

The Sun Goddess of the Heavens

Introduction: There are many stories from ancient times that were told to explain the changing of the seasons. Most are about pleasing the gods and goddesses of various religions. The story of the Sun Goddess, Amaterasu Omikami, is found in the most ancient book of Japan, called the Kojiki. It's in the myths of the Kojiki where the roots of the Shinto religion are found.

Long, long ago, high in the heavens above Japan, was the land of the gods and goddesses. *(Amateratsu walks up the stairs to the pulpit, smiles)* It was a peaceful land, ruled by the Sun Goddess, Amaterasu. Amaterasu was a kind and gentle ruler. She had a younger brother whose name was Susano. *(Susano mounts a block at bottom of pulpit)* One day Susano called up to the heavens, *(palms together, pleading)* "Please, sister, can I come up and live in the heavens with the gods and goddesses?"

Amaterasu said, *(wagging her finger at her brother)* "If you are to live in the land of the heavens, you must promise to behave and not make any mischief."

"Yes, sister. I promise," he said. *(he crosses his fingers behind his back for congregation to see, then turns and winks)*

Now Susano may have been the Sun Goddess's little brother, but he liked to play rough and rowdy sometimes. *(he gets down from the block)* Soon he was stomping through the land, wrecking the rice fields and destroying the canals the other gods and goddesses built. *(he stomps around front of Sanctuary)* *(Amaterasu descends stairs, goes to brother, shakes her head at him)* Amaterasu talked to him, and felt certain her brother would settle down. *(he slumps away with his head down.)* But Susano grew rowdier and rowdier. *(She brings other actors to center aisle. They unroll fabric in the air)* One day Amaterasu gathered people in the loom house to weave a special cloth for the gods. Suddenly, Susano threw a huge ball onto the loom. *(he throws large ball)* The loom broke, sending splinters in every direction. *(People fall to the floor. Susano grabs ball, giggles and runs)* Some of the people were hurt.

Amaterasu was furious. She could no longer smile. *(She hides on stairs & moves block in front of her.)* She ran to a cave, hid herself inside, and sealed the cave shut with a large boulder. Without the Sun Goddess, the heavens and earth were plunged in to darkness. Everyone rushed to the cave. *(All run to cave, cup hand as if calling out)* "Sun Goddess, the world has been plunged into darkness. Please come out." But no sound came from the cave. *(Pretend pushing boulder)* They tried to move the boulder aside, but it didn't budge. They needed another plan. *(They get in a huddle)* So they brought a large mirror and held it in front of the cave. *(2 carry mirror)* And they gathered all the sleeping roosters. *(congregants snore)* Now they were ready. They began to play music and dance. *(Music plays, all dance around, including congregants)* Inside the cave, Amaterasu wondered how there could possibly be music and laughter when all was in darkness. She pushed the boulder aside just a crack, *(do this)* but the roosters saw the light and thought it was dawn, so they started crowing. *(congregants crow)* Then Amaterasu poked her head out and saw before her the light of a sun goddess. "Beautiful", she thought, not realizing she was looking in a mirror. She came out to see more, *(come out)* and the world was no longer in darkness! Everyone rushed to her and held her and cheered. They begged her to never leave them in darkness again. When she realized how much they needed her, she agreed. And Susano, he was sent back down to earth. *(She motions for Susano to come to her, then points him down the center aisle.)* All was right with the world.