Kafka on the Shore Study Guide

Kafka on the Shore by Haruki Murakami

(c)2015 BookRags, Inc. All rights reserved.

BOOKRAGS

Contents

Kafka on the Shore Study Guide....1

Contents....2

Introduction....4

Author Biography....5

Plot Summary....6

The Boy Named Crow, Chapters 1-5....8

Chapters 6-10....10

Chapters 11-14....12

Chapters 15-17....14

Chapters 18-21....16

Chapters 22-24....18

Chapters 25-29....20

Chapters 30-33....22

Chapters 34-37....24

Chapters 38-42....26

Chapters 43-46....28

The Boy Named Crow (2), 47-49....30

Characters....32

Objects/Places....45

Themes....47

Style....50

Historical Context....53

Critical Overview....55

Criticism....56

Critical Essay #1....57

Critical Essay #2....58
Critical Essay #3....59
Critical Essay #4....60
Critical Essay #5....62
Critical Essay #6....64
Quotes....67
Topics for Further Study....71
Topics for Discussion....72
Further Study....73
Bibliography....74
Copyright Information....75

Introduction

Kafka on the Shore (2005), Haruki Murakami's tenth novel, marks a slight departure from his previous work. While most of Murakami's protagonists are thirty-something men who favor isolation and have unremarkable histories with women, the main character in this novel is a fifteen-year-old runaway. For the most part, though, *Kafka on the Shore* is classic Murakami. The story is rich in references to music and Western culture, dreamy scenarios that expose the spooky underbelly of ordinary life, utterly unadorned language, and elements of magical realism that challenge the reader's grasp of reality.

Murakami's intention was to write a story about a boy who escapes his dangerous father and goes in search of his long-lost mother. The myth of Oedipus is thrown in along with a cast of supporting characters that includes an old man who talks to cats, a female hemophiliac who lives as a gay man, and two World War II soldiers trapped in time. The familiar themes of isolation, reality versus fantasy, and the connection between past and present are handled with Murakami's trademark humor.

Kafka on the Shore marks another critical and popular success for Murakami. According to the *Washington Post, Kafka on the Shore* is "an excellent demonstration of why [Murakami is] deservedly famous [for] postmodern fiction that's actually fun to read." The *New York Times Book Review* enthused, "Anyone can tell a story that resembles a dream, it's the rare artist, like this one, who can make us feel that we are dreaming it ourselves."

Author Biography

Haruki Murakami was born on January 12, 1949, in Kyoto, Japan. His parents taught high school Japanese literature and allowed their only child to read whatever he wanted. From an early age, Murakami was drawn to the works of Leo Tolstoy and Fyodor Dostoevsky, preferring them to writers of classic Japanese literature. He made good grades despite a *laissez-faire* attitude toward teachers and studying. He spent a good amount of time pursuing his interests in Western literature (especially the novels of Raymond Chandler, Truman Capote, F. Scott Fitzgerald, and Kurt Vonnegut), jazz, rock 'n' roll, and film. Before graduating from Waseda University, he and his new wife opened a jazz club called *Peter Cat*. Murakami continued running the club after graduating from Waseda in March 1975.

The story behind Murakami's decision to become a writer has become lore among his fans. It was April 1978, and Murakami was at a baseball game watching the Yakult Swallows and the Hiroshima Carps. The Swallows' first batter, American Dave Hilton, hit a double his first time at bat. Just as the ball flew into left field, Murakami thought, "I could write a novel." He bought a pen and paper on his way home from the game and started writing that night. He submitted his first novel, *Hear the Wind Sing* to *Gunzo* magazine and won its 1979 Newcomers Award. With a well-received first novel under his belt, Murakami went on to write short stories, essays, translations, and more novels. *Norwegian Wood*, published in Japan in 1987, gained Murakami international acclaim.

Introverted by nature, Murakami's sudden and wild fame was an unwelcome shock. He and his wife escaped first to Europe, then to the United States, where he accepted a writer's fellowship at Princeton University in 1991. Murakami was drawn back to Japan in 1995 after two catastrophes struck his homeland. On January 17, 1995, an earthquake killed 6,500 people in the Osaka-Kobe area of Japan. Two months later, Aum Shinrikyo cult members perpetrated a rush hour nerve gas attack on the Tokyo subway system, killing eleven and affecting some five thousand other commuters. Upon his return to Japan, he wrote *After the Quake*, a collection of six short stories that characterize the aftereffects of the earthquake, and *Underground*, a nonfiction book of interviews with attack victims and Aum members and former members. After his foray into the world of nonfiction, it took Murakami four years to write his next novel, *Sputnik Sweetheart*.

Murakami has become a respected international literary figure largely due to his originality. His straightforward style of writing stands in sharp contrast to the surreal, humorous, postmodern stories he tells. His characters are dreamy nonconformists who find themselves in situations that invite comparisons to dreamscapes or other worlds. By successfully rebelling against traditional Japanese literature and culture, Murakami has made his mark on a rapidly changing society while forging a path for young, upcoming authors. As of 2006, Murakami lives in Japan with his wife, Yoko Takahashi.

Plot Summary

Kafka on the Beach is a coming-of-age story told in a magical realist style. The story concerns two men: Kafka Tamura, a fifteen-year-old boy from Tokyo running away from an emotionally abusive father; and Nakata, an older man who can communicate with cats. These two travel throughout the south of Japan in search of the mysterious entrance to a spiritual realm.

The story begins with Kafka - not his real name - boarding a bus for Shikoku. When he was very young, Kafka's mother left the family, taking his sister with her. Kafka's abusive father prophesied not long after that Kafka would kill him and sleep with his mother. He settles in Takamatsu and spends his days reading in the quaint Komura Library, owned by the beautiful Ms. Saeki and attended by Oshima, a friendly, esoteric transsexual. All is well until Kafka blacks out one day and wakes covered in blood.

Meanwhile, Nakata searches Tokyo for a lost cat. When he was very young, his entire school class slipped into a hypnotic state in the woods, and when he awoke he had no memory and could speak to cats. Now he lives on a federal subsidy and makes extra money finding lost cats. His search for this particular cat leads him to the home of an evil spirit, Johnnie Walker, who murders cats for their souls. Nakata stabs him to death and flees the city, hitching a ride from a vulgar truck named Hoshino.

Kafka gets a job with the library and hides in Oshima's remote cabin in the woods for a few days. Later, he stays in a spare room in the old library building. Oshima tells him about Ms. Saeki, who wrote a popular song called "Kafka on the Shore" and has been emotionally withdrawn since her husband was killed when she was twenty. Kafka is drawn to her and begins to see the spirit of her younger self in his room. He falls in love, but he suspects that she may be his mother. One day, Oshima brings Kafka a newspaper story: his father has been stabbed to death and he is a suspect.

Hoshino the trucker grows friendly with his elderly passenger and decides to take a few days off to accompany him to Takamatsu. Nakata does not know what he needs to do down there. When they arrive, Nakata realizes he needs to find the "entrance stone," but he falls asleep first and stays asleep for days. Hoshino, meanwhile, runs into the evil spirit in the guise of Colonel Sanders, who shows him where to find the stone. Nakata, waking to find the entrance stone, uses it to "open" the entrance.

Kafka begins a romantic relationship with Ms. Saeki, who sees her dead husband in the young man. Soon thereafter, Oshima finds out that the police are in town searching for Kafka. He returns him to remote cabin to hide out. The next day, Hoshino and Nakata arrive at the library. Nakata talks to Ms. Saeki about the entrance stone, which she used long ago. After they leave, she dies. Not long after, Nakata passes away himself, leaving Hoshino to figure out how to close the stone.

In the woods, Kafka is lead by two soldiers to the entrance of a desolate village, a state of limbo. There, he meets the dead Ms. Saeki, who asks his forgiveness for abandoning

him and begs him to return to the real world. He does so, and afterward, Hoshino closes the entrance and kills the evil spirit that tries to sneak through. Kafka says his goodbyes to Oshima and boards a bus to return to Tokyo and continue his life.

The Boy Named Crow, Chapters 1-5

The Boy Named Crow, Chapters 1-5 Summary

In "The Boy Named Crow," a prologue of sorts, "Kafka" Tamura is preparing to run away from his home in Tokyo. He talks about his plans with his imaginary companion, Crow. Tomorrow is Kafka's fifteenth birthday and he has taken a substantial amount of money from his father, along with his cell phone and hunting knife. Crow warns Kafka that he can expect many trials on his journey, and he must be the toughest teenager ever to withstand it.

In Chapter 1, Kafka is planning his escape. He has been planning to run away for years, and in preparation he has been working out. He now looks older than his age. He takes a picture of his sister with him. Kafka's father destroyed all the pictures of his mother when she left, taking Kafka's sister with her. Kafka takes the bus to Takamatsu, since no one would think to look for him there. He boards the bus - the trip will take ten hours - and falls asleep. When he wakes up, it is his birthday.

Chapter 2 is an interview conducted by US military intelligence with a provincial Japanese schoolteacher involving and incident that occurred in November 1944. The teacher took a group of children to the hills outside town to pick mushrooms. While there, she is certain she saw a B-29 fly overhead, though records show no American planes in the area. The teacher discovers the children in a strange clearing in the forest, all passed out in a trance.

In Chapter 3, Kafka's bus stops at a rest area before arriving in Takamatsu. At the rest stop, he meets Sakura, a strange talkative hairdresser who asks to sit next to him on the bus. She is on her way to visit relatives in Takamatsu, and Kafka lies that he is on his way to do the same. On the bus, she mentions that she has a brother she has not seen in awhile, and Kafka wonders if she is his sister. After a time, they both fall asleep.

Chapter 4 is an interview with the town doctor who attended to the catatonic children in 1944. Dr. Nakazawa, upon hearing that the children had been picking mushrooms, assumes that they have been poisoned in some way. He brings many men with him on bikes to transport the children. Arriving, he is struck by the strangeness of the clearing where the children passed out. It does not seem natural. He also doubts they are poisoned. He is confounded as to what to do, but soon the children regain consciousness - all but one - and have no memory of passing out. The last child, Nakata, is taken away for inspection.

In Chapter 5, Kafka arrives in Takamatsu. Sakura gives him her number and invites him to call her sometime. Kafka decides to visit the Komura Library. There he meets the assistant librarian, Oshima, who tells him the library is a historical building, largely consisting of Japanese poetry. Kafka goes to the reading room and peruses The Arabian Nights. In the afternoon, he takes the building tour, led by the head librarian,

Ms. Saeki. Oshima, an effeminate young man with an interest in Kafka, invites him to return the nest day. That night, Kafka gets a room - discounted by the YMCA - at a cheap hotel. Before he falls asleep he checks his cell phone. It still works, and he wonders if his father has even noticed that he has run away.

The Boy Named Crow, Chapters 1-5 Analysis

We learn about our protagonist, Kafka, in bits and pieces, and several pieces of information - such as his real name - are never revealed. We know he has lived alone with his father for a long time and that he has not seen his mother or sister since he was a young child. We know that he is running away from home. What we do not know is why, and his alter ego, Crow, begins the journey with an intense warning that:

Sometimes fate is like a small sandstorm that keeps changing directions. You change direction but the sandstorm chases you ... Over and over you play this out, like some ominous dance with death just before dawn. Why? Because this storm isn't something that blew in from far away, something that has nothing to do with you. This storm is you. (5)

Kafka holds within him a terrible secret. Kafka on the Shore is a bildungsroman, or coming-of-age story, but its young protagonist is deeply troubled by a past that has already damaged him. In this sense, the novel has the trappings of Greek tragedy (most overtly, Oedipus Rex). In the first chapter, in fact, Kafka casually mentions the possibility of killing has father.

In this section, we also begin to learn the back story of Nakata, told in an epistolary format. Both his former teacher and a doctor from his village relate an incident that happened in the woods of southern Japan, an event that rendered Nakata amnesiac, mentally impaired, and able to speak with cats.

Both Nakata and Kafka are men haunted by the past: Nakata by events during World War II, Kafka by a broken family. Both are men were born in Tokyo and impelled southward by some unknowable force. Lastly, both will find healing throughout the novel through quirky characters who are drawn to them and want to heal them. Sakura, the young hairdresser, is the most apparent in this section, but the other two people Kafka meets, Oshima and Ms. Saeki, will have a more profound effect on him.

Chapters 6-10

Chapters 6-10 Summary

In Chapter 6, Nakata - the young boy who didn't wake up after the 1944 incident in the woods, now fully grown - is looking for a lost cat named Goma. Since the incident, Nakata has no memory and cannot read, but he can communicate with cats. As such, he has become adept at finding runaways, though the government considers him mentally deficient and keeps him on a subsidy. Nakata talks to a nameless cat that he calls Otsuka. Otsuka has not seen Goma, but he is more interested in Nakata. He feels that Nakata has lost half his spirit, and he suggests that he seeks out his other half.

In Chapter 7, Kafka negotiates with the girl at the hotel desk to give him his reduced rate through the week. He claims to be a student researching at the library, and she says she will run it by the owner. Kafka finds a gym to work out at and goes to the library, where he and Oshima discuss "In the Penal Colony," a short story by Franz Kafka. He continues reading The Arabian Nights when Oshima tells him that the hotel has called to confirm with he is actually doing research. They will give him his discount through the week. Oshima seems inclined to ask Kafka to stay with him, but he stops short of asking. Through the rest of the week, Kafka follows the same regiment: eating breakfast, working out, and spending all day in the library.

Chapter 8 is a US military interview with Dr. Shigenori Tsukayama, a renowned doctor of psychiatry in Japan. In 1944, his team ran tests on the children affected by the incident in the clearing. Tsukayama discounts the notions of poison gas or food poisoning, settling rather on mass-hypnosis of some sort. He likens the incident to the concept of "spirit projection." Tsukayama observes Nakata - the boy who didn't wake - at length, trying many ideas to wake him from his hypnotized state. All fail. One day, however, Nakata wakes up for no apparent reason. He has become a blank slate.

In Chapter 9, Kafka wakes in the middle of the night, at an unfamiliar shrine outside of town. He has passed out and does not remember when. Entering a public restroom, he discovers that he is filthy and his top shirt is soaked through with blood - someone else's. Crow tells him to calm down and collect himself. With no other ideas, Kafka calls Sakura. She is annoyed at being woken, but she agrees to meet him. He catches a cab to her sister's apartment, where she is staying. Kafka admits that he is only fifteen and a runaway. Sakura tells him that when she was his age, she ran away also. When it didn't work out, she learned to cut hair to get away from her family.

In Chapter 10, Nakata talks to a particularly stupid cat that he calls Kawamura. Kawamura seems to know where Goma is, but he is unintelligible. A clever Siamese cat named Mimi helps Nakata out, translating the gibberish. Evidently, Goma has been hanging around an empty lot, but recently a strange man caught him and took him away. Mimi fears that the man may be some sort of pervert who tortures cats. Nakata is shocked that such people exist. He goes to the lot and sits, eating his lunch. When he is

finished, he falls into a hibernating state, something he has been able to do since the incident.

Chapters 6-10 Analysis

In this section, we meet the older Nakata, now a mentally-impaired senior with a gift for communicating with animals. When introduced to Kafka at the beginning of the novel, we recognize an angry young man on the order of Holden Caulfield. Nakata, on the other hand, seems perpetually content, given the fact that he is, as Dr. Tsukayama puts it, a blank slate. Since the incident in 1944, Nakata has no memory, no emotion, and no developing mental faculties.

Along with Nakata, we are introduced to our first animal characters (excepting Crow, who takes on several forms throughout the novel), Otsuka, Kawamura, and Mimi. The presence of talking animals is the first inclination that this is a novel in the magical realism vein. Magical realism in literature does not only indicate that presence of the supernatural in the world of the narrative. It requires that characters accept unquestioningly this paranormal world. Throughout Kafka on the Shore, fish will fall from the sky, characters will die and reincarnate in another form, and our protagonist will wander into the afterlife by way of the woods. None of this will seem dubious to the participants.

In this section, we also learn more about Oshima. He has the first of many literary discussions in the novel, this one appropriately about Franz Kafka. Oshima is intelligent and confident, and his love of literature translates to a critical understanding of the world around him. Oshima believes there is such a thing as metaphor in the corporeal world. In this setting of talking cats and falling fish, he is indispensable as a resource to Kafka, using his knowledge of myth and folklore to explain the meaning and logic behind these strange events.

Chapters 11-14

Chapters 11-14 Summary

In Chapter 11, Kafka sits with Sakura in her apartment. Apparently, Kafka has had violent episodes in the past, but nothing involving the amount of blood on his shirt. Sakura asks him about his parents and sister. His older sister was adopted, so Sakura finds it odd that Kafka's mother left with an adopted child and not her biological son. After a time, she goes back to sleep. Later in the night, neither can sleep, and Sakura sits with Kafka. She tells him that she has a boyfriend in Tokyo, but as they sit together Kafka gets an erection. Sakura nonchalantly strokes him to orgasm.

The next morning, Sakura has left for work, leaving a note for Kafka telling him that there is no news of a violent crime in the area. By way of thanks, he cleans her whole apartment and leaves her a grateful note. He leaves, unsure of where he will sleep, heading toward the library.

Chapter 12 is a letter - written in 1972 - from the teacher whose children collapsed in 1944, to Dr. Tsukayama. She admits to lies she told both Japanese and American officials about events. At the time of the incident, her husband has been drafted. The night before the children collapsed, the normally prim teacher has an intense sex dream that leaves her in a euphoric state the next day. On the hill with her students, she discovers that her period has abruptly begun. She excuses herself to wipe away the blood with some towels that she hides in the woods after. Nakata, however, discovers the towels and returns them to her. She panics and begins to beat him; the other students watch. After they collapse and reawaken, though, they have no memory of the towels or the beating.

In Chapter 13, Oshima approaches Kafka and offers him some lunch. They discuss Japanese writer Matsume Soseki, and Kafka asks Oshima if he can help him find a place to sleep. Oshima suggests that he can get him a job at the library, where he can sleep at night. In the meantime, however, Oshima has a place for Kafka to sleep. After the library closes, Oshima drives Kafka to a cabin in the woods of Kochi. The cabin is a Spartan one-room building with no utilities or phone reception. Oshima warns Kafka not to wander to far into the woods. He leaves, promising to return in a couple days.

In Chapter 14, Nakata gives an update to and collects his daily fee from Goma's family. He does not mention that his information is coming from cats rather than humans. Returning to the empty lot, he is approached by Kawamura, who babbles nonsensically, and a tough cat he calls Okawa. Okawa has seen Goma, but he's unwilling to talk about him. A large black dog approaches him and demands that he follow him. The dog leads Nakata to another part of town, to the house of a strange elegant man who calls himself Johnnie Walker. Johnnie Walker offers to give Goma to Nakata in exchange for Nakata's cooperation in a game. Mr. Walker has been looking for Nakata for some time.

Chapters 11-14 Analysis

Kafka's pleasant existence in Takamatsu is shattered by this strange night and the blood on his shirt. We learn in Chapter 11 that he has violent episodes where he loses time. The mystery of this patch of lost time will affect him for the remainder of the novel, given another event that it coincides with and a prophecy that follows him wherever he goes.

When Kafka first meets Sakura on the bus to Takamatsu, a strange ambiguity about sex is evident. Kafka, clearly haunted by his abandonment by his mother and loss of his adopted sister, constantly questions whether women of certain ages may be his lost family. Sakura mentions having an estranged brother. As Kafka considers the possibility that she may be his sister, he gets an erection. At her apartment in Takamatsu, they engage in some cursory sexual activity, ostensibly to relax him. All the while, however, Kafka keeps open the possibility that she may be his sister. Several chapters later, we will learn of the prophecy that has shaped his attitude toward the lost women in his family.

After one night in her apartment, though, Kafka leaves Sakura, unsure of where he will stay. With Crow goading him, Kafka steadfastly refuses to form a connection with anyone. The reason for this falls somewhere between pride and fear, and when he does allow someone to form a relationship with him in the latter passages of the novel, the result is devastating and cathartic. The irony of these early passages is that Kafka does rely on others - Sakura and Oshima particularly - to survive in this unfamiliar town. Others care for him and want him to be safe, but for him, reciprocation needs to be clear. Sakura took him in for the night; so, he cleans her apartment. He will work at the library in exchange for rooming there. Kafka has never experienced the organic reciprocation of a loving family, a close friendship, or a lover. As such, he is intensely wary of it.

Chapters 15-17

Chapters 15-17 Summary

In Chapter 15, Kafka has been left alone in Oshima's cabin. In his sleeping bag that night, he is frightened by noises and solitude, and Crow harangues him for weakness. The next day, Kafka reads part of a book about Adolf Eichmann. Oshima has made a note in it that one must accept responsibility for one's imagination. Kafka walks a ways into the forest, stopping short of losing his way. He is jarred by how easily one can lose himself. After dinner, he writes everything he has done since running away. The next day, Kafka wanders farther out in the forest. That night, it rains, and Kafka washes himself.

Chapter 16 returns to Johnnie Walker's residence, where the large dog leads Nakata to a large freezer. Inside are the severed heads of many cats, but Goma's is not among them. Johnnie Walker explains that he is taking the souls of cats to create a mystic flute to steal still larger souls. He has grown weary of his life and wants Nakata to kill him. Walker agrees to give Goma to Nakata if he does so, but Nakata feels he cannot kill a man. Johnnie Walker calmly responds that this is a war and Nakata will learn to kill. Walker proceeds to murder two paralyzed cats in front of him, cutting out their still-beating hearts and devouring them before beheading the animals. He tells Nakata that there are two more cats before he kills Goma. They are Kawamura and Mimi. Walker kills Kawamura, but before he can cut Mimi open, Nakata attacks him and murders him with his own butcher knife. Nakata takes Goma and Mimi with him as he leaves Johnnie Walker's lodging.

In Chapter 17, Kafka has spent three days in the cabin alone, and he feels he is growing connected with nature. On the afternoon of the fourth day, he is sunbathing nude outside when Oshima arrives to pick him up. They clean the cabin and head back to Takamatsu, where Oshima says Kafka now has a job and a place to stay. Oshima was able to convince Ms. Saeki to take him on as an assistant and give him one of the empty rooms in the library to him as a bedroom. Oshima goes on to tell Ms. Saeki's story. She fell in love as a teenager, with the son of the wealthy sake distributors what own the library. While engaged, the man went to Tokyo for school, and Ms. Saeki went to visit him. There, she wrote a song for him called "Kafka on the Shore." She played it for friends and eventually she was asked to record it. It became a pop hit. Not long after, Ms. Saeki's husband died - killed during a student protest - and she disappeared for a long time. One day, shortly after her mother's death, she abruptly returned to Takamatsu and took over stewardship of the library.

Chapters 15-17 Analysis

Chapter 16 provides the most horrific section of the novel, with the docile Nakata watching Johnnie Walker slaughtering cats with a knife, devouring their hearts and

slicing off their heads. Johnnie Walker is a malevolent spirit that wants entrance to the afterlife and needs human support to make that happen. This spirit, in various forms, will require much of Nakata, but at this time Walker needs him to kill him. Nakata, who was forced from his home in Tokyo during the war, is a passive man. He detests the idea of war, of one person killing another. Johnnie Walker's florid killing of the cats is intended as Nakata's education in the ways of war, to force his hand.

Kafka, meanwhile, is growing accustomed to life in the woods. The forest at Kochi is a wild, spiritual place in the novel, and like many things associated with the divine, it combines comfort and fear. Kafka feels an airy peace brought by the solitude, but he is acutely aware of the danger wrought by wandering alone in the thick woods. In Chapter 15 he experiences the wonder. In the closing chapters of the narrative, he will abandon himself to whims of nature and wander into another plane of existence.

In this section, we learn about the sad life of Ms. Saeki. She will be a unifying element to the story, a kindred soul both to Kafka and Nakata. Her present self is entirely determined by her past. This is true of everyone, but Ms. Saeki seemingly has no life except that life which was destroyed when she was twenty. Her journey is about to intersect with Kafka's, obliterating each other's conception of his or her life.

Chapters 18-21

Chapters 18-21 Summary

In Chapter 18, Nakata wakes up in the vacant lot with Mimi and Goma. He has no blood on him, but he still recalls killing Johnnie Walker. He is also unable to understand the cats. Nakata returns Goma to her family and proceeds immediately to the local police station. There, he confesses to the duty officer that he has committed a murder. The officer thinks Nakata is mad, but he humors him. Nakata thanks him, and on the way out the door, he mentions that the officer should bring an umbrella tomorrow because it will rain fish. The next day, 2,000 sardines and mackerel fall from the sky. The officer is shock, and he cannot believe his ears later that day when a famous artist is discovered stabbed to death.

In Chapter 19, Kafka moves in to the library. The next day, he mans the front desk with Oshima when two serious women enter. They seem to scrutinize the whole library before complaining to Oshima that the building is in violation of gender equality standards. It has no separate restrooms, and the books are separated by author gender with women shelved below men. Oshima explains that the library has no room for another restroom and is understaffed, but the women accuse him of misogyny. Enraged, Oshima fires back that he is, in fact, a woman. He was born with female genitals, and his breasts never developed. As such, he lives his life as a gay man, assuming a male identity and engaging in anal sex. The women are chastened and leave. After they do so, Oshima and Kafka sit together. Oshima is sickened by people who act out of dogmatic certainty, that lack imagination. Kafka assures him that his opinion of Oshima is not changed by the revelation that he is transsexual.

In Chapter 20, Nakata tries to leave Tokyo. He wants to travel west on the Tomei Highway, but he does not know how to use the train system. He doesn't like to admit that he cannot read, but he stops two businesswomen on the street to ask them how to get ticket. They get a friend of theirs, Togeguchi who is heading west, to take Nakata with him. Nakata can hitchhike from there. On the road, Togeguchi confides all of his secrets to Nakata, who listens quietly. At a rest stop, Nakata hitches a ride with older trucker who asks him on the road what his political views are. The trucker himself is a Communist. At the next rest area, Nakata has difficulty finding another ride. He happens upon some bikers beating a man. Nakata feels the same rage building that he had with Johnnie Walker. Suddenly, leeches begin to fall from the sky. After the rain of leeches, Nakata gets a ride with a vulgar young driver called Hoshino, because he reminds Hoshino of his senile grandfather.

In Chapter 21, Kafka reads about he murdered artist in Tokyo. The artist is his father, Koichi Tamura. He is terrified because the night his father was murdered was the night he blacked out and awoke covered in blood. He could not have gone to Tokyo in that time, but he wonders if he is still somehow responsible. He tells Oshima that when he

way young, his abusive father told him that one day Kafka would murder his father and sleep with both his mother and sister.

Chapters 18-21 Analysis

In Chapter 20, we are introduced to one more major character, Hoshino the truck driver. Initially, the ridiculous young man seems less than consequential. He is a slovenly guy with a baseball cap and an aloha shirt, and as he talks with Nakata, we realize that he is unaware that Japan fought in World War II. Hoshino, in short, seems like dead weight as a character in this ethereal story. Still, there is a sentimentality to him: he picks up Nakata because of some fealty to his own grandfather. As the narrative progresses, Hoshino will become the most dynamic and evolving character in the novel.

This section also contains two developments surrounding Kafka that will alter the tenor of the story. Both involve his father, Koichi Tamura. Up until this point, all we know about Koichi is that his son hates him. We receive much more information about him after his murder. The news story indicates that he was one of Japan's most innovative sculptures.

The eventuality of his murder coincides with two other events: Nakata's murder of Johnnie Walker and Kafka's waking in the Takamatsu shrine, covered in blood. Certainly, Nakata was in Tokyo when he killed the evil spirit, and this fact leaves open the possibility that Kafka's father is more a malevolent spiritual force than a man. Kafka, however, could not physically have killed his father, but in the novel, metaphysical culpability is just as real as corporal action. Kafka is responsible for the murder if in his heart and mind he committed the deed. The same will be true of another action involving a dream of Sakura. As Oshima states throughout the novel, imagination is a powerful force. One must accept responsibility for it.

The other revelation of Chapter 21 is Koichi Tamura's curse on Kafka, made when the boy was very young. Mr. Tamura gave his son the prophecy of Oedipus Rex, with the added caveat that he would sleep with his sister also. Knowing this, we understand more fully what is propelling Kafka forward and away from those who care for him.

Chapters 22-24

Chapters 22-24 Summary

In Chapter 22, Hoshino treats Nakata to dinner at a rest stop and asks him where he is headed. Nakata says he wants to go over the bridge to Shikoku and figure out from there. The next day, Hoshino arrives at his destination and tells Nakata to wait in a small park while he unloads his freight. Evidently, when Nakata finished primary school, he learned the trade of traditional woodworking. He assisted a carpenter well into middle age, when his mentor died and the shop closed. Afterward, he invested his retirement in a condo project sponsored by his cousin. The cousin lost all the money to loan sharks and disappeared. Since then, Nakata has lived in a flat arranged by one of his brothers. The company of cats has been his only joy until now. Hoshino returns and asks Nakata if he can join him in his travels for the next couple days. Nakata agrees.

Chapter 23 picks up right after Chapter 21 ends. Kafka abruptly wakes in his room to see a spirit of a beautiful teenage girl. She looks at a painting in the room of a boy looking at the water from a beach. Then, she vanishes. Kafka is smitten and unsure what to do. The next day, he asks Oshima to get him a copy of Ms. Saeki's hit song on vinyl. Oshima gets a copy from his mother, and sure enough the picture of Ms. Saeki on the sleeve is a slightly older version of the spirit he saw. Kafka asks Oshima if a ghost can exist when the person is still alive. Citing folklore, Oshima says it can if the intentions of the living person are evil. Kafka listens to the song and determines it has been written about the picture on his wall. It also mentions knives, rains of fish, the "entrance stone," and the Sphinx (Oedipus's nemesis, reflecting Kafka's father's Oedipal prophecy). At night, he goes to sleep, anticipating seeing the apparition again.

In Chapter 24, Hoshino and Nakata travel by bus to Shikoku, and when they arrive Nakata is deathly tired. Hoshino hunts down a cheap hotel and gets a room for them. Nakata warns him that he will sleep a very long time. Indeed, he does not wake for over 24 hours. Hoshino, meanwhile, spends his days playing pachinko, drinking, and wondering why Nakata intrigues him so. Hoshino was an errant youth, often picked up by the police and always bailed out by his grandfather. When Nakata wakes, he gobbles down two days worth of food and declares that they should they should go to Takamatsu next. Before they check out, Nakata performs an extremely painful adjustment on Hoshino's spine, curing his chronic stiffness. When the two arrive in Takamatsu, Nakata announces that they need to find the "entrance stone," though he does not know what it is.

Chapters 22-24 Analysis

This section introduces us to several of the most important objects in the story: Ms. Saeki's song, the picture of the boy looking out to sea, and the "entrance stone." All of

these things are connected by the mysterious spiritual entrance that Ms. Saeki has discovered and that Nakata is seeking.

The framed picture of the boy looking out to sea, which hangs in Kafka's room in the library, is a point of focus both for Ms. Saeki and the ghost of her childhood self that visits Kafka at night. The painting seems to be the inspiration of Ms. Saeki's pop hit, "Kafka on the Shore." This song is a mix of strange - and often violent - images, one of which is an "entrance stone." Clearly, this stone must exist, since Nakata is now searching for it.

Taken together, the boy on the beach, the love song, and the mystical stone that no one has seen symbolize an objective that everyone in the novel has but no one can express. This is like the plot device that Hitchcock called the MacGuffin, an object around which an entire plot revolves. The audience does not really care what the MacGuffin is; they only care that the hero gets to it first. However, Kafka on the Shore is not a suspense thriller, and this unnamed objective takes on true form in the final chapters. By then, we understand the importance of its discovery.

Chapters 25-29

Chapters 25-29 Summary

In Chapter 25, the spirit of the teenage Ms. Saeki again visits Kafka. He realizes when he wakes in the dawn hours that he is in love with the spirit and the spirit is in love with her long-dead lover. Kafka asks Oshima if he can find the music to "Kafka on the Shore," and he wonders aloud if Ms. Saeki is his mother. Later that day, Kafka brings Ms. Saeki coffee, and she asks him why he ran away from home. As they talk, she says he reminds her of a boy she knew long ago. She also mentions that she wrote a book of interviews with people who had been struck by lightning. That night, Kafka recalls that his father, when younger, had been struck by lightning on a golf course.

In Chapter 26, Hoshino and Nakata go to the Takamatsu Public Library (not the Komura) to figure out what the entrance stone is. They spend all day there with no luck. That night, after Nakata goes to sleep, Hoshino cannot. He gets a drink at a bar, and on his way back, he runs in to Colonel Sanders. The Colonel is working as a pimp, and he offers Hoshino a deal on a beautiful girl. Hoshino declines, but Colonel Sanders sweetens the deal by offering to show him where the entrance stone is. Hoshino agrees.

The morning after Kafka is visited yet again by the spirit, in Chapter 27, Oshima is interviewed by the police. They know that Kafka came to the library, but Oshima lies, saying he hasn't seen the runaway in days. When Kafka brings Ms. Saeki her coffee that day, he bluntly asks her if she has any children. She does not answer. That night, Kafka wonders if he is in love with the younger or the older Ms. Saeki.

In Chapter 28, Colonel Sanders takes Hoshino to a religious shrine to meet the prostitute. She is knock-out, and after they go to a hotel, she has hours of sex with him while reciting Hegel. After they are finished, Colonel Sanders offers to take him to the entrance stone. Hoshino is momentarily dubious - thinking the offer is too good to be true - but he goes along.

In Chapter 29, Kafka calls Sakura to warn her that the police know that he called her phone weeks back - that was how they traced him to the library - and to tell her he is safe. He says he is in a surreal situation, and she suggests he come back to her place. She likes him, but he tells her that he is in love with someone else. Sakura tells him that if he ever needs to talk, he should call her. That night, Kafka thinks he sees the spirit enter his room, but this time it is the real Ms. Saeki, sleepwalking. She strips and gets in bed with him, thinking he is her long-dead husband. They make love, and she leaves immediately after.

Chapters 25-29 Analysis

The strange romantic relationship between Ms. Saeki and Kafka begins to develop in these chapters. Kafka's mind is a mess of different theories and emotions. On the one hand, he is growing enamored of the fifteen-year-old spirit of Ms. Saeki who enters his room every night. He wonders whether he is actually in love with the real, older Ms. Saeki, instead, and more than anything, he feels jealous of her dead husband, who enjoyed five years of pure love with her before dying. On the other hand, Kafka suspects - and is in the process of corroborating - that Ms. Saeki is his mother. In this sense, he is wandering into his curse. This debate in his mind between his desire for the woman and his desire for a mother is obliterated at the end of Chapter 29, when he allows a sleepwalking Ms. Saeki to have sex with him.

In the chapters involving Nakata's narrative, we meet our second strange emissary from the spiritual realm. Johnnie Walker was all bluster and bald-faced malevolence. He was fearsome to a fault, but the new form that this evil spirit takes is much trickier. Colonel Sanders, the fried chicken magnate, is a facilitator and a pimp. He does not challenge Hoshino as Johnnie Walker challenged Nakata. Moreover, Sanders does not lay all his cards on the table as Walker did. He simply tells Hoshino that he has an objective, and in order to accomplish it, Hoshino must have sex with a beautiful woman and get the entrance stone. In this sense, Colonel Sanders functions in much the same way the witches in Macbeth do, tempting flawed men with what they desire - no strings attached - while silently moving toward their own ends.

As time goes on, Colonel Sanders will continue to pull the strings for Hoshino and Nakata, "aiding" them in their journey. Only at the very end of the novel, will he appear in his true self-serving form.

Chapters 30-33

Chapters 30-33 Summary

In Chapter 30, Sanders explains to Hoshino that his is a spirit - neither god not Buddha - that chooses his earthly form as he goes along. He needs the help of a mortal with a task, and giving him the entrance stone is part of that task. They arrive at a vault at a religious shrine, and Sanders tells Hoshino that this is where the stone is located. Hoshino is unsure about robbing a shrine, but Colonel Sanders assures him that it is OK. The stone is heavy, and Hoshino needs a cab to get it back to the hotel. He leaves it on Nakata's bed and goes to sleep.

In Chapter 31, Ms. Saeki asks Kafka about his past, and Kafka mentions what he is from Tokyo and his father has recently died. He suggests to her that she may have been his father's lover at one time. She dismisses this notion. He asks her to go to bed with him, and she does not answer. After work, Oshima and Kafka go out for a nice dinner. Oshima talks about his fantasy of fighting in the Spanish Civil War and mentions that he has a regular boyfriend. Oshima says that love is accompanied by sadness because our beloved -in completing us - reminds us of what we have lost. That night, Ms. Saeki lets herself into Kafka's room and looks at the painting. She offers to show him the beach that the painting depicts. On the beach, Kakfa embraces her, emboldened by Crow and perhaps the spirit of her dead lover. They go back to the library and make love, and Ms. Saeki leaves afterward.

Nakata wakes in Chapter 32 and discovers the stone on his bed. He spends a long time looking at it, wondering what to do next. He talks to Hoshino about how sad he is, unable to learn of create memories. He feels that once he opens the entrance stone, something will change, but he cannot do anything until thunder begins outside. Hoshino agrees to stay with him as long as it takes. Soon a harrowing storm begins outside. The entrance stone has become heavier, and Nakata realizes that flipping it will open the entrance. Hoshino musters all his energy and flips the stone.

In Chapter 33, Kafka slips out of the library to work out at the gym. He does not know what to say to Ms. Saeki. After working out - resisting the urge to immediately hop a bus out of the city - Kafka returns. Oshima talks to him about his quest for freedom, questioning if anyone is truly free. When he brings Ms. Saeki her coffee, Kafka asks her about her past. She tells him he doesn't need to know and wonders aloud how he has become so wise so young. He says he is taking back his life after the emotional abuse of his father. This why he chose the name Kafka: it means "crow" in Czech, and crows are free and wild. He asks Saeki if she interviewed his father for her lightning book. She says she didn't, but he does not believe her. She says that she is confused by her life, and Kafka retorts that she does not have to be confused by him. He is her lover - past and present - and her son. That night, they make love again, and she stays.

Chapters 30-33 Analysis

In Chapter 29, Ms. Saeki dreamt that she made love to her dead husband, while in reality she was sleeping with Kafka. Throughout the novel, actions undertaken in sleep have repercussions in waking: the murder of Koichi Tamura, Ms. Saeki's sex with Kafka, Kafka's later rape of Sakura. In Chapter 31, however, Ms. Saeki chooses to sleep with Kafka while awake, in part because the boy takes on the persona of her husband as they stand on the couple's beloved beach.

This decision on Kafka's part to assume the mantle of Ms. Saeki's husband signals a new, destructive inclination. He speaks to her later in book of absorbing all of the negative energy hurled at him. As concerns his father's curse, Kafka has pushed this philosophy as far as it will go. If he is fated to sleep with his mother and sister, he will do so on his own terms. In Chapter 33, he tells Ms. Saeki everything he must to justify the affair to himself and her at once: he will love her as a son, a husband, a boy, and a man.

In Chapter 32, meanwhile, the action that will precipitate the developments of the last third of the novel occurs. After hours of contemplation of the entrance stone, Nakata figures out how to open it. This passage shows that in this world where living people can interact with and affect the spiritual world, there are still rules that confound human will. The entrance stone is only sometimes a key to opening the way to another world. Nakata must wait for the metamorphosis to occur in this chapter, and Hoshino will have to wait even longer at the end of the novel.

Chapters 34-37

Chapters 34-37 Summary

Chapter 34 begins after the entrance stone has been flipped, and the storm is passing. Hoshino is confused that nothing seems to have changed since the "opening." Nakata is tired and goes to sleep. That night, Hoshino goes to a coffee shop, where the elderly owner, a classical music enthusiast, talks to him about Beethoven. Hoshino wonders why he is so drawn to Nakata, why he follows him unquestioningly. The next day, Nakata has not awoken, and Hoshino takes in a double feature of Truffaut films. He thinks about his life, how he should be smarter than he is. He goes to the coffee shop and talks to the old man about classical music again.

In Chapter 35, Kafka is awoken in bed by a call from Oshima. He tells him to get dressed and packed and ready to be picked up; something has come up. Oshima drives him to the cabin in Kochi. Evidently, the police are searching the city since word broke of Nakata's confession to a stabbing murder. Police suspect that Kafka may have hired him to commit the crime. As they drive, Oshima asks Kafka to stop seeing Ms. Saeki for the time being. He fears that Ms. Saeki's deluded sense of Kafka as a reincarnation of her husband is dangerous.

Hoshino finds Nakata still asleep in Chapter 36. He gets a call from Colonel Sanders, who insists that Hoshino wake the sleeping man and immediately leave the hotel. Police are sweeping the hotels of Takamatsu, looking for Nakata. Colonel Sanders has arranged an apartment for the two men. Hoshino wakes Nakata and asks him why the police might be looking for him. Nakata tells him about killing Johnnie Walker. The men check out quickly and take everything - including the entrance stone - to a chic new apartment in a residential part of town. Inside, they discuss what happened in the hotel room. Nakata says that the stone definitely opened something - somewhere - but he does not know the next step. The two men walk to the beach. Hoshino promises Nakata they will go to an aquarium after things blow over.

In Chapter 37, Oshima and Kafka arrive at the cabin. Oshima is tired and lays down for a nap. Kafka, meanwhile, puts away the groceries and reads a while. When Oshima wakes up, he again warns Kafka against wandering too far into the woods. During the War, a regiment of soldiers trained in these woods, and two disappeared, never to be found. Oshima leaves, and Kafka lies down in bed. He cannot get thoughts of Ms. Saeki out of his head.

Chapters 34-37 Analysis

Chapter 34 begins with the sensation that the narrative is entering its final passages. The "entrance" has opened, but we do not know where it is or what it leads to. The

police are sweeping Takamatsu looking for Kafka and Nakata, despite the fact that it is possible that neither killed Koichi Tamura.

This latter occurrence compels Kafka to flee town, returning to the woods in Kochi. The Kafka that returns is far different from the Kafka that lived there a couple weeks ago. The line between real and illusory has blurred, and he has accepted that he cannot escape his oedipal fate. Indeed, he is careening into his prophesy, enacting fate with his own hand. Before Oshima leaves him at the cabin in Chapter 37, he gives an ominous warning about soldiers disappearing in the woods. As stated before, Kafka experienced the peace of the woods last time; now, he will experience something akin to holy dread.

Chapters 34 and 36, on the other hand, follow the more hopeful excursions of Hoshino. Nakata has fallen asleep again, and the trucker has nothing to do but kill time until he wakes. The young man despairs that he has wasted much of his life on trivia. He sees in Nakata a man working toward some sort of higher end, even though he has no idea what that end is, exactly. Hoshino begins his personal journey to fulfillment in a coffee shop listening to Beethoven. In the haunting fugue, this genuinely silly man realizes that he, too, could be meant for serious things.

Chapters 38-42

Chapters 38-42 Summary

In Chapter 38, Hoshino rents an inconspicuous car and brings it back to the apartment. There, Nakata talks to him about the stone, which is telling him that someplace nearby has what they need. The next day, they begin driving around Takamatsu, looking for the mysterious location. They drive all day, by Nakata does not find it. The normally patient Hoshino is getting irritated. They return home dejected, but they plan to cover more ground the next day. The next day passes without their finding anything, but on the way home, they get lost in the neighborhood surrounding the apartment. They happen upon the Komura Library, and Nakata is certain that it is his destination. Unfortunately, today is Monday and the library is closed. They will return tomorrow.

Kafka wanders into the forest around the cabin in Chapter 39. He carries survival supplies and heads farther out than ever before. That night, he dreams about raping Sakura. She begs him not to, saying that although it is a dream, she is his sister. He orgasms and wakes up.

In Chapter 40, Nakata and Hoshino enter the library and are greeted by Oshima. Hoshino reads a book about Beethoven, and at lunch, he converses with Oshima. In the afternoon, Nakata and Hoshino take Ms. Saeki's tour of the building. Nakata mentions that he is from the area where Kafka's father was murdered, and Hoshino is nervous. Ms. Saeki disregards this, though, and continues with the tour. Afterward, the two men go back to the reading room. Suddenly, Nakata dashes out and bursts into Ms. Saeki's study. He wants to talk to her about the entrance stone. She agrees and closes the door so that they can speak in private.

Kafka again wanders into the woods in Chapter 41. He is forging a trail with a hatchet, arguing all the while with Crow. He has been fighting against his father's curse all his life, culminating in his metaphysical rape of his "sister" last night. The war within him is destroying him. He throws away his survival supplies, except his father's hunting knife, and presses farther into the forest.

In Chapter 42, Ms. Saeki and Nakata talk. They are companions with incomplete shadows: he cannot live except in the present, and she cannot live except in the past. She opened the entrance stone when she was twenty, to save her husband. She was punished for doing so: first, with his death, then with her inability to forget their love. Now, she understands why Nakata is doing the same. She points out to him that he is the boy looking out at the water in the painting, and his touching her hands floods his mind with memories. Ms. Saeki gives Nakata a stack of papers that tell the story of her life. She asks him to burn them. Nakata leaves with Hoshino to find a safe place to burn the papers, and Oshima mans the front desk. The library is so busy that not until the late afternoon does he realize that Ms. Saeki has died. As he waits for the ambulance, Oshima makes note of the time to tell Kafka.

Chapters 38-42 Analysis

In Chapter 39, Kafka begins to realize the extent to which his embrace of his own fate is destroying his soul. This realization comes first from his dream that he rapes Sakura. Even during the dream, both Sakura and Crow beg him to stop. Again, within the realm of the novel, actions committed in dreams carry just as much moral weight as those committed in life. By the same token, Sakura may or may not actually be Kafka's sister, but this does not really matter. If Kafka acknowledges her as his kin, she is for all intents and purposes.

In Chapter 41, Kafka effectively commits suicide. He knows the danger of the woods, and he forges through them, hatchet in hand, with Crow arguing with him that he is destroying himself. Frustrated and distraught, Kafka abandons his hatchet, food, and compass and presses on with no means of return.

This section also includes the meeting of Nakata and Ms. Saeki. Evidently, Ms. Saeki has opened the entrance stone in the past. She wanted to freeze her life and save her husband, but the result was his death and her inability to move one with her life. Nakata and Ms. Saeki need each other at this moment: he needs her to give him memories, and she needs him to destroy hers. When he does so, she dies.

Chapters 43-46

Chapters 43-46 Summary

In Chapter 43, Kafka continues to wander through the woods. He feels connected to the rhythms of nature and is unafraid of being lost. On the other hand, he despairs that his mother despised him so that she abandoned him. He is also confused by his feelings for Ms. Saeki. He doubts the possibility of feeling love for anyone. The two Japanese Imperial soldiers who disappeared in the forest during the War approach him. They say they have been waiting for him a long time and invite him to come with them through the "entrance." He immediately agrees.

In Chapter 44, Nakata and Hoshino burn Ms. Saeki's memoir. After they finish, Nakata is very tired; so, Hoshino calls a cab to take them home. In the cab, he tells Nakata how much the past ten days have meant, how Nakata has made him a better person. Nakata falls asleep during the cab ride, and Hoshino carries him to bed. Nakata dies in his sleep. Hoshino, afraid of complicity in the Tokyo murder, thinks of calling the examiner and leaving. He stops short, however, when he realizes the entrance stone has not been closed. He wants to do that for Nakata but does not know how. He waits for word from Colonel Sanders.

In Chapter 45, the two soldiers are leading Kafka through the increasingly treacherous woods. He is tired and starting to fall behind when they reach a ridge overlooking a smattering of utilitarian huts. The desolate village looks deserted as they descend. They take him to a hut that resembles Oshima's cabin inside. There, he is told to adjust to his surroundings and left alone. He turns on the television and watches part of The Sound of Music before falling asleep. When he wakes up, the teenage spirit of Ms. Saeki is cooking him dinner. He sits with her and talks. She has no name, she says, and she will appear whenever he needs to see her. Kafka tells her that he feels he has come here to see her and one other person.

In Chapter 46, Hoshino is still waiting to figure out what to do with the stone. He turns down the AC to keep Nakata from smelling. The weather is steadily improving, contrary to the storm Hoshino remembers from when he flipped the stone the first time. He cannot sleep, and the next morning he sits with the stone and discusses the failings of his life. He feels his life is largely a waste. A cat goes by the window and says hello to him.

Chapters 43-46 Analysis

In this section, Kafka enters the desolate village beneath the ridge in the woods at Kochi. This, we discover, is the goal to which every major character - Nakata, Ms. Saeki, the evil spirit - has been striving: access to this place. It is a settlement entirely free from time and desire. It is limbo.

This, as it turns out, is what Kafka has desired. He has experiences, in his short fifteen years on earth - all the pain that comes from love and hope. He has experiences loss comparable to Ms. Saeki's, and now he is in the place where she has lived since she was twenty. The two Imperial soldiers who missed the war serve the function of Chiron on the River Styx, leading Kafka from one life to the next. They, too, are an appropriate metaphor, two men who avoided a life of pain and torment by giving up a life of happiness as well.

Hoshino, by the end of Chapter 36, has effectively taken over for Nakata. The old man, having found what he was looking for, dies, leaving the truck driver the job of closing the entrance to limbo. Hoshino has been steadily transforming himself over the last few chapters into a man who dissect complex and abstract ideas, but this job confounds him. He waits for Colonel Sanders to give him a hint. He asks Nakata's body questions. After more than a day, Hoshino is carrying on an extended conversation with the rock. Finally, at the moment that Hoshino is certain that he's learned nothing from his mentor Nakata, he discovers he can speak to cats.

The Boy Named Crow (2), 47-49

The Boy Named Crow (2), 47-49 Summary

In The Boy Named Crow, Crow happens upon Johnnie Walker in the woods. Johnnie Walker shows him his flutes made from cats' souls. He complains that since dying, he has been stuck in limbo, and he is struggling to find his way out. The acerbic Mr. Walker invites Crow to try and kill him. Without hesitation, Crow leaps on him, gashing his skin and gouging out his eyes and tongue. Johnnie Walker just laughs.

In Chapter 47, Kafka wakes up in the desolate village. He wants to read a book, but there are none. The fifteen-year-old spirit returns to sit with him. She feels completely one with him, she says, content. She also says that in this village - where time is meaningless - memory ceases to exist, along with hunger. After the spirit disappears, the real Ms. Saeki enters the hut. Kafka fixes her tea, and they talk about their relationship. Ms. Saeki explains to him how much she lost trying to freeze time when she feared she would lose her husband. She implores him to go back to the real world immediately. She tells him to take the picture of the boy on the beach and to remember her. Kafka, meanwhile, forgives her for leaving him as a child. The two soldiers lead Kafka out of the village, warning him not to look back. He does once, at the top of the ridge, and he nearly can't bear to leave. Finally, he makes it back to Oshima's cabin.

Hoshino converses with the cat in Chapter 48. The cat warns him that a being of pure evil will try to slip through the entrance before it closes. This is when Hoshino must flip the stone and kill the being. Hoshino is concerned that he does not know what this being looks like. The cat hints to him that it only moves by night. That night, Hoshino waits with an arsenal of kitchen knives and mallets. At midnight, he sees a creature that looks like a slimy white salamander crawl out of Nakata's mouth and makes a beeline for the stone. Knives and mallets have no effect on it; so, Hoshino puts all of his energy into flipping the stone. After doing so, the creature is easily killed with a knife. The next morning, Hoshino says his goodbyes to Nakata and takes the creature's body to be burned.

In Chapter 49, Oshima's brother Sada comes to the cabin to pick up Kafka. As they drive back to Takamatsu, Sada says that the cabin is the one thing that unites him and Oshima. They discuss surfing for a while, and Kafka mentions that he wandered into the woods. Sada asks if he met the soldiers. Neither man acknowledges what the soldiers told them. At the library, Oshima tells Kafka of Ms. Saeki's death and gives him the picture of the boy on the beach and a copy of "Kafka on the Shore." Kafka says he will head back to Tokyo to finish school and talk to the police. Afterward, maybe he will come back to assist Oshima at the library.

At the bus station, Kafka calls Sakura to tell her he is leaving Takamatsu. As they talk, she mentions that she dreamed of him a couple nights ago, but it is not the rape dream he had. She dreamed she was protecting him. He thanks her for everything. On the bus

back, Crow tells Kafka he did well on his journey, but Kafka is concerned that he learned nothing about himself. Crow tells him to sleep a while. When he wakes, he will be in a whole new life.

The Boy Named Crow (2), 47-49 Analysis

The Boy Named Crow chapter at the beginning of this section is the one time that Crow abandons Kafka. In the Kochi woods, Crow happens upon Johnnie Walker, and we understand - perhaps for the first time - why this evil force has been so intent on opening the entrance stone. Evidently, after Nakata killed Johnnie Walker, he went not to the afterlife but to limbo. Now he wanders perpetually, looking for his escape. Clearly, his last ditch effort happens in Chapter 48, but Hoshino succeeds in stopping him by closing the stone.

Kafka, meanwhile, learns the lesson that he ran away from home to discover, even though he does not recognize it immediately. Ms. Saeki, a woman who squandered her life after twenty, begs him to accept the pain of his early life and move on living. Oshima seconds this in Chapter 49, saying that we store our memories inside of us like books in a library, and only every now and then do we need to dust them off.

The novel ends like it began, with Kafka and Crow talking. At the beginning, Crow cautioned him that he could only survive by becoming the toughest fifteen-year-old in the world. The narrative ends on a bus back home, and Crow assures Kafka that he is a survivor. Now Kafka has the strength to let people who love him into his life.

Characters

The Boy Named Crow

The identity of the boy named Crow is unclear. The chapter preceding chapter 1 in *Kafka on the Shore* is titled "A Boy Named Crow" and he is given the first line of the novel. His voice is described as being sluggish, but the reader learns very little else about him. In his self-titled chapter, he appears to be Kafka Tamura's imaginary friend, leading him through a visualization game while the two sit side by side. As the novel progresses, the boy named Crow is sometimes a voice in Kafka's head, Kafka himself (Kafka means *crow* in Czech), or an actual crow. Sometimes he appears to Kafka; other times Kafka only hears his thoughts. The boy named Crow functions as Kafka's alter ego, giving Kafka advice, cheering him on, and narrating present and future events.

Goma

Goma is the one-year-old tortoiseshell cat Nakata is looking for at the beginning of the novel. Nakata saves the cat's life when Johnnie Walker threatens to kill it.

Hagita

Mr. Hagita is the fresh fish truck driver who gives Mr. Nakata a ride to the Fujigawa rest area. He tells Nakata to be aware of the connections between things and buys him eel for dinner.

Hoshino

Mr. Hoshino has a ponytail, wears Hawaiian shirts, and drives a truck. He gives Nakata a ride from Fujigawa to Kobe and the two become fast friends. Hoshino regrets the way he treated his grandfather when he was alive, so he tries to makes up for it by taking care of Mr. Nakata.

While traveling with Mr. Nakata, Hoshino goes to the library for the first time and begins to appreciate classical music and François Truffaut films. He compares his relationship with Nakata to that of a disciple's relationship to Buddha or an apostle's relationship to Jesus Christ. He tells the old man that the time they spent together was the most meaningful time in his life. After Nakata dies, Hoshino is able to talk to cats.

Kawamura

Kawamura is the name Mr. Nakata gives a striped brown cat. When the cat was young, it hit its head on the concrete after a child hit it with his bicycle. It was never able to communicate very well after that. Kawamura is caught and killed by Johnnie Walker.

Koizumi

Mrs. Koizumi is the owner of Goma. She and her husband hire Mr. Nakata to find the cat after it goes missing. Mrs. Koizumi gives Nakata food whenever he goes to their house to give them updates on his progress.

Kafka on the Shore was released in an unabridged version on audio CD by Naxos of America in May 2006. It is narrated by Sean Barrett and Oliver Le Sueur. It is also offered as an audio download on www.audible.com.

Mimi

Mimi is the name of the clever, beautiful, educated Siamese cat that translates what Kawamura says for Mr. Nakata. It is one of the cats, along with Goma and Kawamura, caught by Johnnie Walker. Mr. Nakata saves its life.

Satoru Nakata

When he was nine, Satoru Nakata and fifteen classmates collapsed while picking mushrooms on Rice Bowl Hill. He spent three weeks in a military hospital and woke to find that he could not read or write. His memory was completely erased so he did not recognize his parents or understand anything about what happened to him. His shadow becomes half as dark as it should be. He can, however, talk to cats and make fish and leeches fall from the sky.

Nakata is an old man throughout most of *Kafka on the Shore*. He tells everyone he meets that he is not very bright. He lives on a government subsidy and any money that he makes finding lost cats. He lives a contented, simple life within the bounds of Nakano Ward, never venturing out lest he get lost. He has no concept of time, so he never gets impatient. He does get angry, though, when he witnesses violence.

When Johnnie Walker threatens to kill Goma and Mimi, after killing Kawamura right before Nakata's eyes, the old man stabs the cat-catcher to death.

Juichi Nakazawa

Dr. Nakazawa is the town physician called to examine sixteen children after they collapse on Rice Bowl Hill in 1944. He describes the details of that day in a U.S. Army

intelligence report in 1946. He is characterized by the interviewer as being "big boned and dark skinned…. He has a calm manner but is very brisk and concise and says exactly what's on his mind."

Setsuko Okamochi

Setsuko Okamochi describes the events of the Rice Hill Bowl Incident of 1944 in a U.S. Army intelligence report in 1946. She was the teacher of a class of sixteen students who mysteriously collapsed on a mushroom-gathering outing to the woods near the school. She was the only person among the group who did not collapse.

Although she appeared to provide an accurate and honest account of what transpired that day, at least according to the lieutenant who interviewed her at the time, Setsuko confesses twenty-six years later that she had not been completely truthful. In a letter addressed "Dear Professor," she confesses private details she was too embarrassed or ashamed to reveal in her original report in 1946. She hopes the truth might assist the professor in his quest for the truth of that day.

Oshima

Oshima lives and thinks like a man but is genetically a woman. He is very attractive, almost pretty, and dresses impeccably. His manner is relaxed and soothing, and he seems to have a calming effect on most people. Because he is a hemophiliac, he cannot play sports, travel, or cook, though he does drive his Mazda Miata very fast when he can. He helps Miss Saeki run the Komura Memorial Library and quickly becomes Kafka's confidant. The two become friends because they both left school at an early age and love books and libraries. Despite his lack of a formal education, Oshima is incredibly intelligent, always citing quotes from ancient philosophers, world literature, and Greek mythology. Because he is a "special person," he is especially sensitive and kind to other people who do not quite fit in to social molds. He lends the mountain cabin he shares with his brother to Kafka when the boy needs a place to stay or hide out. He tells him he thinks Kafka is either running away from something or seeking something out. Although he and Kafka are close, Oshima is guarded about the details of his personal life, preferring instead to advise or engage him in intellectual discussions.

Otsuko

Otsuko is the name Mr. Nakata gives to an elderly black tomcat. Nakata shares details of his life with the cat and asks if he has seen Goma. Otsuko tells Mr. Nakata that, for a human, he has an odd way of talking. He tells Nakata that he has not seen the cat he is looking for, and he advises the old man to stop looking for cats and start looking for the other half of his shadow.

Sada

Sada is Oshima's older brother. Unlike Oshima, Sada is a rough and rugged outdoorsman who owns a surf shop. When he drives Kafka from the cabin to the library, he admits to having seen the two soldiers in the woods, though he does not share any details of his experience. He tells Kafka that Kafka will probably opt to keep his experience to himself, too.

Saeki

Miss Saeki is the mysterious head librarian of the Komura Memorial Library. When she was still in grade school, she became the sweetheart of a distant relative, a young boy of the Komura family. The two were never apart and fell in love when they became adults. When she was nineteen, she recorded a song called "Kafka on the Shore," which became a huge hit. A year later, her boyfriend was senselessly killed. She dropped out of college and vanished for twenty-five years. She returned to Takamatsu and became head of the Komura family library.

Miss Saeki is beautiful and smart, elegant, and aloof. When Kafka becomes part of the library staff, he wonders if she might be his mother. He shares his father's ominous prophecy with her and tries to get her to admit to giving birth to him. Her fifteen-year-old self comes to Kafka as a ghost a few times during his stay in her old boyfriend's room in the library, and then cooks and cleans for him after he enters a parallel world. The fifty-year-old Miss Saeki comes to Kafka's room in the library and makes love to him, once while she sleepwalks, once while she is awake. She never admits to knowing Kafka's father and does not speak of Kafka's older sister. She tells Kafka she is waiting to die, that her return to Takamatsu was prompted by her desire to die there.

Sakura

Sakura is a hairdresser Kafka meets on the bus from Nagata to Shikoku. She is drawn to Kafka because she sees a little of herself in him. She, too, ran away from home when she was fifteen. Upon arriving in Shikoku, Sakura gives Kafka her telephone number and tells him to call if he needs anything. Kafka uses the number the night he wakes up disoriented and bloody in a field behind a Shinto shrine. He stays the night at her apartment and tells her his story, except the part about his father's omen. Kafka believes that Sakura might be his sister, but he lets her get physically intimate with him anyway.

Sanders

Colonel Sanders, the Kentucky Fried Chicken icon, guides Hoshino to the entrance stone and sets Hoshino and Nakata up in an apartment when they are trailed by the

police. Colonel Sanders is really just a "metaphysical, conceptual object" with no shape or form. He simply takes the appearance of Colonel Sanders to give him substance.

Kafka Tamura

Kafka Tamura is a fifteen-year-old runaway living in Shikoku. His mother and older sister left him and his father when Kafka was only four. He does not know anything about their identities or what they look like, which leads him to wonder about the women he meets. His father prophesied that Kafka would murder his father and "be with" his mother and sister. This omen plays a large part in his decision to run away from home. He intimates that his father is a dangerous and violent man, but he does not offer any details.

Kafka decides to run away on his fifteenth birthday and trains for the big day for two years. He works out to build strength and bulk, which makes him look older than he really is. He also reads voraciously, spending most of his time in the library, and pays attention in class. He isolates himself from other people, never laughs or smiles, and prefers to be alone.

Koichi Tamura

Koichi Tamura is Kafka's father and a famous sculptor. He prophesies that Kafka will murder him and "be with" Kafka's mother and sister. He is found stabbed to death by a kitchen knife. His best-known work is a series called "Labyrinth."

Togeguchi

Mr. Togeguchi is a young office worker who drives Mr. Nakata to the Tomei Highway. He is bashful when he first meets Nakata, but he soon opens up and shares many personal stories with his elderly passenger.

Toyoma

Major Toyoma is the military internal medicine specialist who examined the children right after the Rice Bowl Hill Incident. He shared all of his findings in an honest, straightforward way with Professor Tsukayama and his team of physicians. He admitted that the Japanese were "definitely developing poison gas and biological weapons," but the possibility of the children being affected by them was highly unlikely.

Shigenori Tsukayama

Dr. Tsukayama is the leading Japanese psychiatrist called in by the military to examine the children after the Rice Bowl Hill Incident. His account of the examinations is recorded in a U.S. Army intelligence report dated May 12, 1946.

Johnnie Walker

Johnnie Walker, like Colonel Sanders, is a metaphysical, conceptual object who takes on a Western corporate identity: Johnnie Walker is a brand of Scotch that features a man in a top hat with a walking stick on the label. This is the form the character Johnnie Walker assumes. He is the feared cat-catcher who prowls an empty lot favored by strays. His diabolical plan to collect cats' souls to make a special flute includes capturing them, slicing open their bellies, eating their hearts, and decapitating them. He lures Mr. Nakata to his home and makes the old man watch him perform his sadistic ritual, hoping this will make Nakata kill him. It works. Nakata stabs Johnnie Walker with a knife until he is dead.

Kafka Tamura

Kafka Tamura - Kafka is an fake name - is one of the two main characters in the novel. Half the chapters follow him in his quest of self that takes him from Tokyo to Takamatsu to Kochi.

When Kafka was young, his mother left the family, taking his sister with her. Kafka's emotionally abusive father prophesied not long after that Kafka would kill him and sleep with his mother and sister. On his fifteenth birthday, Kafka boards a bus for Shikoku. On his way south, he meets the talkative young hairdresser Sakura. Kafka settles in Takamatsu, and spends his days reading in the quaint Komura Library, owned by the beautiful Ms. Saeki and attended by Oshima, a friendly, esoteric transsexual. All is well until Kafka blacks out one day and wakes covered in blood. Confused, he goes to Sakura, who takes him in and sexually pleasures him. Kafka wonders if she may be his sister.

Oshima gets Kafka a job with the library, and gives him access to remote cabin in Kochi to hide out. After a few days, Kafka moves into the library. Oshima tells him about Ms. Saeki, who wrote a popular song called "Kafka on the Shore" and has been emotionally withdrawn since her husband was killed when she was twenty. Kafka is drawn to her, and soon a spirit of her younger starts visiting him at night. He falls in love and suspects that Ms. Saeki may be his mother. One day, Oshima brings Kafka a newspaper story: his father has been stabbed to death and he is a suspect. Kafka begins a romantic relationship with Ms. Saeki. Kafka, to her, is the reincarnation of her dead husband.

Soon thereafter, Oshima finds out that the police are in town searching for Kafka. He returns him to remote cabin to hide out. Kafka begins to explore the deep woods. More and more, he is growing depressed that his journey for self is destroying his soul. This culminates one night in a dream where he rapes Sakura. The next day in the woods, Kafka meets two Imperial soldiers, who lead him to the entrance of a desolate village, a state of limbo. There, he meets the dead Ms. Saeki, who asks his forgiveness for abandoning him and begs him to return to the real world. He does so, and decides he needs to return to Tokyo to meet with the police and finish school. Kafka says his

goodbyes to Oshima and Sakura and boards a bus to return to Tokyo and continue his life.

Mr. Nakata

Mr. Nakata is one of the main characters of the novel, and approximately half of the chapters follow his flight from Tokyo to Takamatsu. Nakata is an older man with no memories who can communicate with cats. When he was very young, his entire school class slipped into a hypnotic state in the woods, and when he awoke he had an impaired intellect and could speak to cats.

The novel begins with Nakata searching for a lost cat in Tokyo. He lives on a federal subsidy and makes extra money finding lost cats. His search for this particular cat leads him to the home of an evil spirit, Johnnie Walker, who murders cats for their souls. The enraged Nakata stabs him to death. On his way out, he confesses to a policeman, who does not believe him. Nakata also mentions that fish will fall from the sky, and they do the next morning. By now, he has discovered that he can no longer speak to cats

Nakata leaves town, unsure of where he's going. He hitches with truckers, heading south and west. At a truck stop, he sees a man being beaten by a motorcycle gang and saves him by making the sky rain leeches. The next day, he hitches a ride with the unpleasant and vulgar Hoshino. Hoshino grows friendly with his elderly passenger and decides to take a few days off to accompany him to Takamatsu. Nakata does not know what he needs to do, but when they arrive, he realizes he needs to find the "entrance stone." They head to a hotel, where Nakata falls asleep for several days. While he is out, Hoshino stumbles upon the stone.

Nakata wakes to find it and has to figure out how to "open" the entrance. His only certainty it that he cannot do so until a massive storm strikes. When the storm happens, he has Hoshino flip the heavy stone to open the entrance. Afterward, Hoshino and he search the city for the entrance in question. Meanwhile, Colonel Sanders - the evil spirit in a new form - rents an apartment for them to hide out in, since Tokyo police are searching the city for "Johnnie Walker's" murderer. As all this is happening, Nakata grows wistful for his former self, before the accident.

One day, Hoshino and Nakata arrive at the Komura Library, which Nakata now realizes is his destination. Nakata talks to Ms. Saeki about the entrance stone, which she used long ago to try to save her husband. She touches Nakata, returning to him the memories he has lost, and gives him her memoirs to destroy. He and Hoshino do so, and return to the apartment. Not long after, Nakata passes away in his sleep.

Ms. Saeki

Ms. Saeki is the middle-aged proprietor of the Komura Library. She is elegant, distinguished, and attractive; she is also remote and inscrutable.

When Ms. Saeki was a teenager, she fell madly in love with the son of a wealthy sake-producer in Takamatsu. They became engaged and he moved to Tokyo to attend school. Ms. Saeki wrote a poem to him, which when set to music became the popular song "Kafka on the Shore." When she was twenty, her lover died in student riots, beaten to death as a traitor. At this time, Ms. Saeki opened the "entrance stone" to try to save her husband. As a result, she has been living in static limbo ever since. She may have carried on a brief marriage with Kafka's father in Tokyo.

Now, she is the manager of the Library, where she gives a full tour of the building every Tuesday. She is fixated on a painting in her husband's old study of a boy on a beach. When Kafka moves in to the study, he and Ms. Saeki are strangely drawn to each other. They have conversations about each other's life when he brings her morning coffee. One night, she sleepwalks into his room and has sex with him. The next day, they walk to the beach in the picture and she makes love to him as though he were her husband. Later, he asks her if she is his mother, and she will not answer.

After Kafka goes into hiding, Ms. Saeki meets Mr. Nakata. He storms into her office to talk about the entrance stone. She realizes that she and he are opposing sides of one personality. She asks him to burn her memories, and after he does so, she dies.

Ms. Saeki then meets Kafka in the desolate village in the woods of Kochi. She asks his forgiveness for abandoning him - though she may not be his actual mother - and begs him to return to his life and not live on memories as she did.

Hoshino

Hoshino is the vulgar, young trucker who picks up Mr. Nakata on his travels and accompanies him to the end of the old man's life.

Hoshino was a troubled teenager, part of a motorcycle gang and a juvenile delinquent. His grandfather was his only role model, and he straightened up to join the army and get work as a trucker. He picks up Nakata because he reminds him of his grandfather. Hoshino is drawn to Nakata and his destination-less journey. He decides to accompany him as far as Takamatsu. They get a hotel room, and Nakata fixes Hoshino's back problems with a painful procedure. The old man knows he needs to find the "entrance stone," but he falls into a deep sleep before he does.

Hoshino wanders the streets and runs into Colonel Sanders. Sanders is a spirit and a pimp, and he offers to give Hoshino the stone if he accepts an arrangement with a prostitute. After the best sex of his life, Hoshino goes with Colonel Sanders to a religious shrine where he finds the stone. Back at the hotel room, he helps Nakata "open" the stone by flipping it during a thunderstorm.

By now, Hoshino has decided he doesn't care about his job: he will follow Nakata wherever necessary. At a local coffee shop, he learns about classical music and begins to focus on expanding his mind. Soon thereafter, Colonel Sanders tells him that the police are looking for Nakata, and they need to flee to an apartment he's arranged.

Hoshino rents a car, and with Nakata they search Takamatsu for the "entrance." Arriving at the Komura library, Nakata speaks to Ms. Saeki while Hoshino talks to Oshima about Beethoven. Later that day, he and Nakata burn Ms. Saeki's memoirs for her.

When Nakata dies the next day, Hoshino wants to call the police and leave, but he resolves to "close" the stone for Nakata first. He spends days trying to figure out how to do that, until a cat comes by to tell him he must destroy the evil spirit that wants to get through the entrance. That night, the evil spirit appears as a slimy salamander creature. Hoshino closes the stone and kills it. Then, he says his goodbyes to Nakata - his mentor and friend - and leaves.

Oshima

Oshima is the kind, esoteric transsexual who works as an assistant to Ms. Saeki at the Komura Library. He was born a female, but his breasts never developed; so now he lives life as a gay man. When we meet him, he is in the midst of a long-term relationship with a man.

Oshima befriends Kafka when the boy first arrives at the Library. During lunch, they discuss literature. When Kafka finds himself in trouble and without a home a week later, Oshima arranges a job for him at the library and lets him hide out a couple days in the remote cabin in Kochi that Oshima and his brother Saba maintain. In the ensuing weeks, Oshima becomes Kafka's most trusted confidante, keeping him abreast of developments in his father's murder and lying to the police for him. He also tells him Ms. Saeki's story and offers advice as their relationship develops. One day, two women accuse Oshima of misogyny, and he responds to them that he is biologically female, revealing himself to Kafka.

After police begin searching the city, Oshima takes Kafka to his cabin for the week, in the process telling the boy that he'd best cut off his affair with Ms. Saeki, for both their sakes. Days later, he meets Hoshino, and they discuss music while Nakata and Ms. Saeki talk. It is Oshima that discovers that Ms. Saeki has died. At the end of the novel, Oshima is the acting head librarian of the Komura Library. He tells Kafka of her death and offers him a position once he is done with school.

Oshima has a near encyclopedic knowledge of Japanese folklore, Greek tragedy, and classical literature. He often illuminates discussions of life by applying literary logic to it.

Sakura

Sakura is the talkative and flirtatious hairdresser who meets Kafka on his bus ride to Takamatsu. She is heading down to watch her sister's apartment for her. When they arrive in town, Sakura - who recognizes Kafka as a runaway - gives him her number. Days later when Kafka blacks out and wakes up covered in blood, she takes him in for the night. That night, he confides his dislike for his father and abandonment by his

mother and sister. Sakura, wanting to relax him, strokes him to orgasm. The next day, he leaves her apartment. Kafka suspects that she may be his sister.

Later in the novel, Kafka calls Sakura to tell her that he is alright. She likes him, and she tries to convince him to leave the Library and stay with her. He tells her that he is in love with someone else. While in the cabin in Kochi, Kafka dreams of raping Sakura. He fears that this dream is a betrayal of her love for him. Before he leaves for Tokyo at the end of the novel, he calls Sakura. They tentatively plan to meet up in the city.

Johnnie Walker/Colonel Sanders/the White Creature

This evil entity describes itself as neither god nor human, and it appears in many different guises throughout the novel. Its duel goals throughout the narrative appear to be the collection of souls and entrance into (or release from) the desolate village.

Nakata meets this spirit in the form of Johnnie Walker, the dandy on the scotch bottle. Johnnie has been kidnapping cats and sacrificing them to capture their souls. He uses these souls to create flutes which he uses to catch larger souls for larger flutes, and so on. Now, he wants Nakata to kill him, which he encourages by slaughtering cats in front of the old man. Nakata obliges him, killing him with a knife.

The spirit next appears to Hoshino in the form of Colonel Sanders (the KFC founder). Sanders, here, is a pimp who fixes Hoshino up with a prostitute and shows him where the "entrance stone" is located. Hoshino is wary of him, but Sanders assures him that his motives are reasonable. He needs the entrance opened, as well. Sanders later arranges an apartment for Hoshino and Nakata to hide in when police search hotels for Koichi Tamura's killer.

Johnnie Walker appears to Crow in the woods in Kochi. He shows Crow the flutes he has created from cats' souls and dares the bird to kill him. Crow gouges Walker's eyes out and bites out his tongue, but the man just laughs.

At the end of the novel, the spirit appears as a slimy, white salamander-like creature, trying to enter the stone in Hoshino's apartment. The creature is impervious to knifes and bludgeons while the entrance is open, but once the stone is closed Hoshino easily kills it. He cuts it up with a knife and burns it.

Crow

Crow is Kafka's alter ego that follows him throughout the story in the form of a crow. Kafka, the protagonist's assumed name, means "crow" in Czech.

Crow's function through the first half of the novel is encouraging Kafka to stay though in his journeys and not to let anything get to him. Crow often browbeats the boy, challenging him to prove himself. When Kafka begins to fall in love with Ms. Saeki, Crow questions his wisdom. As Kafka grows more destructive in his fight against his father's

curse, Crow tries to persuade him to drop his defenses and become himself again. When Kafka refused and forges deeper into the forest, Crow leaves him.

Crow happens upon Johnnie Walker in the forest, who tells him about his souls and flutes. The evil dandy urges Crow to try to kill him. Crow pounces on Walker, tearing out his eyes and tongue.

At the end of the novel, Crow assures Kafka that his journey has been a success, and he is still the toughest fifteen-year-old in the world. When Kafka expresses trepidation about the future, Crow tells him to go to sleep: he will wake up in a new life.

The Spirit of Fifteen-Year-Old Ms. Saeki

The Spirit of Fifteen-Year-Old Ms. Saeki visits Kafka for several nights in his bedroom at the Komura Library. She appears when he is not paying attention and sits at his desk looking at the painting of a boy on the beach. After a time, Kafka falls in love with her, though he is not sure if it is the spirit or the living Ms. Saeki that he loves. The night the older Ms. Saeki sleepwalks into his room and has sex with him, the spirit stops appearing.

In the desolate village, the Spirit of Fifteen-Year-Old Ms. Saeki comes to his hut and cooks for him. She tells him that she will appear whenever he needs her and that she feels one with him.

Koichi Tamura

Koichi Tamura is Kafka's emotionally abusive father, a popular artist in Tokyo. Years ago, his wife left him, taking their daughter with her. When Kafka was young, Koichi told him that one day Kafka would murder his father and sleep with his sister and mother. Someone murders Koichi with a large knife after Kafka runs away. On the same night, Nakata murders Johnnie Walker with a knife, leaving open the option that Kafka's father is Johnnie Walker, or that the evil spirit inhabited the body of Koichi Tamura.

Sada

Sada is Oshima's more rustic brother, a surfer. Each brother considers the other to be stubborn. The one area where they get along is the cabin in Kochi. At the end of the novel, Sada picks Kafka up at the cabin and drives him back to Takamatsu. On the way, Sada indicates that he has met the soldiers that guard the entrance, but he will not say if he followed them.

The Philosophy Student Prostitute

This Prostitute sleeps with Hoshino on the night that he finds the entrance stone. Her pimp is Colonel Sanders. She gives Hoshino the best sex of his life while quoting Hegel.

Nakata's Teacher

Nakata's teacher takes her class to the hills outside town to pick mushrooms in 1944. The night before, she had a vivid sex dream involving her husband, who is fighting in the war. This dream precipitates an early period, which starts while she is in the hills. The Teacher wipes herself off with some towels, which she hides among the tree. Nakata, however, finds the towels and brings them to her. Mortified, his Teacher beats him in front of the class. As this happens, he and the entire class fall into a trance state. The Teacher calls for medical help and after some time, every student except Nakata wakes up. Earlier in the day she saw an American bomber flying overhead.

When interviewed by the doctors and the US Army, she neglects to mention the towels or beating Nakata. Only years later does she admit the whole story in a letter to Dr. Tsukayama.

Dr. Nakazawa

Dr. Nakazawa is the town doctor brought to the hills in 1944 to tend the catatonic school class. He brings associates with bicycles with him to transport and immediately discounts the possibility of food poisoning and poison gas. Unsure what to do, Nakazawa is relieved when all the children wake back up. Only Nakata does not, and he is taken away by the military for observation.

Dr. Shigenori Tsukayama

Dr. Tsukayama is a renowned professor who observes the children who fell into trance, specifically Nakata. His best theory regarding the cause is that the children experience a type of mass hypnosis, comparable to the "spirit projection" of Japanese literature. He works with the catatonic Nakata for a while, trying various ideas for waking him.

The Two Soldiers

The Two Imperial Soldiers disappeared in the forties during training exercises in Kochi, never to be found again. Now, they guard the entrance to the desolate village in the woods. Kafka happens upon them late in the novel and follows them down the ridge into the village. They walk fast and don't look back. A few days after arriving, Kafka decides to leave, and the two soldiers guide him back to his cabin. They warn him not to look back.

Mimi

Mimi is a Siamese cat that assists Nakata in finding his lost cat. Mimi, named after the character from La Boheme, is an eloquent house cat who translates for less bright felines. Johnnie Walker drugs Mimi and is about to slaughter her when Nakata stabs him.

The Black Dog

The Black Dog is Johnnie Walker's servant. He approaches Nakata in the empty construction lot and leads him to Walker's lodging and shows him the refrigerator containing severed cat heads.

Kawamura

Kawamura is a cat with brain damage. He knows where Nakata's lost cat has been living and that he has been kidnapped. Because of his injury, his is nearly unintelligible. Mimi browbeats Kawamura into explaining himself more clearly. He is the last cat that Johnnie Walker kills before Nakata kills him.

Otsuka

Otsuka is the first cat the Nakata speaks to in the novel. He knows nothing about Nakata's missing cat, but he suggests that Nakata look for another person who - like him - has only half a shadow.

Objects/Places

The Entrance Stone

The Entrance Stone is the mystical stone that Ms. Saeki and Nakata use to open the entrance to the desolate village in the Kochi woods. Most of the time it is a regular white stone — approximately the size of an LP — but then it has the power to open or close the entrance, it becomes incredibly heavy.

The Painting of the Boy on the Beach

This painting is hung in Ms. Saeki's dead husband's study in the Komura Library. It shows a boy on a nearby shore looking out to see. The boy may be her husband or Nakata. It was likely one of the inspirations for her hit song "Kafka on the Shore."

Kafka on the Shore

"Kafka on the Shore" is the hit song written and sung by Ms. Saeki when she was a teenager. She wrote it as a poem to her fiance and put it to music later. The song may take its name from the painting in her lover's study in Takamatsu. The song makes mention of the entrance stone.

The Komura Library

The Komura Library is a historic building in Takamatsu, opened as a library by a wealthy sake-producer. Ms. Saeki took over as head librarian after the producer's son, her husband, was killed. The library has a metaphoric value for her as a repository for her memories of a happier life. Oshima and Kafka work there.

Oshima's Cabin

Oshima's cabin in the remote woods of Kochi is a utilitarian one-room building with no utilities or plumbing. Oshima maintains it with his brother Saba. Kafka hides out in it twice to avoid detection by the police.

The Desolate Village

The Desolate Village in a valley int he woods at Kochi is an otherworldly realm — similar to limbo — where there is no time or desire. Its entrance is controlled by the entrance stone. Kafka goes there, led by the two lost Imperial soldiers. Ms. Saeki and her younger spirit live there.

The Woods at Kochi

The Woods at Kochi that surround Oshima's cabin or thick and wild. Oshima warns Kafka not to wander too far into them. In the 1940s two soldiers disappear in the woods during a training exercise.

Eel

Eel is Nakata's favorite food. Whenever asked what he likes, eel is invariably what he talks about.

Aloha Shirts

Hoshino always wears aloha shirts. When Colonel Sanders arranges an apartment for Hoshino and Nakata to hide out, he provides Hoshino with new shirts since the police are looking for a man wearing an aloha shirt.

Pachinko

Pachinko is a popular gambling game — like a complicated slot machine — located in game parlors in Japan. Pachinko is how Hoshino often passes the time when Nakata is asleep.

Kafka's Father's Hunting Knife

Kafka's Father's Hunting Knife is one of the few things Kafka takes with him when he runs away. When he sheds all of his possessions in the Woods at Kochi, he holds on to the knife in case he chooses to kill himself

Kafka's Father's Cell Phone

Kafka's Father's Cell Phone is one of the few things Kafka takes with him when he runs away. He assumes it will only work as long is his father doesn't notice it is missing. When it continues to work — because Koichi Tamura has been murdered — Kafka thinks that his father has noticed he is gone.

The Photo of Kafka and his Sister on the Beach

This Photo is one of the few things Kafka takes with him when he runs away. He has not seen his sister since his mother left with her when he was very young.

Themes

No One Is an Island

At the beginning of the novel, Kafka converses with Crow, his alter ego, and psyches himself up for his impending departure. He has worked out for years and studied extensively to prepare himself for being on his own. His goal, as articulated by Crow, is to be the world's toughest fifteen-year-old.

As a result, Kafka spends much of his time rejecting offers of assistance from people who care about him like Sakura and Oshima. He cloisters himself off at the gym and in the reading room of the Komura Library, and little by little, his desires and his insecurities assault him. These manifest themselves in visions and dreams, most vividly the spirit of a teenage Ms. Saeki with whom Kafka falls in love. When the real Ms. Saeki wonders aloud why he walls himself off against the world, he responds:

The strength I'm looking for isn't the kind where you win or lose. I'm not after a wall that'll repel power coming from the outside. What I want is the kind of strength to be able to absorb that outside power, to stand up to it. The strength to quietly endure things. (317)

At an early age, Kafka was abandoned and abused by those who should have loved him, and his father's oedipal curse terrifies him. His response - employing the power about which he speaks above - is to grab the curse by the horns: to seduce Ms. Saeki and rape Sakura in his dream. He delves deep into the unforgiving woods in the hope of absorbing its power.

What he finds is limbo, the desolate village. He meets Ms. Saeki there, in this place where she has existed since the death of her husband. Her relationship with Kafka is her first real embrace of the living world since his death, and this relationship saves her. Already dead, she begs Kafka to go on living his life and to remember her. His strength must be the will to let others into his life.

Art Heals and Illuminates

The characters of Kafka on the Shore are constantly looking to art - be it literature, folklore, drama, or music - to understand their situation. For some, art provides inspiration and illumination while others use it as a reference point. These two conceptions of art's role in our world are typified in the characters of Hoshino and Oshima.

Hoshino, when we first meet him, seems an unlikely figure to become immersed in the classics. He's a long-haul trucker with a penchant for aloha shirts and baseball caps whose only exposure to the arts is the occasional kung fu picture. He picks up Nakata on a whim and is inexplicably drawn to the old man. Again, this situation - chauffeuring a

mentally-challenged man who talks to cats - does not seem conducive to aesthetic development for Hoshino. What strikes him in their adventures is the strange, spiritual logic that guides Nakata. One day, while killing time in a coffee shop, Hoshino is struck by a recording of Beethoven's Archduke Trio. He cannot fathom the introspective nature of the fugue, its hypnotic quality. Soon, he buys a copy of the piece, reads entire books about Beethoven, and takes in a Truffaut retrospective. This new world of self-searching art opens Hoshino to parts of himself he never understood before. By novel's end, he is a richer person with a better self-image and a drive to do -if not great - better things with his life.

On the other end of the spectrum is the pedantic Oshima. As a man with intense confusions of self, he uses the structure of classical tragedy as a framework for understanding the world. As such, Kafka's predicament with his father's curse is a genuine delight for him to analysis. Oshima has a habit of picking out parts of other people's lives - songs, experiences, objects - that seem like metaphors. In analyzing life like a piece of literature, he can understand not only others but himself. He has carried on a long-term relationship with a man for a long time by understanding his feelings through the prism of Plato's notion of split-identities. As such, he is remarkably well-adjusted for a man who acknowledges his confusion of sexual identity.

In the world of the novel, art is a topic of much discussion. The reason is not merely that many of the characters are cultivated human beings; rather, art holds the key to success and happiness for them.

Memories Can Sustain and Destroy

The idea of memory in the novel is an ambiguous notion. Some lack it and feel incomplete; some have a surfeit of it and are stymied in their lives. At the center, at once fueled and stalled by his memories (and lack thereof) is Kafka.

Kafka Tamura feels the lingering pain of abandonment by his mother and the dread of his father's curse. He has no joyful memories of the place in which he grew up, and so he ostensibly has no home. He has all the pain that memory can bring and none of the joy that it can foster. This novel, largely, is the story of his reconciliation of his past with his present, coming to terms with loss so that he can move forward to a new life.

Nakata, on the other hand, has lost all memory of his past. He produces no new memories, and as a result he lives entirely in the present. This results in a total emotional numbness for most of the novel: he does not know what it is to be in love, excited, angry, or bored. He clings to the things that he knows he likes, like woodcarving and eel. Later in his quest, as he approaches the Komura Library, he feels wistful for the memory that he has lost. He longs for his old humanity.

On the other end of the spectrum is Ms. Saeki. When she realized that she would lose her beloved husband, she attempted to freeze time by opening the entrance stone. When he died anyway, Ms. Saeki withdrew from life. Over and over, she mentions that

her life effectively ended when she was twenty. An over-abundance of memories has rendered her immobile, and not until she dies can she express to her new lover, Kafka, that he has to accept the past but live in the present.

Style

Point of View

Kafka on the Shore is written in two points-of-view, alternating largely chapter-by-chapter, each one corresponding to a different protagonist.

The story of Kafka Tamura is told in the present tense from a first person point-of-view. Our understanding of characters' thoughts in these chapters is restricted to Kafka himself. The interior life of other characters only comes to us through what they tell him. At the beginning of the novel, particularly, Kafka is a reliable protagonist. Emotionally abused before the story begins, he has affected an emotionless, analytical attitude to the world. In latter chapters, he grows more confused and despairing and his internal life overwhelms the action, rending him less reliable as a narrator. Kafka also has an alter ego, Crow, who appears in these chapters as a separate voice - generally in bold print - speaking in imperative statements.

The story of Nakata is told in the past tense, in a third person omniscient voice. This is especially helpful to the reader given that Nakata is a mentally challenged man with no memory, who is the central player in a paranormal plot. Our narrator in these chapters has knowledge of Nakata's thoughts as well as - later - Hoshino's. Four of the "Nakata" chapters (Chapters 2, 4, 8, and 12) are presented in the form of historical documents - military interviews and letters - detailing the strange incident that occurred in Nakata's childhood.

Taken together, these two groups of chapters create two completely separate narratives that compliment each other poetically until the last quarter of the novel, where the two strands intersect.

Setting

The novel takes place in the present in the south of Japan. Both Nakata and Kafka begin the novel in Tokyo, and both travel south through Shikoku to Takamatsu, where the majority of the novel takes place. Some passages also take place in the woods in Kochi.

Several specific locations have particular significance to the story, containing a sort of spiritual energy that makes them focal points for the ethereal plot that runs beneath the action of the story. The most important of these is the Komura Library. Both Kafka and Nakata are drawn to it without their understanding, and it becomes Kafka's home in Takamatsu. In the end, Oshima comments to Kafka that we are all libraries with catalogs of our memories, and the Komura Library is a physical manifestation of Ms. Saeki.

Another of these living settings is Oshima's cabin in the woods of Kochi. Oshima, his brother Sada, and Kafka all find passage to another world through this location and its dark, imposing surroundings.

Several locations exist on a different plane of reality from our world. Characters can move seamlessly from the real world to these locations, but they inhabit a place outside of space and time. The most consequential is the desolate village in the woods that Kafka gains entrance to. It is a limbo state for those who no longer live in their own lives. Long ago, Ms. Saeki opened the door there to attempt to prevent her husband's death. Kafka, too, goes there to escape his life. Other locations are created by the malevolent spirit that follows Nakata in order to gain entrance to this limbo space. These locations include Johnnie Walker's lodging in Tokyo, the shrine that Colonel Sanders takes Hoshino to and the apartment he arranges.

The world of Kafka on the Shore is a world like ours except in respect to the fact that its inhabitants can travel in and out of spiritual dimensions through it.

Language and Meaning

The language of Kafka on the Shore is informal and malleable, shifting from the professorial observations of Ms. Saeki and Oshima to the lower vernacular of Kafka and Hoshino. Kafka's narration, in particular, is clear but littered with slang and explicit descriptions of body and sex.

In reference to the professorial - most prevalent, of course, in the world of the library - the language is structured carefully, in clear arguments, and is full of literary references. As such, the novel takes on a self-referential quality, with Oshima at one time discussing the purpose of the bildungsroman (coming-of-age story) in a novel that is essentially a bildungsroman.

The bluer of the language comprises of more modern references, primarily to movies and rock music. Sections during which Hoshino is telling a story - for example, when he considers the women he has slept with - contain colloquialisms and nervous ticks like constant "you know"s and hypothetical conversations.

All told, the language in Kafka on the Shore reflects a diverse group of characters of varying ages, backgrounds, and levels of education.

Structure

Kafka on the Shore is comprised of 49 regular chapters - each about ten pages in length - and two short passages labeled "The Boy Named Crow," located at the beginning and near the end of the novel. These passages deal mostly with Crow, Kafka Tamura's alter ego and connection to the spiritual realm.

The 48 main chapters can be divided half-and-half with those focusing on Kafka and those focusing on Nakata. The focus shifts back and forth between the two protagonists on a chapter-by-chapter basis. Throughout the novel, these chapters are largely narrative in structure, dedicating little time to exposition, overt character description, and detailing of setting. Rather they allow both character and setting to develop through action.

Four chapters - each dealing with the character of Nakata - are set up in an epistolary form, like a compilation of documents that combine to tell a story. These chapters (three US government interviews and a letter) tell the story of the strange incident in an unnamed forest that resulted in Nakata's memory loss.

Taken together, the novel comprises a relatively straightforward narrative, told in linear form, alternating between two protagonists. Within this narrative there are occasional interjections of background materials and information about the spiritual world of the novel.

Historical Context

Japan's Violent Past

In an interview with *Salon*, Haruki Murakami, born in Tokyo, Japan, during the waning years of the American occupation, admitted to being heavily influenced by World War II:

I have drawers in my mind, so many drawers. I have hundreds of materials in these drawers. I take out the memories and images that I need. The war is a big drawer to me, a big one…. My father belongs to the generation that fought the war in the 1940s. When I was a kid my father told me stories—not so many, but it meant a lot to me. I wanted to know what happened then, to my father's generation. It's a kind of inheritance, the memory of it.

The Sino-Japanese War, the Russo-Japanese War, the Manchurian Incident, the Rape of Nanking, the Pacific War, and the subsequent occupation of Japan by American troops are related historical events that contribute to this memory. Murakami nods to all of them, either directly or indirectly, in much of his work. Murakami translator, biographer, and self-described fan, Jay Rubin, writes, "Although Murakami's works have been dismissed by critics as apolitical and ahistorical, most of them are set in carefully defined periods and, taken in aggregate, can be read as a psychological history of post-post-war Japan."

Contemporary Japan

On January 17, 1995, a powerful earthquake hit Kobe, Japan. Two months later, on March 20, members of the Aum Shinrikyo cult released sarin nerve gas on the Tokyo subway system during rush hour. Murakami, still living in the United States, felt compelled to return home. In an interview with Velisarios Kattoulas for *Time*, Murakami said,

I thought 1995 was a turning point for our society. I didn't know if it was good or bad, only that everything had changed. At the same time, it was a turning point for me. I made up my mind that I had to commit to my society again.

The change Murakami experienced mirrored the societal changes brought about by the earthquake, the gas attack, and the crash of the Japanese economy. The company-man mentality was suddenly challenged by economic uncertainty. In his 1997 interview with Laura Miller for *Salon*, Murakami said, "Ten years ago, Mitsubishi or other big companies were very solid, unshakable. But not anymore. Especially right now. Young people these days don't trust anything at all." Reactions to *Underground*, the title given to Murakami's collection of victim interviews, were positive, as he recounted to Miller:

It was a strange reaction to a crime nonfiction book. But they said they were encouraged. People are working so hard and so sincerely, and they were moved by

that. This isn't the same as what we used to think—that working so hard was a good thing. It's not that.

Critical Overview

It is impossible to critique Haruki Murakami's *Kafka on the Shore* without making comparisons to his other works of fiction, most notably, *The Wind-Up Bird Chronicle*. Given the fact that critics and longtime fans already have a favorite Murakami novel, *Kafka*, the author's tenth, is judged as not quite measuring up and praised for exhibiting all the elements that make his books such a joy to read.

Some fault the novel's lack of resolution. David Mitchell of *The Guardian* (U.K.) wrote,

Unless I am being particularly dim-witted, loose ends remain far looser than in any Murakami novel to date…. The mythic motifs also remain frustratingly shady…. For Murakami devotees, this fantasy's loose ends will tantalize; to his admirers, they may invite flummoxed interpretation; but for the unconvinced, they will just dangle, rather ropily.

As if in answer to Mitchell's frustration, Matt Thorne of the *Independent* (U.K.) pointed to Murakami's suggestion for making sense of the book and added a helpful hint of his own:

Murakami has suggested it is a book that needs more than one reading to comprehend fully, and it may also be true that some scenes that will seem baffling to a Western audience make more sense to Japanese readers. If you return to the beginning of the book after completing it, the prologue actually works best as an epilogue.

Some critics, like Janet Maslin of the *New York Times* forgave the novel's shortcomings and focued on the work as a whole: "However vague its allusions and overbearing its pretensions … this book makes for a beguiling and enveloping experience." Laura Miller, also of the *New York Times*, agreeed: "So great is the force of the author's imagination, and of his conviction in the archaic power of the story he is telling, that all this junk is made genuine."

The consensus seems to be that *Kafka on the Shore*, though flawed, is a work of tremendous originality offering something for ardent fans and newcomers alike. Whether Murakami will top his wildly popular and critically acclaimed *The Wind-Up Bird Chronicle* remains to be seen.

Criticism

- Critical Essay #1
- Critical Essay #2
- Critical Essay #3
- Critical Essay #4
- Critical Essay #5
- Critical Essay #6

Critical Essay #1

Ann Guidry is a freelance writer and editor. In this essay, Guidry examines the literary, cultural, and historical influences that helped shape the structure and content of Kafka on the Shore.

With a novel as hauntingly convoluted as *Kafka on the Shore*, it seems appropriate to look to the author for clues to the meaning of the book, if not, at least, clues to help answer the many riddles the book puts forth. The fact that Haruki Murakami is Japanese is both important and purely incidental. The novel, like Murakami, is steeped in Western cultural and literary references, but it has a particular quality that reveals its true nationality. An examination of Japanese history, society, and culture and of Murakami's own life reveal much about the mysteries of *Kafka on the Shore*. To begin to understand the complexities of the novel, it is helpful to study the complexities of the author's relationship with his homeland and its literature. Murakami's bold independence in a culture that reveres the group informs many aspects of *Kafka on the Shore*. For this reason, he and Japan's culture and history will form the foundation of this inquiry into the novel.

Critical Essay #2

The isolation felt by the characters in *Kafka on the Shore* mirrors the general isolationism of Japanese society. Kafka isolates himself from everyone, choosing solitary pursuits such as working out, reading, and listening to music. He has no mother, no sister, and, for all intents and purposes, no father. His only real friend, the boy named Crow, is his alter ego. Oshima is mysteriously private about his personal life. He converses freely with Kafka on a number of philosophical and literary topics, but he falls silent when questioned about private matters. Miss Saeki's twenty-five year disappearance is an extreme sort of isolationism, one that lessens only slightly after her return home.

The isolationism apparent in Japanese society can be traced to the homogeneity of the culture as well as the fact that it is an island country. Having been isolated for thousands of years, the Japanese live in something of a cultural bubble. The Japanese attitude toward their language serves as a perfect example of this exclusionary outlook. Murakami explains in the *New York Times* in a discussion with novelist Jay McInerney:

Many Japanese think their language is so unique that foreigners cannot grip its essence, its beauty or its subtlety. And if some foreigner claims that he has grasped that essence, nobody believes him. One reason they think that way is because Japan … has not been occupied by other countries except for a brief period after World War II. Its culture was not threatened by other cultures. So the Japanese language has been isolated…. That's why the Japanese are so certain about its uniqueness, its nature, its structure, its functions.

Critical Essay #3

The characters in *Kafka on the Shore* are as introverted, individualistic, and dreamy as the man who created them. Naturally independent, Murakami has always been something of an anomaly in a culture that reveres the group, the family, and the corporation. From an early age, he was drawn to the music, literature, and films of the West, where independent thinking is encouraged. In high school, he favored the paperback novels of Raymond Chandler, Truman Capote, F. Scott Fitzgerald, and Kurt Vonnegut. Later, he discovered Richard Brautigan, Manuel Puig, Gabriel Garcia Marquez, John Irving, and Raymond Carver. Classic Japanese literature never captured his interest. The sheer volume of Western thought Murakami consumed likely influenced his personality. It helps to understand that members of Japanese society don't simply support the group ethos but are downright distrustful of independents. Murakami explains to McInerney:

Japan is such a group-conscious society that to be independent is very hard. For instance, when I looked for an apartment in Tokyo, the real-estate people didn't trust me because as a writer I was self-employed and didn't belong to any company.

This cultural attitude toward independence is especially illuminating when one considers the character of Satoru Nakata. Existing on the fringes of society, Nakata lives an utterly solitary existence, contributes little to society, collects money from the government, and talks to cats. What made Murakami decide to give this old man such a strange gift? Could it be to emphasize his marginality? Maybe Nakata's ability to talk to cats is a metaphor for the way society views him. But his scarlet letter is not so hard to bear. Because he is a lovable person and a victim—possibly of the government—Murakami grants him inclusion to one society (cat society) after being ousted from another (human society).

Looking through the same lens, the circumstances that lead to Mr. Hoshino being given the same gift (the ability to talk to cats) are particularly striking. Hoshino at least holds a steady job that he is dedicated to—until he meets Nakata, that is. After becoming Nakata's "disciple," he decides to quit his job and dedicate himself to the old man ("Maybe this is going overboard, but I bet Buddha's followers and Jesus' disciples felt the same way," he says). When Nakata dies, it is up to Hoshino to fulfill the old man's destiny. It is at this point that Hoshino is able to talk to cats. In *Kafka on the Shore*, a novel full of metaphors, characters with the ability to speak to cats are obviously unwanted by society, but loved by Murakami. They are given the ability to find meaning where ordinary people cannot.

Critical Essay #4

It could be said that Franz Kafka was postmodern before postmodernism existed. One need only look to his body of work to see that he shares much with the post-World War II writers that came after him. It is clear Murakami had the Czech writer on his mind when naming the protagonist in *Kafka on the Shore*. On his website at RandomHouse.com, Murakami has this to say about why he named his protagonist Kafka:

It goes without saying that Kafka is one of my very favorite writers. But I don't think my novels or characters are directly influenced by him…. What I see myself doing … is writing novels where, in my own way, I dismantle the fictional world of Kafka that itself dismantled the existing novelistic system. One could view this as a kind of homage to Kafka, I suppose. To tell the truth, I don't really have a firm grasp of what's meant by postmodernism, but I do have the sense that what I'm trying to do is slightly different.

Murakami is not alone in his confusion over the definition of postmodernism. Critics apply the term to certain kinds of literature, art, architecture, history, technology, and philosophy, but few agree exactly on what the term means. In a broad sense, postmodernists seem to posit that reality cannot be determined and truth is constantly evolving. If modernism was a reaction against the condition of modern civilization, postmodernism is a reaction against the linear nature of modernism.

While Murakami does not consider himself a postmodern writer, elements of his work are undeniably postmodern. Kafka, for one, drifts in and out of time, takes on and sloughs off a second personality, and enters and leaves reality as easily as the wind blows. And he is one of the "normal" guys. Johnnie Walker and Colonel Sanders are "concepts." They take on the names and appearances of corporate icons just so that they will have substance. Murkami's decision to make two powerful characters look like American corporate icons is another postmodern flourish: a blending of the eternal and mythic with the commercial and material.

Murakami employs postmodern structural elements, too. On several occasions, the first-person narrative shifts to second person. These shifts mark tremendous changes in the storyline and cause the reader to question what he or she has come to know about the characters, whether the words on the page represent a dream or reality, or whether the moment in time being described is really the present. These sudden narrative shifts are literary earthquakes, upsetting the balance of an already bizarre universe. Second-person narration is used to similar effect by other prominent postmodern writers, including Italo Calvino (see *If on a Winter's Night a Traveler*) and Carlos Fuentes (see *The Death of Artemio Cruz*).

The most postmodern moment in the novel takes place during a discussion between Colonel Sanders and Hoshino. Hoshino is terrified to take the entrance stone from the temple, fearing God's wrath. Colonel Sanders explains why nothing could possibly happen:

God only exists in people's minds. Especially in Japan, God's always been kind of a flexible concept. Look at what happened after the war. Douglas MacArthur ordered the divine emperor to quit being God, and he did, making a speech saying he was just an ordinary person. So after 1946 he wasn't God anymore. That's what Japanese gods are like—they can be tweaked and adjusted. Some American chomping on a cheap pipe gives the order and *presto change-o*—God's no longer God. A very postmodern kind of thing. If you think God's there, He is. If you don't, He isn't. And if that's what God's like, I wouldn't worry about it.

Murakami may claim to not fully grasp the concept of postmodernism, but the previous paragraph is more than a witty metaphysical rant. It is an accessible and engaging definition of the nebulous school of thought being addressed.

Haruki Murakami has said that *Kafka on the Shore* needs to be read more than once to be understood. Even he admits to learning more and more about the world he created after reading and rereading his own manuscript. But readers, be warned: Do not expect every question to be answered, every loose end to be neatly tied up. No matter how many times one reads *Kafka on the Shore*, elusive elements will remain. Understanding the author's historical, cultural, and literary background provides something of a map to help readers navigate the complex world Murakami creates. Once those connections are made, it is not difficult to see that the mysteries and complexities in Murakmi's fictional world are not so different from those in Murakami's "real" world.

Source: Ann Guidry, Critical Essay on *Kafka on the Shore*, in *Literary Newsmakers for Students*, Thomson Gale, 2007.

Critical Essay #5

In the following excerpt, Hensher discusses Murakami's accomplishment of creating fiction that feels realistic and has universal appeal despite its fantastical elements and Japanese settings.

Haruki Murakami must be one of the most successful novelists in the world, from the point of view of readership; he has a very substantial following in this country, but it is still much smaller than the enormous readership he has in much of Europe. He is not one of those writers who appeals most to foreign readers; his status in Japan, after the publication of *Norwegian Wood*, rose to such a level that he was forced to leave the country to flee his own celebrity.

At first sight, he seems to have attained this global status with a kind of global style. The manner of his writing is simple, clear and direct; the trappings of his novels are strikingly international. Though they are mostly set in Japan, his novels talk principally of McDonalds, café au lait, Rossini overtures, Lennon and McCartney, Jack Kerouac and Dostoevsky; their political concerns, if any, are deliberately international ones. The settings are hotels, universities, unspecific houses and flats, airports. The experiences they deal in are either so universal, like love affairs, or so totally fantastic that they rarely evoke or require any particular culture. Only rarely does a novel turn to a specific Japanese experience which the reader in London or Athens might not know about: the private militarised university in *Norwegian Wood* or the Manchurian war memories in *The Wind-Up Bird Chronicle* are very unusual in Murakami's work. This new novel, too, deals with episodes in the Japanese past; but like all such episodes in Murakami's work they remain purely decorative, the political implications deliberately unexplored. The question of poison gas arises at one point; Murakami has written extensively about the gas attacks on the Tokyo underground, but whether his conclusions there bear any relationship to the apparent gas attack in this novel is a question producing answer so speculative as to make one wonder whether there is any substantive connection, or if Murakami is, in any useful sense, writing about the real world in his novels at all.

The Tale of Genji, written soon after the year 1000 A.D., is widely regarded as the world's first novel and one of Japan's greatest literary achievements. Penned by Murasaki Shikibu as entertainment for aristocratic ladies, *Genji* describes the customs of eleventh-century high society while recounting the romantic life of Genji, son of an emperor.

A Wild Sheep Chase, published in the United States in 1989, is Haruki Murakami's story about a young advertising executive forced to find a mutant sheep he used in an insurance company ad campaign.

Murakami's *Hard-Boiled Wonderland and the End of the World* was published in the United States in 1991. Alternating chapters follow an unnamed science experiment victim through an imagined Tokyo of the future to an ancient walled city. The novel features an insane scientist, unicorn skulls, Bob Dylan, and subterranean monsters.

Murakami's short story collection, *The Elephant Vanishes*, was published in the United States in 1993. The stories tackle universal themes of love, death, and life in the modern world in Murakami's trademark postmodern style.

The Wind-Up Bird Chronicle, published in the United States in 1997, is widely considered Murakami's finest work. It marks a change in the writer's usually cool, detached stance to one of true commitment. For the first time, Murakami focuses on the intricacies of human relationships.

Murakami's *Norwegian Wood*, published in the United States in 2000, focuses on how the relationship between Toru and Naoko is affected by the death of their mutual friend.

Underground is Murakami's first foray into nonfiction. Published in the United States in 2000, *Underground* is a collection of interviews between Murakami and victims of the Aum Shinrikyo sarin gas attack of the Tokyo subway system in 1995. Interviews with members and former members of the Japanese cult are also included.

Murakami's *Sputnik Sweetheart* was published in the United States in 2001. The novel features "K" and his search for Sumire, the writer and classmate he loves.

After the Quake is Murakami's second short story collection. Published in 2002, its six stories all revolve around the aftereffects of the 1995 Kobe-Osaka earthquake.

And yet Murakami is the opposite of a bland, flattened novelist. He has a unique and pungent flavour, and his own extraordinary world. There is a marvellous sense, in all of his books, that anything at all may happen. Sometimes that means something totally extraordinary; a giant frog start living in someone's apartment (*After the Quake*), or an unknown 16th floor materialises in an ordinary provincial hotel (*Dance Dance Dance*). That kind of extravagant swerve we readers have got used to in the last 30 years, from writers from all parts of the world, under the not very useful tag of 'magic realism'. What I like about Murakami's unexpectedness is that it may just as readily manifest itself in ways much more realistic but equally alarming; and it will all make sense in the end.

Nevertheless, *Kafka on the Shore* works a powerful spell, its extremes of violence and sexual encounter drifting across its surface like a painless dream. Although there is a recurrent sense of unreality, what keeps the reader firmly attached to the demented flood of events is the certainty that there is a solid reality, however oddly expressed, at its heart. It seems to be telling us something immensely important, perhaps about unspoken family relationships, perhaps about love, given the undeniable warmth and simple tenderness at the centre of the book. What it is about I would not confidently venture to say, except that it is not all about Kafka, and not very much about beaches either. But I will say that it was one of the books which, arriving through the post, caused me to stop doing everything else and devote and energies to reading another of these wonderful, inexplicable romances.

Source: Philip Hensher, "Curiouser and Curiouser," in the *Spectator*, Vol. 297, No. 9204, January 2005, pp. 23-24.

Critical Essay #6

In the following essay, Myers reviews Kafka on the Shore, *tantalizing would-be readers with glimpses of plots, characters, and elements of the magically realistic story*.

Haruki Murakami became an international cult hero with his evocation of a sinister parallel universe in *The Wind-Up Bird Chronicle*. He also sold over four million copies of *Norwegian Wood*, his lugubrious love story which starts out depressingly and very slowly gets worse. So many tears fell from female readers that the pages became wet and warped and stuck together and Murakami became rich.

Murakami is a magic realist. This is of course just another humdrum lit crit label, but Murakami does manage to breathe some pop culture spoofiness into the genre with *Kafka on the Shore*. He happily gives surreal cameo roles to Colonel Kentucky and red label Johnnie Walker in top hat. But there is not much danger of you confusing Murakami with a childish comic strip. Before you know it, he has suddenly dropped you into a black hole filled with the sacred junk of 2000 years of Western philosophy and art. Audaciously he brings the Oedipus complex back to life, mixes in a super-sexy callgirl who quotes Bergson and Hegel while she does hand jobs, reactivates the age-old quest for the Absolute, has live fishes and then giant leeches raining out of blue skies, and features a strange old man with a soul of pure gold who can converse with cats.

Is this enough to give you a severe case of indigestion? Well, with another author, perhaps. But Murakami's narration moves along calmly and without clutter or artifice. The most peculiar things happen quite naturally. Mysticism and the supernatural so infuse the characters' souls that the bizarre becomes everyday, indeed almost Kafkaesque.

In *Kafka on the Shore* Murakami is very interested in fate or fatedness in the sense of Greek classical tragedy. This is quite distinct from the Shakespearean sense of fate which grows out of a fatal flaw in the hero's character. But in Greek tragedy it is often the protagonist's heroic excess which calls forth the wrath of the gods or the inexorability of some external and fearful fate. Murakami mixes in a touch of Buddhist reincarnation as a soother, or perhaps it comes from Pythagoras and the transmigration of souls.

Kafka on the Shore takes its name from two sources. First, Franz Kafka is the spiritual inspiration of the alienated fifteen-year-old boy runaway, who virtually lives in libraries in order to escape the attention of his hated and neglectful father. The boy believes that Kafka's strange torture- and learning-machine in the story "*In the Penal Colony*" is an existential symbol for enlightenment through suffering and out of reverence he resolves to re-christen himself Kafka, or in full Kafka Tamura. Second, Kafka is the eponymous hero of a love song composed by the Oedipal mother-figure, Miss Saeki, when she lost the great and only love of her life when she was fifteen. The song became top of the pops at the time, though I found this difficult to believe, as it is fairly obscure and elusive.

Are you confused? Excellent. Murakami wouldn't want it any other way. A certain confusion at the outset is needed to give you the jolt to start you on your pilgrimage, in which you will tag along at the heels of Kafka Tamura. Once you suspend your disbelief and identify with the yearnings and the sacred missions of the twin protagonists, namely the fifteen-year-old Kafka and the eighty-five-year-old sacred simpleton Nakano, you will never have another dull moment. You will never be bored. Things are fated to happen to you, meaningful things. Your fellow characters will never ignore you or even maintain the usual formal barriers of distant courtesy and indifference. Your intense field of gravity will irresistibly sweep them into your orbit and intimate encounters will be the order of the day.

Teenage Kafka undergoes a compulsive quest to fulfil his father's curse of an Oedipal reunion with his long-lost mother and sister. Kafka (the word means *crow* in Czech) is also the boy's alter ego as a shiny black crow who urges him on to claim spiritual and sexual recompense for his lost childhood and his lost mother.

At the same time elderly Nakano is like an elderly *sunnyasi* seeking for the lost stone that is the magical entrance to the spirit world of the alternative universe. This alternative universe can provide spiritual healing and release from the agony of meaninglessness and loneliness in this world, but it can only be given after Nakano has completed his sacred task. Or rather, Nakano is striving to return to this parallel universe into which he involuntarily stumbled as a child during the Second World War. He was zapped into a simpleton in this encounter and lost half of his shadow. He wants to reclaim his lost mind.

As for the subsidiary characters, Colonel Kentucky is an irascible spirit-guide, a gifted pimp, and a minor fate-functionary who has to ensure that the sibylline prophecies all stay on the rails and get fulfilled punctually. Mr Johnnie Walker, on the other hand, is a villainous incorporation of bloodthirsty evil as he murders cats, devours their hearts live and deep freezes their heads. He also doubles as the Oedipal tyrant-father who longs for release from his own hell of lovelessness by encouraging his own violent murder.

Nakano's quest is sexless and hilarious. He talks to cats and enlists strange helpers as he seeks the missing entrance stone to the parallel universe. Kafka's quest, by contrast, involves a great deal of matter-of-fact talk about sex and menstrual bleeding and also some explicit sexual ecstasy and love tragedy. His pilgrimage is quite eventful. Most events seem to be caused by his penis, which has a life of its own. Considering that most of the females it seeks out are introspective loners and misfits, the sex is wonderful. For them, anyway. He has ecstatic sex with his fifty-one-year-old ersatz-mother and also with her fifteen-year-old girlish ghost and commits dream-rape on his substitute-sister, in the nicest possible way of course. After all, he is driven. The curse is fulfilled and now he must seek absolution, love and forgiveness.

In the final analysis the novel lacks the tense, menacing quality of *The Wind-Up Bird Chronicle*, where evil oozes out of the parallel universe and creates lots of narrative suspense as the hero quests for his stolen wife in Dr Caligari-like corridors and strange brothel-like rooms. But in *Kafka on the Shore*, when the hero finally journeys through

the magic forest and penetrates into the other universe, it turns out, disappointingly, to be a rather bloodless limbo of zombies engaged in a gradual losing of their human memories as they transit slowly to the joyless afterworld. It's all a bit like crossing the Styx and entering Hades. It is a release from suffering but it is not a fulfilment.

I suppose readers will just have to ask themselves whether Murakami has created a meaningful re-evocation of the Oedipus myth or whether it's all just an excuse for some pretty kinky sex combined with philosophical dialogue. Perhaps this is a novel for new age, pot-smoking crystal-gazers. Personally I prefer the psychological complexity and tragic characterisation of the great late-nineteenth-century novelists in what was surely the golden age of the novel.

Source: David Myers, "The Crow in the Back Hole," in *Quadrant*, Vol. 49, No. 6, June 2005, pp. 91-92.

Quotes

"From now on - no matter what - you've got to be the world's toughest fifteen-year-old. That's the only way you're going to survive."
The Boy Named Crow, p. 5

"Naturally, I have zero friends. I've built a wall around myself, never letting anybody inside and trying not to venture outside myself. Who could like somebody like that? They all keep an eye on me, from a distance. They might hate me, or even be afraid of me, but I'm just glad they don't bother me."
Chapter 1, p. 9

"What I think is this: you should give up looking for lost cats and start searching for the other half of your shadow."
Nakata tugged a few times at the bill of his hat in his hands. "To tell the truth, Nakata's had that feeling before. That my shadow is weak. Other people might not notice, but I do."
Chapter 6, p. 52

"The term 'spirit projection' sprang to mind. Are you familiar with it? Japanese folktales are full of this sort of thing, where the soul temporarily leaves the body and goes off a great distance to take care of some vital task and then returns to reunite with the body ... Of course there's no scientific proof of this, and I hesitate even to raise the idea."
Chapter 8, p. 67

"Listen - I'm not killing cats just for the fun of it ... I'm killing them to collect their souls, which I use to create a special kind of flute. And when I blow that flute it'll let me collect even larger souls."
Chapter 16, p. 140

"What's the name of the song?"
"Kafka on the Shore," Oshima says.
"Kafka on the Shore?"
"That's correct, Kafka Tamura. The same name as you. A strange coincidence, don't you think?"
"But Kafka isn't my real name. Tamura is, though."
"But you chose it yourself, right?"
Chapter 17, p. 158

"Each person feels the pain in his own way, each has his own scars. So I think I'm as concerned about fairness and justice as anybody. But what disgusts me even more are people who have no imagination. The kind T.S. Eliot calls hollow men. People who fill up that lack of imagination with heartless bits of straw, not even aware what they're doing."
Chapter 19, p. 181

"So he said that someday you would kill your father with your own hands, that you would sleep with your mother."
I nod a few more times.
"The same prophecy made about Oedipus. Though of course you knew that."
I nod. "But that's not all. There's an extra ingredient he through into the mix. I have a sister six years older than me, and my father said that I would sleep with her, too."
Chapter 21, p. 202

"It would appear that can't becomes living spirits out of honor or love or friendship. To do that they have to die. People throw away their lives for honor, love, or friendship, and only then do they turn into spirits. But when you talk about living spirits - well, that's a different story. They always seem to be motivated by evil."
Chapter 23, p. 227

"During his wild high school days, his grandfather was always the one who'd show up at the local precinct ... He never lectured Hoshino, even then. Not once did his parents come to get him. They were just barely scraping by and didn't have the time or energy to worry about their no-good third son. Hoshino sometimes wondered what would've happened to him if his grandfather hadn't been there to bail him out."
Chapter 24, p. 233

"There's one thing, I discover, this girl and I have in common. We're both in love with someone that's no longer of this world."
Chapter 25, p. 242

"You've never ever in your life envied anybody else, or ever wanted to be someone else - but right now you do. You want more than anything to be that boy. Even knowing that at age twenty he was going to be smashed over the head with an iron pipe and beaten to death, you'd still trade places with him. You'd do it, to be able to love Miss Saeki for those five years. And to have her love you with all her heart."
Chapter 25, p. 243

"Am I in love with Miss Saeki when she was fifteen? Or with the real fifty-something Miss Saeki upstairs? I don't know anymore. The boundary line separating the two have started to waver, to fade, and I can't focus."
Chapter 27, p. 270

"Since I'm neither god nor Buddha, I don't need to judge whether people are good or evil. Likewise I don't have to act according to the standards of good and evil."
"In other words you exist beyond good and evil."
"You're too kind. I'm not beyond good and evil, exactly - they just don't matter to me. I have no idea what's good or what's evil. I'm a very pragmatic being. A neutral object, as it were, and all I care about is consummating the function I've been given to perform."
Chapter 30, p. 284

"It's not that I'm dumb. Nakata's empty inside. I finally understand that. Nakata's like a library without a single book. It wasn't always like that. I used to have books inside me.

For a long time I couldn't remember, but now I can. I used to be normal, just like everybody else. But something happened and I ended up like a container with nothing inside."
Chapter 32, p. 306

"Nobody's going to help me. At least no one has up till now. So I have to make it on my own. I have to get stronger - like a stray crow. That's why I gave myself the name Kafka. That's what Kafka means in Czech, you know - crow."
"Hmm," she says, mildly impressed. "So you're Crow."
"That's right," I say.
You're right, the boy named Crow says.
Chapter 33, pp. 316-317

"I'm Kafka on the Shore, you say. You're lover - and your son. The boy named Crow. And the two of us can't be free. We're caught up in a whirlpool, pulled beyond time. Somewhere, we were struck by lightning. But not the kind of lightning you can see or hear."
Chapter 33, p. 319

"There's another world that parallels our own, and to a certain degree you're able to step into that world and come back safely. As long as you're careful. But go past a certain point and you'll lose the path out. It's a labyrinth."
Chapter 37, p. 352

"You have to overcome the fear and anger inside you," the boy named Crow says. "Let a bright light shine in and melt the coldness in your hear. That's what being tough is all about. Do that and you really will be the toughest fifteen-year-old on the planet."
Chapter 41, p. 387

"And that's why I opened the entrance stone - to prevent our perfect, private world from collapsing. I can't remember now how I managed to do it, but I decided I had to open the stone no matter what - so I wouldn't lose him, so things from the outside wouldn't destroy our world. I didn't understand at the time what it would mean."
Chapter 42, p. 392

"Do you know what limbo is? It's a neutral point between life and death. A kind of sad gloomy place. Where I am now, in other words — this forest. I died, at my own bidding, but I haven't gone on to the next world. I'm a soul in transition, and a soul in transition is formless."
The Boy Named Crow (2), p. 433

"The most important thing," she says quietly, "is you've got to get out of here. As fast as you can. Leave here, go through the woods, and back to the life you left. The entrance is going to close soon. Promise me you will."
Chapter 47, p. 439

"You know what, Gramps ... I think that whenever something happens in the future I'll always wonder - What would Mr. Nakata say about this? What would Mr. Nakata do? I'll

always have someone I can turn to. And that's kind of a big deal, if you think about it. It's like part of you will always live inside me. Not that I'm the best container you could find, but better than nothing, huh?"
Chapter 48, p. 455

"Every one of us is losing something precious to us ... Lost opportunities, lost possibilities, feelings we can never get back again. That's part of what it means to be alive. But inside our heads - at least that's where I imagine it - there's a little room where we store our memories. A room like the stacks in this library. And to understand the workings of our own heart we have to keep making new reference cards. We have to dust things off every once in a while, let in fresh air, change the water in the flower vases."
Chapter 49, pp. 463-464

Topics for Further Study

- Read the myth of Oedipus and write a paper noting the similarities and differences between the ancient Greek myth and the prophecy of Kafka's father in *Kafka on the Shore*. Include Kafka's reaction to the prophecy and how it influenced his actions.
- The idea of war and its effects permeate *Kafka on the Shore*. World War II forces the young Nakata from his home and toward his fate in the forest. His teacher's emotional strain is brought on by separation from her solider husband. Unexplained military research may have played a role in what happened to Nakata. Hoshini was part of the Japanese Self-Defense Force. Two deserters from the Japanese army help Kafka on his spiritual journey. Write an essay in which you examine these and other instance of "military presence" in the novel and what you think Murkami is saying about war in general and World War II in particular.
- Murakmi twice refers to the François Truffaut film *The Four Hundred Blows* in *Kafka on the Shore*, once in connection with Hoshini and once in connection with Kafka. Watch the film and discuss the similarities among the film's young protagonist, Hoshini, and Kafka.
- Murakmi refers to several specific pieces of music in connection with various key scenes in *Kafka on the Shore*: Franz Schubert's "Sonata in D Major," Ludwig Beethoven's *Archduke* trio, and John Coltrane's "My Favorite Things." Listen to these pieces and discuss Murakami's possible reasons for featuring them so prominently in his novel.
- The contradictory concepts of freedom and fate are very important to Kafka, though he seems unable to form an exact definition of either. Write an essay in which you define freedom and fate, then explain what impact both concepts have in the lives of Kafka, Miss Saeki, and Nakata.

Topics for Discussion

Discuss fate. Kafka runs away from home to escape his father's prophecy, but Crow say that his fate is inside of him. He cannot escape it. Do you believe in fate? Can a person escape it?

Discuss the idea of memory. Nakata has none and longs for it. Ms Saeki has nothing except memory. What is the function of memory in a well adjusted life? Are some events or people better forgotten?

One of the most dynamic supporting characters in Kafka on the Shore is the truck driver Hoshino. How does his worldview change over the course of the narrative? How does his association with Nakata precipitate that?

Discuss Ms. Saeki and Sakura. Do you believe they are related to Kafka? Does this matter?

What is the desolate village in the Kochi woods? Are its inhabitants dead? How is the opening of its entrance connected to the death of Ms. Seki's husband?

Kafka's story is in many ways a classic Aristotelian tragedy, where the flawed hero strives desperately toward a goal only to arrive at its opposite. Compare Kafka to other tragic figures (Oedipus, Macbeth, etc).

Compare Oshima and Sada. Oshima finds illumination through literature; Sada through nature. How do their conceptions of life and death differ?

Two of the most enigmatic character in the novel are Johnnie Walker and Colonel Sanders. Both intimate that they need human assistance to accomplish an unnamed goal. What do you think is their objective?

In the last chapter, Oshima compares our hearts to libraries, stacked with our memories and in need of housekeeping. How do you think Kafka's work in the physical Komura Library corresponds to the maintenance Oshima mentions for our metaphysical libraries?

Further Study

Akinari, Ueda, *Tales of Moonlight and Rain*, Columbia University Press, 2006.

As timeless and canonical as The Tale of Genji, this collection of Japanese occult stories blends realism with the grotesque.

Rubin, Jay, *Haruki Murakami and the Music of Words*, The Harvill Press, 2002.

Rubin is both a translator and fan of Murakami's work. In this book, he traces Murakami's career using interviews he conducted with the author between 1993 and 2001.

Soseki, Natsume, *I Am a Cat*, Tuttle Publishing, 2002, originally published in 1905.

This 1905 satire by eminent Japanese author Natsume chronicles the lives of a middle-class Japanese family from the point of view of their cat, Mr. Sneeze.

Zimmerman, Bernhard and Thomas Marier, *Greek Tragedy: An Introduction*, The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1991.

Zimmerman and Marier analyze the most famous plays of Aeschylus, Sophocles, and Euripedes.

Bibliography

"A Conversation Between Haruki Murakami and His Random House Editor," in *RandomHouse.com* 2004, www.randomhouse.com/features/murakami/site.php (July 27, 2006).

Kattoulas, Velisarios, "Pop Master," in *Time*, November 17, 2002, www.time.com/time/asia/magazine/article/0,13673,501021125-391572,00.html (July 27, 2006).

Maslin, Janet, "Adrift in a Universe in Flux Like Some Big FedEx Box," in the *New York Times*, January 31, 2005, www.nytimes.com (July 27, 2006).

McInerney, Jay, "Roll Over Basho: Who Japan is Reading, and Why," in the *New York Times* September 27, 1992, www.nytimes.com (July 27, 2006).

Miller, Laura, "*Kafka on the Shore*: Reality's Cul-de-Sacs," in the *New York Times* February 6, 2005, www.nytimes.com (July 27, 2006).

Miller, Laura, "The Outsider—The Salon Interview with Haruki Murakami," in *Salon.com* 1997, www.salon.com/books/int/1997/12/cov_si_16int.html (July 27, 2006).

Mitchell, David, "Kill Me or the Cat Gets It," in *The Guardian* (U.K.), January 8, 2005, books.guardian.co.uk/review/story/0,,1384788,00.html (July 27, 2006).

Moore, Steven, "As the Crow Flies," in the *Washington Post*, January 30, 2005, p. BW06.

"Murakami Haruki at *The Complete Review*," in www.complete-review.com/authors/murakamh.htm (July 27, 2006).

Murakami, Haruki, *Kafka on the Shore*, Vintage International, 2005.

Rubin, Jay, *Haruki Murakami and the Music of Words*, The Harvill Press, 2002.

Thorne, Matt, "Japan's Divided Souls: *Kafka on the Shore* by Haruki Murakami," in the *Independent* (U.K.), January 7, 2005, p. 22.

"What Is the Definition of Postmodernism?" in *Essortment*, www.oh.essortment.com/postmodernphilo_rorp.htm (July 27, 2006).

BOOKRAGS

Copyright Information

This Premium Study Guide is an offprint from *Novels for Students*.

Project Editor
David Galens

Editorial
Sara Constantakis, Elizabeth A. Cranston, Kristen A. Dorsch, Anne Marie Hacht, Madeline S. Harris, Arlene Johnson, Michelle Kazensky, Ira Mark Milne, Polly Rapp, Pam Revitzer, Mary Ruby, Kathy Sauer, Jennifer Smith, Daniel Toronto, Carol Ullmann

Research
Michelle Campbell, Nicodemus Ford, Sarah Genik, Tamara C. Nott, Tracie Richardson

Data Capture
Beverly Jendrowski

Permissions
Mary Ann Bahr, Margaret Chamberlain, Kim Davis, Debra Freitas, Lori Hines, Jackie Jones, Jacqueline Key, Shalice Shah-Caldwell

Imaging and Multimedia
Randy Bassett, Dean Dauphinais, Robert Duncan, Leitha Etheridge-Sims, Mary Grimes, Lezlie Light, Jeffrey Matlock, Dan Newell, Dave Oblender, Christine O'Bryan, Kelly A. Quin, Luke Rademacher, Robyn V. Young

Product Design
Michelle DiMercurio, Pamela A. E. Galbreath, Michael Logusz

Manufacturing
Stacy Melson

©1997-2002; ©2002 by Gale. Gale is an imprint of The Gale Group, Inc., a division of Thomson Learning, Inc.

Gale and Design® and Thomson Learning™ are trademarks used herein under license.

For more information, contact
The Gale Group, Inc
27500 Drake Rd.
Farmington Hills, MI 48334-3535
Or you can visit our Internet site at
http://www.gale.com

ALL RIGHTS RESERVED.
No part of this work covered by the copyright hereon may be reproduced or used in any

form or by any means—graphic, electronic, or mechanical, including photocopying, recording, taping, Web distribution or information storage retrieval systems—without the written permission of the publisher.

For permission to use material from this product, submit your request via Web at http://www.gale-edit.com/permissions, or you may download our Permissions Request form and submit your request by fax or mail to:

Permissions Department
The Gale Group, Inc
27500 Drake Rd.
Farmington Hills, MI 48331-3535

Permissions Hotline:
248-699-8006 or 800-877-4253, ext. 8006
Fax: 248-699-8074 or 800-762-4058

Since this page cannot legibly accommodate all copyright notices, the acknowledgments constitute an extension of the copyright notice.

While every effort has been made to secure permission to reprint material and to ensure the reliability of the information presented in this publication, The Gale Group, Inc. does not guarantee the accuracy of the data contained herein. The Gale Group, Inc. accepts no payment for listing; and inclusion in the publication of any organization, agency, institution, publication, service, or individual does not imply endorsement of the editors or publisher. Errors brought to the attention of the publisher and verified to the satisfaction of the publisher will be corrected in future editions.

The following sections, if they exist, are offprint from Beacham's Encyclopedia of Popular Fiction: "Social Concerns", "Thematic Overview", "Techniques", "Literary Precedents", "Key Questions", "Related Titles", "Adaptations", "Related Web Sites". © 1994-2005, by Walton Beacham.

The following sections, if they exist, are offprint from Beacham's Guide to Literature for Young Adults: "About the Author", "Overview", "Setting", "Literary Qualities", "Social Sensitivity", "Topics for Discussion", "Ideas for Reports and Papers". © 1994-2005, by Walton Beacham.

Introduction

Purpose of the Book

The purpose of Novels for Students (NfS) is to provide readers with a guide to understanding, enjoying, and studying novels by giving them easy access to information about the work. Part of Gale's"For Students" Literature line, NfS is specifically designed to meet the curricular needs of high school and undergraduate college students and their teachers, as well as the interests of general readers and researchers considering specific novels. While each volume contains entries on "classic" novels frequently

studied in classrooms, there are also entries containing hard-to-find information on contemporary novels, including works by multicultural, international, and women novelists.

The information covered in each entry includes an introduction to the novel and the novel's author; a plot summary, to help readers unravel and understand the events in a novel; descriptions of important characters, including explanation of a given character's role in the novel as well as discussion about that character's relationship to other characters in the novel; analysis of important themes in the novel; and an explanation of important literary techniques and movements as they are demonstrated in the novel.

In addition to this material, which helps the readers analyze the novel itself, students are also provided with important information on the literary and historical background informing each work. This includes a historical context essay, a box comparing the time or place the novel was written to modern Western culture, a critical overview essay, and excerpts from critical essays on the novel. A unique feature of NfS is a specially commissioned critical essay on each novel, targeted toward the student reader.

To further aid the student in studying and enjoying each novel, information on media adaptations is provided, as well as reading suggestions for works of fiction and nonfiction on similar themes and topics. Classroom aids include ideas for research papers and lists of critical sources that provide additional material on the novel.

Selection Criteria

The titles for each volume of NfS were selected by surveying numerous sources on teaching literature and analyzing course curricula for various school districts. Some of the sources surveyed included: literature anthologies; Reading Lists for College-Bound Students: The Books Most Recommended by America's Top Colleges; textbooks on teaching the novel; a College Board survey of novels commonly studied in high schools; a National Council of Teachers of English (NCTE) survey of novels commonly studied in high schools; the NCTE's Teaching Literature in High School: The Novel;and the Young Adult Library Services Association (YALSA) list of best books for young adults of the past twenty-five years. Input was also solicited from our advisory board, as well as educators from various areas. From these discussions, it was determined that each volume should have a mix of "classic" novels (those works commonly taught in literature classes) and contemporary novels for which information is often hard to find. Because of the interest in expanding the canon of literature, an emphasis was also placed on including works by international, multicultural, and women authors. Our advisory board members—educational professionals— helped pare down the list for each volume. If a work was not selected for the present volume, it was often noted as a possibility for a future volume. As always, the editor welcomes suggestions for titles to be included in future volumes.

How Each Entry Is Organized

Each entry, or chapter, in NfS focuses on one novel. Each entry heading lists the full name of the novel, the author's name, and the date of the novel's publication. The following elements are contained in each entry:

- Introduction: a brief overview of the novel which provides information about its first appearance, its literary standing, any controversies surrounding the work, and major conflicts or themes within the work.
- Author Biography: this section includes basic facts about the author's life, and focuses on events and times in the author's life that inspired the novel in question.
- Plot Summary: a factual description of the major events in the novel. Lengthy summaries are broken down with subheads.
- Characters: an alphabetical listing of major characters in the novel. Each character name is followed by a brief to an extensive description of the character's role in the novel, as well as discussion of the character's actions, relationships, and possible motivation. Characters are listed alphabetically by last name. If a character is unnamed—for instance, the narrator in Invisible Man–the character is listed as "The Narrator" and alphabetized as "Narrator." If a character's first name is the only one given, the name will appear alphabetically by that name. • Variant names are also included for each character. Thus, the full name "Jean Louise Finch" would head the listing for the narrator of To Kill a Mockingbird, but listed in a separate cross-reference would be the nickname "Scout Finch."
- Themes: a thorough overview of how the major topics, themes, and issues are addressed within the novel. Each theme discussed appears in a separate subhead, and is easily accessed through the boldface entries in the Subject/Theme Index.
- Style: this section addresses important style elements of the novel, such as setting, point of view, and narration; important literary devices used, such as imagery, foreshadowing, symbolism; and, if applicable, genres to which the work might have belonged, such as Gothicism or Romanticism. Literary terms are explained within the entry, but can also be found in the Glossary.
- Historical Context: This section outlines the social, political, and cultural climate in which the author lived and the novel was created. This section may include descriptions of related historical events, pertinent aspects of daily life in the culture, and the artistic and literary sensibilities of the time in which the work was written. If the novel is a historical work, information regarding the time in which the novel is set is also included. Each section is broken down with helpful subheads.
- Critical Overview: this section provides background on the critical reputation of the novel, including bannings or any other public controversies surrounding the work. For older works, this section includes a history of how the novel was first received and how perceptions of it may have changed over the years; for more recent novels, direct quotes from early reviews may also be included.
- Criticism: an essay commissioned by NfS which specifically deals with the novel and is written specifically for the student audience, as well as excerpts from previously published criticism on the work (if available).

- Sources: an alphabetical list of critical material quoted in the entry, with full bibliographical information.
- Further Reading: an alphabetical list of other critical sources which may prove useful for the student. Includes full bibliographical information and a brief annotation.

In addition, each entry contains the following highlighted sections, set apart from the main text as sidebars:

- Media Adaptations: a list of important film and television adaptations of the novel, including source information. The list also includes stage adaptations, audio recordings, musical adaptations, etc.
- Topics for Further Study: a list of potential study questions or research topics dealing with the novel. This section includes questions related to other disciplines the student may be studying, such as American history, world history, science, math, government, business, geography, economics, psychology, etc.
- Compare and Contrast Box: an “at-a-glance” comparison of the cultural and historical differences between the author’s time and culture and late twentieth century/early twenty-first century Western culture. This box includes pertinent parallels between the major scientific, political, and cultural movements of the time or place the novel was written, the time or place the novel was set (if a historical work), and modern Western culture. Works written after 1990 may not have this box.
- What Do I Read Next?: a list of works that might complement the featured novel or serve as a contrast to it. This includes works by the same author and others, works of fiction and nonfiction, and works from various genres, cultures, and eras.

Other Features

NfS includes “The Informed Dialogue: Interacting with Literature,” a foreword by Anne Devereaux Jordan, Senior Editor for Teaching and Learning Literature (TALL), and a founder of the Children’s Literature Association. This essay provides an enlightening look at how readers interact with literature and how Novels for Students can help teachers show students how to enrich their own reading experiences.

A Cumulative Author/Title Index lists the authors and titles covered in each volume of the NfS series.

A Cumulative Nationality/Ethnicity Index breaks down the authors and titles covered in each volume of the NfS series by nationality and ethnicity.

A Subject/Theme Index, specific to each volume, provides easy reference for users who may be studying a particular subject or theme rather than a single work. Significant subjects from events to broad themes are included, and the entries pointing to the specific theme discussions in each entry are indicated in boldface.

Each entry has several illustrations, including photos of the author, stills from film adaptations (if available), maps, and/or photos of key historical events.

Citing Novels for Students

When writing papers, students who quote directly from any volume of Novels for Students may use the following general forms. These examples are based on MLA style; teachers may request that students adhere to a different style, so the following examples may be adapted as needed. When citing text from NfS that is not attributed to a particular author (i.e., the Themes, Style, Historical Context sections, etc.), the following format should be used in the bibliography section:

"Night." Novels for Students. Ed. Marie Rose Napierkowski. Vol. 4. Detroit: Gale, 1998. 234–35.

When quoting the specially commissioned essay from NfS (usually the first piece under the "Criticism" subhead), the following format should be used:

Miller, Tyrus. Critical Essay on "Winesburg, Ohio." Novels for Students. Ed. Marie Rose Napierkowski. Vol. 4. Detroit: Gale, 1998. 335–39.

When quoting a journal or newspaper essay that is reprinted in a volume of NfS, the following form may be used:

Malak, Amin. "Margaret Atwood's "The Handmaid's Tale and the Dystopian Tradition," Canadian Literature No. 112 (Spring, 1987), 9–16; excerpted and reprinted in Novels for Students, Vol. 4, ed. Marie Rose Napierkowski (Detroit: Gale, 1998), pp. 133–36.

When quoting material reprinted from a book that appears in a volume of NfS, the following form may be used:

Adams, Timothy Dow. "Richard Wright: "Wearing the Mask," in Telling Lies in Modern American Autobiography (University of North Carolina Press, 1990), 69–83; excerpted and reprinted in Novels for Students, Vol. 1, ed. Diane Telgen (Detroit: Gale, 1997), pp. 59–61.

We Welcome Your Suggestions

The editor of Novels for Students welcomes your comments and ideas. Readers who wish to suggest novels to appear in future volumes, or who have other suggestions, are cordially invited to contact the editor. You may contact the editor via email at: ForStudentsEditors@gale.com. Or write to the editor at:

Editor, Novels for Students
Gale Group
27500 Drake Road
Farmington Hills, MI 48331–3535