

# **36 Views Study Guide**

## **36 Views by Naomi Iizuka**

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## Plot Summary

36 Views begins both in a dream and at Darius Wheeler's - a notorious art dealer's - apartment. He tells the story of his Indiana Jones-like adventures tracking down art in a no-man's-land in Southeast Asia in one spotlight while an 11th-century Japanese lady removes layers of her clothing in another. The juxtaposition of modern and ancient, traditional and avant-garde, real and imaginary set, the playwright jumps into the height of Darius' party. He meets Setsuko Hearn, an up-and-coming Asian studies professor to whom he can't help but be drawn, even though she finds him rather base and loathsome.

Upstairs Darius' assistant, John Bell, scrambles to track down the artist the event is honoring, while Darius, Dr. Hearn, and her boss, Owen Matthiassen discuss the artwork downstairs. A startling blend of traditional styles and modern ideals, Owen and Dr. Hearn both find the artist Utagawa's work intriguing, but Darius disdains it as lacking beauty. John announces the artist isn't going to show after all, and the party breaks up. Owen excitedly shows Darius a 19th-century Hokusai woodblock print from the 36 Views series on Mt. Fuji, but Darius demonstrates to him it is clearly a fake.

The next day, Claire Tsong, an Asian art restorer who does work for Darius from time to time, stops by the office and tries to empower over-qualified John into leaving Darius, who then shows up for a mysterious meeting with Elizabeth Newman-Orr, who snuck into his party the previous evening. She has a proposition for Darius, offering to pay him a sizable sum if he discreetly moves a priceless piece of art from one country to another, and he accepts. Darius finds a beautifully-written manuscript on John's desk and asks where it's from, but John just makes up an incredibly elaborate story about the manuscript's history. Complaining about his lies later to Claire, John goes on to "create" the original manuscript with her while he, Claire, Darius, and Dr. Hearn act out and recite the manuscript's contents, the diary of an 11th-century noblewoman who chronicled her affairs one summer.

With the fake manuscript now fully written, the play sweeps briskly through six short scenes as Darius passes the manuscript on to Dr. Hearn, who in turn tells her boss Owen about it, who in turn tells his dean, and then the press. Darius and Dr. Hearn study Claire's Polaroid prints of the "original," and Darius confesses his feelings for Dr. Hearn while she bubbles over with excitement about the impact the manuscript will have on her field. The two begin to have an affair while John and Claire also grow closer as co-conspirators in the creation of the forged manuscript. A brief scene shows Owen, also studying the manuscript, as he writes about the prevalent description of loss in the work and works like these, setting the scene for the unraveling to come.

Darius receives the shipment for Elizabeth and invites her to his office. He realizes he is trying to entrap her, however, and pretends the item he imported--an exact copy of the portrait of a Japanese lady hanging in his home--is a fake and he always knew that it was. She tries to get him to admit that he at least illegally imported the copy he personally owns, but he pretends that is a fake as well, leading him and John to have a



rather ironic discussion about when it is okay to lie. He tells John to buy the pillow book manuscript quickly and takes off. Elizabeth returns later, hoping to get some useful information out of John, but finds Claire instead who offers to tell her whatever she'd like to hear.

Owen calls Dr. Hearn to his office to discuss the ramifications of the manuscript being a forgery and Dr. Hearn in turn confronts Darius about his deceit. He claims he never knew, but she can no longer believe him and they break up. Claire, happy and successful with the cash she and John got for the "original" manuscript, concentrates on her mixed media art, bolstered by Elizabeth's, now her girlfriend, support. Owen shows up at Claire's opening--still believing it's for the artist Utagawa, who is actually Claire--and commends John on the quality of his text. Though the playwright never shows the characters Dr. Hearn and Darius again, the actors who play them deliver an epilogue through dialogue explaining they both turned out fine, happy, and successful, even though they never reunited.



# Act 1, Scene 1

## Summary

In a long monologue, Darius recounts an art buying trip in the Doi Lang Mountains between Thailand and Myanmar, or Burma. He's essentially in the middle of a war zone, with soldiers and mercenaries everywhere armed with huge rifles and grenades. This is the kind of off-the-beaten-path region where if you go missing no one will notice or ever find you again. An acquaintance of an acquaintance told him about some men with an amazing stash of art, so Darius sets out to an even more remote location in the middle of the night to meet them. His driver and guide races through the mountain passes with such speed and reckless driving Darius isn't even sure he'll make it to the meeting alive, but when he does, he's amazed at the goods the men bring along: museum-quality pieces from some of Thailand's most important temples and one piece he knew he had to have. While Darius speaks, spotlights shine on a gilt painting of a Japanese lady and Setsuko Hearn, dressed as a Heian-era lady, who removes layer after layer of clothing while Darius speaks. At the end of his monologue, the final layer comes up with a dramatic Kabuki-style costume change, revealing her western clothes.

## Analysis

Rather than setting the stage for the scenes to come, Scene 1 is actually a stark departure from the style of most of the rest of the play, offering a disembodied scene not connected to the mainly plot-driven scenes that follow. Even though Darius' speech does relate to the later scenes at the party, the structure of the scenes, contrasting an action-packed tale of Western stereotypes of orientalism with the private, slow removal of the superficial layers covering an 11th-century Japanese lady, foreshadows many of the themes and plot lines to come: Darius will later peel back his own superficial layers of protection and assumed stature for Dr. Hearn, while she will in turn become the effusive spinner of tales.

## Vocabulary

Kamakura-era, opium, Heian-era, kimono, shakuhachi flute, Kabuki, paddy fields, antiquities, retrospect, gilt, Myanmar



# Act 1, Scenes 2-5

## Summary

In scene 2, the light widens and the background noise grows to show Darius and Dr. Hearn are at a party in Darius' art-filled loft apartment. Dr. Hearn is rather skeptical about Darius' stories, not going so far as to say they aren't true, but heavily insinuating that he has a flair for the fantastic and adventure tales. They discuss his personal art collection as well as the works on display for the evening. As a favor to a friend, Darius is hosting a reception for the Asian fusion artist Utagawa, even though he himself doesn't care for the work.

In the brief scene 3, Claire Tsong silently reads from a manuscript while John Bell's voice, from offstage, says the text of the manuscript. It is a "list of beautiful things" describing a loved person in sensual terms. Claire approaches John at his cluttered work desk in scene 4, asking if Utagawa has arrived yet. John is actually trying to get in touch with Utagawa's assistant to see why the artist hasn't arrived yet, and leaves to make his phone call when Elizabeth Newman-Orr walks into the office looking for Darius at the beginning of scene 5. The two women introduce themselves and Elizabeth claims to be an old friend of Darius'.

## Analysis

This group of scenes sets both of the play's main plots in motion: the mystery of the pillow book manuscript and the romance between Darius and Dr. Hearn. More notably, these scenes introduce the themes of fusion and authenticity. Utagawa's work, and Dr. Hearn and Darius' reactions to it, inform their receptiveness to each other, romance, and the pillow book itself, while Claire's fluid views of authenticity foreshadow her remorseless decision to create a fake copy of the "original" pillow book.

Through their brevity and sudden scene and topic shifts within the same space and time, these scenes also demonstrate what the playwright means to show in her 36 views: snapshots, some longer and more involved, some more brief, visual and visceral. The reader quickly sees that they cannot see each scene as a free-standing piece of the puzzle that is the play, but rather as a particular view of the interaction between these characters, which may overlap or even directly contradict other views.

## Vocabulary

shoji screens, rickshaws, bracing, woolly, sensibility, Dynasty, shoddy, counterfeits, pawn, woodblock, mixed media



# Act 1, Scenes 6-9

## Summary

Owen, an old friend of Darius', finds him and Dr. Hearn talking and introduces her as his brilliant new hire. Not having realized she was an academic, Darius is embarrassed for his previous lofty claims about his art and adventures. The trio discuss Utagawa's art and Darius reveals he actually does enjoy some of the artist's shunga, or erotic prints, because they expose some universal truths. Owen takes Dr. Hearn to see some of Darius' other art, and scene 8 begins immediately, with John arriving to tell Darius Utagawa won't make it to the party after all.

Elizabeth enters and introduces herself to Darius. They aren't actually old friends, and she lies to him several times about how she knows him before finally revealing she snuck into the party. Initially dismissive of her, she tells him she has something important to discuss with him and finally intrigues him enough to get a meeting with him the next day. The party continues to wind down and scene 9 begins with Owen proudly showing Darius a woodblock print he recently purchased, an excellent specimen of a rare print of Mt. Fuji from Hokusai's 36 views. The second Owen pulls the piece out of his portfolio, Darius knows it's a fake and explains why: the ink colors are synthetic and couldn't possibly have been in Japan during Hokusai's time. In the scene the woodblock appears projected behind the actors and the colors become harsher and more artificial as Darius points out the flaws. In Scene 10, Claire's voice reads a disclaimer policy absolving the seller of any fault if the print is not authentic.

## Analysis

Owen, Darius, and Dr. Hearn's discussion of the truth once again reveals fundamental truths about the characters involved. When Darius reveals he actually finds more truth in Utagawa's erotic prints than his other art, Darius might as well be talking about himself. His typically modern, fusion, and idea-driven veneer falls away to more basic truths later in the play when he expresses his love for Dr. Hearn.

Scene 8, meanwhile sets up an interesting recurring theme in the play: the prints of Hokusai, from whom the play actually derives its name. Hokusai created a book of woodblock prints called *36 Views*, which contained 46 woodblocks of Mt. Fuji from different angles and different towns on all sides of the mountain. The playwright approaches the plot of the novel, and specifically the discovery of the pillow book, in this same manner, dancing around the main subject, exploring it through every possible angle to find the unexpected beauty in unusual viewpoints. This is the first time Hokusai's work is mentioned in the play, and it's notable the first iteration of his work the viewer sees is a forgery.



## Vocabulary

humdrum, vernacular, philistine, uncanny, anachronistic, shunga, abstractions, tarted, recluse, mandala, stupefied, unerring, pigment, disclaimer, authenticity





# Act 1, Scenes 10-11

## Summary

Appearing in a narrow spotlight, Dr. Hearn briefly reads a portion of the manuscript Claire found on John's desk as the scene transitions into scene 11. A stagehand dressed all in black with his face covered brings in a covered screen as she reads. After uncovering the screen, the stagehand slowly removes all of his black clothing, finally removing the cloth over his face--it's John Bell.

In Scene 11, Claire has just brought the screen into Darius' office and meets John there. He praises her work, but she goes off on a diatribe about how art isn't art, but merely expensive decoration for rich people. She tells him he can't romanticize the profession he's in, that everything is about market value, and he grossly underestimates his own value. Outlining his impressive qualifications--he speaks most major Asian languages and has high academic qualifications--she tells him he should embrace his talents and quit working for Darius, who she believe is a huge scumbag, but John defends Darius.

## Analysis

Scenes 10 and 11 both indirectly reveal John has written the pillow book and set up his background to have possibly come up with such a thing. Ancient Japanese forms of theater, such as the Kabuki and Noh Theater forms which appear interspersed in this work, relayed the action and revelations of their plays in incredibly veiled manners, similar to the way John removes the cloth over his face as the viewer hears his manuscript evolving in Claire's hands. The following scene outlines, in a list not unlike the list of beautiful things, a list of John's impressive Asian literary qualifications. Scene 11 also foreshadows Claire's vendetta against Darius by betraying her deep resentment and hatred of the man.

## Vocabulary

Edo period, bric-a-brac, romanticize, subsidizing, market value, independent contractor, existential, Renaissance man, narcissistic, dropcloth



# Act 1, Scene 12

## Summary

In scene 12, Elizabeth and Darius' mysterious meeting takes place. After beating around the bush, she finally explains her client purchased a piece of art that he cannot get as it is a national treasure and would be seized by authorities in transport. She tries indirectly to ask Darius to help her move the object, but he makes her come out and say exactly what she wants, at which point he bursts into a long diatribe about how dangerous it is to do such things, and how likely it is he could land in jail for the attempt. When he asks her if she has ever been in a jail in Asia, she names her price and he just laughs. He haggles her up to twice the amount, with half immediately and half on delivery, and she says it can be arranged.

## Analysis

In addition to setting up on the play's important subplots, this scene reveals another side of Darius' personality the reader or viewer has only heard tell of but not yet seen. Scene 12 showcases the Darius of myth, the unscrupulous art dealer who will say or do whatever he needs to make a sale or get a precious piece of art. Even when Darius protests he couldn't possibly do such a thing as Elizabeth suggests, it is as though he is given a prewritten monologue or acting out a theatrical scene--the words come too naturally, too effusively to him, and it is clearly a feint.

## Vocabulary

precede, thwarted, homespun, Zen, lacquerware, unbeknownst, candid, tariffs, pilfer, confiscate, transcription



# Act 1, Scenes 13-16

## Summary

Scene 13 begins with Darius reading a new section of the manuscript silently while Dr. Hearn appears in a spotlight and recites the words. Dr. Hearn disappears in a quick segue to brief scene 14 in which Darius asks John where he got the manuscript. Scene 15 consists almost entirely of John's monologue in response. Rapid-fire, he reports on his research on the manuscript's history, tracing it from a Dutch trader to a Chinese magnate and English gentleman poet to its current owner, who received it with several other pieces as part of an estate. Darius asks if she thinks it's a genuine article and when John responds it is, the scene quickly shifts to scene 16.

John tells Claire he can't believe he lied about the manuscript being fake and that he actually made up that entire history on the spot. Claire thinks it's great and encourages him to keep lying to Darius, but John is in shock. Guiding him, she asks him to describe the language of the book and the type of script he used, finally getting him to start to write out the Japanese characters for her. Claire picks up the text where John leaves off, drawing the characters onto the shoji screens, creating the "original" manuscript.

## Analysis

This group of scenes begins the second third of the play and definitely sets the main plot of the work in progress. While earlier scenes have danced around the text of the pillow book, what it is, and where it came from, in these scenes the reader or viewer receives, in head-spinning back to back scenes, two different stories about where the book came from. The first--articulate, deeply researched and documented--seems entirely more plausible than the dreamlike sequence during which John and Claire create the "original" manuscript, and yet it is the authentic-, professional-sounding history which is actually the fake.

## Vocabulary

carp, transcription, appraisal, provenance, scant, oblique, courtesan, magnate, astronomical, besotted, ineffable, antiquarian, bequeath, miscellany, kanji, kana, archaic



# Act 1, Scene 17

## Summary

As John and Claire continue to paint the manuscript, Darius and Dr. Hearn begin to read the text, alternating lines and later joined by John and Claire. The scene begins with the screen that Claire restored, an autumn scene, morphing into full summer blooms. Dr. Hearn reads a part of the same part of the manuscript Darius read in scene 13 about a lover visiting the lady in the deepest, darkest part of the night. The lady lists the things that are exciting about her new lover, but then explains how Lord S has grown jealous and she has to lie to him insisting she is saying prayers on the nights she doesn't visit him. Rumors begin to circulate and Lord S asks her if they are true, bidding her not to bring shame upon his house. Her new lover comforts her and Lord S writes her repeatedly but she ignores his missives. As summer fades, so does her infatuation with her new lover and they grow apart. She wishes to continue her affair with Lord S but he is no longer interested. She feels that she fell asleep on a wonderful summer evening and awoke in the fall to a completely different, dead world.

## Analysis

Another dreamlike scene about the pillow book challenges the reader or viewer to guess at what is actually going on during this reading the text. Is Dr. Hearn reading the manuscript and imaging the lady? Or is she dreaming and seeing herself as the lady? Is this what John sees in his mind while he composes the text? What Claire sees as she paints? The playwright intentionally provides this scene without a clear explanation prior to, during, or after of whether what the reader or viewer reads or sees "really" happened, begging the reader or viewer to ask themselves what is the reality and what is the dream. This scene is one of the playwright's most poignantly written scenes exploring the theme of authenticity.

## Vocabulary

starlings, sutra, slander, crimson, vermilion, comport, reproachful, moulder, cudgel, inauspicious, foxfires



# Act 1, Scene 18 - Act 2 Scene 23

## Summary

A series of incredibly brief scenes sweeps the reader from Act 1 right into Act 2. In scene 18, Darius brings the transcript of the manuscript to Dr. Hearn to get her thoughts. Expecting her to say it's nothing special, he's shocked at her excitement over the piece. He asks her to dinner and she agrees, but says she has to make a quick phone call. In scene 19, Owen calls Darius' office, as Dr. Hearn (not in the script) just called him to tell him about the discovery and he wants to confirm. John answers the phone and drops the receiver when he realizes Owen is talking about his manuscript. In scene 20, the end of act one, John punches his fist through the screen he and Claire painted with characters.

Act 2 scene 21 opens with Claire surrounded by colorful pages. She sets one on fire, blows it out and snaps a Polaroid. In scene 22, Owen and Claire meet briefly backstage at a lecture at the university to set up their strategy for announcing the manuscript, and scene 23 mirrors the same scene but at a public press conference.

## Analysis

Even though these six scenes cross the divide between acts 1 and 2, they function as an important whole, with the arrangement of characters mirrored across the set. The viewer sees Dr. Hearn centrally in both scenes 18 and 23, the first time in her first encounter with the text, the later with her taking a stand to validate its authenticity. The same thing happens with Owen in scenes 19 and 22, while scenes 20 and 21 depict the duo of counterfeiters, John and Claire. John first "discovering" the importance of the pillow book and trying to reject the developments, but Claire then validates the pillow book by creating the "original."

## Vocabulary

ken, batsban, interpolation, syntax, diction, extant, nil, speculate, distressed, fragmentary, scholarship, immeasurable



## Act 2, Scenes 24-25

### Summary

Dr. Hearn and Darius excitedly look at Polaroid prints of the manuscript in the park. She, again, asks when they'll be able to get their hands on it, and bubbles effusively about what this discovery means for her profession. She explains men during this period wrote almost exclusively in Chinese, the learned language of the time. Only women wrote in Japanese and even then only in their private diaries and correspondence. This afforded them an ability to express their feelings and emotions with an intimacy impossible for their male peers, who couldn't seamlessly connect their thoughts to their words. There are so few examples of the pillow book form in existence, and finding such a complete specimen is an incredibly breakthrough. Overcome by her exuberance, Darius confesses his intense feelings for Dr. Hearn, and kisses her even though she initially resists the intensity of his feelings.

Scene 25 returns to John and Claire, as Claire puts the finishing touches on the "original," explaining to John there's no way they can get caught. He can't believe how fluid and authentic her calligraphy is and says if he was handed these pages he wouldn't know himself they were forgeries. The whole affair is overwhelming him though, and he feels like he needs to come clean because he didn't intend for the lie to go this far. When he accuses Claire of getting him into this, she defends saying she is just the executor of his genius and he is the architect of all of it. While they talk, Claire does her hair and makeup and finishes the scene with a Kabuki-style costume change, causing John to remark that she looks really different, even though he can't pinpoint why.

### Analysis

In Scene 24, the transformations of Darius and Dr. Hearn reach their peak, as Dr. Hearn has become incredibly effusive and obsessed about her work, while Darius has become timid and withdrawn. Scene 25 brings us into the final third of the play, most clearly demonstrated by Claire's physical transformation. While she has been shown an aggressive, sarcastic, punkish demeanor throughout the first 24 scenes of the play, the playwright now has the character undergo a slow but marked change in her physical appearance to foreshadow and prepare us for the unveiling of the transformation of her personality from Claire the young art restorer to Utagawa, the famously reclusive modern Asian art fusion artist.

### Vocabulary

climatized, proficiency, clarity, immediacy, inchoate, candor, doctrinaire, artifice, skeptic, transparency, calligraphy



## Act 2, Scene 26-28

### Summary

In brief scene 26, Dr. Hearn reads a sexually descriptive portion of the pillow book while a shunga erotic woodblock print appears behind her. In the equally brief scene 27, Owen reads a footnote from his analysis of the pillow book, describing a common theme found in works of that era, which is particularly prevalent in this pillow book: awareness of imminent loss. He explains a paradox by which these authors were most able to appreciate only a thing, person, or event when confronted with its impermanence.

Lying in bed after a liaison in scene 28, Darius and Dr. Hearn again discuss the pillow book and why it is so singular and important. Dr. Hearn tells Darius what they've learned about the lady who wrote the pillow book. Though they can't figure out her name or exactly who she is, the text gives them all sorts of new information about life at court during that period. Most notably, this is the first manuscript to describe a noblewoman having relationships with both lords and ladies at court.

### Analysis

This trio of scenes, book-ended on each side by depictions of Darius and Dr. Hearn's relationship is actually most notable due to the brief injection of Owen. Explaining the theme of imminent loss literally in the middle of Darius and Dr. Hearn's love making, he strongly foreshadows not only the issues the couple will soon face, but also the fact that they will never end up together. By beginning with a scene of passion, injecting the notion of imminent loss, and then returning to the couple, the playwright sets up the reader or viewer to have a heightened appreciation of the happy moments Darius and Dr. Hearn share by highlighting their impermanence. This connection also serves to tie the relationship between Darius and Dr. Hearn into the relationship in the pillow book between the lady and her new lover.

### Vocabulary

disembodied, prevalent, imminent, melancholic, impermanence, delimited, inklings, aestheticized, liaison, articulation, transgressive, patriarchal



## Act 2, Scenes 29-31

### Summary

After a long absence, Elizabeth Newman-Orr resurfaces when the piece she asked Darius to procure finally arrives. While John pries the crate open, Elizabeth asks Darius if he feels bad breaking the law, but he evades the question as he is on to Elizabeth's true purpose. When John finally gets the box open, he is shocked to see it contains a portrait of a Japanese lady identical to the one on Darius' while. Thinking she has him caught, Elizabeth is shocked when Darius tells her he has known it was a fake from the first moment he saw it hanging in her "client's" home. Seeking to catch him on something, she says it must be a crime to own such a piece of art, alluding to his copy of the portrait, but then he sends her reeling again implying his copy is also a fake. Completely deflated, Elizabeth leaves.

In scene 30, which begins immediately after Elizabeth leaves without skipping a beat, John asks Darius if his piece is really a fake. Further sending John for a whirl by saying his piece is not in fact a forgery, Darius exposes John to the art of lying and the most important part about whether a lie is okay, necessary or even the right thing to say in a certain situation depends entirely on to whom you are talking. Switching topics abruptly to the acquisition of the pillow book, John thinks he has been made, but Darius is just eager to finally procure the piece from its own. When John says the owner is asking for a million pounds--thinking the number is too high--Darius is delighted to get such a deal and tells John to wire the money immediately.

Later that evening in scene 31, Elizabeth returns to Darius' office, hoping to get some useful information from John but instead finds Claire who has come by to drop off the "original" manuscript Darius purchased that afternoon. After revealing she is a journalist who just had her big story go bust, Elizabeth confides in Claire she thinks Darius is an ass and Claire wholeheartedly agrees, inviting Elizabeth out for a drink.

### Analysis

These three scenes each feature a major reveal, ending the honeymoon period for both Darius and Dr. Hearn's relationship and John and Claire's collaboration. In particular, scene 29 sets the stage for these reveals, as it is itself essentially one long series of tables turning on Elizabeth. This scene, and its natural flow into the next one, offer an important visual depiction of the play's exploration of authenticity. On stage, two seemingly identical gilt portraits face each other, while Darius and John, who couldn't seem more opposite, face each other as well. As John asks Darius whether his portrait is a fake, Darius displays his inner truths and scruples, explaining why he lies when he does and how he would never lie to people who matter to him. Opposite him, John, who continually protested to Claire he couldn't believe what they were doing or that he was lying to Darius, stands silently without commenting on Darius' words or coming clean





about his own betrayal. Though seemingly stand-alone, the brief scene between Claire and Elizabeth is inextricably tied to the rest. If Elizabeth had satisfied her story to entrap Darius, she would have never returned to his office and met Claire, who gave her the even bigger scoop--the pillow book forgery. In this way, the playwright shows even though Darius seemed to outsmart Elizabeth, he was actually the architect of the end of his own happiness.

## **Vocabulary**

dolly, qualms, exposé, impropriety, self-loathing, carbon dating, arbitrary, courier, auto-radiography, line producer



## Act 2, Scenes 32-33

### Summary

In Owen's office in scene 32, he and Dr. Hearn discuss Mt. Fuji, the subject of the large (fake) woodblock print on the wall behind Owen's desk. He tells her she is lucky to have even glimpsed the awe-inspiring peak, and then goes on to reveal he should have known instantly the pillow book manuscript was a forgery. A journalist reporting the story called him for a quote and he realized immediately she was right. He points out several obvious inconsistencies, such as the parrot--a bird virtually unknown in Japan at the time--and gently blames Dr. Hearn for not noticing these issues, as it is her area of expertise.

In scene 33, Darius and Dr. Hearn speak cordially about their pasts--past loves, their parents, their careers--revealing Dr. Hearn is not in fact Japanese, but was adopted from China by a Japanese woman and Midwestern American man, and that Darius' father was also an amateur antiquities collector of Japanese woodblocks. His favorite piece, for which he paid far more than he should have then and more than he had to spare, was one of Hokusai's prints from 36 Views. Finally, almost out of the blue, they come to the subject of the forged manuscript as Dr. Hearn tells Darius of her lifelong ambition. She clung to the authenticity of the manuscript, ignoring signs to the contrary, because it would further her career, but she can't understand why Darius lied to her. He tries to explain he had no idea it was a fake, but she doesn't believe he was ever anything besides the liar she first thought him to be. They break up even though Darius believes he is in love with her.

### Analysis

Scenes 32 and 33 deal with the same theme--heartbreak--but in very different ways. For Dr. Hearn, hearing that the pillow book is a fake shatters not only her enthusiasm, but her entire world--her brilliant career appears to be over, and she has to resign from the job she has worked her whole life to get. Scene 33 shows the end of Darius' world--he can recover from the scandal of the manuscript, but he can't bear to lose Dr. Hearn. Ironically, she believes he was playing her the entire time, even though she has been nothing but honest with her. In a reversal of roles, Dr. Hearn explains how she has been using her appearance to deceive people about her background to further her career for years, while Darius describes the pure, honest motives for his career's beginning--he was simply carrying the ardent torch of his father, an amateur woodblock collector.

### Vocabulary

permutations, forgery, anomalies, inconsistency, non-indigenous, affectations, missionary, Hangzhou, resignation, reproach



## Act 2, Scenes 34-36

### Summary

Claire and Elizabeth talk before an opening of Claire's mixed media art in scene 35, and discuss the interviews Elizabeth did for her story, in particular the one with Darius. Claire asks if Darius could explain how he got started, how he got his capital to become an art dealer, and tells Elizabeth about a poor art student who inherited some pieces from the death of a relative Darius lied to and took everything from him for a song before turning around and selling it all for almost two million dollars. Years later he met the woman again at a party and told her he'd be happy to hire her for some restoration work. Elizabeth says she rather likes that girl and she and Claire kiss.

In scene 35 the art show begins and Owen runs into John commending him not only for the quality of his text, but for pulling off such a ruse. Owen came to the opening hoping to meet the artist, Utagawa, but since he rarely appears at these events, Owen leaves early telling John to let him know if Utagawa actually shows up. Scene 36 picks up with the actors who play Darius and Dr. Hearn discussing, epilogue-style, what becomes of the characters after the party in a Socratic sort of questioning dialogue. Darius asks what becomes of himself and Dr. Hearn, and she tells him they both end up fine, even though they never get back together. Apparently Claire was actually Utagawa and in purchasing the forged manuscript, he actually purchased an incredibly valuable new work by the reclusive artist. The play closes on the 36 pieces of art hung for the art reception moving together to form the image of a woman like Darius' portrait of a Japanese lady but composed of tiles of all sorts of different styles, from traditional to anime.

### Analysis

Chapter 34 brings the largest reveal of the play, more so than the mystery of the pillow book, which was shown again and again to be a fake throughout the play, even though many refused to believe it. Claire is Utagawa! The simplicity of it is a testament to Utagawa's literary mastery. In this one move, she throws every view, every scene, every work the reader has heard so far completely on its head, and makes the reader or viewer reevaluate everything they have thought so far in the work. Cementing the 180-degree roundabout, John Bell is no longer Darius' assistant or a forger potentially facing persecution, but a celebrated author of a groundbreaking novel. Closing on the note that no one is ever who they appear to be, the stage directions call for Utagawa's art to become a mixed media vision of Darius' portrait, making the reader or viewer wonder if anyone can ever know if any history they have ever read or heard is actually true.

## Vocabulary

nut (capital), celadon vase, speculative, fabrication, yarns, acumen, reclusive, masterworks, recedes, mosaic, anime

# Characters

## Darius Wheeler

Darius Wheeler is an Asian art and antiquities dealer around whom the plot of *36 Views* primarily revolves. He has a reputation as an adventurer and a bit of a swindler, as he routinely moves objects across borders through less than legal means and takes advantage of individuals who don't understand the worth of objects they're hoping to sell him. He is extremely well-versed in Asian artistic styles, materials and artists, has an excellent eye for art. He can spot an original from a fake even at a distance.

## Setsuko Hearn

Setsuko Hearn, also often called Dr. Hearn, is an bright, ambitious young assistant professor of East Asian literature working under the department head Owen Matthiassen, who snagged her from Stanford. Her research focuses specifically on the intimate female voice in private writings from the Golden Age of Japanese literature, around 1000 years ago. In particular, she focuses on diaries and pillow books, which is why Darius brings the manuscript to her to authenticate. Even though she seems Japanese, she was adopted from China and raised in the Midwest.

## John Bell

Darius' trusted assistant, John Bell is highly qualified Asian historical scholar. He has a masters and an unfinished PhD in the field and speaks all of the major East Asian languages, so he researches potential acquisitions for Darius and communicates with buyers and sellers, in addition to completing more mundane assistant tasks, such as handling Darius' correspondence and event planning. Claire, recognizing John's talents, encourages him to become more than just an assistant, and it is through her urging he claims his pillow book as an authentic ancient Japanese text.

## Claire Tsong

Claire Tsong is a brazen and outspoken, though delicately skilled, artist who does restoration work for Darius. Though she mentions her own works of mixed media several times throughout the play, it is not until the second to last scene the viewer learns she is also the reclusive and highly regarded artist Utagawa, known for mixing traditional Asian artistic styles with ideological themes in a startling blend of ancient and modern. When she was a young, in-debt art student, she sold several pieces of Asian art she had received from a family member's estate to Darius, who told her they weren't worth much and then turned around and sold them for nearly two million dollars, cementing a life-long hatred on Claire's side. Though she seems to flirt with John for



much of the play, she later begins dating the journalist Elizabeth Newman-Orr at the end of the play.

## **Elizabeth Newman-Orr**

Though the script of the play lists her as a "free agent," implying she is part of the art world, Elizabeth Newman-Orr is actually an undercover journalist, sent to expose Darius' illegal activities. After she fails to entrap him with a plot to catch him illegal important artwork, she and Claire connect and she exposes his as a fraud for promoting the pillow book created by John Bell as an authentic historical piece.

## **Owen Matthiassen**

The chair of the East Asian studies department, Owen plays a minor role in the play, serving primarily as the force that both brings Setsuko and Darius together and later breaks them apart. Though he is a well-regarded academic, he has a major interest in antiquities dealing and attributes part of Darius' success to himself, as he often supplies Darius with purchase ideas and contacts.



# Objects/Places

## Gilt Portrait of a Japanese Lady

Most prominently appearing in the first few scenes of the play and when contrasted with its twin in the shipping crate, Darius' gilt portrait of a Japanese lady is one of his personal favorites in his art collection, a piece he has never been able to sell or trade. When he first came across the painting, in an illicit dealing with art smugglers, he was instantly drawn to it. In her appearances as a Heian-era lady, Dr. Hearn is made to resemble the portrait, and at the end of the play, Utagawa's art comes together to form a version of the same image.

## Transcript

The first occurrence of the pillow book at the center of 36 Views is in the form of a "transcript" John claims to have created by translated the Japanese text from "Polaroids" of the "original" manuscript. Before the dubiousness of the "transcript's" origins are uncovered, each of the characters in the play comes upon the text and inquires after its origin, showing John there is an obvious interest in his work.

## Edo-era Shoji Screen

Claire restores an Edo-era Shoji screen for Darius that was in rough shape and brings it to his office on the afternoon she and John begin their collaboration. In the dreamlike sequence in scene 17, this screen, featuring an autumn garden scene, seems to serve as the catalyst for John's loose plot in the pillow book.

## Original Manuscript

Though claims to have created this translated "transcript" from photos of the "original" manuscript, the manuscript--which later becomes an acclaimed work of mixed media modern--is actually created by Claire. Starting with paper colored with brilliant organic dyes, including mulberries, Claire paints the kana script with organic inks and then ages the paper by strategically burning, tearing, and staining sections of it.

## Pillow Book

A pillow book is a sort of diary typically belonging to ladies during the Golden era of Japanese literature at the turn of the millennium. Consisting of scenes, lists, and poetry, it is also called a book of miscellany. In 36 Views, a forged pillow book created by Japanese art and literature scholar John Bell becomes the central object in a giant



mystery of origins orchestrated by the book's author and an accomplished restoration artist he works with.

## Heian-era Kimono

Heian-era kimonos actually consisted of many layered kimonos in different colors and patterns with sleeves of varying lengths arranged to create a complex whole. In the play, Dr. Hearn dons such a kimono in several scenes when she reads from the pillow book, thought to be written by an 11th-century Japanese woman who would wear just such a kimono.

## Hokusai Print

After Darius' party at the beginning of the play, Owen shares with Darius a rare Hokusai woodblock print he recently acquired. Though Owen is extremely proud of the condition of the print's paper and the fact it is the most famous view of Mt. Fuji from Hokusai's 36 Views, Darius instantly spots that it is a fake, because the ink colors are too vibrant. The print was made with artificial ink imported from Germany no earlier than the 1859s, but Hokusai made his prints of Mt. Fuji in the 1830s with organic inks.

## 36 Views by Hokusai

The artbook 36 Views by Hokusai was the inspiration for Iizuka's play 36 Views and appears several times in the play. Hokusai created a book of woodblock prints called 36 Views which contained 46 woodblocks of Mt. Fuji from different angles and different towns on all sides of the mountain. Early in the play, Owen thinks he has found a rare copy of one of the most famous prints in the book, but Darius tells him it's clearly a fake. At the end of the play, Darius reveals his father was an amateur collector of woodblock prints and also had a fake Hokusai for which he paid an exorbitant sum and clung to even though it was a fake.

## Darius Wheeler's Apartment

Though the playwright does not explicitly tell us where he lives, Darius Wheeler's apartment is described as a thoroughly urban and modern loft space, indicative of one of America's major cities. The apartment is positively brimming with exquisite and expensive Asian art and antiquities, many examples of which Darius shows to Dr. Hearn in the second scene.

## Darius Wheeler's Office

Darius Wheeler's office, co-located with his apartment, is the setting for many of the scenes in the play concerning the business of art, while scenes involving the philosophy





or ideology of art usually take place in his apartment. Expensive works of art often lie somewhat scattered around the space, and Darius' assistant's desk is piled with research, bills of sale, and other miscellany about the art.

## Owen Mattiassen's Office

The viewer only sees Owen Mattiassen's office later in the play, and he has framed and mounted his fake Hokusai print on the wall behind his desk. The looming presence of this artificially bright image of Mt. Fuji crowns his office as a sort of temple to artificiality, where approximations of reality and old, unearthly ideals are worshipped. It is particularly notable the reader or viewer only hears with 100% certainty that the pillow book in Owen's office is a fake.



# Themes

## Authenticity

Widely discussed at the central theme of the novel, Iizuka's examination of authenticity--what is and isn't real or original--is one of the most stunning aspects of this work. The author has created a world in which the very meaning of the word 'real' is challenged. At every turn the playwright causes the reader to question what they are seeing and what they believe to be the truth. In the first scene, Darius simply feels the portrait is real, implying authenticity is something one can know by intuition, as opposed to something that must be verified scientifically. In some ways, this is also exploring the theme of faith and belief in what you cannot see or prove to others, but in what is true to your own heart and mind.

Throughout the play, the playwright challenges the reader and the characters to determine what is real and what is not. Both Owen and Darius' father own Hokusai prints that they know in their gut to be real, even though Darius knows them to be forgeries. Meanwhile, both Darius and Dr. Hearn completely believe the pillow book manuscript is real, even though the readers and viewers know it to be fake. By constantly juxtaposing supposedly "real" articles with their counterfeits through dream-like scenes that force the reader or viewer to question what is real, the playwright calls attention to the fact this entire story is fiction. In fact, the reader is asked to consider why, given the construct of the artificial nature of the play, they should even attempt to parse out the fakes within an artificial world. The playwright highlights the fact humans believe things to be authentic or inauthentic because it is in their nature, often choosing to believe something is true despite apparent evidence to the contrary. The theme challenges readers to examine their own lives for areas or topics that might not be valid.

## The Value of Art

The play is also a consideration of the nature and value of art. The debate is mainly explored through the character of Claire, who has to determine what value art can have and in what ways that value can be expressed or created. The main question of the debate is whether or not art is simply decoration, or whether it has an intrinsic beauty and power that makes it more valuable than just a simple piece of decoration to hang on the wall. Given the major reveal at the end of the play, the reader or viewer is invited to question how art is valued and to examine why society puts a higher dollar value on some pieces of art over others. Since all art is an expression of the person who created it, why is there more value placed on some of these expressions than others?

Claire initially defends the viewpoint that a piece of art's value is economic in nature; the value of a piece is simply its market value--what people are willing to pay for it. However, at the end of the play, Claire is forced to examine this belief on a personal level. Her forged manuscript, which should lose its value as a forgery, takes on an



astronomical value when Claire reveals herself to be the reclusive artist Utagawa. Now the manuscript is viewed not as a forgery of an 11th-century pillow book, but as highly innovative original work by a famous modern artist. In this case, the work of art seems to have gained some value simply because it is not what everyone first believed it to be. Through these constant reveals and reevaluations, the playwright seeks to show the reader or viewer the value of art is not absolute, but it depends entirely on the person and their relationship to the piece.

## Fusion

Fusion refers to the combination of different elements in order to create a new whole. In this work, the playwright explores the concept of fusion in several different areas. Fusion is considered not just in art, but in culture throughout the work, and is a recurring theme in almost every scene of the play. In a sense, this fusion is also a form of artwork; by fusing together two or more idea, objects, people, styles, or cultures, a new form is created that didn't exist before. In some cases, this is a new form of expression. In others, it can be a new way of thinking or a new way of being. In the greatest forms of fusion, the best elements of each original are combined to create a new ultimate whole.

Dr. Hearn herself, a seemingly Japanese scholar, is a product of fusion of cultures who enjoys a professional life that requires her to fuse her interests in ancient history with her modern life. She specializes in the intimate works of 11th-century women, but she is herself an adopted Chinese immigrant raised almost entirely in the Midwest by American parents. She chooses to allow people to see her as Japanese because it helps her advance her career. Meanwhile, Claire and her alter-ego Utagawa represent the ultimate fusion of seemingly polar opposites. A young, punkish female, through the character of Utagawa she is also (supposedly) an older, male recluse; a master-level restorer of ancient Asian art and a ground-breaking mixed media artists transforming modern themes with classic techniques.

# Style

## Point of View

As a play, *36 Views* naturally has an omniscient, third-person point of view, allowing the audience to see scenes and learn things that are not known to the characters. In a few instances, while the pillow book is being read, the playwright invites the audience to see the text as it takes place within the characters' minds, briefly changing the point of view to an internal one.

## Setting

*36 Views* primarily takes place in Darius Wheeler's apartment and office, where he and John work and take meetings with many of the other characters in the novel. When the action of the novel takes place elsewhere--the park during Darius and Dr. Hearn's courtship, Owen's office when revealing the manuscript is a fake, Claire's studio when creating the fake manuscript--it gives the scene a dreamlike aspect, so that the audience is not entirely sure if the scene is "real" for the characters.

## Language and Meaning

The language in *36 Views* is typically incredibly straight-forward, as the play primarily consists of conversational dialogue. However, since the play concerns Asian art and ancient Japanese literature, the playwright does incorporate a number of Asian theater and art terms and place names that can be difficult for a reader to follow. In the text of the play, the playwright takes pains to explain many of these terms in the stage notes so that a reader or author who is not well-versed with Japanese theater will not have problems with the text, but certain long monologues about Darius' trips or art, which are essentially just lists of obscure references, are not explained, as it is not crucial for a reader or view to understand these terms to follow the play.

## Structure

True to its title, *36 Views* incorporates 36 views, or scenes. The scenes in this play, however, are not as clearly delineated as they typically are in Western theater. One scene often flows seamlessly into the next and then the next, such as the series of scenes when Darius reads the pillow book transcript, asks John about it, and hears the improvised monologue about the manuscripts origin, then cutting immediately to Claire and John's discussion of the lies he told about the manuscript. Other times, dialogue within one scene is broken by the sound of wooden clappers, which bring about a stark change in subject or tone that would typically herald a new scene. The first act of the play is significantly longer than the second, both in the number of scenes and pages.



## Quotes

Let's just say, you seem to be a man with a weakness for stereotype.

Takanobu, he was after this thing, to make something lifelike, to create something that was real.

Modern, almost modern in their insights, oddly familiar, they wrote in a voice that was singular and unmistakably female.

Happy means happy, beautiful means beautiful. Oh to live in the work you live in.

You know, there are fakes, and then there are fakes.

The permutations are infinite. How we look at the thing itself, which part we're able to see, if we're able to see it at all.

My father loved that print. He loved it with a big and undiscerning heart. It didn't matter if it wasn't what he thought it was.

One always hears fiction is based on real life. Of course, that would mean you'd have to be a Japanese woman going on a thousand years old, give or take a few decades.

A memory pieces itself together in his mind. Her eyes. The look in her eyes.



# Topics for Discussion

## Topic 0

Dr. Hearn herself is a prime example of the issues of authenticity in this play and the space between what a thing appears to be and what it really is. Describe the discrepancies between her actual personal history and the personality and appearance she projects. Why does she choose to embody a different reality? How does this help her in her life and career?

## Topic 0

Why does Owen keep the fake Mt. Fuji print? How do its placement in his office relate to and inform the scenes that take place there?

## Topic 0

Do you think that Darius' gilded portrait of a Japanese lady is authentic or fake? What evidence is there of its authenticity? Is it possible to ever know a piece of art is original?

## Topic 0

While the two identical gilded portraits face one another, John and Darius do as well, offering another type of mirror image of reality slightly distorted into a fake. Which of the two, John or Darius, is authentic? Are they both authentic in different ways?

## Topic 0

How is Darius influenced by his father? Why does he not think less of his father's clinging to a fake print even though he derides Owen for the same reaction to the same print? How has Darius' father affected his view of authenticity?

## Topic 0

What is the significance of the wooden clappers throughout the play? How does the playwright use them to change the emotional landscape of the play? Are they a natural break or a distraction from flow of the play?



## Topic 0

Throughout the play, the playwright mixes traditional Kabuki and Noh theatrical conventions into an extremely modern framework and subject matter. Which character in the play represents the playwright? How does this character (or characters) transform art in the same way Naomi Iizuka transforms theater?

## Topic 0

What does the complete picture formed by the 36 images from Claire's exhibit mean? How is it a metaphor for both the pillow book and the play as a whole?