

# **Kokoro Study Guide**

## **Kokoro by Natsume Sōseki**

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# Plot Summary

Kokoro is a story of one young man searching to fill a void in his life. It is the story of many individuals who long to appease loneliness, and the story of two men who attempt to assuage loneliness through love but only find peace in death. Soseki befriends an older man he calls "Sensei" with the expectation of learning about life. What Soseki does learn is that Sensei is a troubled and reclusive man who does not trust himself or humanity enough to interact with the world. Though Soseki and Sensei develop a close friendship, Sensei's life remains a mystery. Only when Sensei decides to end his life does he decide it is time to pass on his testament. Kokoro is a tale that gets to the heart of the loneliness, fear, and guilt that accompanies love, individuality, and betrayal.

Soseki is a young man bored with life when he befriends Sensei. Sensei believes Soseki has sought him out because he is lonely, but himself unworthy of society and unable to help the younger man. Often Soseki is confused and disappointed by Sensei's words and believes the older man's perceptions of him incorrect. Soseki learns more about Sensei through his wife, Shizu and his knowledge and feelings for her grow as well. Shizu explains to Soseki that a friend's unnatural death coincided with the slow descent Sensei has taken into isolation. Shizu loves her husband, but Sensei hides what torments him and has spent their wedded life just outside of her emotional reach. Soseki also feels that Sensei has erected a wall between them and one day confronts Sensei with his suspicions. Sensei is unsure he can trust Soseki, but the younger man assures him he is a true friend. Sensei acquiesces saying he will tell his life story when the time is right.

When Soseki is home with his parents he is initially happy to be with them. Soon however, he is bored of the country and finds himself continually comparing his father unfavorably with Sensei. When Soseki arrives home after graduation to find his father actively working in the garden, he is haunted by Sensei's and Shizu's words of caution and is filled with worry. Shortly after Emperor Meiji falls ill, Soseki's father's illness takes a turn for the worse. When he begins suffering fainting spells and nausea, Soseki is reminded of Shizu's mother and believes his father's death is not far off. Soseki is tending to his father when his brother hands him a letter from Sensei. Distracted with worry, Soseki only glances over the letter until he reaches the end and realizes Sensei has decided to kill himself. Soseki searches the pages for answers but finds nothing that satisfies him. Frantic, Soseki sneaks out of the house and hastens his way to the train station praying his father will be alive when he returns from Tokyo and that Sensei will be alive when he arrives there. Once Soseki boards the train, he re-opens Sensei's letter.

Sensei is nearly twenty when he loses both his parents to typhoid. Sensei's young life is made more difficult when he learns that his uncle, who has been left in charge of his finances, has secretly used the money to advance his business. Sensei is hurt by the betrayal and angry with himself for trusting his uncle. Vowing to never see his uncle again Sensei sells everything he has left, including his family home, and returns to Tokyo. Sensei moves out of the student boardinghouse and finds a room for rent in the



home of a soldier's widow and her daughter. Though he is becoming ever misanthropic and suspicious, Sensei still cannot help being affected by the widow's trusting nature. Sensei also quickly falls in love with the widow's daughter, Ojosan. As Sensei's unchecked emotions overtake him, he is caught between feeling suspicious of the mother and daughter of being after his money and feeling love and respect for them. Sensei finally discloses his past to them, but does not feel confident enough to disclose his feelings for Ojosan.

Sensei, out of concern, invites his friend K to live with him. Believing K's ideas of torturing his body for the glorification of his soul to border on madness, Sensei attempts to "humanize" his friend. However, fearing harsh disagreement will lead K into further isolation, Sensei leaves the environment and natures of the women to influence K. When Sensei begins to suspect K and Ojosan have feelings for one another, he is overcome with jealousy and his opinion and treatment of K slowly changes. When K finally divulges his feelings for Ojosan, Sensei forgets to treat his friend gently and instead treats him as an enemy in battle. Sensei berates K for his feelings and charges he is betraying his religion. Though K agrees and says he wishes to forget about his feelings for Ojosan, Sensei does not trust him. One morning Sensei stays home from school to privately ask Okusan for her daughter's hand in marriage. Okusan agrees, filling Sensei with relief, but he cannot bring himself to tell K what has occurred. When K kills himself soon after learning of their engagement from Okusan, Sensei is overcome with grief, guilt, and shame. Though unexpressed in K's suicide letter, Sensei believes K's death partially results from his deceitful engagement to Ojosan.

Sensei and Ojosan live together for many happy years, however when each is alone with Soseki both admit Sensei has erected a barrier which prevents them from experiencing a deep emotional bond. Sensei does not want to spoil his wife's innocence with the ugliness that became of his relationship with K due to their love for her; therefore, there is much that goes unsaid between them. Sensei's guilt often overtakes him and he becomes addicted to books and alcohol in turn. Finding neither will assuage his pain for long, Sensei eventually gives up on both, only allowing himself small increments of alcohol to induce high spirits.

When first Emperor Meiji and then General Nogi die, Sensei decides it is time to tell Soseki his life story and requests Soseki visit. When Soseki is unable to return to Tokyo due to his father's illness, Sensei commits himself to writing his testament to his closest and truest friend. Sensei wishes that his life story be a guide to those who wish to learn something about life; however, Sensei still cannot stand the idea of his wife's innocence being compromised. His only requirement for Soseki is that his story not be publicized until his wife has passed. With his final request, Sensei tells his young friend he will be dead by the time the letter reaches him.



# Foreword

## Foreword Summary

Soseki Natsume was born in Tokyo in 1867 and studied English literature at the Imperial University. After teaching in Japan and England, Soseki wrote many novels, but none with more impact than *Kokoro*, written in 1914, two years after the death of Emperor Meiji. Soseki expresses the loneliness individuals experience in a world of waning traditions.

## Foreword Analysis

Edwin McClellan, the translator of the novel, gives insight into the author of *Kokoro*. Mr. McClellan believes through understanding Soseki Natsume in addition to the prominent figures in the novel, the reader will gain better understanding of Sensei and his story. Perhaps in explanation if one finds the text simple and without poetical flow, Mr. McClellan says he hopes the translation reads as simply and poetically as the original version.



# Part I, Sensei and I (through page 21)

## Part I, Sensei and I (through page 21) Summary

Soseki sees Sensei on a beach in Kamakura and feels they have met before. Soseki anticipates the stranger's arrival at the beach each day. Soseki soon approaches Sensei and swims with him. Soseki is drawn to Sensei and visits him while they vacation. Soseki tries to visit Sensei once he returns to Tokyo, only to find him not at home. Sensei's wife says he has gone to Zoshigaya to visit a friend's grave. Soseki walks there and finds Sensei. The men walk around the cemetery before returning to Sensei's home. Soseki visits Sensei regularly, but is never again allowed to accompany Sensei to the grave. Soon Sensei asks why Soseki visits him; he welcomes the company, but questions why he would want to spend time with him. Sensei says loneliness can not be escaped in his presence and warns Soseki against adulation of him, explaining his enthusiasm will wane and admiration turn to disgust. Soseki asks why Sensei does not trust him. When Sensei responds that he does not trust anyone, Soseki asks if his feelings extend to his wife. Sensei replies that he does not even trust himself, and mentions an act he committed which led to this distrust. He is then called away by his wife.

## Part I, Sensei and I (through page 21) Analysis

Sensei initially stands out to Soseki in the crowd "of black heads" because of his strange western companion. Soseki mentions that if not for the man he would not have noticed Sensei. Soseki also says boredom was his reason for seeking Sensei's company. Soseki sees Sensei as the one unique person in a city of people who appear so much alike. Perhaps Soseki has become bored with the predictability of life as a second son in

Sensei does not treat Soseki adversely; however, Sensei's quiet countenance does appear antisocial at times. Indeed, Sensei does not turn away Soseki's company, but he does not appear to welcome it either. It appears as though Sensei merely accepts Soseki in his presence. Soseki is still drawn to him however, though now it is unclear why. Soseki says he is often disappointed by Sensei's responses, as the older man appears skilled in deflating Soseki's ideas or optimistic attitude.

The reader should take note that Sensei does warn Soseki about taking him on as a friend. When he tells Soseki he cannot help him ease his loneliness, Soseki cannot understand Sensei's words, but is clear Sensei does not believe in his capacity to be a friend to Soseki. Even in his youth, Soseki still maintains the presence of mind to not distance himself from Sensei by analyzing the older man. Soseki mentions he is often confused by Sensei's behavior and feels Sensei should tell him more, but he does not force the issue. That Soseki has done this foreshadows Sensei's words about Soseki's friendship in Part III.



## Part I, Sensei and I (through page 42)

### Part I, Sensei and I (through page 42) Summary

Soseki and Sensei see an affectionate young couple. Sensei retorts that Soseki makes fun of them because he has not been in love but yearns for it. Sensei comments that Soseki already wrestles with the guilt of love. Soseki denies it, but Sensei explains that Soseki's restlessness arises from his love needing a target. He explains that seeking out his friendship was a step towards finding love, and that he will soon tire of his company. Sensei expresses his sentiment about guilt again and Soseki asks him to explain what he means by guilt or end their discussion. Sensei apologizes for upsetting Soseki. Sensei suddenly questions if Soseki understands why he visits his friend's gravesite. When Soseki does not respond, Sensei apologizes.

Soseki gets to know Sensei's wife and gains deeper insight to Sensei's attitude. Sensei's wife feels sorry for her husband. Soseki notices a faint smile on the lady's face and wonders what is truly in her thoughts. She says Sensei was different when he was young. If she left Sensei, he may not want to go on living. She believes her husband is weary with mankind, including herself. When Sensei was at the university, his good friend died an unnatural death just before graduation. From that moment, Sensei began to change. Though Sensei claims to have no knowledge of how his friend died, his wife wonders if he knows more than he admits.

### Part I, Sensei and I (through page 42) Analysis

The reader will notice an example of Soseki mentioned earlier in Part I that he is often disappointed by Sensei's response and behavior. Soseki's visit to Sensei after completing his term paper is a clear example of that. Without realizing it Soseki has avoided getting annoyed with Sensei's statements and questions until Sensei gives what Soseki believes is a trite answer to a serious question. What Soseki as well as the reader will learn in Part III; there is a valid lesson behind Sensei's words and actions. Sensei rarely gives Soseki the response he wants, however, it is always a seed of knowledge Soseki will need later.

Soseki observes the relationship between Sensei and his wife and believes them to be a happy couple. Soseki realizes after repeated conversations with Sensei's wife that although the couple loves one another, there is something about Sensei, which prevents his wife from connecting with him completely. Sensei's wife alludes to the death of a friend occurring before the subtle change began to take over Sensei. The story she tells Soseki foreshadows Sensei's own tale of how he came to fall in love with Shizu and the situation surrounding their eventual engagement.

Sensei mentions the guilt of love and points out that Soseki suffers from it. Soseki does not understand what Sensei means because he does not see in himself what Sensei



sees. This is another example of Soseki's lack of introspection, which is mainly due to his youth and inexperience with the world. Sensei does not explain himself to the satisfaction of Soseki, but Sensei's words foreshadow the tale he will later tell Soseki in Part III of how he came to marry his wife.

Soseki mentions Sensei is not a heavy drinker, and stops if the alcohol does not improve his mood. However, Sensei has formally refused to partake in even a little sake daily though it improves his mood. The reader will find the reason behind Sensei's cautious drinking in Part III.





# Part I, My Parents and I (through 80)

## Part I, My Parents and I (through 80) Summary

Soseki receives a letter informing him of his father's failing health. Soseki calls upon Sensei to lend him the money for train fare. Soseki and his parents are initially happy together. Soseki finds his father not too ill, but realizes he does not feel the spiritual connection with him that he does with Sensei. Soseki soon bores of home. When his father receives a promising prognosis, Soseki decides to return to Tokyo. Soseki visits Sensei to repay his loan. Sensei tells a story of a friend who died suddenly in his sleep. Soseki says that although his father will not be cured, there is nothing immediate to worry about. Sensei admits his friend lived a poor life but then mentions frail humans not knowing how or when we will die, and the contrast between people dying of natural and unnatural causes. Soseki questions his meaning of unnatural death. Sensei questions if suicide is not an unnatural death. When Soseki opines that murder is also unnatural Sensei agrees, saying he did not think of it.

Weeks later, after submitting his thesis, Soseki goes for a walk with Sensei. Sensei asks a question about Soseki's family's wealth. Soseki replies that his family has property but not much money and returns the question. Sensei replies that he used to be rich and switches the topic to Soseki's father. Sensei tells Soseki he must do what he can to secure his inheritance before his father's passing. Sensei then asks about the character of Soseki's family. Sensei explains that though people are intrinsically good, all have the capacity to be bad given the right temptation—money. Sensei tells Soseki that his own seemingly good relatives betrayed him once his father died. Sensei confesses that he did not retaliate against his relatives, opting instead to hate all of humanity.

Soseki believes Sensei withholds information. Sensei replies that he is willing to share his opinions, but he will not share his past. Soseki ardently wants to learn about life. He believes he will learn about life from Sensei's experiences. Sensei wonders if he can confide in Soseki, telling him he longs for one person he could trust completely. Soseki affirms he is a true friend and Sensei says he will reveal his past when the time is right.

## Part I, My Parents and I (through 80) Analysis

It is becoming apparent that although Soseki looks up to Sensei he does manage to see Sensei as a man with faults. At times Soseki is obviously very disenchanted with Sensei's outlook on life and humankind. Such is the case when Soseki calls upon Sensei to loan him money to visit his father. Instead of accepting Soseki's advice about not wishing to be very ill, Sensei responds by saying he would prefer to be mortally ill if he were truly ill. Even in his health, Sensei still thinks of death. When Sensei again mentions the unpredictability of death, this time he mentions the death of the healthy with a bitterness that alludes again to the passing of his friend. The reader should take note of Sensei's words, as Soseki's mother will mirror his sentiment in Part II.



When Soseki visits Sensei after completing his thesis, he again experiences feelings of disappointment in talking to Sensei. Soseki attempts to maintain his good spirits but when Sensei tells him people have a tendency to become evil given temptation but does not clarify the type of temptation, Soseki loses his temper and storms off. One is reminded of Soseki's youth in his behavior. Perhaps due to Sensei's age and wisdom, or their deepening friendship, Soseki's behavior is transparent to him. When Soseki asks a question in attempt to upset him, Sensei's response is prime example of a peeing contest in, perhaps, its inaugural moment. Sensei's act serves not only to silence Soseki but humiliate him as well.

Sensei and Shizu attempt to impress the seriousness of Soseki's father's illness upon him. It is becoming apparent however, that Sensei's words at the tree nursery about country people as well as the closeness that Soseki has developed with Sensei appears to have distanced Soseki somewhat from his feelings for his father and family until he is alone with his own thoughts. When Soseki is with Sensei he does not think of his father, yet in his father's presence, Soseki can not help comparing Sensei to him as the men are so very opposite. What the reader will learn through Soseki's comparisons, however, is that despite their opposite locations, Sensei and Soseki's father share similarities in their perceptions of the world and fading traditions.



# Part II, My Parents and I

## Part II, My Parents and I Summary

When Soseki arrives home, his father is in the garden appearing in good health. His father commends Soseki on graduating and Soseki is touched by the compliment until his father repeats himself. Soseki compares his father disparagingly to Sensei. Soseki's father explains why he is proud and Soseki, filled with remorse, takes out his now wrinkled diploma. His parents insist on a party to celebrate and finally Soseki capitulates. Soseki is concerned with his parents' apparent lack of regard for his father's illness.

The family receives news that Emperor Meiji has fallen ill. Soseki's parents suggest delaying the dinner. Soseki's father is most affected by the Emperor's illness, as it is similar to his own. He vigilantly reads the newspaper for updates. As Emperor Meiji's health continues to decline, Soseki's father descends into despair and loses interest in activities. When Emperor Meiji passes away, Soseki's father takes the news very badly.

In August, Soseki receives a letter from a friend referring to an open position with a post secondary school in a poor area. Soseki replies he is not interested, believing he will find a more lucrative position. Soseki's mother then says Soseki needs to use his contacts and asks about Sensei. Soseki's parents are dismayed to hear Sensei is unemployed. Although Soseki's mother is sure Sensei will help Soseki if he only asks, Soseki is sure Sensei is not that type of person. However he agrees to write Sensei a letter. When Soseki does not hear from Sensei, he supposes Sensei has gone on vacation.

Shortly before Soseki is scheduled to return to Tokyo, his father suffers a fainting spell. Soseki decides to put off his trip. Soseki's father faints again three days later and his doctor orders complete quiet in the household. Although Soseki's father has moments when he believes he will get better, he begins to talk to Soseki of his death. As word spreads that Soseki's father's health is declining, the house is visited regularly by relatives.

Soseki is sitting on his bedroom floor contemplating his father and Sensei when his mother appears and questions him about Sensei. She suggests writing again when Soseki responds that he has received no reply. Soseki insists he must go to Tokyo to find a position himself. His mother tells him he cannot leave with his father so near to death, yet says Soseki must be a good son and let his father die knowing he is financially secure. Soseki is bewildered at the opposing desires. Soseki's brother and brother-in-law arrive. While Soseki's brother appears optimistic in front of their father, when he is with Soseki he suggests that perhaps their father has already lost some of his faculties.



Soseki's father is the first to learn of General Nogi's death. He yells out in his grief. Soseki receives a telegram from Sensei requesting he visit Tokyo. Soseki expresses his regret in a short telegram and then writes Sensei a letter explaining the situation. Before Sensei receives the letter, Soseki receives a second telegram stating he does not have to come.

Soseki's father is committed to bed rest and his appetite and strength begin to wane. As Soseki discusses his father's condition with his brother he feels the growing of a new brotherly connection. Soseki changes his view of his brother when his sibling inquires about Sensei. Soseki believes his brother questions why he holds a man without reputation or credential in such high regard. Soseki begins to worry what he will tell his family if Sensei does not help him find a suitable position.

Soseki's father begins to suffer delirium. Soseki's brother believes it is time to speak to their father about his will. Soseki disagrees, and as the brothers discuss it, their father falls into a coma. Soseki is attending to his father when his brother hands him a letter. Soseki sees Sensei's handwriting, but puts the letter away for later.

Soseki's father steadily worsens throughout the day. He thanks everyone for their kindness before again falling into a coma. Soseki goes to his bedroom and attempts to read Sensei's letter but is overcome with worry for his father. Realizing Sensei has written to finally tell his life story. Soseki wonders why Sensei did not wait until he returned to Tokyo. Distracted, Soseki only scans the neatly written characters. A sentence catches his eye; Sensei writes that by the time Soseki receives the letter he will be dead. Disbelieving, Soseki frantically scans the pages for a clue or hope that Sensei is still alive. Soseki checks on his father once more before sneaking out of the house and hailing a rickshaw to the train station. He hurriedly writes a note to his family and sends it back with the rickshaw driver before catching the train to Tokyo and opening Sensei's letter.

## Part II, My Parents and I Analysis

Soseki is confused by what his parents expect of him. Although Soseki's father appears anxious for him to find a position, his father is also concerned that his children live so far from home, especially as his death is imminent. Soseki's parents in turn impress that he must find a lucrative position so as not to embarrass them, however, they also speak against his return to Tokyo. Soseki is not himself worried about finding a position, however, as Sensei and the idea of him helping Soseki has been introduced, Soseki must maintain to his family that he is looking for work and being assisted by Sensei.

Sensei's foreboding words about his mother-in-law in Part I stay with Soseki during his summer at home. Though Soseki's father appears well at first, once Emperor Meiji falls ill, his own health begins to deteriorate. One might take note that when Soseki's father had a positive outlook, his health was improved as well. Though his wife is worried about him, he was able to surpass it with his own positivism. Now encumbered with the fret of his son finding work and thoughts of an ailing emperor, Mr. Soseki's spirits and



his body begin to feel the strain. One should also take note the more people arrive the further he deteriorates, as if he is carrying out death as is expected of him.

The loneliness of the individual is most apparent when Soseki is home following graduation. Soseki's father is surrounded with family yet, still experiences many moments of loneliness that only his wife can alleviate. When a childhood friend comes to visit, Soseki's father expresses his envy of his friend's health. His friend responds that even in his health he is lonely. Though Soseki's father is dying, his friend reminds him he should still feel grateful, as he is not without love and family as many are.

Soseki changes his new, positive view of his brother when his sibling inquires about Sensei. Soseki believes his brother is questioning why Soseki holds a man without reputation or credential in such high regard. Although Soseki himself has questioned why Sensei is unemployed, when his family poses the same question, Soseki is insulted. He believes his father and brother should accept that Sensei is worthy, otherwise Soseki would not think so highly of him. Perhaps Soseki also feels defensive because although he has become close to Sensei he still does not understand himself why Sensei is reclusive and does not work. Soseki originally writes the letter to Sensei to appease his parents, knowing Sensei is a useless contact in this regard. However, as time passes, he begins to hope Sensei will respond, if only to stop his parents' and brother's questioning. Soseki's attempt to please and placate his parents has developed into full-scale deception, as his family now believes Sensei has found him a position in Tokyo.



## Part III, Sensei's Testament (through 164)

### Part III, Sensei's Testament (through 164) Summary

Sensei explains that when he received Soseki's initial letter, he was struggling to find a reason to live. In retrospect Sensei believes it is better Soseki did not visit, as telling his story would have meant Sensei could not go on and he was not ready to die at that time. Sensei reminds Soseki he once looked on him in amusement, believing his views showed off his youth and inexperience. Only when Soseki earnestly said he wanted to learn from life itself, did Sensei begin to respect him. With words of warning that Soseki will now descend into the world of moral darkness, Sensei begins his life's tale.

Sensei is almost twenty years old when orphaned. Before Sensei's mother passes on, she asks her brother-in-law to take care of Sensei, their only child. Sensei's uncle steps into his role handling Sensei's finances and taking care of the family home. Sensei trusts his uncle explicitly. As Sensei's family is wealthy, he enjoys the life of a comfortable student in an upscale boardinghouse in Tokyo. Sensei misses his home while away at school and is happy when summer arrives and he can return. Aside from mourning his parents, Sensei enjoys his summer with his uncle's family. The holiday is dampened when Sensei's uncle and aunt suggest he get married. Sensei disregards their wishes as none of his college friends are married, proving he is too young to consider it. When Sensei returns for second summer, the topic is again revisited. This time Sensei's uncle offers Sensei a bride—his own cousin. While Sensei agrees that the idea is indeed reasonable, he contends he will not marry his cousin since he feels no love for her deeper than siblings would share. Sensei's uncle offers to postpone the wedding until Sensei has graduated. Knowing he will never want to marry his cousin, Sensei continues to refuse.

Sensei returns home for the third summer believing the wedding issue has been settled. Within a few days Sensei realizes his uncle, aunt, and cousin are treating him differently. Sensei then notices his male cousin, whom he recently corresponded with while at school, is also treating him coldly. At first, Sensei thinks it is he who looks on his family differently. However, Sensei begins to sense his parents urging him toward truth. Sensei kneels before their grave in prayer for guidance. Sensei soon begins to believe his uncle is trying to avoid sitting down with him to discuss his money. Soon, Sensei learns from a friend that his uncle is not only rumored to be keeping a mistress, but it is also rumored that his failing business suddenly began doing better soon after Sensei's parents' deaths. Sensei finally learns he has been cheated out of his inheritance. Sensei then understands his uncle wanted him to marry his cousin in order to continue using Sensei's fortune. Sensei cannot forgive himself for believing in his uncle. Family members intervene to settle the issue. Sensei has the choice of suing his uncle or accepting what his uncle can offer. Sensei decides to do the latter vowing to never see his uncle again. Once Sensei returns to Tokyo, he learns of a lonely soldier's widow



living with her daughter nearby who is looking for a boarder. Sensei immediately sets off for the home. The lady of the house immediately trusts Sensei and offers him a room. When Sensei meets the widow's daughter, he is immediately taken with Ojosan.

Sensei writes that he became a misanthrope following the situation with his uncle, looking on everyone with suspicion, constantly wary of any dealings concerning money. Sensei finds it difficult to trust Okusan. He silently watches the movements of the women from his desk. Okusan mistakes Sensei's suspicious behavior for that of a studious student. Ojosan however, is exempt from Sensei's suspicions. Okusan's treatment of Sensei warms him to his housemates. Eventually they are inviting him to tea and sharing long conversations. Sensei admits wasting time in conversation, but admits he often sits at his desk waiting for Ojosan. When Ojosan enters and sits with Sensei in his room, he becomes self-conscious and wonders at her sudden self-assured attitude. When her mother calls for her, she responds but does not usually get up and leave.

Sensei is falling deeply in love with Ojosan. Around Ojosan, Sensei is suddenly beautiful, he feels deep self-worth. Most often, Okusan appears to condone the closeness developing between Sensei and Ojosan. Other times, however, Sensei senses Okusan wants to keep them apart. Confused at her motivations, Sensei becomes suspicious of Okusan. Soon though, Sensei believes he is wrong in suspecting her, realizing Okusan may merely be trying to prevent them from becoming too close before any commitment is made. Sensei realizes that Okusan trusts him completely and has since his arrival. Having told Okusan little about himself, Sensei wonders if Okusan is gifted with intuition or is a victim of gullibility. Sensei finally tells Okusan and Ojosan his story. Both women are moved by Sensei's tale. Okusan, believing her intuitions proven, begins treating Sensei like a relative instead of a boarder. Again, Sensei begins to suspect Okusan of duplicity. He further begins to wonder if Ojosan is party to her mother's underhanded intentions. Unable to control his love for Ojosan, Sensei is in emotional torment.

Okusan suggests Sensei buy himself new clothes. They all head into town the following day. Sensei is unused to walking with a young woman and notices the way people look at her beautifully made up face and back to him. When Sensei returns to school a classmate jokingly comments on the beauty of his wife. Sensei tells Okusan and Ojosan what his friend has said. Both women are amused and Ojosan comments his friend has gone too far. When Sensei attempts to find out Okusan's plans for Ojosan, Okusan insinuates that her daughter can have her pick of suitors at anytime. Sensei finds it difficult to speak on his own behalf until he feels it is too late. When Okusan questions Sensei about what he thinks about Ojosan and marriage, Sensei only agrees Ojosan should wait.

### **Part III, Sensei's Testament (through 164) Analysis**

When Sensei learns that he has been cheated by his uncle, he is immediately taken over by feelings of hate, both of himself and his uncle. Sensei mentions that his mother





and father trusted his uncle explicitly and that he himself had very little experience with the world. He does not see this as an excuse to be swindled by his uncle and cannot forgive himself for his naiveté. Though Sensei is angry for trusting his uncle, he is also angry that his uncle has proved to be untrustworthy. Sensei maintains that he began to hold everyone in suspicious contempt however it appears more likely that as a parentless young man betrayed by close family, Sensei begins to go about his life in fear. When he leaves the boardinghouse Sensei says it is because he can afford to, however he has been able to afford to live on his own since his parent's death, perhaps even before. However, Sensei has mentioned he has become ever more suspicious in nature since his uncle's betrayal.

When Sensei moves in with Okusan and her daughter, it is apparent he has decided to become reclusive though he will continue to attend college in Tokyo. Sensei is wary of everyone, and he is soon caught unawares when he begins to fall in love with Ojosan. Sensei cannot quiet his distrust for people as he says he watches the women he lives with suspiciously. Sensei cannot commit on how he should feel when he begins to fall in love with Ojosan. Sensei attributes Okusan's trusting behavior to easing his suspicious brooding nature, but he is continuously caught between loving Ojosan and being at ease with Okusan to feeling both mother and daughter are scheming against him. Sensei describes his love for Ojosan as nearly religious. He idolizes her yet distrusts her at once.

Sensei is jealous when he arrives home to hear a male visitor in Ojosan's room. He cannot explain himself and believes the women make fun of him when he questions about Ojosan's caller. Sensei's jealousy concerning Ojosan foreshadows his behavior toward his friend K when he comes to live in the house.





## Part III, Sensei's Testament (through 207)

### Part III, Sensei's Testament (through 207) Summary

Sensei's friend K is in need of a place to stay. Okusan does not want another boarder and tells Sensei she does not trust strangers. Sensei tells her he was once a stranger. Okusan responds that Sensei was different and continues to tell him he will regret moving K into their home. When Sensei informs her he worries about K's health and hopes she and Ojosan will treat K as well as they have treated him, Okusan acquiesces.

Sensei has known K since childhood. K was adopted by an affluent doctor. Once in Tokyo, K defies his foster parents' wishes that he study to become a doctor and secretly pursues studies in theology. Sensei does not know if K is influenced by his natural father who was a priest, but he reprimands his friend all the same for deceiving his foster parents. K agrees he is being deceptive, but believes his studies will lead him to the true way to live. Sensei agrees he is doing the right thing. Sensei admits he does not believe his approval sways K either way, but claims partial responsibility for K's decision to deceive his parents.

When their first summer break arrives, K does not go home, instead renting a room at a temple in Komagome. When Sensei returns to Tokyo in September, he visits K to find that he is living like a priest. K continues to become more devout, but eventually his family convinces him to return home his second summer. When their third summer holiday arrives, K decides to stay in Tokyo again and writes a letter to his foster parents confessing he has not been practicing medicine. His foster father is furious and refuses to continue financing his education. K's natural family also feels betrayed. K shows Sensei the letters from both his parents and adopted parents. K is unhappy about his parents' sentiments, but resolves to find a way to pay for his university education. He immediately turns down Sensei's offer of financial assistance, deciding he will teach in a night school.

Sensei begins to worry, as K appears to overextend himself with work and school. When K declines returning home mid-term to discuss the situation, his family becomes more incensed. K is eventually reclaimed by his original family and arrangements made to return the money expended for K's education. K feels that he has been disinherited.

For a year and a half, K works to support his education. Sensei continues to worry if his friend's mental and physical condition is deteriorating. As K's despondency grows, Sensei begins thinking of a way to help his friend. Knowing his friend will not simply agree to live with him, Sensei tells K he wants to learn from him by living with him. Sensei offers to share his large room with K and use the smaller attached room as a shared study. K declines, saying he must have his own space even if it is small. K does



not comment on his new surroundings and only answers noncommittally when asked his opinion. Sensei is perturbed by K's blasé attitude but believes it is due to K's Buddhist upbringing that his friend views material comforts as immoral. Instead of arguing, Sensei decides to treat K as Okusan treated him, believing his friend will eventually warm to his new environment.

Sensei attempts to make K become more human and appeals to Okusan and Ojosan to be courteous to him as well. The women laughingly respond that K is unapproachable. Ojosan relays a situation in which K preferred to be cold rather than have her light his brazier. K is resentful of Sensei's attempts to force him into interaction with the ladies; he often walks out of a room without a word. When Sensei questions him on it, K questions why Sensei wastes his time in pointless conversation. Sensei admits to feeling despised by K as his friend says this and admits he may be deserving of it. Sensei understands that K's ideas may be loftier than his own, but believes K does not live admirably.

Soon Sensei's plan of opening K up begins to work. K's contempt for women slowly dissipates as Sensei reminds him that women add depth to their lives. When Sensei comments to Okusan and Ojosan on his pleasure with the change in K, both women agree. One evening Sensei returns home late from the university to find K is already home. Sensei enters the house and hears Ojosan and K talking in his room. When they hear the door, the two stop speaking. When Sensei arrives at K's door, K and Ojosan are sitting closely and behave strangely though K offers his usual greeting. Sensei feels uneasy and questions Okusan's whereabouts. Ojosan laughs, but the look on Sensei's face makes her serious again and she answers his question. Sensei walks through K's room to his own knowing he cannot, as a boarder, ask anymore.

Sensei wonders at Okusan leaving Ojosan in the home with K. One week later Sensei arrives home to find K and Ojosan alone again. This time Ojosan laughs immediately on seeing Sensei. Embarrassed, he silently continues on to his room. At dinner, Ojosan says Sensei is strange, ignoring her mother's angry look. After dinner, Sensei invites K for a walk intending to find out how K feels about the women. K instead diverts the conversation to their studies, leading Sensei to believe that is where his interests lie.

When the young men return home after completing exams Okusan is there to congratulate them for their hard work and having only one year to go. When it is mentioned that Ojosan will also be graduating soon, K comments that women graduate not having learned anything. Sensei responds that women's worth should be judged differently. Sensei is secretly pleased when K does not appear convinced, believing it means that K's apparent contempt for women still transcends to Ojosan.

For the summer holiday, Sensei and K end up in Nako, a beach populated with students. Sensei reads while K sits beside him quietly watching the sea. Sensei often imagines Ojosan at his side instead of K. Sensei then wonders if K imagines the same thing and is soon driven to release his frustrated thoughts by screaming at the top of his lungs. Sensei goes as far as to grab K by the neck and threaten to throw him in the ocean. When K responds that he does not mind dying, Sensei quickly releases him.



Sensei feels savage next to his serene friend and wonders if K's new calmness is a result of Ojosan's influence.

Sensei decides to divulge his feelings for Ojosan to K but cannot find the right opportunity. Never finding the right time to speak to K, Sensei resolves that K is too aloof to care for Ojosan and inwardly apologizes to his friend for doubting him. Soon enough however, Sensei's mind changes and he doubts K once again. Sensei also begins comparing himself to K and finding himself the inferior from looks to intellect. K soon notices that Sensei is in conflict and suggests returning to Tokyo. Sensei refuses.

As the two continue on in the overwhelming heat, Sensei's hate and affection for K grows. When they reach the Bay of Tai, the two stop to gaze into the bay connected to the tale of Nichiren. Though Sensei is enthralled with the beauty of the Tai fish, K appears to be thinking of Nichiren and their earlier visit at the Tanjo-ji Temple in Kominato. When the disheveled couple arrived at the temple Sensei believes they will not get in. However when K requests to see the chief priest they are granted admittance and his audience. As the priest relays Nichiren's accomplishments in things such as grass script, K impatiently waits for his many questions to be answered. Dissatisfied in the discussion with the priest, K commences to lecture Sensei on Nichiren when they leave the temple.

Sensei learns that K is upset about his lack of interest in Nichiren. K tells Sensei he is frivolous for not taking religion seriously. Feeling attacked, Sensei retaliates by telling K he behaves as if he is not human. When K finally questions what Sensei means, he explains that K's attempt to live in abjectness is unnatural. K quietly responds that his poor training leads Sensei to misunderstand him. K continues that if Sensei only understood the men of the past, he would understand K's suffering. When the friends continue their walk the next day, Sensei reprimands himself for not telling K about his feelings for Ojosan. The friends are more amicable as Sensei's concern over K's qualities dwindles and K appears to behave less piously. When they reach Tokyo, Sensei and K stop for a meal before K suggests they continue on to Koishikawa by foot. When they arrive at Okusan's home, she attempts to hide her shock at their darkened complexions and thinned bodies. Sensei feels happy to be home, forgetting he left feeling angry with Ojosan, and is again secure in his feelings for Ojosan. Soon, however, Sensei sees a change. Returning home one evening from school, Sensei is surprised to hear K's voice. Sensei then hears Ojosan's laughter, but when he arrives in K's room, he sees Ojosan fleeing to her room.

Sensei returns home one cold, rainy day to find a fire in K's brazier while his own sits cold. When Okusan enters and assists Sensei, he questions her about K's whereabouts. Okusan replies that K was home but went back to school. Sensei is seized with the desire to do something. Sensei makes his way down the steep, muddy, narrow path leading to town. As the road is precarious, Sensei spends most of his time looking down and does not see K until they are facing one another. Sensei questions where he has been; K answers curtly as he passes. Sensei then notices Ojosan blushing behind K. Sensei steps aside into the mud to let Ojosan pass. Sensei walks around angrily before returning home.



K informs Sensei he only met Ojosan on the road and walked home with her. However, when Sensei questions Ojosan at dinner she laughs and tells him to guess. Sensei believes Okusan knows what agony he is going through and is tempted to confess his feelings and ask for Ojosan's hand. Where Sensei was once afraid to disclose his feelings out of fear of duplicity, Sensei now fears Ojosan will prefer K to him but may not voice it.

One morning Okusan and Ojosan leave home to visit relatives. Sensei and K spend a quiet morning in their respective rooms until K suddenly appears in Sensei's doorway. K enters the room and begins questioning Sensei about Okusan's and Ojosan's whereabouts and why they have gone out. Soon K's questions become too personal for Sensei to answer and he questions K's motivations. K informs Sensei he is deeply in love with Ojosan. As K continues to expel his feelings, Sensei sits in torment feeling K has again beaten him. Sensei agonizes over telling K his own feelings for Ojosan, but when K stops speaking, Sensei does not begin. The men eat lunch together in silence and return to their respective rooms. Sensei no longer feels he can be taken seriously if he tells K about his feelings for Ojosan, believing he will come across as contrived. Sensei wishes for the morning to be replayed. He watches the door hoping K will barge in once more and give him the opportunity to confess his long-time love for Ojosan. The house silent once more, Sensei is driven to distraction. Feeling he has lost his chance by not speaking earlier, Sensei slowly finds his way out of the house to avoid the approaching K. As Sensei wanders the streets, he contemplates his friend and rival for love. Among other thoughts, Sensei wonders why K has confided in him. Sensei suddenly realizes he must know more about K before he can know how to continue.

### **Part III, Sensei's Testament (through 207) Analysis**

When K initially moves in with Sensei, Sensei is very attentive of his friend's state of mind. Though Sensei often wants to argue K out of his behavior, he resists any contention that would drive K into further isolation. One will take note that Sensei's sympathy for K's feelings change as he begins to believe K is also in love with Ojosan. Sensei feels inferior to K intellectually and holds K in reverence and believing him to be on a noble pursuit. It is clear why Sensei is secretly happy K does not think much of women, believing he has been saved from a losing competition for Ojosan's affections.

One continues to see that Sensei doubts his abilities to judge others' characters. Just as he could not decide to trust Okusan, Sensei suffers more confusion in deciding whether or not K has feelings for Ojosan and whether he should disclose his own. Just as with Ojosan and Okusan Sensei feels guilty for distrusting K and unsuccessfully attempts to dissuade his negative thoughts about him.



## Part III, Sensei's Testament (through 248)

### Part III, Sensei's Testament (through 248) Summary

The days pass without the conversation being revisited. Sensei decides to broach the topic with K. He then observes Okusan's and Ojosan's behaviors to find out if they are aware of K's secret. Believing they are not, Sensei decides to wait for the opportunity to have the discussion with K instead of forcing the situation. Sensei is studying in the library when K comes to ask him to go for a walk. K wants to know what his friend thinks of him now that he is in love with Ojosan. Sensei carefully chooses words aimed to injure K's love for Ojosan. As K hears his own words thrown back at him, he lowers his head in agreement. Finally, Sensei asks K what he is going to do. When K responds by asking to drop the subject, Sensei reprimands him for betraying the doctrines of the Shinsu. Sensei admonishes K for his lack of faith in religion in the face of love. When K responds to Sensei by questioning if he has the strength, and then affirming he does, Sensei realizes his friend is speaking to himself. That evening, Ojosan laughs at K and questions his silence. K finishes his meal and returns to his room. Sensei feeling elated, follows. K appears as tormented as Sensei has felt of late.

Sensei contemplates K's words and finds he is confused about what K will do next. Blinded by his love for Ojosan, Sensei is convinced he must still compete with K for her love. Sensei feigns illness one morning to stay home from school. Sensei waits until K and Ojosan have gone before informing Okusan he would like to marry her daughter. Okusan gives her consent. Sensei feels that he has finally won the battle with K and would like Ojosan informed right away. Okusan amends that she will tell Ojosan at the end of the day. Sensei roams the streets, his mind is filled with thoughts of Okusan and Ojosan. He no longer thinks of K and later wonders at his lack of conscience. When Sensei sees K at home, he is overcome with a need to beg K's forgiveness, but stops himself. Sensei waits for the moment to arise to inform K of their engagement and struggles with how to explain himself. He considers asking Okusan to tell K, but fears divulging the conversation about K's feelings for Ojosan. A week passes when Okusan informs Sensei she has told K of the engagement. She admonishes Sensei for his not telling K himself. Sensei learns that K remained composed and wished Okusan congratulations before apologizing for having no money for a gift.

Sensei decides as he goes to bed on Saturday night that he will make a decision whether to tell K the following day. Unfortunately, K kills himself that night. Sensei awakens feeling a draft. He looks up to find the door leading to K's room open. When Sensei approaches, he sees K is sitting in the dim light with his back to him. Sensei calls out but receives no response. Sensei steps into the room feeling a sense of foreboding. When he sees the blood on the wall, Sensei is gripped by the same shock as when he was informed of K's feelings for Ojosan. Sensei's mind whispers to him that he is again too late. Sensei notices a letter on K's desk addressed to him. Sensei opens



it fearing the accusations he will find. However, K does not mention Ojosan in his letter. Instead, he explains he can never live the devout life he seeks and so must end his life, questioning why he has waited so long. Believing he is safe from blame, Sensei replaces the letter on the desk.

Sensei is afraid to wake Okusan to inform her and is further afraid of Ojosan's reaction. Shortly before six, Sensei decides to wake the maid but happens instead upon Okusan in the hall. Sensei asks her to follow him to his room. When they enter, Sensei closes K's door and solemnly informs Okusan he has taken his life. In her silence, Sensei throws himself down before her in contrition. He blames himself for K's death and begs her forgiveness. Okusan comforts Sensei by saying it is not his fault. When Sensei opens K's door she looks in but will not enter, instead telling Sensei to let in the light. Okusan orders Sensei to contact the doctor and police. When Sensei returns the women are sitting in K's room amongst burning incense; Ojosan openly cries at her mother's side. Okusan tells Sensei to offer incense. Sensei, now feels comfort in releasing his sorrow. When K's brother and father arrive, Sensei advises them to bury K at Zoshigaya, a favorite place of K's. Whenever Sensei is questioned about the suicide, he hears accusations. His guilt makes him believe people want to question why he killed K. Sensei, Okusan and Ojosan move to another house, unable to deal with the memory.

Sensei and Ojosan marry after he graduates. A cloud of guilt hangs over Sensei. When Ojosan suggests visiting K's grave, Sensei questions her suspiciously. Ojosan explains she believes it would make K happy. As the newly married couple kneel before K's grave, Sensei imagines his wife silently talking of their happiness, while he is apologizing for what he has done. Sensei resolves not to return to the gravesite with his wife.

Sensei suffers reminders of K whenever he looks at his wife, but Sensei and his wife are, for the most part, happy together. Sensei attempts to assuage his mind by burying himself in his studies. Unable to find solace in it, Sensei abandons reading and often drinks heavily. In his inebriated state Sensei fluctuates between extreme happiness and utter depression. Bewildered by Sensei's behavior Ojosan questions sometimes if he likes her at all or if he is hiding something from her. Ashamed of his truth, Sensei is always unable to answer. Though Sensei often considers confessing to Ojosan, the idea of exposing ugliness to her and risking it tainting her innocence and beauty is a task Sensei refuses to undertake. Sensei says he finally gives up drinking out of self-disgust and resumes reading voraciously. When Ojosan questions why Sensei studies so hard, he is saddened that she does not understand him and he is not brave enough to explain himself to her.

Sensei continues to wonder about K's suicide and begins to think his friend possessed a deeper reason than his love for Ojosan. At first, Sensei wonders if K committed suicide because he could no longer deal with reality. Soon, however, Sensei realizes K may have just been unable to deal with the loneliness he suffered from. The realization frightens Sensei as he is aware the feeling of loneliness run as deep within him as it did within K.





When Sensei's mother-in-law falls ill, he becomes her main caretaker, not only out of love and respect, but in an attempt to redeem himself in his own eyes. When his mother-in-law dies, Sensei becomes emotional when Ojosan tells him he is all she has left. He questions how she can depend on him when he does not trust himself. When Ojosan later asks if two people's hearts can become one, he responds noncommittally, but an unnamed fear begins to develop within him. Sensei contends his marriage with Ojosan remains a happy one although the growing fear leads to a shadow hanging over it. He is assailed by his own sense of sin and the sin of man. Finally, Sensei decides to live as a dead person, however, even in his living death, Sensei sometimes feels moments of euphoric happiness he struggles, but fails to hold on to.

Sensei explains that although his life appeared simple, he was wrought with mental and emotional torment. Soon Sensei can take the struggle within no more and decides to kill himself. He attempts to do so three times and each time is stopped by thoughts of Ojosan, unable to accept the pain killing himself will cause her. Sensei discloses the thought of taking her with him, but says he lacked the courage to kill her. He believes also that while it is his destiny to die, Ojosan's destiny lies elsewhere.

When Emperor Meiji dies, Sensei is overcome with a sense he has been left behind. When he mentions it to Ojosan, she does not take him seriously and tells him junshi is his solution. Sensei replies that he will commit junshi, but only out of honor to the emperor. A month later Sensei listens to the cannons he believes are announcing Emperor Meiji's funeral. When he reads the late edition and learns General Nogi has killed himself. Sensei is reminded of Ojosan's words and shouts "junshi!" as he waves the paper. Later when Sensei learns how long General Nogi lived with the guilt that led to his suicide, Sensei wonders whether the General's guilt or his actual suicide caused him more pain.

Sensei decides to kill himself. When his wife goes to visit with relatives, Sensei begins revealing his life on paper. Sensei hopes the testament of his life can be used to guide others looking for answers. Sensei tells Soseki he wants others to know everything about his life if it will help them, but he does not wish for his wife to be aware of anything he has written. As long as Sensei's wife lives, he asks Soseki to keep the letter a secret. Sensei will kill himself quietly and without bloodshed while his wife is away. He hopes his death will appear sudden, but does not mind if his wife thinks he has lost his mind.

### **Part III, Sensei's Testament (through 248) Analysis**

Sensei is indecisive in divulging his love and eventual engagement to K for many reasons. Sensei's fear of people, especially those he holds in regard is evermore apparent in his behavior toward K once he is engaged to Ojosan. Sensei's fear in confessing what he has done stems from his reverence of K as well as his feelings of shame, as Sensei is aware that in his secrecy and jealousy he has betrayed his only close friend.



When K commits suicide, Sensei is freed from anyone discovering his true behavior to his friend. However, Sensei cannot escape his own mind. Sensei has mentioned in Part I, that when he was betrayed by his uncle he decided to hate humanity instead of seek revenge. It appears in believing himself to be like his uncle, Sensei has also decided to hate himself. Unable to escape through alcohol and books, Sensei says he at times craved public beating. Perhaps Sensei craved for the release of his secret, even if it meant public humiliation, which he believed was nevertheless his due.

When Sensei's mother falls ill, he attempts to repent for his wrongs in caring for her. Sensei believes he will give himself worth, but when his mother-in-law dies, Sensei still feels incapable of being the man his wife loves. In K's death, Sensei still appears to fear his wife loves him. When Emperor Meiji passes away and General Nogi kills himself, Sensei decides it is time for him to end with his era. One ponders if Sensei's explanation for his suicide is any different from K's own suicide letter, in that even in death, neither man can fully disclose the reasons they have chosen to end their lives.





# Characters

## Sensei

Sensei loses his parents as a young man and is left to rely on his paternal uncle to manage his family's home and fortune. Sensei, who is nearly twenty, is sent to Tokyo for college. Sensei returns home every summer and enjoys the time he spends with his uncle and family. However, when his uncle first suggests and then insists Sensei marry his cousin, Sensei's refuses and suffers a strained relationship with his family as a result. When Sensei is home after his third year of college, he learns his uncle has cheated him out of much of the money left by his parents. Betrayed by the only close family he has left, Sensei sells his belongings and vows to never speak to his uncle again. Slowly he begins to distrust everyone, particularly when his interactions concern money.

Though Sensei detests what his uncle has done, he fears he has become like his uncle when he betrays K. At first concerned for his friend's state of mind, Sensei becomes K's adversary when he learns K is in love with Ojosan and treats his close friend cruelly when K turns to him and divulges he is in love with Ojosan. When K commits suicide after learning about Sensei's and Ojosan's engagement, Sensei is overcome with guilt. Though married and living with his mother-in-law, Sensei descends into a life of isolation and misanthropy.

By the time Sensei meets Soseki he is, among other feelings, suffering from the guilt resulting from a friend's suicide and the belief that he is himself not unlike his deceiving uncle. Sensei has become an introverted man who lives a secluded life with his wife and maid. He is amused by the title Soseki has given him, and Soseki attempts to hide his reverence and embarrassment by saying it is a title he uses for elders. Sensei continuously warns Soseki about the younger man's adulation for him. When Soseki questions Sensei's lack of faith in his respect for him, Sensei responds that he has a deep distrust for humankind. Sensei tells Soseki he even finds it difficult to trust himself.

Though Sensei marries the love of his life, his love for her is riddled with guilt from K's suicide. Though he wishes he could truly connect with his wife, he does not want to tarnish her innocence with the true story behind his love for her. Sensei wishes for a person who can truly understand his internal struggle. Though Soseki is young, Sensei begins to wonder if Soseki can be his confidant. When Sensei finally decides to divulge his life to Soseki, it is when Sensei also decides it is time to end his life.

## K

When K is a young boy, he is adopted out to an affluent doctor and his family. When K enters college, his family assumes he will undertake medicine, following the course of his foster father. However, K deceives his parents by pursuing studies in religion



instead. Sensei warns K against his deception, but K has decided to go forward, believing his quest for the true way to be worth any consequence he may suffer. When K ends his third year in college, he confesses his deception in a letter to his foster father. His foster father is angered at K's lies and decides he will have nothing to do with K any longer. Although K's natural father is a priest, K suffers similar treatment from his natural family. They return the money spent on K's education to his adopted family but will not assist K any further.

K is left to find a way to finance his studies. He declines monetary assistance from Sensei and instead finds work as a teacher to support his meager lifestyle and university education. As K begins to show signs of overwork, Sensei begins to worry about his mental and physical health. In order to watch over him, Sensei eventually convinces K to move in with him under the premise that he wishes to learn from him.

K enters the house in apathy, but soon it becomes apparent to Sensei that K and Ojosan are developing feelings for one another. When K finally divulges his feelings for Ojosan to Sensei, K is distraught that he has fallen in love, as it is against the doctrines he wishes to live by. When Sensei responds to K's admission by telling him he is a fool, K seems to make a decision Sensei is unaware of due to his blind love and jealousy.

When Okusan tells K Sensei and Ojosan are engaged, it appears that K is hurt by the news. When Okusan seeks confirmation he is happy for the new couple, K only laments that he cannot buy them a gift. K commits suicide shortly after. In his letter to Sensei K does not mention Sensei or his love for Ojosan. Instead, K only says he does not have the strength to live as he believes he should.

## Soseki

Soseki is a young man searching for answers to fill the emptiness he feels inside. Soseki appears unaware of what he feels or what he is seeking when he is drawn to Sensei. When Soseki pokes fun at an affectionate couple one day, his mentor tells him he is lonely and in search of someone to love. Soseki believes Sensei is wrong, but it is apparent Sensei's words about love and the guilt of it has affected him. A college student on his way to studying at the university, Soseki's inexperience with life is apparent as he rushes to conjecture about Sensei's life and marriage. His youth is also apparent in the way his emotions are easily swayed by what others, especially Sensei, say.

When Soseki is summoned home due to his father's illness, he becomes torn between his responsibility to his father and his growing connection with Sensei. When Soseki returns home after his final year in college, he pledges to return to Tokyo in September. As Soseki's father's health slowly declines, Soseki finds himself torn between staying to be with his father, and returning to Tokyo to find a career that will make his father proud before his death.



When September arrives, Soseki decides to return to Tokyo. His plans are delayed when his father's illness takes a turn for the worse. Soseki is caring for his father when his brother hands him a letter from Sensei. When Soseki finally has a moment to scan the letter, he is stricken to learn that Sensei has decided to commit suicide. Soseki sneaks away from his family's home, praying Sensei will be alive when he arrives in Tokyo and that his father will be alive when he returns home.

## **Sensei's Wife, Shizu (Ojosan)**

Soseki's first impression of Shizu is her beauty. The two soon bond over their joint affections for Sensei. Shizu worries over her husband's emotional state and isolation from society. Shizu remembers her husband before his dissent into melancholy as a very different man and suffers from guilt believing she is the cause for Sensei's dislike and distrust for mankind. She is an obedient wife who loves her husband deeply, however as Soseki unwillingly learns, there are moments when the couple does not see eye to eye. At these times, Shizu will assert her opinion about Sensei's behavior and an argument will develop as a result. Shizu believes her husband stronger than he believes himself, which appears to be a major consternation of his.

When Soseki reads Sensei's letter he learns that Sensei has known Ojosan since he was a college student and fell in love with her nearly from the moment the two met. Ojosan appears to like Sensei as well and often finds reasons to visit his room and stay for conversation. Ojosan begins to show signs that she is stepping away from her mother's control. It so becomes apparent theirs is not the strictly conventional behavior of the time.

When her mother calls Ojosan away while she is sitting with Sensei, Ojosan replies but remains seated. Ojosan believes K to be unapproachable, however, eventually their developing relationship betrays her as she alternately switches favoritism between Sensei and K. Ojosan marries Sensei a few months after K's funeral, and begins to live a happy, yet often unsettling, life with Sensei. Ojosan often wonders if Sensei dislikes her along with the rest of humanity. Ojosan sometimes believes as far as that she is the reason Sensei dislikes the world.

## **Sensei's Father**

Soseki's father is a simple country gentleman who, at the time Soseki relays his tale, is dying of a kidney ailment. As Soseki and Sensei get to know one another, Soseki finds himself comparing Sensei to his father. To Soseki his father and Sensei are very opposite men. However, when Soseki's father remarks on the discrepancies between the older and younger generations, it appears his views sometimes mirrors Sensei's. Soseki does not agree with his father's views and is sometimes offended by what his father says regarding himself and the younger generation at large. Soseki believes his father's views are attributed to the fact that he has lived a simple country life.



Soseki's father has conflicting feelings regarding Soseki's prospective career in Tokyo and his duties to his family. While he believes Soseki should find a lucrative position in Tokyo, he also wants to know his wife will not be lonely when he is gone.

## Sensei's Uncle

On her deathbed, Sensei's mother asks his paternal uncle to take care of Sensei when she is gone. Sensei trusts his father's younger brother to manage his fortune and family home while he attends college in Tokyo. Sensei's uncle, who is a businessman and former member of the assembly, is on the surface a trustworthy man. However, when he begins to pressure Sensei into marrying his daughter, the reader is given a deeper look into the uncle's character. Sensei also learns more about his uncle from a friend in town who informs Sensei not only is his uncle keeping a mistress, but his once failing business has been thriving for three years. When Sensei learns that his uncle has stolen much of his fortune, one discovers the event that changed the course of Sensei's life.

## Okusan

The widow of a soldier, Okusan lives with her daughter and maid. Okusan is looking for a boarder and when she meets Sensei, she offers for him to move in right away. Okusan appears to be a silent observer of the happenings in the house, only stepping in if she feels situations are becoming too personal. Okusan admires Sensei from the moment he arrives at her home. She tells him often she believes him to be studious and generous. Relying on the same instincts that prompted her to welcome Sensei, Okusan refuses K's admittance to her home at first. Okusan gives into Sensei's demands perhaps partially due to her regard of Sensei. However, she does warn him he will regret his decision.

Okusan appears to encourage the developing closeness between Sensei and Ojisan, leading Sensei to believe she would approve of their union. However, when K moves in, not only does he begin to get close to Ojisan, but Okusan also leaves them in the house alone, which she has never done with Sensei. One begins to wonder if Sensei is completely mistaken in his suspicions of Okusan.

## Soseki's Mother, Omitsu

Omitsu appears to be the more traditional wife of Japanese culture. She worries over her husband's health but, succumbing to his will, does not pressure him to slow down. Uneducated with the world and perhaps in her blind hope her husband will recover, Omitsu mistakes his deteriorating health for progress. When Soseki's father begins to lose control of his faculties, Omitsu shows her loyalty to her husband by reminding his sons of the formidable character he used to be. Omitsu also appears conflicted when she speaks to her son. On one hand, she wants him to find a good career in order that



his father is satisfied before his death. However, when Soseki informs her he must go to Tokyo to find a position, she tells him he cannot leave with his father in his condition.

## Soseki's Brother

Older than Soseki by unmentioned years, Soseki's elder brother is already ensconced in his career in another province. Since his arrival, Soseki's brother feigns positivism in front of their parents but believes their father is in a more advanced state than he is. It is apparent he upsets Soseki when he opines that their father may not understand what he reads in the paper. Though Soseki worries himself, he asserts their father is still able to understand. Though never particularly close to his elder brother, Soseki momentarily bonds with him over a conversation about their family. Their connection is quickly lost however, when Soseki's brother asks him to stay on at the house when their father passes away. Though Soseki believes his brother should, as the eldest, take his father's place, his brother sees the option as impossible as he has already established a lifestyle and career elsewhere.

Soseki's brother appears intent on stepping aside to allow, or rather force, Soseki into taking primary responsibility for their parents' affairs. When the doctor needs assistance administering an enema to their father, Soseki's brother immediately claims his ignorance and calls upon Soseki to help. Soseki's brother also worries that the estate will not be discussed before their father passes away. However instead of going to his father himself, he seeks Soseki's decision on when the right time will be, again deferring his responsibilities as elder brother to Soseki.

## Emperor Meiji

Although Emperor Meiji does not appear in the novel, his illness has an altering affect on the constitutions of Soseki's father and Sensei. Emperor Meiji has ruled Japan for — years at the time of his death. Both Sensei and Soseki's father spent their lifetimes under his reign. When it is announced that Emperor Meiji suffers the same illness as Soseki's father, his father's illness begins to quickly overtake him. Emperor Meiji succumbs to his kidney ailment and dies, leaving a generation which includes Sensei and Soseki's father, feeling displaced.

## General Nogi

General Nogi does not appear in the novel, however his suicide has an obvious affect on Sensei. General Nogi, who served Emperor Meiji during the war, suffered defeat during Satsuma Rebellion. Never recovering from his failure, General Nogi lived in shame and quiet disgrace for thirty-five years. When Emperor Meiji died, General Nogi's service was completed; giving him leave to end his life. Shizu says the general has committed Junshi and jokingly tells Sensei to do the same when he mentions he feels left behind at the end of an era.



# Objects/Places

## Kamakura

Kamakura is where Soseki is enjoying his summer holiday when he sees Sensei for the first time.

## Tokyo

Called Yedo at the time of Soseki's birth, Tokyo is the city where the young men in the novel attend college and university. When Soseki's father believes he is close to dying, Soseki attempts to buoy his spirits by telling him he has a new Tokyo to explore when he is well.

## Sensei's Family Home

Although the home has been in Sensei's family for generations, Sensei sells it when he learns about his uncle's deceit.

## Ueno

Soseki and Sensei are taking a walk in Ueno during flowering season when a very affectionate couple draws their attention. Soseki makes an amused comment about them causing Sensei to lecture him on love. Soseki mentions that he will never forget the conversation they experienced on that beautiful day. When they walk a distance from the crowd, Sensei wonders aloud if Soseki understood the guilt in love.

## The Tree Nursery

The tree nursery is where Sensei questions Soseki about his family's wealth. For the first time, Sensei warns Soseki to secure his share of his family's fortune before his father dies.

## The University

The University is where Soseki attends school in Tokyo. Sensei and K also attended the university years before.



## **The Boardinghouse**

Soseki lives in a student boardinghouse while in Tokyo. Sensei and K also lived in a boardinghouse, though Sensei mentions he and K can afford to live in one of the better houses.

## **Soseki's Family Home**

Soseki remembers wanting Sensei to see his home when Sensei inquired about its architectural style. As he looks at the house after his family has hung mourning ribbon on its flagpole, Sensei also remembers he felt slightly ashamed.

## **Black Crepe**

When Emperor Meiji dies, Soseki purchases black crepe to adorn the flagpole outside their home.

## **The Country**

Soseki has nothing but disdain for the country once he returns home after graduation. Once believing country people to be good, Soseki has been influenced by Sensei and city life and now believes them to be boorish and insensitive to the lives of those more busy than they.

## **Temple Near Great Kannon**

Sensei returns to Tokyo after his first summer and finds K living like a priest in a room in this dirty temple.

## **Okusan's Home**

Okusan's home is where Sensei decides to rent a room rather than continue to live at the student boardinghouse.

## **Boshu**

With Okusan's assistance, Sensei convinces K to take a holiday with him to Boshu the summer following their graduation from the university.





# Themes

## Loneliness

Loneliness and the search to appease it is the main theme of the novel. Though Soseki is unaware of what he is looking for in Sensei, the elder understands Soseki is a lonely young man who hopes to relieve that loneliness through their relationship. Sensei admits that he is lonely as well but, due to his nature, cannot alleviate it or assist Soseki in alleviating his own. Soseki is unaware of his loneliness until it is pointed out by Sensei, and he still believes Sensei is mistaken. He only believes he has met Sensei to learn about life. However, Soseki admits after his first time seeing Sensei, he looks for him out of boredom, as his own companion was called home. When Soseki returns to Tokyo, he becomes caught up in the bustle of getting ready for college and does not think of Sensei until he is again feeling bored and lost.

When Soseki returns home after leaving school, he often struggles with loneliness. He mentions their home being too large for three people, leaving him feeling isolated. Soseki writes letters to friends to maintain his connection with Tokyo and perhaps his memories of the university. When Soseki reaches out to Sensei in letters, he knows there is little chance of receiving a reply. When General Nogi commits suicide, Soseki begins writing Sensei only to tear up the paper admitting he is writing out of loneliness.

Soseki's father deals with loneliness even with his wife near. When Soseki informs his father he is returning to Tokyo, he responds the house will be lonely without Soseki. Soseki's father laments at the loss of children through their gaining education and thus geographical distance from their parents. Soseki's father suffers loneliness most following bouts of delusion and though he requests everyone present, it is his wife he seeks to assuage his loneliness.

Sensei reaches out to K because he identifies with his friend's loneliness. Although Sensei believes that K's choice of lifestyle is leading to his undoing he approaches K with caution, afraid that any contention between them will lead to K further isolating himself. Though fearful, Sensei appears to long for human contact perhaps due to losing his parents at young age. Sensei is bothered by K's intent on living without human contact or comforts. As Sensei's feelings for Ojosan grow, he attempts to open K's eyes to the joys of human interaction and love.

Though Ojosan's mother suffered with loneliness following the death of her husband, Ojosan's dissent into loneliness begins once she is married. Unbeknownst to Ojosan, Sensei cannot look at her without thinking of the suicide of K. In his grief and guilt, Sensei isolates himself from the world, including his wife. Ojosan is not able to appease her loneliness through childbirth and rearing as Sensei tells her they cannot have children due to divine punishment. The couple live together lonely and in love until Sensei can take his life no more and kills himself.





## The Guilt of Love

Sensei believes Soseki makes fun of love because he himself wants to be in love. He tells the younger man his love is unrequited, not having found an object. Soseki, a young man unused to the company of women, and even viewing them with mild hostility, does not understand Sensei. Sensei warns Soseki of the guilt involved in love and feels pushed to repeat it, as if to say to him, the one true lesson of love is that there is guilt in it. Sensei's love for his wife is full of the guilt of knowing he came to marry her by underhanded ways. Sensei could not dispel his jealousy and self-doubt as his love for Ojosan took hold. When K fell in love with Ojosan himself, Sensei believed he did not have a chance compared to his more worldly and pious friend. Instead of being honest with his feelings, Sensei secretly sought out Okusan and asked for her daughter's hand. In going the path of the mother, Sensei avoids facing Ojosan's possible refusal or, worse, her acceptance of his hand though her heart may be with K. Sensei mentions he cannot marry someone he suspects loves someone else. However, in asking Okusan for Ojosan's hand, Sensei has possibly ignored and betrayed the feelings of the woman he is in love with as he has knowingly done to his closest friend.

K kills himself shortly after learning Sensei and Ojosan are engaged. Sensei feels safe when he sees no mention of Ojosan in the suicide letter. However, he cannot escape the feeling that his engagement to Ojosan, and the manner in which he accomplished it, precipitated K's suicide. Though Sensei says they lead a happy life, Sensei cannot look at his new wife without thinking of K, and his wife mentions feeling a wall separating Sensei from her. When Sensei mentions he and his wife cannot have children of their own due to divine punishment, leads one to speculate if the couple has consummated their marriage.

## The Second Son

In traditional Japanese culture, the first son is expected to follow in the steps of the father and bequeathed most of the family's fortune while the second son is expected to build their own financial stability. Soseki, Sensei's uncle, and K are all second sons of their families. Sensei's father points out the disadvantages of being a first son, as he attributes his younger brother's worldly personality to his having to work hard to gain success.

As Soseki grows up in a different generation, and perhaps due to his family's lack of monetary wealth, both he and his older brother seek their own career paths. When Soseki's illness worsens, though the doctor defers to his older brother, Soseki's brother in turn defers decisions to Soseki. Soseki's parents also turn to him for comfort as he has the ability to stay with them more than his brother who lives in a far away province. Soseki, Soseki also proves to be somewhat worldlier than his elder brother as he lives in a more modern Tokyo. His brother looks to Soseki for advice.

Each of the second sons in the novel suffers some degree of estrangement from their families as they struggle to find identities and career paths. When Sensei's uncle is left



to manage an inheritance he himself as the second son is not entitled to, he decides to use the money to invest in his failing business. Instead of increasing Sensei's wealth, his uncle depletes it. As a result, Sensei's uncle has to face his family in shame and loses contact with Sensei forever.

K also uses his family's money toward an end he believes outweighs the dishonesty of his behavior. K makes a decision to study religion, which is his father's chosen path, instead of medicine, which is the career of his foster father. When K confesses to his foster father that he has used his money to study theology his foster father calls K a thief and excommunicates him.



# Style

## Point of View

Kokoro is written in the first person point of view. This is a subjective point of view only giving the reader opportunity to gain insight to the narrator of the story. The first person point of view is fitting for Kokoro, as Soseki is recounting events in his life and therefore cannot speak for anyone else but himself. Soseki tells the story of how he came to meet and befriend Sensei, a man he believes can teach him about life. In Part III, the perspective of the story changes from Soseki to Sensei as, through his letter, Sensei finally tells Soseki the story of his life.

The story is told in a balance of narrative and dialogue. This is an effective method, allowing the reader to follow the narrator's thoughts surrounding the characters' dialogue. The reader also learns that narrator, at the time he is conveying his story, has gained perspective with age and has the wisdom to acknowledge his errors in thought and behavior as a youth.

## Setting

Kokoro takes place in Tokyo, Japan during and shortly following the Meiji Empire. Soseki attends college and then the Imperial University in Tokyo. Many smaller areas of Tokyo mentioned in the text, however, as the story is about Sensei's life as well as the relationship between Sensei and Soseki, the majority of the story takes place in Sensei's home.

The first part of the story takes place in Tokyo where Soseki is attending school. After meeting Sensei in Kamakura during summer holiday Soseki returns to Tokyo. He is at first taken over by the excitement of preparing for his return to school. Soon, he becomes bored and lonely again and begins spending his evenings at Sensei's home. When Soseki and Sensei enjoy walks together and Soseki often describes the foliage when they are outdoors. His descriptions of the changing of seasons and its affect on the scenery enhances the story as well as gives a timeline to certain events.

Part II of the novel takes place at the home of Soseki's parents in the country. Soseki returns home after graduation to find his father is still doing well despite his failing kidneys. However, when Emperor Meiji falls ill, Soseki's father's illness worsens. As Soseki and his mother tend to his father, Soseki begins to feel the house too large for three people. After hanging ceremonial ribbon from the flagpole outside their home, Soseki remembers feeling slightly ashamed when Sensei questioned him on the architectural style of the house. Perhaps Soseki is comparing his home to Sensei's smaller, less elaborate home.

Part III takes place in the Tokyo of Sensei's youth. Sensei takes Soseki on a tour through his life following the deaths of his parents. Sensei's childhood home is briefly



represented in the novel when Sensei returns to it at the end of each college school year. Sensei sells the house, disregarding the reverence placed on maintaining one's ancestral home, when he is betrayed by his uncle. To Sensei, it is more important to erase ties to his uncle than maintain tradition. When he returns to Tokyo Sensei leaves the student boardinghouse and moves in with a widow and her daughter who Sensei later falls in love with.

Sensei's love for Ojosan leads to the betrayal of his close friend when Sensei surreptitiously becomes engaged to Ojosan. When K commits suicide shortly after the engagement, Okusan, Sensei and Ojosan move to a new home. Sensei and Ojosan are married and live together in the home until Sensei's death.

## Language and Meaning

Kokoro was originally written in Japanese and later translated to English by Edwin McClellan. As Mr. McClellan hoped, the language of Kokoro is simple and at times poetic in its description. There is, at times, a stiff formality to the language that is natural in translated text, as the word usage is more exact given the strict guidelines.

The language of Kokoro is in keeping with the time period and characterizes the individuals in the story. Though the reader is not privy to Sensei's thoughts until Part III, the dialogue shared between Soseki and Sensei, denotes the difference in the viewpoints of each man. The narrator's expository style is simple and poetic when describing the change of seasons as well as Soseki's sentiments toward the other characters in the story.

## Structure

The book is written in three simply titled sections, designating who Soseki is spending his time with at each stage of the novel. The parts vary in length with Part II only 40 pages in length while Part III encompasses nearly half the novel at 123 pages long. The parts are not further segmented with chapters. Instead, asterisks separate passages of narrative thought and dialogue. As the passing of time are not always easy to follow, this manner of breaking down each part helps the reader to follow Soseki's flow of thought and reminiscence. This affectation also lends to the conversational tone of the book.

The plot of the novel is straightforward, however, there is a subplot. Soseki is a lonely young man searching for meaning in his life. Soseki develops a bond with Sensei in hopes he will learn the meaning of life from the older man. Soseki often finds Sensei's words disappointing and its application to his own life false. However, Sensei's words obviously influence Soseki and, led to introspection, he is sometimes frustrated with the failings he finds in himself. Soseki believes he must know more about Sensei's life and when Sensei decides to kill himself, he decides to divulge his story. Sensei's story is one of loneliness and betrayal. His parents die while he is still a young man, and he is deceived by the uncle he trusts. Wary and distrustful, it is only when Sensei moves into Okusan's home does he begin to release his emotional burden. Sensei is plummeted



back into the realms of distrust and melancholy when his love of a woman and treatment of a friend leads to that friend's suicide.

The timeline of the novel spans both Soseki's and Sensei's years in college and university. There remains some confusion to the timeline of events surrounding Emperor Meiji's death. In Part II when the Emperor dies, Soseki has recently graduated from the Imperial University. However, in the foreword, Edwin McClellan writes that the Emperor died while Soseki was approaching the height of his career.



## Quotes

"I am a lonely man," Sensei said. "And so I am glad that you come to see me. But I am also a melancholy man, and so I asked you why you should wish to visit me so often." Pp. 14

"In all the world, I know only one woman. No woman but my wife moves me as a woman. And my wife regards me as the only man for her. From this point of view, we should be the happiest of couples." Pp. 21

"Sensei, please explain more clearly what you mean by 'guilt'. Otherwise, please let us not discuss this matter again, until I have myself found out what this 'guilt' is." Pp. 27

"At any rate," he continued, "don't put too much trust in me. You will learn to regret it if you do. And if you ever allow yourself to feel betrayed, you will then find yourself being cruelly vindictive." Pp. 30

"I see that higher education has made you adept at empty rationalization. You might as well have reasoned that he cannot be fond of me, since I am a part of the world that he dislikes." Pp. 35

Inwardly, I compared my father's unaffected pleasure with the way Sensei had congratulated me that night at the dinner table. And I had greater admiration for Sensei with his secret contempt for such things as university degrees than I had for my father, who seemed to me to value them more than they were worth. P.81

"We are not in Tokyo, you know," said my father. "Country people are rather fussy and resentful." Pp. 86

He always referred to the Emperor as "His Majesty." "I don't wish to seem irreverent," he once said, "but it does look as if His Majesty's illness is not unlike mine." Pp. 90

I imagined this city, the greatest in all Japan, immersed in gloom, yet bustling with activity despite the darkness. There was but one light shining, and that came from Sensei's house. Pp. 92

"Tell me," said my father, not without sarcasm, "why is it that he does nothing? One would think that such a man as he, whom you seem to respect so highly, would find some kind of employment." Pp. 94

"You know," he once said to me, "There are advantages and disadvantages in having one's children educated. You take the trouble to give them an education and, when they are through with their studies, they go away and never come home. Why, you can almost say that education is a means of separating children from their parents." Pp. 95

"In my day, parents were supported by their children. Today, the children are supported forever by their parents." Pp. 98



There was little that I did not know about my father. The regret I would feel if we were parted would be no more than that of any son who was fond of his father. On the other hand, there was much that I did not know about Sensei. He had not yet told me about his past, as he had promised. In short, Sensei still remained for me a figure half-hidden in the shadows. I could not be content until he was fully revealed to me. I could not bear the thought of being parted from him before then. Pp. 99

"Will General Nogi ever forgive me?" he would say. "How can I ever face him without shame? Yes, General, I will be with you very soon." Pp. 117

And I shall be satisfied if, when my heart stops beating, a new life lodges itself in your breast. Pp. 129

If one respects one's elders because they have lived longer and have become more soiled than oneself, then certainly I deserve your respect. Pp. 142

It seemed that reason was powerless in her presence. My love for her was close to piety. You may think it strange that I should use this word, with its religious connotation, to describe my feeling towards a woman. But even now I believe—and I believe it very strongly—that true love is not so far removed from religious faith. Pp 154

Once, I grabbed K's neck from behind. "What would you do," I said, "if I pushed you into the sea?" K did not move. Without looking back, he said: "That would be pleasant. Please do." Quickly, I withdrew the hand that had been holding his neck. Pp. 186

A woman is more happy when she is the sole object of affection—whether or not this kindness may involve injustice elsewhere does not seem to matter very much—than when she is loved for reasons which transcend particular individuals. At least, I have noticed this tendency more in women than in men. Pp. 242

My wife once asked me: "Can't a man's heart and a woman's heart ever become a part of each other, so that they are one?" I gave a noncommittal answer: "Perhaps, when the man and the woman are young." Pp. 242

On the night of the Imperial Funeral I sat in my study and listened to the booming of the cannon. To me, it sounded like the last lament for the passing of an age. Pp. 246

I can only hope that at least a little of the beauty has remained in the translation. I have tried, at any rate, to retain the simplicity. Pp. vi

The best rendering of the Japanese word "kokoro" that I have seen is Lafcadio Hearn's, which is: "the heart of things." Pp. vi



## Topics for Discussion

Why does Soseki seek Sensei's friendship?

Compare and contrast Sensei and Soseki's fathers. How are they similar? How are they different? Explain.

Compare and contrast Shizu (Ojosan) and Soseki's mothers. How are they similar? How are they different? Explain.

Discuss the differences between Sensei's and K's perspectives on life.

Soseki finds himself comparing his father and Sensei whenever he is in his father's presence. Does Soseki view his father with the same open mind in which he views Sensei? Explain.

Why does Sensei's perception of women change while he lives in Okusan's home? How do his perceptions change?

Why does Sensei evade divulging his feeling for Ojosan to her mother?

How is Sensei opinion of himself in comparison to K?

How does Ojosan appear to feel about Sensei before K arrives? How do her feelings change once she gets to know K?

Why does Sensei avoid telling K he is in love with Ojosan?

How does Sensei's treatment of K change when he learns that K is in love with Ojosan?

In his suicide letter, K explains why he is ending his life. Why does he omit mentioning his love for Ojosan?

Why does Sensei feel safe after reading K's suicide letter?

How does K's suicide affect Sensei and Shizu's relationship?