a moment he did not know what to do. He watched Hyoju for a while longer, and then he heard a loud voice coming from the road nearby.

“Fresh sardines! Cheap sardines!” the voice called out with energy. Gon turned his head quickly and ran toward the sound. He saw a man pushing a cart filled with shining fish, their silver bodies catching the light. The smell of the sea came from them, sharp and fresh.

At that moment, Yasuke’s wife opened her back door and said, “Please give me some sardines.” The fish seller stopped his cart and picked up several fish with both hands. He carried them inside the house, leaving the cart standing by the road.

Gon saw his chance. He ran quickly to the cart and took five or six sardines in his mouth. Then he turned at once and ran back the way he had come. His heart beat fast as he moved, but this time he was not thinking of a trick.

When he reached Hyoju’s house, Gon went to the back entrance and threw the sardines inside. He did not wait to see what would happen but turned and ran away toward his hole. On the hill, he stopped and looked back. Hyoju was still at the well, unaware of what had just been left for him.

“That is one good thing,” Gon thought quietly. “I have done one good thing.” The feeling was new to him, and though it was small, it stayed with him as he disappeared into the forest.

Part 8

The next day, Gon went into the mountains and gathered many chestnuts. He picked them one by one from the ground, carrying them carefully in his arms. The shells were rough, and some of them pricked his skin, but he did not stop. When he had collected enough, he brought them down to Hyoju’s house.

Gon looked inside from the back entrance. Hyoju was sitting there, eating his

midday meal. He held a bowl in his hand, but he was not really eating. Instead, he stared ahead as if he were thinking deeply about something. His face looked tired, and there was a small cut on his cheek.

Gon felt uneasy when he saw that cut. Just then, Hyoju spoke to himself in a low voice. “Who in the world threw those sardines into my house?” he said. “Because of that, I was taken for a thief and beaten badly by the fish seller.” He touched his cheek as he spoke, showing how much it still hurt.

Gon felt a sudden shock. “So that is what happened,” he thought. “Because of what I did, he suffered again.” The good thing he had tried to do had only caused more trouble. Gon lowered his head, feeling a deep sadness that he had not known before.

Without making a sound, he moved around to the storage shed and placed the chestnuts by the entrance. He did not go inside, and he did not try to watch what would happen next. After leaving the chestnuts there, he turned and quietly went back into the forest.

The next day, Gon gathered more chestnuts and brought them again. He placed them in the same place and left without being seen. The day after that, he did the same thing once more, moving silently and quickly so that no one would notice him.

After a few days, Gon also brought mushrooms from the mountains. He added them to the chestnuts, leaving them together at the entrance. Each time he came, he felt a small hope that this time his action would not cause harm, and that somehow it might help Hyoju, even if Hyoju did not know who had done it.

Part 9

One night, the moon was bright and full in the sky. Its light spread over the fields and the paths, making everything look pale and quiet. Gon came out of the forest and walked slowly along the road, not in a hurry, just moving as he pleased. The night air was cool, and small insects made soft sounds in the grass.

As he passed below the castle of Nakayama, he heard voices coming from the

narrow path ahead. Someone was walking toward him, speaking in a low tone. Gon quickly stepped aside and hid himself in the shadow by the edge of the road. He stayed very still, listening carefully.

The voices grew closer, and soon he could see two men walking together. It was Hyoju and another farmer named Kasuke. The two of them were talking as they walked, their shadows long in the moonlight. Gon kept his body low and watched them pass.

“You know, Kasuke,” Hyoju said, “something very strange has been happening to me lately.” Kasuke turned his head slightly and answered, “Oh? What do you mean?” His voice sounded curious, and he looked at Hyoju with interest.

“Since my mother died,” Hyoju continued, “someone has been bringing me chestnuts and mushrooms every day. I do not know who it is. They leave them without being seen.” He spoke slowly, as if he himself could not understand it.

Kasuke made a small sound of surprise. “Really? That is strange,” he said. “Are you telling the truth?” Hyoju nodded and replied, “Of course I am. If you do not believe me, come tomorrow and I will show you what I have received.”

The two men walked on in silence for a while after that. Gon followed them at a distance, stepping softly so that they would not hear him. He listened closely, wanting to hear what they would say next, his heart beating a little faster as he waited for their words.

Part 10

After walking for a while in silence, Kasuke spoke again. “I have been thinking about what you said,” he began slowly. “It does not seem like something a person would do. No one brings things like that every day without showing themselves.” He looked ahead as he walked, his voice thoughtful and serious.

Hyoju turned slightly toward him. “Then what do you think it is?” he asked. There was a quiet uncertainty in his voice, as if he hoped for an answer but was not sure what to believe. The road stretched ahead of them under the moonlight, pale and empty.

Kasuke nodded once and said, "It must be the work of a god. A god has seen that you are alone now and feels pity for you. That is why these things are given to you." He spoke with confidence, as if he had reached a clear conclusion in his mind.

"A god?" Hyoju repeated, surprised. He slowed his steps a little and looked at Kasuke more carefully. "Do you really think so?" His voice was quiet, but there was a small hope in it, as if he wanted the idea to be true.

"Yes," Kasuke said firmly. "It cannot be anything else. So you should give thanks every day. You should pray and show your gratitude properly." He raised his hand slightly as he spoke, as if pointing to something above them in the night sky.

Hyoju nodded slowly. "I see," he said. "If that is true, then I must do as you say." The two men continued walking, their voices fading as they went farther down the road. The sound of insects filled the quiet night once more.

Hidden in the shadow, Gon listened to everything. When the voices were gone, he let out a small breath. "That is not good," he thought. "I am the one who brings those things, but he will thank a god instead of me." He lowered his head slightly, feeling a strange disappointment that he had never known before.

Part 11

The next day, Gon went again into the mountains and gathered chestnuts as he had done before. He carried them carefully, holding them close so that none would fall. The path down to the village felt familiar now, and his feet moved without hesitation. Still, his thoughts were not light, and he kept remembering the words that Hyoju and Kasuke had spoken the night before.

When he reached Hyoju's house, he saw that Hyoju was working in the storage shed, twisting straw into rope. His hands moved steadily, and his face was serious as he looked down at his work. There was no sign that he knew anything about the one who had been bringing him food.

Gon waited for a moment, watching from behind, then quietly went around to

the back entrance. He stepped inside without making a sound and placed the chestnuts on the floor. He did not stay long, and he did not look around as he had done before. Instead, he left quickly, his tail low and his steps silent.

As he moved away from the house, Gon thought again about the idea of the god. "So he will thank a god," he said to himself. "Even though I am the one who brings these things." He felt a small pain inside, something close to sadness but also mixed with a kind of anger that he could not fully understand.

"Still," Gon continued in his thoughts, "I will keep bringing them." He stopped for a moment and looked back at the house from a distance. The roof and the red well stood quietly in the sunlight, and there was no sign of what had just happened inside.

Gon turned away and went back into the forest. Even if no one knew what he was doing, he felt that he must continue. The memory of the past, of the eel and of Hyoju's mother, stayed with him. It was not something he could forget, and it pushed him forward, day after day, to return again with what little he could give.

Part 12

The next day, Gon once again gathered chestnuts and carried them down to Hyoju's house. The sky was clear, and the sunlight fell warmly over the village, but Gon did not feel the warmth in his heart. He moved carefully as always, thinking only of placing the chestnuts and leaving without being seen.

Hyoju was in the storage shed again, working with straw. He did not notice Gon as he quietly came closer. Gon went to the back entrance and stepped inside, holding the chestnuts in his arms. He was just about to place them on the floor as he had done many times before.

At that moment, Hyoju suddenly raised his head. His eyes caught the movement, and he saw a fox inside his house. At once, he recognized it. "That fox again," he thought. "It must be the same one that stole my eel." His face grew hard, and his body moved quickly.

"All right," Hyoju said under his breath as he stood up. He went to the shed and

took down his gun. With careful hands, he put in the powder and prepared it. Then he walked slowly toward the house, making no sound, his eyes fixed on the fox.

Gon, unaware of what was happening behind him, turned to leave after placing the chestnuts. Just as he stepped toward the door, there was a loud sound. The gun fired, and the sharp noise broke the quiet air. Gon felt a sudden shock and fell to the ground at once.

Hyoju rushed forward and looked down at the fox. Then his eyes moved to the floor, where the chestnuts lay in a small pile. He stared at them, surprised, and then looked again at Gon. “Gon,” he said softly, “was it you? Were you the one who brought these to me all this time?”

Gon lay still, his eyes closed, but he gave a small movement, as if to answer. Hyoju’s face changed, and the strength went out of his body. The gun slipped from his hands and fell to the ground. A thin line of smoke rose from its end, and in that quiet moment, Hyoju finally understood everything.