

Selections from NDL collections

***Shiohi no tsuto* (Gifts from the Ebb Tide)**

Artist: Kitagawa Utamaro  
 Publisher: Akera Kanko  
 Published in: ca.1789  
 Published by: Tsutaya Juzaburo  
 27.4 × 19.4 cm  
 Owned by the National Diet Library, Japan  
 \* Available in the [National Diet Library Digital Collections](#).

In Japan, from ancient times, collecting beautiful shells and decorating them with poems has been an elegant pastime. *Shiohi no tsuto* (*Gifts from the Ebb Tide*), an illustrated book of multi-coloured woodblock prints with *kyōka* (humorous and satirical Japanese poems of thirty-one syllables), drawn by Kitagawa Utamaro (?-1806) at the end of the 18th century, is a beautiful work featuring both shells and poems. The book begins with a scene of *shiohigari* (clam-digging) followed by six pages of elaborately drawn pictures of shells with 36 *kyōka*, and last comes this scene of the shell-matching game.

In the shell-matching game, 360 shells are separated into 720 half-shells, laid with their inside down. Players match shells by the outside patterns and shapes. The inside of each shell carries an exquisite little picture on a subject such as birds, flowering plants or scenes from the *Tale of Genji* and the *Tales of Ise*. In the Edo period, a shell-

matching game set was part of a bride's trousseau for court nobles, feudal lords and wealthy merchants.

It is spring, and the cherry blossoms are blooming in the garden. Shells are laid in circles in front of a richly-dressed woman on a cushion, who is playing the game with her attendants. A *kyōka* is written at the top of the picture. Some partially different versions of this book are known. The Gerhard Pulverer Collection in Germany has the same version as the National Diet Library.