

Cloze Passage: Foxes in Japanese Culture

An activity of "Hyenas are welcome in the city of Harar".

In the story "Hyenas are welcome in the city of Harar" (page 19, *What's Up* June 2024), you can read about how the people of this Ethiopian city welcome hyenas. This is unusual, as many other communities view this animal negatively. Similarly, traditional Japanese stories view the fox favourably, even though they are often seen as pests elsewhere. Complete the cloze passage below to find out more. Fill in the 12 blanks with the words below. Use each word only once.

simile	benevolent	associated	all	sly	lore
felicitous	staple	elevated	rodents	con	notorious

"As cunning as a fox" is a common English **(A)** _____. It describes a person as **(B)** _____ and clever in a dishonest way. Western culture tends to portray the fox as deceptive, with foxes playing the **(C)** _____ man in fables. In England, foxes are hunted down as they are **(D)** _____ chicken thieves. The Japanese hold a more balanced view of the fox.

In Japan, rice is a **(E)** _____ food and central to life. Foxes lived closed to rice fields, preying on **(F)** _____ and safeguarding the harvest from such pests. This made foxes celebrated, and they came to be **(G)** _____ with the Japanese god of rice. It is believed that foxes serve as this god's messengers, and fox statues are found in shrines **(H)** _____ around Japan. They delivered not just messages, but also good fortune — it was **(I)** _____ to spot one.

Gradually, foxes were **(J)** _____ to the status of gods themselves. These *Zenko* foxes were believed to be centuries old and supremely powerful. Nonetheless, they were **(K)** _____ beings, helpful and kind to humans.

Traditional Japanese stories do acknowledge that foxes may not always be good. Japanese **(L)** _____ also includes wild fox spirits which use their shape-shifting powers for vengeance and mischief.