

The Master Puppeteer Study Guide

The Master Puppeteer by Katherine Paterson

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Plot Summary

Jiro is a boy living in feudal Japan with his parents, who make puppets for the local puppet theater. Jiro apprentices himself to the theater so that his parents will have more to eat. He makes friends with the other apprentices, especially a boy called Kinshi. As time passes, Jiro begins to realize that Yoshida, the puppet master, is linked to the bandit Saburo. When Kinshi is determined to help the city's poor, whatever the cost, Jiro decides to appeal to Saburo. Unfortunately, he has misunderstood the situation, and it is actually the blind chanter Okada who is Saburo. Okada confronts him and he runs away. As riots break out in the city, Jiro tries to find Kinshi and his missing mother. He saves them and returns to the theater, where Okada decides to trust and accept him.

Jiro lives with his parents, Hanji and Isako, in a small house in the city of Osaka. He helps his father make puppets for the puppet theater, but they do not have enough work to buy enough food for the family. The owner of the theater, Yoshida, expressed an interest in Jiro, so Jiro decides to apprentice himself there. The theater will feed and house him, meaning his parents will have more between them. At the theater, he is accepted by the blind chanter called Okada and he befriends a kind boy called Kinshi.

Kinshi teaches Jiro the ways of the theater and helps him to practice for the performances. Jiro meets the other apprentices and makes friends with them. He soon finds that he is fitting in and doing well. However, things are not so good at home. He receives news that his parents have gone to the country because his father is sick. At New Year's, his mother comes back alone, and Jiro goes to see her. He takes her food, and is dismayed to see that she is starving and unhappy. On his way back to the theater, he is attacked by a ronin but saved by Yoshida, who was supposed to be sick in bed.

Okada writes a new play about a bandit called Joman. One night, the bandit Saburo leaves a note at the theater demanding they put on a special performance of the play for the city's poor. Saburo will attend. At first the authorities are not keen, but when they realize that it will be a chance to catch the bandit, they agree. The play goes ahead, and Saburo uses the messages in it to convince the poor not to betray him if they ever get the chance. He then robs the police and leaves. Jiro is suspicious of Yoshida's behavior, as he is sure the master puppeteer was putting on an act to convince the authorities to allow the play to go ahead.

The city's poor grow more restless and bands of night rovers begin to roam the streets at night, throwing rocks at random buildings. One night they come to the theater begging for food, but Yoshida will not give it to them. Kinshi feels sorry for them and is determined to help. He starts going out at night, and Jiro is afraid he is putting himself in danger. One day while Jiro is practicing with the puppets in the storehouse, he finds a samurai sword belonging to the men Saburo robbed at the performance. He is now convinced that Yoshida is Saburo. He is afraid of Yoshida, so he decides to appeal to Okada, to see if Saburo will meet with Kinshi. He hopes this will persuade Kinshi not to go out at night.



However, Jiro has misread the situation. Saburo is not Yoshida but is actually Okada. Okada confronts him and Jiro is afraid. He runs away. Meanwhile, riots are breaking out in the city and Kinshi is missing. Jiro goes out to look for him, but meets his father on the streets instead. Hanji tells Jiro that he was never sick, and is a member of Saburo's gang. He also tells Jiro that his mother is missing. Jiro goes out to look for them again, and finds them at the police station. Jiro disguises himself as a fireman to get them out. He is almost caught out in his lie, but he manages to get away. He is horrified to see that Kinshi's hand has been cut off, which happened when Kinshi was trying to stop Jiro's mother from stealing from a merchant's house.

They take Kinshi back to the theater, where he is looked after by his mother and Jiro's mother. Okada has decided to forgive and trust Jiro, and Yoshida formally offers him a place at the theater. He also says that Jiro's mother can stay there and be cared for. Kinshi will be taken in by Okada. This is a happy ending for both boys.



Chapters 1-2, 'Son of Hanji' and 'The Feast'

Chapters 1-2, 'Son of Hanji' and 'The Feast' Summary

Jiro is a young boy living in Feudal Japan during a time of famine. His family is poor and so he apprentices himself to the local puppet theater. He makes friends with the other boys, particularly Kinshi, the son of the master puppeteer Yoshida. As the months pass, Jiro becomes suspicious of Yoshida's behavior, suspecting that he is the mysterious bandit Saburo. When Kinshi becomes determined to help the desperate groups of citizens who roam the city at night, Jiro risks his life to ask Saburo to help him, only to discover that the bandit is not the person he expected.

Jiro helps his father to make a new puppet for the puppet theater. The city is suffering from a famine, but thankfully they can still make money by selling puppets, so are better off than many others. Still, Jiro is very hungry and keeps making mistakes. His mother is constantly frustrated with him. Jiro and his father Hanji decide to visit the bathhouse with their remaining money. As they bathe, they talk to another man about a rice merchant who has recently been robbed by the notorious bandit Saburo.

Jiro goes with his father to sell the puppet to Yoshida, the master puppeteer. They walk to the Hanaza, the puppet theater. Inside, Yoshida is disciplining one of the boys for moving the puppet's feet in a performance when he was supposed to stay still. The boy takes his beating without flinching or crying out, which Jiro admires. Yoshida offers them food and Hanji politely refuses, but Jiro is too overcome with hunger to follow social etiquette. He interrupts his father and accepts food for the both of them. This is very rude behavior and his father is shocked, but Yoshida laughs and praises Jiro's spirit. He suggests to Hanji that he would be interested in taking on Jiro as an apprentice.

Jiro and Hanji return home, buying food on the way. Hanji does not tell Jiro's mother, Isako, about Jiro's dishonorable behavior, but he does mention Yoshida's suggestion. Isako thinks the offer was not made seriously, so Hanji agrees not to think of it any more.

Chapters 1-2, 'Son of Hanji' and 'The Feast' Analysis

This story is set in Feudal Japan during the Tokugawa shogunate. This was a time when the Tokugawa family was in power as shoguns. The shogun was the military leader and political ruler of Japan. Above him was the emperor, but his power was more symbolic than that of the shogun. Society was arranged in a strict hierarchy, meaning that people were supposed to know their place and be loyal and obedient to their superiors. At the top of the hierarchy were the shogun and the emperor. Under these were the daimyos,



the land-owning lords. The rest of society was arranged according to importance too, with nobility at the top and peasants below.

The samurai were military nobility who followed a strict code of honor called Bushido. This meant that they dedicated their fighting skills to their master and were supposed to serve him honorably, even to the extent of giving their life for his. They were provided with a stipend or farm by their master. Samurai who lost their masters, or fell from their masters' favor, were known as ronin. Ronin were considered to have lost their honor, and were not given a stipend or a farm. This meant they had to find other employment or become criminals in order to survive. They had a bad reputation and were considered dangerous, as well as often being looked down on. Underneath the samurai in the hierarchy of society were the farmers, followed by the artisans (people who make things) and then the merchants. Although merchants did not technically have a very high place in society, they were often richer than others. The farmers had to give large amounts of their produce to the daimyos and so they were often very poor despite being considered more important than merchants and artisans.

In this story, the gap between people's wealth and their social position is particularly large. This is because it is a time of famine, and the farmers are forced to give most of their food to the daimyos. The rice merchants have grown extremely rich while the farmers and other peasants are poor and starving. The samurai might be considered very important on the social scale, but Jiro tells us that even some of the samurai are starving on very small rice stipends. This has made people very angry and restless, as the lowliest and undeserving members of society, the merchants are getting rich and fat while those who should be more important starve. The famine has only made these feelings worse, and has caused the peasants of the city to become desperate.

This background explains why the bandit Saburo is looked on fondly by the people. He robs those who are considered to be richer than they deserve to be. Not only does he steal food to give to the poor, but he also humiliates people who are seen to have stepped beyond their social position. By stealing from the merchants and making them look like fools, Saburo is putting them back into their proper place. The general populace approves of these actions. They enjoy talking about Saburo's exploits, and he seems to be a symbol of hope and resistance, perhaps even justice, in these difficult times. As Jiro's father points out, it is never a good thing to be a thief, but perhaps Saburo's actions can be forgiven because of the situation in the city. He considers it criminal that the rice merchants have so much and everyone else has so little, and comments that the authorities are not doing anything about this. Saburo is the only one who is taking action, and although he is using criminal actions, at least he is doing so to fight other criminals.

The authorities themselves do not appear to share this view. They consider Saburo a dangerous criminal and a menace to social order. They are determined to stop him, and will punish those who speak fondly of him. This is why the people in the bath house are careful to talk quietly. Jiro tells the reader that spies are all over the city and that there are bound to be many in the bathhouse where gossip is common. This shows how the authorities do not trust the people, and the methods they need to resort to to keep order.



It also shows how frightening it must be for ordinary people in the city at this time. They are afraid of each other, because starving people may resort to anything, and they are also afraid of the authorities, who may use violence to maintain order.

In these first two chapters, the characters of Jiro and his family are introduced. Jiro is the main character of the book. He is a young boy who lives with his mother and father in Osaka, Japan. His father is Hanji, a puppet maker, and his mother is Isako. Jiro tries to be a well behaved and loyal son, but despite his best efforts he often gets things wrong. He is clumsy and unsure of himself, and his hunger makes this worse. He makes mistakes while helping to make the puppets, which will cost his family materials and money. His mother is constantly frustrated with him, but his father tries to be kind and to give him a chance. He tries to help him learn and encourages him to develop his skills. He wants Jiro to be able to help make puppets so they can earn a living, but he also wants Jiro to learn a skill that will help him in later life. Jiro tries his best and feels embarrassed and upset when he makes mistakes. He loves both his parents, but feels a little despairing of ever earning his mother's love. He thinks his mother resents the fact that he was even born, as his elder siblings died. He thinks that his mother would have preferred her other children to survive and Jiro to die. This makes him very sad, but also a little resentful of his mother.

Jiro enjoys working with his father and happily accompanies him to the puppet theater to sell the puppet. However, when they are there he cannot resist accepting Yoshida's offer to stay for dinner. This is extremely rude and dishonorable behavior for a young boy at this time. Yoshida is their superior, as well as the man on whom their livelihood depends. He should be shown respect at all times. Not only does Jiro show disrespect by speaking out of turn, he also breaks the rules of social interaction. At this time in Japan, there were strict codes and rules for how people should speak to each other. It would have been considered polite for Yoshida to offer his food for them, and they should show respect and politeness by refusing the offer three times. After this, if the offer is still there, they would be allowed to humbly accept. These rules of etiquette may seem unnecessary, but they were extremely important at the time. To ignore them and accept Yoshida's invitation straight away, as Jiro does, is rude. This brings dishonor down on him and his family. At this period in history, honor was considered to be of the utmost importance. Honor mattered in everything, from polite behavior and being respectful of one's superiors, to being loyal to one's friends and family. Although this is a strange concept in our society, to Jiro and his father, honor was very important. It is considered a huge disgrace for Jiro to act dishonorably in this way. He is afraid that it has brought shame down on himself and his father, but Yoshida is understanding and even admires Jiro's spirit. He thinks that respect and proper behavior can be taught, but a brave spirit is something that a person has to be born with. This gives Jiro mixed feelings. On one hand, he is ashamed of how he acted, but on the other, he is proud of the compliment that Yoshida gave him. His emotions and his hunger eventually become too overwhelming and he cries himself to sleep.



Chapter 3, 'Yoshida Kinshi'

Chapter 3, 'Yoshida Kinshi' Summary

One evening, Saburo and his band rob a rice brokerage, disguised as Komuso monks who wear baskets on their heads. They stuff rice and money into secret compartments in the baskets, tie up the guard, and get away safely. The authorities and the merchants' guild offer a large reward for information leading to Saburo's capture.

Jiro and his family are hungry again and their money has run out. Hanji is working on a new puppet, but Yoshida has just sent word cancelling the order, as he will no longer need the puppet. Jiro decides he will go to the theater and offer himself as apprentice. His family will then have one less mouth to feed, and one day Jiro will be employed properly and be able to give them money.

When he gets to the theater, there is a performance in progress. He sees the apprentice that he witnessed being disciplined the last time he was here. The boy introduces himself as Kinshi, the son of Yoshida. He tells Jiro to go round to the side entrance in the alley and yell. His mother will come out, and Jiro should then ask to see Okada, the master chanter.

Jiro watches Okada perform the end of a scene on stage, then visits him in his dressing room. He tells Okada that he wants to be an apprentice at the theater, and Okada agrees to take him on. He tells him to wait until the morning to introduce himself to Yoshida. Mrs. Yoshida gives him food and Kinshi makes friends with him. He sleeps in the dressing room with the other boy apprentices.

Chapter 3, 'Yoshida Kinshi' Analysis

Jiro makes a brave decision in this chapter. He decides to leave his family, the comfort of his home and a life he knows, to become an apprentice at the theater. He does this because he is convinced that it will be better for his family. He knows that he is just another mouth to feed, which means that his parents have less. He thinks that he is just a nuisance who makes mistakes and does not contribute anything. If he leaves, his parents will have more food between them. He will be fed and will sleep at the theater, so his parents will not have to worry about looking after him. By joining the theater he also has the prospect of being hired properly one day and being paid. He can then give money to his parents and look after them in their old age. This is a frightening decision for Jiro, as he does not know if he will be good at his new job and he worries about getting into trouble with the fierce puppet master Yoshida. The fact that Jiro chooses this daunting opportunity shows how brave he is. It also shows that he can think practically, and that he can be selfless when it comes to the people he loves. He chooses what he thinks is best for his parents rather than the easiest option for himself, showing that he is compassionate and a dutiful son.



However, Jiro might also have other more personal motivations. He is an ambitious boy who thinks of the future rather than just worrying about each day as it comes. He realizes that he has a chance of real employment at the theater. He imagines himself being paid and being able to take care of his parents. He likes the theater, and likes the idea of making something of himself. He was pleased when Yoshida praised his spirit, and perhaps feels a little undervalued at home. He wants to prove that he is not just a clumsy boy who cannot do anything right. He longs to make his parents, particularly his disapproving mother, proud of him.

Things look hopeful for Jiro in this chapter. He has been accepted into the theater, which means that his father cannot take him away without breaking his honor. This means he has a real chance to stay and make something of himself so that he can look after his parents and pay his father back for his kindness. At the theater he has food and a comfortable place to sleep. The theater is safe and secure, and there are kind people there such as Okada and Mrs. Yoshida. Kinshi has befriended him, which will be a huge help to Jiro, as he now has someone to guide him in his new life. He has a place where he can begin to feel at home and fit in. So far, everyone seems very accepting of him. However, Jiro worries what will happen if he is clumsy or no good at his job. He worries about meeting Yoshida in the morning, in case Yoshida is angry with him for coming to the theater and being made an apprentice without his approval. Things are hopeful for Jiro, but also very unsure and frightening. Jiro does not know what the future will bring, but at least he has taken the first step in taking his life into his own hands.



Chapter 4, 'The Hanaza'

Chapter 4, 'The Hanaza' Summary

Isako comes to the theater the next morning with Jiro's sleeping quilts. She tells him that he is selfish, and that leaving to join the theater will make his father sick. She does not give Jiro a chance to explain his reasons for leaving them.

Kinshi introduces Jiro to the other boy apprentices. There is an ugly and quiet boy called Wada, a handsome but fat boy called Minoru, and a boy called Teiji who stutters when he talks. All the boys clearly love Kinshi, and Jiro can see why.

Jiro presents himself to Yoshida and explains that he is a new apprentice. Yoshida tells him to go get ready for the performance. Jiro is worried because he does not know the play, but Kinshi says the left-hand operators will give him a nod when it is time to pull the curtain. This goes well, and Jiro is able to watch Yoshida perform. Yoshida moves the female puppet's fingers beautifully, as if she is playing an instrument. Kinshi admires his father's skill and Jiro agrees that the performance was magnificent.

Kinshi steals some texts for Jiro so that he can learn the plays. A kindly man called Mochida oversees their work and their practice at manipulating the puppets. They hang the puppets' legs from the rafters of their room and practice moving the legs in time to the script. Jiro keeps getting it wrong, but Mochida does not explain how he is wrong, which means Jiro finds it hard to correct his mistake. After lunch Yoshida comes to inspect the boys' practice. Jiro is worried, but it is Kinshi who Yoshida finds fault with. Yoshida throws his stick at Kinshi and storms out. Kinshi tries not to show that he is upset by his father's behavior.

Meanwhile, Saburo is still on the loose. His band pretends to be tax collectors and steals rice from the merchants. The Shogun places a huge reward of one thousand ryo on Saburo's head.

Chapter 4, 'The Hanaza' Analysis

In this chapter, Jiro meets the other apprentice boys at the Hanaza. Wada is an ambitious boy who longs to be the next Yoshida. According to Kinshi he emulates Yoshida's behavior, and likes to remain aloof from the other boys. Wada's grumpy attitude seems to back up Kinshi's assessment of him. However, Wada seems to like Kinshi's teasing and obviously respects and loves Kinshi deeply. Similarly, Minoru and Teiji seem happy to be teased by Kinshi, as this is a mark of his friendship. Minoru seems to be a relaxed and good-natured boy, and Teiji is nervous but friendly. They obviously all look up to Kinshi and value his friendship dearly. Kinshi is a very likeable and friendly boy who seems to feel the need to take care of the other boys. He does not feel jealous of others easily, and appears not to be ambitious at all. This means that he does not see the other boys as threats to his position but as friends to help and laugh



with. He makes sure that the others enjoy their life at the theater. He is very anxious to make Jiro feel safe and accepted, and to help him with the performances. He tells Jiro about the theater and even steals the texts of the plays for him to learn. He is a very kind boy and Jiro immediately thinks of him as a good friend.

Wada seems a little suspicious of Jiro, perhaps because he sees him as a potential threat to his position and advancement at the theater. Jiro might become a rival for promotion. Jiro notices that Wada glares at him when he seems too eager to do kitchen chores, as if he thinks that Jiro is overstepping himself. Jiro is still very new at the theater and so will have to be careful not to offend the other boys or seem like he thinks too much of himself. He is supposed to know his place, and will have to remember this, no matter how ambitious he really is. Kinshi reminds him of this when he says that Jiro will have to treat the other boys as his elders and let them feel big by ordering him around for a while. Kinshi is joking, but he is also half serious. Just as Japanese society has a strict social hierarchy at this time, so the theater seems to have a strict hierarchy too. At the top is Yoshida, who everyone seems to be afraid of, as Mochida tells Kinshi at the end of the chapter. Below Yoshida are the puppet manipulators and performers. The apprentice boys are right at the bottom of the ladder, but have their own hierarchy amongst them. The most important boy is Kinshi, as he is the most popular and best loved. He is also the son of Yoshida and has been at the theater the longest. Under him seems to be Wada, the most ambitious of the boys. Under him are Minoru and Teiji. Jiro is at the bottom because he is the newest member of the group. He will be expected to treat the others with respect. He will also have to remember that the way of the theater is not to help each other, but to worry about one's own ambition. With the exception of Kinshi, the others may not be willing to help Jiro. This is why Kinshi has to steal the texts of the plays, as none of the other people at the theater will lend them to the boys.

Yoshida is the most important man at the theater. He is the master puppeteer, the owner of the theater and the man in charge. He is a master at manipulating the puppets to make them move in amazing ways. He is most famous for his portrayal of female characters. Kinshi talks about his father's skill with pride, and Jiro is amazed when he witnesses Yoshida's skills for himself. Jiro is pulling the curtain at the side of the stage, so has a good view of a scene in which Yoshida moves a female puppet's hands as if she is playing an instrument. Yoshida does this with such skill that the audience forgets the fact that there is a person manipulating the puppet. Kinshi is not so complimentary of Yoshida as a father, however. He considers Yoshida very skilled, but an unpleasant and cruel man. Yoshida's treatment of Kinshi hurts the boy a great deal, and he hates his father's attitude to the other people at the theater as well. The reader also finds out some of Yoshida's history. He is the son of a ronin, a samurai who lost his master and so lost his honor. Kinshi explains that although his grandfather was a ronin, he still behaved according to the samurai code, and so he still considers him to be an honorable man. Yoshida did not want to continue in the samurai way like his father, so he decided to enter into a completely new way of life. He apprenticed himself to Okada at the Takemoto Theater and learnt to be a puppet manipulator. He then bought his own theater, and now he is the puppet master with Okada working for him. He hopes Kinshi will follow in his path, and so set up a new heritage for the Yoshida family, but Kinshi

does not show the same level of skill or determination. This is why Yoshida is so harsh with him.

At the end of the chapter, the reader is given another little story about Saburo's exploits. This time he and his gang steal rice from the merchants by pretending to be the Shogun's tax collectors. The merchants are surprised and angry when the real tax collectors turn up later. Not only has Saburo successfully stolen food again, but he has also managed to embarrass and strike a substantial blow to the greedy merchants who are exploiting the city's poor. He has also sent a strong message to the Shogun that if the authorities continue to support the tyranny of the rich, they can be targeted too. He shows how easy it is to get what he wants by impersonating government officials. These little anecdotes about Saburo and what he is doing pop up throughout the story, despite having nothing to do with Jiro's story at present. They create intrigue and mystery, as well as reminding the reader what is going on in the city. They foreshadow later events as Saburo will become very important to Jiro's life later in the story.



Chapter 5, 'The Fourth Fearful Thing'

Chapter 5, 'The Fourth Fearful Thing' Summary

One day Jiro is chosen to hold a clam on stage during a performance. Kinshi is to control the snipe, which gets caught in the clam. He hopes his father will come to deliver puppets and see his performance, but his father does not come. Jiro begins to worry about him, as he knows he is not well, and asks Mochida if he can go see him. Mochida gives him permission, so Jiro goes early the next morning.

At the house, however, Jiro finds Taro, his neighbor's son. Taro tells him that Hanji's lungs are bad, so he and Isako left to go to Jiro's cousin's farm in the country. Taro is looking after the house while they are gone. Worried, Jiro leaves and returns to the Hanaza.

One day Kwada the foot operator has stomach pain and cannot continue with the performance. Yoshida tells Kinshi to operate the feet for the rest of the show. He manages to do it perfectly, without any criticism from his father. That night Kinshi steals some wine to celebrate. Yoshida catches them and whips Kinshi to punish him. Jiro realizes that he not only fears Yoshida, he hates him too.

Yoshida picks a new play to put on, and Kinshi says he will steal the text for Jiro. Jiro does not want his friend to get into trouble again, however, so he slips out to Yoshida's house himself. He takes one of the scripts. While he is there, he notices a flower arrangement in an odd looking basket. As he looks closer, he realizes that the basket is actually one of the basket hats that Komuso priests wear.

Chapter 5, 'The Fourth Fearful Thing' Analysis

Jiro begins to learn the ways of the theater in this chapter. Despite Kinshi's kindness towards him, things will not be easy for him at the Hanaza. The people there are ambitious and anxious to get ahead, and they do not like to help each other. The operators took pity on Jiro because he was new, but they will not give him cues any longer. Now that he is one of them, he is expected to get by on his own. Nobody at the theater seems to care when things are unfair. Jiro asks Kinshi how the apprentice boys are expected to learn the texts if they are not given them. Kinshi admits that he does not know, as he has always stolen the scripts for them. He explains that the way of the theater is hard and ruthless, and that he is too soft for it. He does not have the drive to be a puppeteer if it means seeing others suffer. Jiro still has to find his place in this new world, in which things are so different from what he has known before.

Jiro is extremely grateful to Kinshi. Without him, Jiro would have been completely lost at the theater and would have gotten into a lot more trouble. He feels like he owes Kinshi, and hates to see him upset or in pain. When Kinshi is punished for stealing wine, Jiro feels terribly guilty because he was the one who suggested celebrating Kinshi's



success. Even though it was Kinshi who stole the wine, they all drank some of it. Jiro feels that it is unfair that Kinshi is made to suffer for something they all did, and he hates the fact that Kinshi had to go through that alone. When Kinshi says he will steal the text for Jiro, Jiro is determined not to let Kinshi get into trouble for him again. He bravely decides to steal the text himself, despite the fact that his punishment is likely to be much worse than Kinshi's if he is caught in Yoshida's house. Jiro may be struggling to understand the ways of the theater, but his time there is helping his confidence hugely. When he arrived he was a frightened, clumsy boy, who did not think much of himself. Now he is brave and strong, and determined to be true to his friend. He feels like he belongs at the theater, and is confident that he is doing well. Jiro notes this change in himself when he goes to see his parents, and realizes how much braver he has become. He recognizes that being at the theater is good for him, and is helping him to grow up.

Jiro's parents are not at home when he goes back to see them. Instead, he is met by the neighbor's son who tells Jiro that his mother and father have gone to a farm in the country. Hanji, Jiro's father, is unwell. Jiro left home to join the theater, but he still had family close by, like a lifeline he could rely on. Now his parents have left and he is truly on his own. He has no place left to return to, and no contact with his mother and father. He is worried about his father, and has no way to know how ill he really is. He feels very guilty about this, as his mother made him feel like it was his fault that his father is sick. His father loved Jiro, and wanted to look after him and teach him his skills. Instead, Jiro left. He might be better off, and in a better position to help his parents, but to them it must seem as though he abandoned them. Jiro's mother made it clear that she feels this way. This upsets him, and makes him feel like he is a bad son. He wishes he could show them that he is being successful at the theater and that he came here because he was thinking of them, but now he may never get the chance.

This chapter also provides the first clue that Yoshida has some kind of connection with Saburo. Earlier, the reader heard the story of how Saburo robbed a rice brokerage by disguising his gang as Komuso priests. Komuso priests wear basket hats over their heads, exactly like the basket hat that Jiro sees in Yoshida's house. Yoshida has never been a Komuso priest, and it is unlikely that he was given a basket hat by one. Saburo and his gang must each have a basket hat that they used in their heist and now need to hide. This would explain why it is being used to hold a flower arrangement in Yoshida's house, as it is disguised as a simple basket. Jiro does not make the connection yet, but the reader begins to wonder whether Yoshida is a member of Saburo's gang.



Chapter 6, 'Bad Omens for the New Year'

Chapter 6, 'Bad Omens for the New Year' Summary

Okada finishes the new play, *The Thief of the Tokaido*, and the apprentices worry about learning it when they have no copy to read. Kinshi explains that last time there was a new play he stole Yoshida's personal copy. Jiro does not want him to risk this again, so he says he will steal a copy instead. However, instead of stealing one, he goes straight to Okada and asks him for a copy instead. Okada laughs at Jiro's openness and gives him a copy, but tells him to claim that he stole it if anyone asks.

The boys are preparing for New Year's. The theater has plenty of food and Yoshida is sick, so the boys look forward to a good celebration. However, outside the theater the city is starving. Jiro receives word that his mother has returned home without his father. He worries about her being hungry and alone, so decides to go see her first thing on New Year's instead of celebrating at the theater with the others. Kinshi meets him on the way out and hands him a box of food and a jug of soup that he stole from the kitchen.

Jiro goes to his parents' house but his mother is not there. He starts a fire and sets out the food. His mother returns, disheveled and confused, with a torn kimono. She tells him that she had gone to get food that was being distributed at a shrine, supposedly from Saburo. She managed to get food, but was attacked on the way home and the food was stolen. Jiro eats with her, and then helps out around the house. She tells him that the price on Saburo's head has been raised, and that even though he is a friend to the poor, any hungry person would betray him to save their own or their family's lives.

Jiro leaves to get back to the theater for the night. On his way there, he finds a dead man on the street and decides to pull him to the side of the road so his body is not run over by a cart. A ronin sees him and thinks he is trying to steal from the dead man. The ronin tells him that this is his territory, and raises his sword to kill him. Suddenly the ronin is hit from behind and Jiro sees Yoshida standing there. Yoshida tells him to remember that he never saw him tonight, and then tells him to get back to the theater. Jiro thanks him and runs to the Hanaza.

Chapter 6, 'Bad Omens for the New Year' Analysis

Jiro tries to protect Kinshi from risking himself for the other boys. He wants to pay back Kinshi for all his kindness and cannot bear the thought of him being punished to help Jiro. Jiro is determined that he will earn the kindness Kinshi has already shown him, as well as the friendship and respect of the other boys. He wants to be part of their team and to help them as Kinshi does. He insists that he will steal the new play instead of Kinshi, and persuades the other boys to let him. Kinshi does not seem thrilled with this idea, and the other boys are a little taken aback too. Jiro is perhaps overstepping himself here. It seems as though he is trying to tell the others what to do, and trying to



take Kinshi's role. It looks as though Jiro wants to be the new leader, so is proving himself by acquiring the new script. This is not Jiro's intention at all, as he is well-meaning, but the other boys seem suspicious. Jiro still does not understand the way things work at the theater, as Okada points out to him in this chapter, and he will have to be careful that he does not offend the others unwittingly.

Instead of stealing the script, Jiro tries something completely different. He goes to Okada and asks him for the script. This makes more sense to Jiro, and seems like a more sensible solution to the reader as well. However, this is clearly not how things are done at the theater. Once again, Jiro misunderstands how things work at the Hanaza. Here, everyone is supposed to be ambitious, strict, and a little ruthless. No one likes to be seen as helping others because at the time, being self-sufficient was necessary for success and to become a great master. Okada tells Jiro that he knows Kinshi steals scripts. Not only does he know this, but it seems to be expected that this will happen. It seems like it is easier for the elders at the theater to turn a blind eye to stealing than it is to actually help the boys by giving them a script. It is as if the whole theater is a play, not just the performances on stage. Every person knows their part and plays along accordingly. Jiro has not quite learned his part yet, and so still gets things wrong. He is very confused by this, but is slowly beginning to learn how to get by. Okada gives him an important lesson here. There is a strict way of doing things at the theater and Jiro needs to make sure he learns it or he will cause problems for himself.

Okada is another aspect of the theater that is not quite what it seems. Jiro thinks he is a pitiable blind man, but Okada seems very capable and happy. He is calm, in control and sure of himself. He has become a great master at his craft, and is very content with his skills and place in life. He is also a very kind man, and is always gentle with Jiro and happy to explain things to him. He jokes about getting into trouble with Yoshida, but it is clear that he is not frightened of the puppet master at all. He is also the person who people regularly come to for things. He accepted Jiro into the theater, and Jiro naturally thought to go to him for the script. He has an important position at the Hanaza, and is very well respected. Jiro's initial perception of him as a pitiable and helpless blind man was completely wrong. This shows that Jiro should be careful not to judge on appearances alone.

Jiro turns out to be a kind and loving son as well as a brave friend in this chapter. He is determined to help Kinshi and the others even if it means he is punished. He is determined to see his mother even though it means missing a fun celebration and good food with his friends. His mother has always been very harsh with him, and it is obvious he will not have as good a time with her. She will probably reproach him and make him upset. Despite this, Kinshi is a dutiful son and cannot bear to think of his mother alone and hungry. He loves her, and knows it is his duty to go be with her. In Japanese society at this time, it was seen as an essential duty for a son to respect and help his parents. Jiro never forgets this, and proves many times that he is a good son. The reader can see this even though Isako cannot. This provides a lot of sympathy for Jiro, who is doing his best for his parents but is constantly put down by his mother.



There are more clues in this chapter about Yoshida's involvement with Saburo's gang. First, Jiro realizes how much food the theater always seems to have, even though the rest of the city is starving. He thinks this is odd, and wonders how they always manage to have plenty. Teiji tells him it is because they make so much money off the rich merchants who come to see the plays, but Jiro does not think they could make enough to afford so much food when food is so scarce and expensive. Later, Isako makes a comment about how the only food to be found in the city is with the merchants and moneylenders. Since Saburo regularly robs the merchants and moneylenders, then the only other people who have food are Saburo and his gang. Could the food at the theater come from Saburo? When Jiro is returning home at night, he is attacked by a ronin and saved by Yoshida. However, Yoshida is supposed to be at home sick. What is he doing out on the streets and why is he pretending to be ill? Isako told Jiro that she had gone out that morning to get food that was being distributed, supposedly by Saburo's men. Perhaps Yoshida pretended to be sick so that he could go out and hand out food to the poor. This seems to be a little more evidence to suggest that Yoshida is actually part of Saburo's gang. Jiro has not quite put all this together yet, but he is certainly very suspicious now.



Chapter 7, 'Okada's New Play'

Chapter 7, 'Okada's New Play' Summary

Yoshida posts up a new list of the boys' roles in the play. He has changed their duties and now Jiro is the foot manipulator for one of the female puppets. It is a big responsibility and Jiro is worried that he is not ready. Wada is jealous, but Kinshi congratulates Jiro and says it is a big chance. Jiro practices constantly and eventually manages to get the steps of the dance right.

The scene in the play involves a courtesan called Fusamu and a bandit called Joman who she has fallen in love with. Fusamu hides Joman in her house while the authorities search it. Joman disguises himself as Fusamu's old mother. A guard is posted on the house, and that night Fusamu starts shrieking, pretending that her mother has died. She goes into a mad dance of grief, and while the guards are distracted, the bandit's followers pretend to be kinsmen and take out the 'body.'

Jiro performs well, and the play is a huge success. None of the merchants or samurai seem to care about the resemblance between the bandit character Joman and the real Saburo. The authorities are less pleased, and there are always plenty of spies at each performance. Yoshida is pleased, however, as he is making plenty of money and even the spies have to pay at the door.

Chapter 7, 'Okada's New Play' Analysis

Jiro has come a long way since the beginning of the story. He started off as a nervous, clumsy boy who worried that he was not good at anything. He left his home because he believed that he was more trouble to his parents than he was worth. Now he is a skilled, confident and happy boy. He is not at all clumsy, and manages to manipulate the feet of a female puppet in a very complicated dance. He gains praise and applause, and is proud of what he has achieved. He is successful, and is really fitting in well. His parents would be amazed and proud if they could see him. Jiro is happy because he feels like he really belongs here, and that he is finally beginning to prove himself. He is also starting to really enjoy the applause and respect he receives. He likes the attention, and is beginning to get quite ambitious. He realizes that the theater is actually the life for him, and that he really enjoys what he is doing.

Jiro has now come further even than Kinshi, who tells Jiro that he cannot help him anymore as he has passed him in skill. This makes Kinshi very sad, as Jiro notes when he sees the pain in his friend's eyes. Kinshi knows that he does not have the skill and drive needed to succeed in the theater, but it still hurts to see others surpass him so easily. Jiro has not been at the Hanaza long, yet has already proved himself. Kinshi feels like he has let his father and his family name down. However, he loves Jiro and does not want to make him feel bad. He recognizes that this is a big achievement for



Jiro and compliments him on his performance. Although he is sad, he is not bitter or jealous. Kinshi is a very good person and a caring friend.

Okada's new play is finally finished and performed in this chapter. The play is about a bandit called Joman who bears a surprising resemblance to Saburo. This is a little odd, as the theater makes its money from the merchants, who all hate Saburo. Many of them have been embarrassed by him and made to look like fools. Why would Yoshida want to alienate the people who make up most of his audience? Jiro finds this confusing, but Kinshi tells him that Yoshida would perform anything if it were a great script. Yoshida has a great deal of respect for his profession, and truly loves the theater. Money is important to him, but so is the integrity of the performance. However, it does seem like there may be a little more to it than this. The reader has been given several clues that Yoshida is somehow connected to Saburo. Now he is performing a play that romanticizes a fictional villain who is very similar to Saburo. Perhaps Yoshida asked Okada to write this play so that he could make Saburo more popular, or so that he could poke more fun at the foolish merchants. Perhaps Okada knows Yoshida is part of Saburo's gang, or perhaps Okada is connected to the bandit somehow too. The subject matter of the play is very cheeky, but it does very well. The merchants laugh at and like the fictional bandit, perhaps not realizing that he is just like the man who robbed them. Even some samurai come to see the play and they enjoy the bandit's exploits too. The play seems to be succeeding in making a hero out of a bandit, while making plenty of money at the same time. Is this all part of Yoshida's plan?



Chapter 8, 'Command Performance'

Chapter 8, 'Command Performance' Summary

The months pass into spring and The Thief of the Tokaido is still successful. However, outside the theater the city is still starving. Some people have started wandering the streets at night, occasionally throwing stones at a wealthy man's house.

One night, someone bangs on the side door and Jiro and Kinshi go to see who it is. There is no-one there, but a message has been bolted to the door. The message is from Saburo, proclaiming that a special performance of The Thief of the Tokaido will be held at the theater for the poor. Entrance will be free for them, and Saburo himself will attend. Yoshida takes this cheeky message better than they thought he would, and tells them to post the notice up in the courtyard.

When the authorities see the poster, Yoshida is visited by the assistant magistrate. He is a high level samurai with a spread-winged heron crest. He tears down the notice and tells Yoshida that the performance will not be allowed. Yoshida tells the man that he is very noble to put the safety of the city over catching the bandit. Jiro realizes that Yoshida is trying to manipulate the assistant magistrate so that the performance will be allowed. The next day, the assistant magistrate returns to tell him that he is ordered to go ahead with the performance after all.

On the night of the performance, the boys are instructed to hang lamps everywhere. The theater fills up with the poor and Jiro sees his own mother in the audience. He tells Kinshi to ask her to leave, as he worries that something bad will happen tonight. Kinshi thinks he is being silly, and instead tells Isako to watch out for Jiro's excellent performance of Fusamu's feet.

The performance goes well and the crowd responds wonderfully. Jiro is actually pleased that his mother is there to see his success. The play ends with Joman's betrayal by his own wife. The audience gets into the play and shouts for the puppet to realize that his wife is the traitor. Joman is sent to prison and his wife, regretting her actions, kills herself. The next day guards arrive to execute Joman, but he tells them that once his head has been cut off, it will have the power to bring terrible curses on even the slightest wrongdoer. Even those who simply think about lying or cheating will suffer. The guards are too afraid to kill him, so they wrap up Joman's wife's head instead and take it back to the daimyo. They repeat Joman's story to dissuade him from taking a look at the head. The audience cheers to see Joman escape and the play is over.

Suddenly, all the lights in the theater go out. A voice tells them not to betray Saburo, and to remember the despair they felt when they saw that Joman was going to be betrayed. By the time the lamps are lit again, Saburo has gone. The assistant magistrate and all the police in the theater are tied up and have been stripped down to their loincloths. The assistant magistrate tells Yoshida that he is never to perform this play again.



Chapter 8, 'Command Performance' Analysis

More clues emerge in this chapter that Yoshida is connected to Saburo. First, a mysterious message is pinned to the theater door, telling them to give a special performance for the poor, which Saburo himself will attend. The message seems to assume that Yoshida will obey. The others are afraid that Yoshida will be extremely angry about this, but he actually reacts very calmly and tells them to pin the notice in the courtyard. He seems to be going along with the command. This is odd behavior from a man who would normally not take insults lightly. Later, when the assistant magistrate tells him the performance is forbidden, he manipulates the situation. He puts on a performance of his own, pretending to be very subservient to the assistant magistrate and afraid for his own theater. He pretends to admire the magistrate for putting the city's safety above catching Saburo. Of course, this will persuade the authorities to do exactly the opposite, as they care about catching the bandit above everything else. If this performance will give them a chance to do so, then they must allow it. Yoshida has cleverly maneuvered them into giving him permission to perform. This is very strange behavior, as he actually seems to be helping Saburo and putting his own establishment in danger to do so. From seeing Yoshida's fake behavior, Jiro realizes that Yoshida is cleverly putting on a performance. He begins to be very suspicious of Yoshida, wondering what his motivations are in all this. Jiro shows how sharp and observant he can be, as no-one else at the theater seems to have noticed Yoshida's odd behavior, or the convenient way in which things are working out so well for Saburo. Now he knows that there is something mysterious going on.

The message of the play *The Thief of the Tokaido* seems to fit current events very conveniently. It convinces the poor not to give Saburo up if they get the chance. It achieves this by telling them the story of a fictional bandit called Joman, who is just like Saburo. They come to love Joman through his exploits in the play, and are appalled when he is betrayed. They are overjoyed when he gets away at the end. Just in case they cannot make the link for themselves, Saburo reminds them at the end of the play that betraying him would be like betraying Joman. They felt despair at his betrayal, and so must feel similar emotions at the idea of Saburo being betrayed. This message comes at a time when there is a huge bounty on Saburo's head, and the poor are particularly desperate. The night rovers prove that people are really suffering and angry, and are starting to become restless and violent. If someone were to find out who Saburo is now, it is likely that they would betray him. Even Jiro's mother had explained this to him earlier, telling him that Saburo's life would mean nothing to a hungry person. This play changes that view by showing the poor that a bandit's life can mean a lot to them. Saburo is their friend and their hero, and they should never betray him. This message so perfectly suits Saburo's needs that it seems like the play was written for him. This only increases the suspicion that the reader must have that Yoshida is deeply linked to Saburo.

The play also offers comfort and entertainment in a hard time. This is something that is not normally available to the poor, as only the richer members of the city can afford to attend the theater. The poor show how much they enjoy the distraction by being



extremely enthusiastic about every element of the play. They get into it much more than the merchants ever did, and make the performers feel very special. This is exactly what is needed at this time, as the poor have become restless and desperate. This might help to quiet them down before they hurt others or themselves. By bringing something that is normally closed off to them to the poor of the city, Saburo is providing comfort and hope.

Jiro greatly enjoys the admiration and applause he receives during the performance. He realizes that he loves what he does, and he enjoys being able to be proud of himself for once. He feels like he has actually accomplished something, and he can finally show his mother that he is not useless. Despite this, he would rather his mother leave, because he fears for her life. The thing he wants most in the world is for his mother to appreciate and be proud of him, but he will sacrifice this for her safety. Jiro often feels guilty about his role in his parents' lives, but he is actually a very loving and loyal son. However, when the play goes well, he is secretly glad that his mother is there to see it. Now she can finally share in his pride and his achievement. This makes him very happy, and it looks like Jiro is beginning to get everything he ever wanted.



Chapter 9, 'Night Rovers'

Chapter 9, 'Night Rovers' Summary

Yoshida reacts angrily to his play being shut down. He temporarily shuts the theater and storms around moodily, yelling at everyone in sight. After a while he decides on a new play, *The Battle of Dannoura*, which is the play that was performed when Jiro first arrived at the theater.

A fishmonger arrives and tells them about Saburo's latest theft. Using the clothes and weapons they stole from the police at the performance, his gang disguised themselves as police and arrested a merchant, claiming they believed he had a connection to Saburo. They put him in a jail cell, then robbed his house. Even the police at the jail had been fooled by the disguises, and now the wealthy are saying they will never be able to trust the police again.

The posting for the play lists Kinshi as foot operator for Akoya, a difficult part. Kinshi is worried, but Jiro assures him he will do fine and they sneak into the storehouse to get a puppet to practice with. Jiro wonders what is upstairs in the storehouse, but Kinshi tells him they are forbidden to go up there.

That night they are sewing costumes while Kinshi practices. Jiro is irritable because he is jealous of Kinshi, but Teiji misreads this as concern for Kinshi. Jiro feels guilty. Just then, they hear stones rattling against the gate. Wada tells Jiro to go see what the night rovers want, and Teiji goes with him. The night rovers are shouting for Yoshida and begin trying to knock the door down. Jiro waits until Yoshida and Kinshi have finished rehearsing the scene, then tells Yoshida about the people at the gate. The night rovers shout that they want food, but Yoshida tells them to ignore them. He instructs the boys to get mallets and stay up, ready to defend the Hanaza if any of the night rovers break in. Kinshi argues with his father, telling him he should take pity on the hungry people, but Yoshida shouts back at him, calling him a fool.

Jiro and Teiji wait up all night, but the rovers do not get in. As they disperse in the morning, Jiro hears his mother shout out a curse and realizes with horror that she was one of the night rovers.

Chapter 9, 'Night Rovers' Analysis

Jiro is beginning to realize how the whole Hanaza is actually a performance, not just what happens on stage. Every person there has their place and understands what their role is. People are expected to remember this and to 'play along.' Even when something does not seem the most sensible or easiest way to do things, Jiro must remember that the way of the theater is important. He compares this to knowing his lines in the play. He realizes that by insisting on stealing the script, he was stealing Kinshi's role and lines, and so usurping his place. He thought he was helping Kinshi, but he actually just



offended him. Later, when he becomes too curious about what is upstairs in the storehouse, he realizes that he is 'forgetting his lines' again. In other words, as the youngest apprentice he is not supposed to be curious or to overstep himself. He has to be more careful about how he acts and what he says.

Yoshida also seems to be performing even when he is not on the stage. Jiro thinks that his anger and moody behavior is actually just pretence, and that he secretly achieved exactly what he wanted with the play. Now he has to pretend to be angry that his play was cancelled so that no-one will suspect him of involvement with Saburo's gang. Jiro can see that Yoshida is putting on a show, just as he put on a performance for the assistant magistrate earlier. Just as he is on stage, Yoshida seems to be a master puppeteer in real life, putting on a performance and manipulating others into doing what he wants.

Jiro's ambition is starting to make him jealous of Kinshi. Kinshi has been given the opportunity to manipulate the feet of Akoya, a difficult role. Jiro wishes that the opportunity could be his, and secretly hopes that Kinshi will fail. He is immediately ashamed of these feelings, and tells himself that he hopes Kinshi will succeed and be praised. He wants to be completely loyal to Kinshi as he loves him dearly, but at the same time he is anxious to advance. His guilt causes him to be irritable. Wada picks up on Jiro's feelings because he is ambitious too and recognizes it in Jiro. He teases Jiro about liking applause and admiration. This is a little too close to home for Jiro, so he snaps back at Wada. Teiji is less perceptive, assuming that Jiro is irritable because of worrying about Kinshi. Teiji's honesty and loyalty only make Jiro feel more guilty.

Jiro's confused emotions are made worse by the night rovers' attack that night. He is forced to sit up all night with a mallet, instructed to defend the Hanaza if the night rovers should break in. He becomes even more cross through lack of sleep, and he is very frightened about what might happen if the angry mob gets inside. He is annoyed with Kinshi because Kinshi wanted to show compassion to the rovers. This strikes Jiro as too soft-hearted for criminals who mean violence to them. Kinshi, however, realizes that the people are driven to this because they are so hungry, and that it is wrong for them to have so much food inside the theater and refuse to share it. Deep down, Jiro knows that Kinshi is being more compassionate and honorable than him, and this only makes his guilt worse. This increases his feelings of resentment towards Kinshi. When the night rovers leave, Jiro hears his own mother's voice and realizes that she was one of them. He immediately feels sick. He might have hurt his own mother if she had broken in. Kinshi showed sympathy towards the starving people, but Jiro only felt hatred for them. Now he finds out that he felt hatred towards his own mother, and had no sympathy for her hunger. She must be very desperate and hungry to join the mob, and Jiro has plenty of food. Again, Jiro's guilt deepens. Jiro's mother's presence among the mob also suggests that she did not care that her own son was inside. She knows Jiro lives here, but she was still willing to attack the building. In fact, Jiro is the reason that she knows the theater has food. She may have even told the others this. Has Isako turned against her own son? Is she suffering that badly? This must make Jiro feel very hurt and alone. By the end of the chapter, poor Jiro is wrestling with feelings of guilt, resentment, and abandonment.



Chapter 10, 'Anxieties'

Chapter 10, 'Anxieties' Summary

Kinshi talks to Jiro the next morning about how it is wrong for them to have so much food while the poor of the city are starving. That night, Jiro is woken by Kinshi moving about, but Kinshi tells him to go back to sleep. In the morning, Kinshi is exhausted and has clearly been up all night. Jiro worries about how to help his mother, and how to find out what Kinshi is up to.

Kinshi gets out of chores by saying he needs to practice, but has a nap instead. The other boys cover for him, then wake him and get him on stage for the performance. Jiro is shocked to see that the audience is so small, but Mochida explains that the night rovers attacked a rice market, and now all the merchants are staying home to protect their wares.

After the performance, Jiro begs Kinshi not to go out again tonight, but Kinshi says he needs to help the night rovers. Jiro tells him his mother is one of them, and Kinshi promises to try to help her. He will not let Jiro come with him, though, saying he needs him to cover for him at the theater.

Chapter 10, 'Anxieties' Analysis

Jiro thinks about the night rovers and whether they should have helped them. Kinshi argues that it is wrong for the theater to have so much food while people are starving. It is the moral and honorable thing to do to give some of their food to those who so desperately need it. Kinshi is very soft-hearted and compassionate, and cannot stand to think of others suffering. This is what has made him such a good friend to the boys at the theater, and to Jiro in particular, but it is also what makes Jiro despair of him a little now. Jiro agrees with Yoshida's view instead, that it is not sensible or safe to try to help the night rovers. They have plenty of food, but not enough for everyone in the city. If they had given out some last night, then word would have got around and more people would come. Even the people who were given food would soon come back for more. They cannot just hand out some and tell everyone else no, as it is likely that the people will then become violent. It is therefore foolish and dangerous for them to try to help. This is what Yoshida told Kinshi, but Kinshi cannot bear to just do nothing. Even if it is not sensible or safe, he is determined to at least try. This is a difficult argument, and there is not necessarily a right or wrong answer. Yoshida is correct in saying that it is dangerous and foolish for them to try to help, and that their help would not go far anyway. On the other hand, his view seems very detached and cold, and Kinshi is correct in feeling compassion for others.

Jiro does not think of the night rovers in the same way as Kinshi. To Kinshi they are vulnerable and desperate people in need, but to Jiro they are violent and dangerous.



Jiro thinks that they have become little more than animals. He feels sorry for the fact that they are suffering, but thinks that they have gone too far to deserve pity or help. They have turned to violence, and are frightening and threatening other people. They have gone too far. Jiro is more practical than Kinshi, and finds it harder to be compassionate and sympathetic no matter what the circumstances. However, when the situation becomes personal, Jiro changes his mind. He thinks of the night rovers, then sees his mother's face. He immediately takes back his earlier thoughts, telling himself that he didn't include his mother in them. He does not think of her as an animal, but as a suffering person who needs help. He then realizes that if he thinks of his mother this way, he should think of the others that way too. He begins to understand how the night rovers might feel, and he is very worried about his mother. When Kinshi reproaches him for not letting his mother inside the other night, Jiro realizes that he has failed her. He feels guilty for not helping, and is ashamed for letting his mother down. This is a very difficult argument for Kinshi. His brain understands and shares Yoshida's sensible point of view, but his heart sympathizes with his mother.

Jiro worries a lot about the people he loves. Now he seems to be carrying around more worry than ever. He worries about his sick father, and about his starving mother. She must be suffering greatly to join the night rovers, and she could be hurt while she is with them. Jiro also worries about Kinshi, because he knows that he is sneaking out to help the night rovers. Jiro knows that Kinshi is putting himself in danger, and he worries what will happen if he is caught, either by the city authorities or by Yoshida. Jiro also carries around a lot of guilt. He feels guilt about his father and mother, who he feels that he has abandoned and let down. He feels guilt about Kinshi, who he is secretly jealous of. He thinks about appealing for help for his mother, but does not know who would help him. Okada might, but Jiro still owes him two favors, and Yoshida would not care about Jiro's mother. Jiro tries to stop Kinshi from going out, but Kinshi refuses to abandon the city's poor. Jiro does the next best thing and tells Kinshi about his mother. Kinshi promises to try to find her and help her. Jiro wants to go with Kinshi, but Kinshi does not quite trust him and persuades him to stay at the theater and cover for him instead. Jiro is stuck feeling guilty, worried and scared, without being able to do anything about it. He feels helpless, and the whole situation seems completely out of his hands. The situation that Jiro find himself in now is a long way from the hopeful atmosphere just a few chapters earlier.



Chapter 11, 'The Proof in the Storehouse'

Chapter 11, 'The Proof in the Storehouse' Summary

Jiro wakes up the next morning and Kinshi is still gone. Mochida asks where he is and Jiro says that he went out for an early walk. Jiro worries about Kinshi's safety as he starts the fires. Wada comes to get him to tell him that Yoshida wants to talk to him.

Yoshida asks Jiro where Kinshi is but Jiro feigns ignorance. Yoshida is not pleased, but tells Jiro to prepare to work Akoya's feet in the performance. He gives Jiro a script to practice with, and Jiro runs off to the storehouse to get a puppet. He cannot face the looks the other boys will give him for taking Kinshi's role, so he decides to practice in the storehouse instead. He goes upstairs, where he knows no-one will look for him. As he is reaching up to tie the puppet to the rafters, he finds a hidden samurai sword. He knows there are no samurai in the theater, and wonders how it got there. He sees a crest on it, showing a heron with spread wings. He remembers that this is the crest of the assistant magistrate who Saburo robbed at the performance of *The Thief of the Tokaido*. Jiro puts the clues together and comes to the conclusion that Saburo is actually Yoshida. He thinks about what this means, and realizes that he cannot turn Yoshida in to collect the reward, as he would be betraying the whole Hanaza and Kinshi too.

Jiro goes to practice with Yoshida and then has breakfast with the boys. The boys do not talk to him, and treat him like a traitor. Then Jiro hears a thump from the closet and rushes to open it. Inside is Kinshi, trying to sleep. Jiro is so relieved that he is alright that he begins to laugh uncontrollably. The other boys laugh too, and the tension is eased. Kinshi has not been told that Jiro is now working Akoya's feet, so he thinks he needs to rest before the performance. Jiro discusses with them how they can give Kinshi his role in the play back. They decide to delay Kinshi until right before the performance, then swap him with Jiro. Yoshida will not stop the play to swap them back. This plan works well and Kinshi gets to perform. Yoshida punishes them both, but Jiro is happy to be accepted by the boys again.

Kinshi and Jiro go to the bathhouse. Kinshi tells Jiro that he found his mother and gave her money. Jiro begs Kinshi not to go out again that night, but Kinshi is determined. Jiro asks if he will wait to go out if Jiro can arrange a meeting with Saburo himself. Kinshi agrees to give him two days to arrange the meeting, but after that he will go back out onto the streets again.

Chapter 11, 'The Proof in the Storehouse' Analysis

Jiro feels like a traitor for taking Kinshi's role in the play, despite the fact that he did not ask for it. It is what he really wants, and a great opportunity for him. He is very



ambitious, and cannot pretend that the role is not a huge honor. It does not give him any pleasure, however, as the role should be Kinshi's. Not only is he taking something good from his friend, Kinshi is actually out in the city trying to help Jiro's mother. Jiro feels incredibly guilty about this. The other boys also obviously think of Jiro as a traitor. They see him as overstepping himself and taking on 'new lines' in the continual performance that is the life at the Hanaza. The boys all love Kinshi, and none of them like Jiro getting above his position. However, when Jiro shows that he is not simply being ambitious, but actually cares about Kinshi, the others relent. He shows that he is determined to help Kinshi get his role back, even if it means he will get punished. This proves that his ambition is not higher than his sense of honor and friendship. After this, the boys can trust and accept him completely.

There is a theme of treachery and betrayal running throughout this story, which is particularly strong in this chapter. The reader has already been introduced to two different bandits, the real Saburo and the fictional Joman, who both have rewards on their heads. Joman is betrayed by his own wife, a fact that the audience finds shocking and upsetting. Saburo used this fictional story to persuade the city's poor not to give him up if they ever get the chance. Saburo, like Joman, incites absolute loyalty in his gang. Joman's son even died rather than give up his father. Loyalty and the dishonor of betrayal are important themes. Jiro feels like he has been forced into the role of traitor. Joman, Saburo and Kinshi are three separate stories of loyalty and betrayal running through this book. They are all leaders of groups, and they all inspire great friendship and loyalty. The boys at the Hanaza would never betray Kinshi and are as loyal to him as the bandits are to their leaders. Jiro refuses to betray Kinshi, choosing to sacrifice his own ambition and to accept punishment in order to help him. Jiro puts himself back into the position of Kinshi's follower, and is happy to stay there.

When Jiro puts the clues together and realizes that Saburo is actually Yoshida, he is forced to think about loyalty and treachery again. He could give up Yoshida to the authorities and collect the reward. This would allow him to feed his mother and father and to look after them for a long time. Alternatively, Jiro could use the information to blackmail Yoshida into giving him better roles in the performances, and into promoting him to a paid member of the theater. Jiro could get everything he ever wanted. However, he decides not to use the information for his own advantage. By betraying Yoshida, he would be betraying the Hanaza and everyone there. He has come to think of the theater as home, and the people there as his extended family. He also realizes that betraying Yoshida would be to betray Kinshi, as Kinshi could be executed along with his father. This is something that Jiro will never be willing to do. His loyalty to Kinshi is absolute. In the end, it is his concern and love for Kinshi that convince him to use the information he has about Yoshida after all. He will persuade Yoshida to meet with Kinshi as Saburo, so that Kinshi will stop going out at night to help the night rovers. Jiro is willing to risk the anger of Yoshida and Saburo's gang in order to help his best friend. Saburo and Joman could not have asked for better loyalty from their own followers.

Jiro's unwillingness to use the information for his own personal gain shows what a strong and honorable man he is growing into. He worries constantly about the morality of his actions, and feels shame and guilt when he feels that he has not done everything



he could have to help a friend or family member. He is not as compassionate as Kinshi, but he does care for others and he is extremely brave. He is not selfish and although he has a lot of ambition, he does not allow this to turn him into a bad person.



Chapter 12, 'A Matter of Life and Death'

Chapter 12, 'A Matter of Life and Death' Summary

Jiro thinks about how he can arrange a meeting with Saburo for Kinshi. He considers going straight to Yoshida, but knows he will be too angry to listen. He decides he needs an intermediary, someone who loves Kinshi but is also Yoshida's equal. He realizes Okada might be able to help him. He goes to Tozo and tells him that he needs to speak to Okada and that it is a matter of life and death. Jiro anxiously goes back to his duties, and a little later Tozo comes to take him to Okada.

Jiro tells Okada about Kinshi's night activity, then explains what he has found out about Yoshida. He asks Okada to talk to Yoshida for him and arrange a meeting with Saburo for Kinshi. Okada asks him if he is not tempted to turn Yoshida in, and Jiro says he could never hurt Kinshi. Okada says he will help, but asks Jiro to retrieve the samurai sword for him so that he has proof to present to Yoshida. Jiro agrees and says he will go during the last acts of the day's performance.

Jiro happily goes back to the other boys. Okada calls for Tozo and tells him that he will not be performing that night. He tells him to send for Hanji and to inform him that there is a problem with his son.

Chapter 12, 'A Matter of Life and Death' Analysis

Jiro is extremely anxious about Kinshi and the difficult task he has ahead of him. Somehow he has to convince Yoshida to meet with his son as Saburo, and discuss the fate of the city's poor with him. This is a daunting task, as Yoshida is very quick to anger and probably will not listen to Jiro. He may also see Jiro as a threat and silence him to keep his secret safe. Jiro could be putting himself into grave danger, but he is willing to do this for Kinshi. However, he does not simply charge into it and risk his life without considering his options first. He thinks about the most sensible way to proceed, and tries to take the way that has the least risk for him and the most chance of success. He realizes that there is no point being brave but reckless, and throwing his life away if it will not even have a good chance of helping Kinshi. Instead, he decides he needs an intermediary to appeal to Yoshida on his behalf. He spends time thinking about the best person for the job, and shows that he can be clever, perceptive and practical as well as brave. He chooses Okada because he is a kind man who loves Kinshi, as well as being Yoshida's equal. Okada has a better chance of persuading Yoshida than anyone else, and he is also more likely to be able to protect Jiro from Yoshida's anger.

Okada tells Jiro that he will help, and pretends to be the same helpful and friendly old man that he has always seemed. However, it seems that Okada is also playing a role, just like everyone else at the theater. He is putting on an act of the harmless, vulnerable old blind man, but this is not necessarily who he really is. When Jiro leaves, Okada



drops the act. He tells Tozo that he will not be performing that day. He knows that Jiro will be retrieving the sword during the last acts of the performance, so why is he now freeing his schedule during the play? Does he mean to go help Jiro, or is he going to stop him? Perhaps Okada is working for Yoshida and already knew that he is Saburo. He may mean to silence Jiro by capturing him or killing him. However, he does not send a message to Yoshida to tell him he has been found out, which is odd if he is part of Yoshida's gang. Perhaps instead, Okada is a rival to Yoshida, or wants to collect the reward on Saburo's head for himself. It is also possible that Jiro is mistaken about Saburo's identity. Perhaps Yoshida is not Saburo after all. Okada also mentions Hanji, Jiro's father, telling Tozo to send for him. How can he send for Hanji when he is supposedly sick in the country? There is something very strange going on here. Is Hanji working with Okada? Will he turn against his own son? Perhaps Hanji also has a connection to Saburo. Clearly there is more to Okada and Hanji than Jiro or the reader had realized. Okada is not the innocent and friendly old man that he seemed to be and could even be a threat. Jiro is in more danger than he realizes. This ends the chapter with suspense and tension.



Chapters 13 and 14, 'The Master Puppeteer' and 'The Smashings'

Chapters 13 and 14, 'The Master Puppeteer' and 'The Smashings' Summary

Jiro sneaks back into the storehouse to retrieve the samurai sword but finds that it has gone. As he is trying to decide what to do next, he sees a person coming up the stairs wearing a puppeteer's hood and carrying a puppet. The man manipulates the puppet so that it looks like it is searching for someone. The puppet seems to spot Jiro and turns towards him. The puppeteer speaks to Jiro and tells him that curiosity can be very dangerous. He tells Jiro a story about a girl who was being courted by a handsome, high-born suitor. She was not content, and wanted to know exactly who he was and where his ancestral home was. She stuck a needle into his clothes and followed the thread. It led to a cave where she found a huge serpent with a needle stuck in its throat.

Jiro realizes that the puppeteer is Okada. Okada tells him that he is Saburo, and that Yoshida, along with others at the theater and some men on the outside, are his men. Jiro is afraid of what Okada will do, so he runs past him and blocks him in the storehouse using the boxes. He runs away, but is grabbed by Mochida and told that he is needed to take Kinshi's place in the performance, as Kinshi is missing. The next thing Jiro knows he is on stage performing Akoya's feet in the Torture by Koto scene.

As soon as the scene has finished, Jiro runs out of the theater. Tozo grabs him and asks where Okada is, and Jiro tells him he is locked in the storehouse. Jiro then races off into the city to try to find Kinshi. There is a lot of trouble in the city. People are burning buildings and looting, and are even attacking members of the fire brigade. Jiro wanders around all night looking and calling for Kinshi but does not find him. In the morning, the rioters begin to go home and the streets empty. Jiro continues to look for Kinshi. A fireman walks towards him, and Jiro is afraid he will think he is a troublemaker, so he runs away. The fireman follows him and reveals that he is Hanji in disguise. He has been a member of Saburo's gang this whole time. He was never sick, but abandoned Jiro and his mother to help Saburo.

Hanji tells Jiro that Okada sent him out to look for him. He says Okada thinks Jiro is a spirited and brave boy. Hanji wants to help look for Isako and Kinshi, but Jiro says no. He promises he will return to the theater and submit to Okada as soon as he has found them and his father believes him. He gives Jiro the fireman's coat so that he will have protection against the authorities while he is searching.



Chapters 13 and 14, 'The Master Puppeteer' and 'The Smashings' Analysis

Suddenly everything seems to go wrong for Jiro. First, the sword is missing, and as Jiro wonders what he will do next, someone comes up the stairs. It is a man dressed as a puppet manipulator, with a hood covering his face. He is holding a puppet, moving it to look as though it is searching for Jiro. This is very sinister and creepy, reflecting how scared Jiro is and how terrifying his situation is. He is in real danger. Suddenly, the puppets have taken on a very menacing air and the theater no longer feels safe.

Okada reveals that he is actually Saburo and that he has been controlling things all along. He refers to himself as the master puppeteer, rather than Yoshida. In other words, he is the one who is really in control, even though Yoshida owns and runs the theater. Okada is the one who pulls the strings and manipulates what everyone is doing. The people at the theater, as well as the authorities and everyone else in the city, are all under his control. They are like his puppets, and he can make them do whatever he likes because he is a master of manipulation. It was he who wrote the play *The Thief of the Tokaido* and then cleverly demanded that it be performed for the poor so they could sympathize with the bandit. Yoshida played his part well, and convinced the magistrate to allow it, although the magistrate never guessed that he was being played. Puppets are important throughout the story, but here their symbolism is explained. They represent how people can be controlled by the master puppeteer, Okada. Everyone at the Hanaza is playing a role, and the whole theater seems like a performance. Now the reader sees that this theme stretches out to include the whole city. In fact, all of life is like a play, and everyone in it is a puppet being moved by someone else. This is why Okada appears now as a puppet manipulator, covered by a hood and holding a puppet. This represents how he is the master puppeteer, the man who remains hidden but is actually in control. Jiro never guessed that Okada was Saburo, thinking Yoshida played that role instead. He made the mistake of concentrating on the puppet and ignoring the shadowy figure behind it, controlling its every movement. Just like in the actual theater performances, the puppets themselves hold everyone's attention while the puppeteer remains forgotten and out of sight. This is a very clever analogy, emphasized by Okada's appearance here, and the use of the puppet as his 'eyes,' as if it is the puppet and not Okada who is searching for Jiro. Okada also uses the creepy puppet here to frighten Jiro, to remind him that it is Okada who is in control and that he will have to be careful.

Okada tells Jiro a story about a curious girl who is being courted by a handsome, high-born man. She wants to know more about him, to find out who he is exactly and what his ancestral home looks like. She sticks a needle into his clothes, with a long thread attached. When he leaves, she follows the thread to a cave. There she sees a huge serpent writhing in agony with her needle in its throat. Okada uses this story to demonstrate that curiosity can be very dangerous. The story also relates to Okada and Jiro's current situation. Like the girl in the story, Jiro had thought Okada was someone kind, harmless and benevolent, and as long as Jiro did not know the truth about him, he was exactly what he appeared to be. Jiro could be happy and have a good life at the



theater, never knowing any differently. However, now that Jiro knows the truth, Okada has transformed into something very dangerous, like the serpent in the story. In the story, the girl's curiosity leads to her suitor's death. Likewise, now that Jiro knows Okada's secret, it could easily lead to Okada's death. Okada is afraid that Jiro will use the information against him to claim the reward. He knows that Jiro would not betray Yoshida because that would mean betraying Kinshi, but Jiro may not feel the same loyalty towards Okada. This is why Okada tells Jiro that he is the one holding the needle to the serpent's flesh. Jiro is the one who holds the power over Okada, as he knows his secret. Depending on what he decides to do with this information, he could metaphorically plunge the needle into the serpent, or he could choose to pull it out. He can choose to betray or not betray Okada. By telling Jiro this story, Okada is asking Jiro what he means to do. He is testing him, to see whether he means to betray him or not. The story about the serpent also reminds Jiro that although he holds the needle, Okada is still a fierce and dangerous creature who could hurt Jiro if he makes the wrong decision.

After finding out that Okada is actually Saburo and locking him in the storehouse, Jiro is immediately pushed out on to stage to perform. He is expected to manipulate the feet of the courtesan Akoya in the scene Torture by Koto. This is a scene that was mentioned earlier in the story. In it, Akoya must convince the enemy soldier that she is not hiding her lover, who escaped from the battle, in her house. He tests her by making her play three instruments, including the koto. He reasons that if she is lying, she will not be able to play well. She plays perfectly, despite the fact that she knows exactly where her lover is. This convinces the soldier that she is not lying, as she could not produce such pure and beautiful music if she were. It is very significant that Jiro has to play this scene now. Like Akoya, he has to put on a perfect performance despite the fact that he knows exactly where Saburo the bandit is, and that he has locked him in. He is hiding a huge secret, and fearing for his life. He is also worrying about Kinshi, who he has just been told is missing. Despite this, he performs perfectly, and knows that this is the performance of his life. Like Akoya, the performance is torture for him, as he desperately wishes to be anywhere else. It is also extremely ironic that Jiro would finally get to play this role, the part he has always wanted, at this point in time. He wanted this role because it is difficult, and so an honor to be given it. It is a role he could prove himself with and so hope to advance at the theater. However, right now, Jiro knows that he is in danger if he stays at the theater, and that he will have to run for his life. He will most likely never be able to come back.

Jiro also finds out in these chapters that his own father, Hanji, is one of Saburo's men. Everything Jiro thought he knew has turned out to be a lie. His father is not sick and is not in the country. Instead, he abandoned his son and wife to work for Saburo. It is not Jiro who abandoned his father, but the other way around. Jiro has been carrying around a lot of misplaced guilt about his parents, and has needlessly worried about his father's sickness. Hanji has put him through a lot, and has chosen Saburo over his own family. This is all very upsetting and shocking for Jiro, who begins to cry. He refuses his father's help, recognizing the fact that his father has let him down and lied to him. He realizes that he barely even knows the man who he once loved and looked up to. All that he has left now are his mother and Kinshi - the two people who have not betrayed him. He is



determined to help them and not to let them down as his father has let him down. When he has found and helped them he will be satisfied and will willingly go back to Okada. In the end, Jiro is brave and loving, and only cares about his mother and his friend being safe. He proves himself to be more loyal and loving than his father.



Chapters 15 and 16, 'Fireman of Namba Cho Brigade' and 'Debts of Honor'

Chapters 15 and 16, 'Fireman of Namba Cho Brigade' and 'Debts of Honor' Summary

As Jiro is wandering through the streets, he is stopped by a crowd of people and a ronin. Jiro is dressed as a fireman and the people are attacking any signs of authority at the moment. The ronin attacks him and tries to kill him, but Jiro manages to knock him back. He yells to the crowd that the silk is worth a fortune, and they surge forward to take it off the ronin. Jiro runs away.

He takes off the fireman's coat and carries on without it. Then he realizes that Kinshi and his mother might have been arrested the previous night. He goes to the constabulary gate and puts the fireman's coat back on. He is greeted respectfully and congratulated for the good work of his men the previous night. He asks the officer in charge about his relatives and is given permission to go into the courtyard to see if they are amongst the prisoners. His mother yells to him and he goes over to her. Kinshi is with her. As they are leaving, Jiro is called back and told that the assistant magistrate wants to see him. He tells his mother and Kinshi to go ahead to the theater.

The assistant magistrate is the same one who visited the theater and had his sword stolen by Saburo. Jiro is scared he will recognize him, but although the assistant magistrate thinks he looks familiar, he does not identify Jiro. He gives Jiro a message to take to his head fireman, and then sends him off. Jiro is heading towards the theater when one of the policemen catches him up and tells him he is going the wrong way. He says he will come with him to help protect him from the crowds. When they reach the fire station there is a huge mob outside, which begins to crowd around Jiro and the policeman. A hand grabs Jiro and his father whispers into his ear, reminding him of his promise to submit to Okada. He is released from the crowd, and runs away.

He catches up with Kinshi and his mother. One of Kinshi's hands is missing, and his arm is wrapped up in a stump. Isako tells Jiro that she saw her husband on the street one day, healthy and well fed. She had thought him sick in the country, but he lied. She went crazy after that and joined the night rovers. Last night she wanted to steal rice from a merchant's house, and Kinshi charged in to try to stop her. He did not see the policeman, who cut off his hand. He fainted, and Isako immediately burned the wound and bound it up, then demanded the policeman carry him to the station.

At the theater, Jiro takes control and makes sure Kinshi is looked after. He then goes to Yoshida, who has already heard about Kinshi and is crying. Jiro asks him if Okada means to kill him, and Yoshida asks if Jiro would ever betray them. Jiro explains that he would not for himself, but his mother is suffering. Yoshida promises that she can stay at



the theater for as long as Okada continues to be Saburo. Jiro tells him his loyalty will always be to Kinshi. He returns to his friend.

Okada visits Kinshi in the apprentice's room. He agrees to take Kinshi on as his apprentice on the east side of the theater, and Yoshida gives his permission. This means that Kinshi can train in music and reciting rather than puppet manipulation. Okada tells Yoshida that Jiro is in his debt and that he will exchange him for Kinshi. He means that he forgives and trusts Jiro and that Jiro can continue to train to be a puppeteer.

Chapters 15 and 16, 'Fireman of Namba Cho Brigade' and 'Debts of Honor' Analysis

Jiro has really grown up since the beginning of the book. Now he is bold and brave, as well as quick thinking in difficult or dangerous situations. Alone, he finds his mother and Kinshi, and manages to rescue them both. He is responsible and loyal in a way that his father is not, who has given up on them and failed them both. Jiro's father seems a little guilty for this, but not exactly sorry. Although he is being loyal to Saburo, he is letting his own family down. He should never have abandoned them in the first place. Jiro, unlike his father, refuses to ever abandon the people he loves. He puts himself in danger many times to save them. He takes charge at the theater to help Kinshi, and everyone listens to him, even Wada. He is a good leader, and inspires respect and friendship. He has grown up a lot from the nervous, clumsy and unsure boy he was at the beginning of the story.

Kinshi shows his true colors in these chapters too. He proves what an incredibly brave and caring person he is. He is an admirable young man who will do whatever it takes to help others, even those not directly related or linked to himself. He risks his life to help Kinshi's mother, showing what a good friend he is. He charges straight towards his goal, giving his life for others, but not always stopping to think if it is a sensible tactic. He is not as practical as Jiro, but his heart is always in the right place and he is very honorable. In fact, he comes very close to the samurai ideal. His grandfather's samurai blood seems to be thicker in him than it is in his father. He would not be happy in the life of the theater, and needs to be fighting for others and doing honorable deeds instead. Now that Okada has taken him under his wing, he might actually get to work for Saburo after all. He can help people as he desperately wanted to. Okada could not ask for a more loyal, brave and caring follower. Meanwhile, Jiro will be a puppeteer, and now that he has proved his skill to Yoshida he is likely to be promoted very soon. He will get to work in the theater, something that he has come to realize that he desperately wants. This is a happy ending for both boys.

All the way through the book, poor Isako has seemed like the bad parent. She constantly put Jiro down and nagged at him, and told him how useless he is. She cursed him for being born. Jiro has desperately wanted to prove himself to her, but has always been rejected. Now the reader sees that Isako was the good parent all along. It is Hanji who abandoned his family and ultimately rejected Jiro. Isako is the one who



was left betrayed and alone, and it is she who should be pitied. Now she sees that her son is a much better man than her husband, and she respects Jiro. Jiro has finally earned her pride. She shows that she loves him and appreciates him, talking to him with affection and respect and turning to him for help. She is grateful that he still cares, and that his friend Kinshi has helped her so much. She even apologizes to Jiro for her shameful behavior in joining the night rovers. Jiro reassures her, and is pleased to have his mother's goodwill and love. Isako fights for her son at the end, saying that he is her son and cannot be passed around as property. She has seen him take charge and be brave, and has seen the respect he inspires at the theater. She understands that he has always tried to help her, and that he is there for her in a way that her husband was not. At last their relationship can begin to heal and start afresh, and Jiro feels like he has a proper mother again. She has also been given permission to stay at the theater, meaning that she will not suffer or go hungry again. Jiro has achieved what he set out to do at the beginning of the book as he has managed to secure a future for his mother and make sure that she is looked after.



Characters

Jiro

Jiro is the main character of the story. The story is told from his point of view. Jiro is the son of Hanji, a puppet maker who sells his puppets to the Hanaza puppet theater. Jiro's mother is Isako, a grumpy woman who seems to resent that her son was even born. She constantly criticizes him, and all Jiro wants is to prove his worth to her and gain her love again. Hanji treats Jiro with more respect and tries to involve him in his trade. When Jiro makes mistakes he tries to encourage him rather than criticize him. Jiro loves both his parents and is very loyal to them. He is concerned with being a good son, and berates himself when he feels like he is letting them down. When it becomes clear that there is not enough food for the whole family to live on, Jiro apprentices himself to the puppet theater. He knows they will feed him and give him a place to sleep, meaning that his parents will have more. At the theater he will also have a chance to advance and become a paid worker. This will allow him to look after his parents in the future. He is a kind-hearted boy who is trying to do what is best for his family. He does not tell his mother and father that he is leaving, and goes behind their backs to do it. This way they cannot say no and they cannot take him back without dishonoring themselves. Jiro knows that he will hurt them by doing this, but he is doing what he thinks is for the best. He is trying to spare them pain and ensure that they are looked after in the future.

At the beginning of the story, Jiro is very unsure of himself. He is shy, often clumsy, and does not believe that he is worth much. He is afraid that he will fail at the theater because he will not be able to carry out his tasks with the skill and grace needed. However, he soon proves himself wrong, and begins to grow in confidence. As he practices at the theater, he comes to realize that he is actually very skilled at being a puppeteer, and that this is something he could enjoy doing as a profession. He becomes more hopeful about the future, and no longer thinks of himself as worthless. He is no longer clumsy, and finds that he can make friends and talk to others easily. Although performing on stage was terrifying for him at first, now he finds that he enjoys it, and he loves the applause and respect that it brings him. He starts to become very ambitious, wanting to take on more complicated roles to prove himself and advance in the theater. Jiro wrestles with feelings of guilt over this, as he longs to advance ahead of the other boys, and knows that his ambition is inappropriate considering he is still so new. He knows he should practice more humility, especially as his ambition causes him to be jealous and think bad things of Kinshi, his best friend. When Kinshi seems to be spiraling further into trouble, however, Jiro puts his friend's safety over his own desires and realizes that the people he loves are more important to him than advancing at the theater. By the end of the story, Jiro has become a very caring, loyal, confident and well respected boy. He is also very perceptive and clever at putting clues together, as he works out that Yoshida is putting on an act when no-one else does. He has grown up a lot since the beginning of the book.



Jiro is not as kind-hearted as Kinshi, and much more practical. He does not see the night rovers as victims, thinking that when they begin attacking others they have become little more than animals. He pities them because they are starving, but does not give them the sympathy that Kinshi does. He does not believe that they should help them, as he realizes that this could become very dangerous. However, he becomes confused when he realizes that his mother is one of the night rovers. He is ashamed of her behavior, but also very guilty, as he believes that his abandonment of her has driven her to this. He realizes how hungry and desperate she must be, and this makes him worry. He is torn between thinking of the night rovers as animals, and thinking of his mother as a poor victim who needs to be helped. When he finds out that his father also abandoned his mother, and has been lying about being sick this whole time, he feels even worse. He understands why she acted as she did, and is now absolutely determined not to let her down like his father did. He feels abandoned too, as his father clearly chose Saburo over his own family. Now Jiro only has his mother and Kinshi left, and will do anything it takes to make sure they are safe.

Jiro is very brave, and extremely loyal to the people he loves. His spirit is something that Yoshida noticed in him very early on, and is the reason why he was accepted into the theater. When Kinshi insists on going out to help the night rovers, Jiro is very worried about him. He tries to stop Kinshi, and when he cannot persuade him, he decides to put his own life at risk to prevent his friend coming to harm. He tries to arrange a meeting with Saburo, who he thinks is Yoshida. He goes to Okada and tells him everything he knows. This is very dangerous, as Saburo may decide to silence Jiro by killing him, but Jiro only cares about Kinshi. He explains that he would never betray Saburo because he would never betray Kinshi, and if Yoshida is in trouble then so Kinshi could be too. When Okada reveals that he is actually Saburo, Jiro is scared and runs away. However, he does not try to get himself to safety. Instead he begins searching for Kinshi and his mother. He puts their safety over his own. Jiro's father finds him, and Jiro promises that he will submit to Okada as soon as he has found the people he loves. Once they are safe, he will be satisfied. This shows just how brave, loving and loyal Jiro is to the people he cares about. He succeeds in finding his mother and Kinshi thanks to some quick thinking and brave actions, and takes them back to the theater. His mother sees that he is a loyal son and a brave and capable boy. Finally, she can be proud of him, and she shows that she has loved him all along. Jiro is forgiven by Okada and accepted back into the theater. He is now very well respected for his bravery and spirit, and has a good chance of advancing at the theater. His mother will also be allowed to stay and will be looked after. This is a happy ending for Jiro, as he has everything he wanted.

Kinshi/Yoshida Kinshi

Kinshi is Yoshida's son and Jiro's best friend at the theater. He is the first person that Jiro meets and immediately, he offers Jiro his help. Kinshi tells Jiro that he is a soft-hearted person who cannot stand to see others suffer. This is certainly proved to be true, as Kinshi tries to help absolutely everyone that he can. He takes Jiro under his wing and helps him to fit in at the theater. He explains the way of the Hanaza, and that



no-one else will be inclined to give him help. If it were not for Kinshi, Jiro would have had a much harder time at the theater. Kinshi also helps the other apprentice boys, regularly stealing scripts and puppets for them to practice with. It is clear that the other boys love Kinshi dearly, and that he is the glue that holds the group together. He has a very easy manner and is naturally friendly and charming. He tries to make light of hard situations and often makes jokes. When the night rovers begin roaming the city, hungry and desperate, Kinshi sees them as victims who need help. His father points out the danger of helping them, but Kinshi cannot bear to stand by and do nothing. He starts going out at night, risking his life for others. He is very caring, and this often gets him into trouble. He tends not to stop to think, and charges into situations a little recklessly when he thinks he can help. This is what his father worries about, and tries to stop this attitude by being overly harsh with him. Kinshi's kind heart also means that he thinks he cannot do well at the theater, as a more ruthless spirit is needed to succeed. Obviously Yoshida agrees with him, as he thinks his son will never amount to anything. Despite this, Kinshi does show some skill with puppets. The real thing that is stopping him from advancing is the fact that he does not have the same drive or ambition as the other people at the theater.

Kinshi is the leader of the boys and sees his role as taking care of them. It is his job to steal things for them and to help them out of difficult situations. When Jiro tries to save his friend from punishment by stealing the next script himself, he does not realize that he is usurping this role. He upsets Kinshi because it seems like he is trying to take charge and make himself the new leader. Although Kinshi is very kind-hearted and a good friend, he still expects the others to stick to their positions and not put ambition ahead of each other. Jiro quickly shows that he only wants to help Kinshi and is completely faithful to him, and Kinshi holds no grudges.

Kinshi is a very loyal friend and when he finds out that Jiro's mother needs help, he is determined to find her. He tries to stop her from robbing a rice merchant, which leads to him losing a hand. He explains that this is because he charged in without thinking, and so did not see the policeman. He was happy to lay his life down in the protection of his friend's mother. This willingness to sacrifice one's life for the people one is tied to is an important part of the samurai code. Kinshi is actually descended from a samurai, as his grandfather was a samurai who became a ronin. This samurai blood seems to run in Kinshi thicker than in his father. His father wants to start a new destiny for his family as master puppeteers. Kinshi seems to lean more towards the samurai path. He is brave and idealistic, and determined to fight for what he believes to be right. He will lay down his life for his friends. Kinshi would be much happier following the path of a person who fights for what is right, than the path of an entertainer. At the end of the book, Okada takes Kinshi under his wing. As Okada is secretly Saburo, it seems that Kinshi might get to pursue this way of life after all. Despite losing his hand, Kinshi also receives a happy ending at the end of the book.



Hanji

Hanji is Jiro's father. He is a puppet maker who sells his puppets to Yoshida, the owner of the Hanaza theater. He is skilled at his job, but there is not enough work for him to keep his family fed in this time of famine. He tries his best to keep them happy, being kind to Kinshi and his wife and trying to help them to think positively. When Jiro makes mistakes while helping his father with his work, Hanji tries to encourage him rather than criticize. He seems like the perfect loving father, and Jiro loves him dearly.

However, Hanji is not the perfect father he seems to be. He pretends to be sick and goes to a farm in the country with his wife. When she returns to the city, he secretly comes back and joins Saburo's gang. He lets his son and his wife worry about his sickness, and abandons them completely when he knows that they are hungry and that they need him. Jiro feels guilty about abandoning his father, thinking he contributed to his sickness, but all along his father has been alive and well. Although Hanji has joined a good cause and is trying to help people, he has let his family down. He has given his loyalty to someone else, choosing Saburo over his wife and son. Although it seemed like Isako was the worse parent of the two, it was actually Hanji who failed his son.

Isako

Isako is Jiro's mother and Hanji's wife. She is a grumpy and often depressed woman who has experienced a lot of tragedy in life. She lost her previous children, but Jiro survived, a fact that she seems to resent him for. She tells him that she curses the day he was born, and that it was a waste of time to fight to keep him alive. She constantly nags and criticizes him, showing him no signs of motherly love or pride. She seems like a very bad mother, and she is the reason that Jiro has little self-worth or confidence. However, the reader begins to see a different view of her later in the story. She has been abandoned by her husband and her son, and she is alone, afraid and hungry. She begins to get desperate, and joins the night rovers. She is ashamed of this behavior, but explains that she went a little crazy. When Kinshi saves her but is hurt in the process, she takes charge and makes sure that he is cared for. When Jiro comes to save them she is grateful, and finally sees that her son is a good person who can be trusted and respected. He has not abandoned her like her husband, and proves that he has been loyal all along. She now treats him with respect and love, and comes to his defense, claiming that he is her son when Yoshida and Okada talk about him as if he is property. She seems happy again at the end of the book, now that she has a place to stay and a child to be a mother to again.

Yoshida

Yoshida is the owner of the Hanaza, the puppet theater that Jiro apprentices himself to. Yoshida is the master puppeteer and is very skilled at controlling the puppets to make their movements seem lifelike. Yoshida is also the father of Kinshi. He is a harsh father and a firm boss. He is quick to punish any mistakes or insolence, and his punishments



and insults often seem very cruel. He is very quick to anger, and most of the people at the Hanaza are afraid of him. Mochida even tells Kinshi that there are four things to fear in the world: earthquakes, thunder, fire, and his father. Yoshida is particularly firm with Kinshi, and his son has come to resent him. He explains later that this is because he fears Kinshi is too soft-hearted and will get himself into trouble. He feels that he has to work harder to instill discipline in his son. Although he can be unkind, Yoshida does show a softer side to his personality at points. He cries when his son's hand is cut off, and shows that he really does care about him. He offers to let Jiro's mother stay at the theater. Much of his earlier temper may have been false, an act to fool people into thinking he has no connection with Saburo.

Yoshida displays some very suspicious behavior in the story. He has a Komuso priest's basket hat in his house, wanders around at night when he is supposed to be sick, and puts on a subservient act to convince the authorities to allow him to perform a special viewing of his play for the poor, which Saburo has said he will attend. Yoshida seems to have some kind of connection to the bandit Saburo. When Jiro finds a samurai sword belonging to the assistant magistrate in the storehouse, he thinks that Yoshida must actually be Saburo. However, this is not true. Okada is actually Saburo, and Yoshida is one of his loyal men. Yoshida may own the theater, but it is really Okada who runs everything and manipulates what people will do. Yoshida, like the puppets, takes the attention away from the real puppet master, Okada.

Okada/Saburo

Okada is a blind man who works as the master chanter at the puppet theater. He used to be Yoshida's master at the Takemoto Theater, but now works for Yoshida. He is a kindly old man who seems to genuinely care for the apprentices. He helps Jiro several times, and Jiro considers himself to be in debt to Okada for his favors. Okada is the one who admitted Jiro to the theater, and later he gives Jiro a script of his new play so the boys can practice. He also sees that Jiro does not know the way things are done at the theater and warns him to be more careful about stepping out of his place. Okada also seems to care deeply for Kinshi, which is what convinces Jiro that he will help when Kinshi is determined to help the night rovers. Jiro thinks of Okada as someone he can trust and rely on.

Jiro sees that Okada is blind and thinks that he is someone to be pitied, a weak and vulnerable old man. However, Okada is far from what he appears to be on the outside. He is actually very calm and happy, and accepting of his situation. He is very capable, and sees his blindness as more of a slight nuisance than a real hindrance. The biggest shock comes when Okada reveals that he is actually Saburo. Jiro completely underestimates Okada. Okada is actually the master puppeteer, and he is the one who is in control of the theater. He manipulates other people and gets them to behave in ways that suit him. Yoshida is one of his loyal followers, as are some others at the Hanaza. Like a master puppeteer, Okada remains inconspicuous and hidden behind his puppeteer's mask, while his puppets demand all the attention. Okada's puppets are the



people who work for him and the people he manipulates. He is a very clever and skilled man.

Okada as Saburo is a very different character. As Okada he seemed kindly and patient. As Saburo he seems much more dangerous and almost creepy. He seems to be testing Jiro, and may even decide to kill him if he fails the test. As Saburo, he robs from the rich and gives to the poor, but he never seems to have organized a proper and fair system of distribution of the food he steals. This means that many still go hungry, while the rougher and stronger members of the poor get the food. The reader can see that this is the case when Isako tells Jiro that she only got food because she managed to get to the shrine in time before it all ran out, and that she was robbed of it on the way home. Saburo has also never organized any true rebellion or effort against the corrupt merchants and authorities, meaning that the bad situation will only continue. He is a symbol of resistance and provides hope to the poor, but he is not necessarily very effective in actually helping. He is a thief and a bandit, and turns to crime in order to try to make things right. This is not the most honorable path. His motives are also largely unclear.

In the end however, he shows that he can be fair and kind when he decides to trust Jiro and spare him. He agrees to take Kinshi under his wing, showing that he can recognize a good recruit when he sees one. As Saburo, he inspires a lot of loyalty in his men and is clearly considered a wise and good leader.

Wada

Wada is the oldest of the apprentice boys and the most superior second only to Kinshi. He is a grumpy boy who often has a sour expression on his face. At first he seems unfriendly, but this just seems to be his way. He is extremely ambitious and Kinshi jokes that he is training himself to be like Yoshida. Wada does not mind Kinshi's teasing and obviously loves Kinshi dearly as a friend. Despite Wada's ambition, he can still be a good friend to the other boys, and takes part in their exploits and mischief. He is quick to spot Jiro's ambition, even when the others do not see it, perhaps because he recognizes it in himself. He makes digs at Jiro about his love of applause and respect because he thinks Jiro's ambition might cause him to be disloyal. He is also a little jealous of Jiro for getting both Kinshi's and Yoshida's attention despite being so new. He takes a long time to warm up to Jiro, but when Jiro proves his loyalty and friendship to Kinshi, Wada is willing to accept him. By the end of the play, when Jiro has shown his bravery and that he is willing to sacrifice himself for Kinshi, Wada treats him with respect and even allows Jiro to tell him what to do.

Minoru

Minoru is one of the apprentice boys at the theater. He has a handsome face but is very fat. He loves food and seems to be content with simple pleasures. He does not seem to



be as ambitious as Wada or Jiro. Like the others, he is very fond of Kinshi and enjoys his teasing.

Teiji

Teiji is one of the apprentice boys at the theater and is the lowest on the social scale except for Jiro. He is a nervous boy who stutters when he talks. He is very afraid of Yoshida. Like the others, he loves Kinshi and soon shows the same deep friendship and loyalty for Jiro. He is a very caring and open person who is always completely honest. He is not ambitious and would never think to be jealous of the others.

Mochida

Mochida is the left-handed operator at the theater and is in charge of the apprentices. He oversees their practices and tells them when they have made errors. He is much kinder than Yoshida and will not beat them when they make mistakes. However, he also does not explain what they have done wrong, which Jiro finds frustrating as it makes it harder for him to know how to correct the mistake. Mochida seems to genuinely care about the boys, and even lets Jiro off work to go see his mother. Mochida is high in the social ladder of the theater, but is not Yoshida's equal and admits to finding the master puppeteer frightening.

Tozo

Tozo is the personal assistant of Okada. He serves him and helps him with daily tasks. He seems to love Okada and is protective of him. It is unclear whether he knows the truth about Okada's identity as Saburo or not.

Mrs. Yoshida

Yoshida's wife is only ever referred to as Mrs. Yoshida. She is Kinshi's mother and seems to be a caring woman who worries about her son. She cooks the food for the people at the theater, and seems to be kind to Jiro whenever he talks to her. It seems likely that she does not know that her husband is involved with Saburo.

The Assistant Magistrate

The assistant magistrate comes into the story when Saburo posts a notice demanding a special showing of *The Thief of the Tokaido* for the poor. He tells Yoshida that the performance is forbidden. Yoshida manages to play him perfectly, putting on an act of subservience and pointing out that the performance would be a great opportunity to catch Saburo. He comes back the next day and tells Yoshida that the performance must go ahead after all. At the end of the play, he and all his men are robbed by the bandit.



Later, Jiro finds his sword in the storehouse, which is how he knows Saburo lives at the theater. When Jiro frees his mother and Kinshi from the constabulary later in the story, he is called to the assistant magistrate. Jiro is in the disguise of a fireman and the assistant magistrate wants him to take a message to his superior. He shows signs of recognizing Jiro, but does not make the connection and so does not remember who he is.

Ueno

Ueno is one of the paid puppeteers who is higher in status than the apprentices. Jiro works with him to manipulate the puppet of Fusamu in the play *The Thief of the Tokaido*.

Akoya

Akoya is a fictional courtesan in one of the plays at the theater. She is hiding her lover from enemy soldiers, who come to her home and tell her to play three instruments. They think that if she can do so perfectly, then she cannot be lying. She plays the instruments beautifully, and the head soldier decides that such pure music could not be played by a liar. Jiro manipulates the feet of Akoya in this scene at the end of the book.

Fusamu

Fusamu is the fictional courtesan in the play *The Thief of the Tokaido*. She hides the bandit Joman in her house and disguises him as her mother. She then pretends that her mother has died, and smuggles Joman out of the house.

Joman

Joman is the fictional bandit in the play *The Thief of the Tokaido*. He is clearly meant to be similar to Saburo, to make the audience feel sympathy for Saburo. Like Saburo, he is wily and brave, and makes the merchants and the authorities look like fools. In the play, Joman is betrayed by his own wife. The audience feels despair at this and at the end of the play, Saburo reminds them that they should feel the same despair at the thought of anyone betraying him.



Objects/Places

Samurai

Samurai are the military elite of Japan. They are expected to be loyal and brave at all times. They live under a strict code of honor, which includes the willingness to lay down their lives for their masters. Samurai live off the stipends that their masters provide. As Jiro points out, this means that many samurai are not doing too well during this famine.

Ronin

Ronin are samurai who have lost their masters either because their master died or because he dismissed them. According to the strict samurai code of honor, a samurai should really commit honorable suicide in this situation. Those that choose not to do this become ronin, and are considered to have lost their honor. They no longer receive their stipend and must get by on their own. Many become bandits or criminals, so they have a bad reputation. However, some of them try to uphold the honor that they valued as samurai.

The Hanaza

The Hanaza is the name of the puppet theater that Yoshida owns. Jiro apprentices himself here, and he lives at the theater with Kinshi and the other boys. Yoshida and most of the other important men at the Hanaza live in houses outside the theater. The Hanaza has a stage and dressing rooms, living quarters, a kitchen, a courtyard and a storehouse. The puppeteers, apprentices and less important people live on the west side of the theater. The important people, chanters and musicians live on the east side. The whole Hanaza works under an unspoken social code. People are expected to know their place and not try to overstep themselves. Each person has a role to stick to. Jiro compares this to a performance, thinking that the Hanaza is like a play in which each person must remember their lines.

The Storehouse

The storehouse at the Hanaza stores the puppets and costumes. This is where Kinshi comes to steal puppets to practice with. Later, Jiro comes here to be alone to practice. The apprentices are not allowed inside, and the upstairs is completely forbidden, so he knows he will not be interrupted here. This is where he finds the samurai sword that proves Saburo's connection with the theater. This is where Okada confronts him, and Jiro locks him in.



The Puppets

The puppets are used by the puppeteers to tell stories in the plays performed at the theater. They are very tall and almost Jiro's height and require several puppeteers to make them move properly. Puppeteers manipulate the feet, each hand, and the head, in order to make the movements as lifelike as possible. This is seen as a great skill, and the more difficult roles carry a lot of respect and prestige. Female puppets do not have feet, so puppeteers have to pinch the bottom of the dress with their fingers to suggest feet. Both Jiro and Kinshi take this role at several points in the story.

The puppets are also symbols for how the people at the theater are controlled by Okada. Like puppets, they seem to be moving by themselves, and take the attention away from the master puppeteer, who remains hidden and forgotten.

The Daimyo

The daimyo is a land-owning lord in feudal Japan. He is only less important than the shogun and the emperor. The rest of the land-owning nobles in his area are under his control. Each daimyo would have many samurai serving him. Taxes are paid to the daimyos, and in this time of famine people are very resentful of the amount of rice they are taking.

The Shogun

The shogun is the ruler of Japan in the feudal period in which this book is set. At this time, the Tokugawa family is in control, so each shogun is a member of this family. The shogun is lower in status only than the emperor but in reality he has more power, as the emperor is largely a symbolic position.

Osaka

Osaka is the city in which this book is set. This is where Jiro and his family live, and where the Hanaza theater is located. It is a large city in which many different forms of entertainment can be found. At this time, the city is suffering under a famine. The poor of the city are getting desperate and discontent.

The Famine

The story is set in a time of famine when most of the city is hungry and suffering. Jiro and his family do not have enough food, so Jiro apprentices himself to the theater. Things have become so bad that a bandit called Saburo is trying to set things right by stealing from the rich and giving to the poor. Despite his exploits, there is still not enough food to go round and the people soon become desperate. They begin to riot.



The merchants and authorities of the city are blamed, as they have more food than everyone else. The theater also has plenty of food. It is explained to Jiro that this is because the merchants spend their money here, but in reality the theater has connections with Saburo and his gang.

The Dotombori

The Dotombori is the street of entertainers in the city. This is also where the Hanaza is located. There are jugglers, magicians, and courtesans as well as plenty of beggars.

Code of Honor/Social Etiquette

Social etiquette is extremely important in Japanese society at this time, and is considered a matter of honor. It is dishonorable to behave in a manner that is seen as rude. This code of honor includes respecting elders, obeying and looking after one's parents, and always speaking politely. Certain words have to be said in certain situations, such as when leaving a place or saying goodbye to someone. It is considered polite to offer hospitality to guests, but it is also polite for the guests to refuse three times. If the offer is still there after three refusals, the guests can then accept honorably. This is the social rule that Jiro breaks at the beginning of the story, as he is too hungry to refuse the invitation of food. The extreme shame that Jiro feels proves how important these rules really are.

Komuso Priests

The Komuso priests are Buddhist monks who wear basket hats on their heads. These conceal their identities to remind them that their self is just an allusion, and to encourage humility in others. Saburo uses basket hats to disguise himself and his gang as Komuso priests in order to steal from a rice brokerage. Jiro finds a basket hat in Yoshida's house, which is one of the clues that he is somehow connected to Saburo.

The Play Scripts

The play scripts tell the apprentices when they should pull the curtains and how they should be manipulating the puppets in each scene. These play scripts are not given out freely so the boys are forced to steal them in order to practice. This is Kinshi's role, one that Jiro unwittingly usurps when he tries to help his friend.

The Thief of the Tokaido

The Thief of the Tokaido is a play written by Okada. It is about a bandit called Joman, who is betrayed by his wife. Joman is captured, but uses his cunning to get away. He is a likeable character, written to encourage the people of the city to sympathize with



Saburo. At the end of the play, the lights go out and Saburo tells the audience to remember the despair they felt when they saw Joman being betrayed. He tells them that they should bear this in mind if they ever have the opportunity to betray Saburo. The Thief of the Tokaido is therefore a play written to promote Saburo and his interests. This makes sense, since it was written by Okada, who is actually Saburo.

The Heron-Crested Samurai Sword

The heron crest is the symbol of the assistant magistrate. When Jiro sees this crest on the samurai sword he finds in the storehouse, he knows immediately who it belongs to. The assistant magistrate and his men were robbed at the theater by Saburo. The sword being in the storehouse seems to suggest that Saburo himself lives at the theater. Jiro takes this as proof that Yoshida is Saburo.

The Namba Cho Fire Brigade

Jiro pretends to be a member of the Namba Cho Fire Brigade in order to find Kinshi and his mother the day after the riots. The fire brigade is being attacked by angry citizens who hate all signs of authority, but is respected by the police. This allows Jiro to gain access to the constabulary. The fire brigade members are not bad people and are only trying to help. They are unfortunate victims of the riots and of the suffering of the city.



Themes

Loyalty and Betrayal

Loyalty and betrayal is a very important theme running throughout the book. It is central to three different groups of people and their stories. There is the fictional bandit Joman, whose story is told in the play *The Thief of the Tokaido*. He is hidden by his lover Fusamu when the authorities are trying to find him. She shows loyalty despite the danger, risking her life to protect him. Joman's men are also completely loyal. His wife, unfortunately, is not so loyal. She betrays Joman to the authorities, leading to his capture. Saburo uses this play to convince the city's poor that they should not give up Saburo if they have the chance. They are given a special viewing of the play, during which they come to love the character of Joman. They feel despair and anger when they see that he is being betrayed. Saburo asks them to remember these feelings if they should ever be in a situation in which they could betray Saburo.

Joman is a fictional mirror of the bandit Saburo. Saburo's story runs throughout the book alongside Jiro's story. Saburo is a bandit who robs from the rich and gives to the poor. He likes to make the corrupt and wealthy members of society look like fools and he inspires the ordinary people. He also inspires a lot of loyalty amongst his men, but he worries about being betrayed. This is why he insists on giving the special performance of *The Thief of the Tokaido* for the poor. This is also why Jiro is in grave danger when he reveals that he knows Saburo's identity. Saburo may decide to kill him to protect his secrets. Later in the story, it turns out that Jiro's father has been working for Saburo all this time, and has lied about being sick. Jiro's father has sworn himself to the bandit and is completely loyal to him, even if this means abandoning and betraying his own family. This reminds the reader of a scene in *The Thief of the Tokaido* when Joman's son gives up his life rather than betray his father. This is seen as a noble and honorable thing to do. For the bandits in this book, loyalty is an essential theme.

It is not just the bandits Joman and Saburo who inspire absolute loyalty. Kinshi's friends are also loyal to him, and would never do anything to hurt him. They are like his followers, as Kinshi is the leader of their group. As their leader, Kinshi tries to help them whenever he can, befriends them, keeps their spirits up, and will risk himself for them. He steals texts and puppets for them to practice with despite the danger of being punished, and puts his own life on the line to help Jiro's mother. He is a good friend, and it is the love that his friends have for him that inspires their loyalty. They do not have to swear a strict oath like the bandits' followers, as their loyalty is unspoken but never broken. This is because it is held through love rather than obligation.

There is also the threat of betrayal among the bandits. Jiro feels terrible guilt in the story when he is forced into the position of betraying Kinshi. Kinshi is missing, and Jiro has been chosen to replace him in the play. This is a role that Jiro desperately wants, but he does not want to hurt Kinshi. The other boys in the group ignore Jiro and treat him like a traitor because they believe he has put his own ambition ahead of his loyalty to his



friend. However, Jiro does not do this. He chooses to forfeit his big chance, and to accept the punishment of Yoshida, in order to make sure Kinshi gets his part back. He refuses to betray his best friend, and proves his loyalty. When he does so, he is instantly accepted back into the group. Jiro's and the other boys' loyalty for Kinshi runs just as deep as the loyalty of Saburo's or Joman's men. The similarities between the bandit groups and Kinshi's friends is highlighted at the end of the book when Jiro is asked if he will betray Saburo. He says he will not, but points out that he is Kinshi's man, and will remain that way. In other words, his loyalty is first and foremost to Kinshi, not Saburo. Just as the bandit has his own men, so Jiro is Kinshi's man.

Jiro may be absolutely loyal to Kinshi, but he does not owe the same debt to Saburo. It is Kinshi's love and goodness that inspire loyalty and Jiro has no reason to feel the same way towards Saburo. When Jiro thinks that he has found out the truth about Yoshida, therefore, he has an important decision to make. Will he betray Yoshida and collect the reward on Saburo's head? Jiro could use the money to ensure that his parents are looked after for the rest of their lives. This was Jiro's main goal in joining the theater, and his number one priority. However, if he betrays Yoshida in this way, Kinshi may suffer as a result. He might even be executed along with his father. Besides this, by betraying Yoshida Jiro would be betraying the whole theater and all the people in it. He has come to think of this place as his home and the people there as his extended family. He cannot let them down. Another option is not to betray Yoshida, but to use the information to blackmail him. Jiro could get whatever he wants by holding this information over Yoshida's head. He could get the roles that he wants in the plays, and force Yoshida to promote him to a paid member of the theater. He could therefore look after his family, fulfill his own ambitions, and still enjoy the life of the theater that he loves, without hurting anyone else. However, this would be a very dishonorable thing to do, and might still end up hurting Yoshida and Kinshi in the long run. Jiro decides not to do this, showing that he is a good person. He has too much loyalty for his home and his friend to do anything that might hurt them. When Jiro finds out that it is actually Okada who is Saburo, he again has the option of betraying him. This time Kinshi would not be hurt as a result. This is what worries Okada, as Jiro's loyalty is no longer certain. At the end of the book, Jiro assures Yoshida that he would not betray Okada. He still has loyalty to the theater and as long as Kinshi is safe, he is happy. He is not a traitor.

Another form of loyalty in this story is the loyalty of a person to his or her family. Jiro feels a deep loyalty to his parents, even when his mother is treating him badly. He is always determined to do what is best for them, and is willing to risk his own life and happiness for them. It therefore comes as a big shock when Jiro finds out that his father has been lying to them, and has been a member of Saburo's gang all along. Jiro's father has abandoned them, and has chosen loyalty to someone else over his own family. This seems like a betrayal to Jiro and his mother, and causes Jiro's mother to become desperate. She joins the night rovers and nearly gets into a lot of trouble. She is saved by both Kinshi and Jiro, who show her more loyalty and care than her own husband was willing to. Jiro proves that he is a loyal son, and that he will stick by his mother no matter what. At the end, their relationship is more loving and solid because of this. Jiro's loyalty makes up for Hanji's betrayal.



There are many things that bring about loyalty in this story and many different reasons why someone might betray someone else. Loyalty is important to a person's honor, and so may be upheld due to a person's perception of how they should behave. Loyalty might also be enforced by an oath to a particular person, such as the oath taken when followers join the bandits Joman and Saburo. The bandits seem to inspire loyalty by being good leaders, and through their defiance of the authorities at difficult times. Their followers respect them, and believe in the cause that they are fighting for. The poor also show some solidarity with Saburo because he gives them hope in difficult times. They are also grateful for the food he gives out. However, none of these causes of loyalty seem to be enough when a person is truly desperate and hungry. Jiro's mother points out that the starving people of the city would betray Saburo if they could. This is not because they dislike the bandit, but because they are simply that desperate. Their own lives will always seem more important to them than a stranger's. Other causes of betrayal may be for power and riches, or to fulfill one's ambitions. Jiro considers betraying Saburo to help his family, as his loyalties to his parents outweigh any sympathy he has for the bandit. Jiro does not betray Saburo, but this shows another potential reason for disloyalty.

However, there is another important thing that inspires loyalty in people and this will also prevent them from ever betraying that person. This is love. Jiro loves his mother and his friend Kinshi, and he would never even consider betraying either of them. In fact, the mere possibility of Kinshi being hurt is enough to stop him from betraying Saburo. Jiro will risk his life for his mother and Kinshi, showing that loyalty born out of love will even transcend a person's concern for their own life. Out of all the different kinds of loyalty seen in this story, therefore, it is Kinshi who inspires the most powerful form because loyalty for him is motivated by love.

The Puppet Master

The theme of puppets and the idea of the puppet master is important in this story and puppets are used as symbols of control. Yoshida is the master puppeteer, meaning that he is in control of the theater, and that he has reached the top levels of skill in manipulating the puppets on stage. Yoshida is quick to anger, and will punish mistakes severely. He has a very extravagant and loud personality, which demands a lot of attention. Jiro comes to realize that a lot of this is actually just a performance, a play act put on to fool people. Yoshida is distracting people from the truth, and in doing so manipulates various people to act as he wants. For example, he pretends to be subservient to the assistant magistrate and whines about his theater's safety. In the process, however, he manages to persuade the assistant magistrate to allow the performance to go ahead. Although Yoshida pretends to be annoyed about this, Jiro can see that it is all an act. When the play gets shut down, Yoshida rages about and yells at people, but Jiro is convinced that this is also an elaborate performance. Yoshida is trying to convince everyone that he is the same mean boss as ever, to distract them from the fact that he actually manipulated the assistant magistrate into getting exactly what he wanted. Yoshida truly is a master puppeteer, as he can manipulate others as if



they are puppets, and control everything around him as if it is a play. Yoshida makes the perfect distraction for what is really going on secretly in the background.

As Jiro learns later, Yoshida is a decoy in more ways than one. He is not putting on an act to distract people from the fact that he is Saburo, as Jiro thought at first. In fact, it is Okada who is really Saburo. Yoshida, as the master puppeteer, seems to be the one who is in control. He rages about and makes a fuss, taking all the attention away from others. Nobody would ever suspect Okada, who is skilled at staying hidden and forgotten in the background. Okada is the true master puppeteer, but in a symbolic rather than a literal sense. He is the one who is really in control of everything, and it is he who manipulates everyone around him as if they are puppets. Like a good master puppeteer, Okada remains hidden in the background while the puppets take all the attention. In fact, Okada is so good that the people watching think the puppets are really moving on their own, and forget that there is someone manipulating them. In this analogy, Okada is the master puppeteer and the puppets are the people at the theater, the people of the city, and particularly the authorities that Saburo is constantly fooling. This is why Okada uses a puppet when he confronts Jiro. He hides behind the puppet and moves it so that it looks as if it is searching for Jiro. Okada is still hiding behind puppets, and using this one to symbolize his power and control. He wants Jiro to know that he is the master puppeteer, and that Jiro is merely his puppet. It is very appropriate that a story about a bandit who remains hidden while controlling others like puppets should be set in a puppet theater.

Puppets are used as symbols of acting and control throughout the play. People, like puppets, can be manipulated and coerced, and even when people think they are acting freely, they may not be. Puppets are also players in the performances at the Hanaza. Like the puppets, the people there are constantly performing. Jiro notes that the whole Hanaza is like a play, not just what happens on stage. Every person there is expected to know their role and to stick to it. Jiro compares stepping out of his place with forgetting his lines. Okada also points out to him that he does not know the ways of the theater and is in danger of stepping out of his role. At the Hanaza, there is a set way of doing things that the people there stick to. Jiro has to learn this in order to fit in. This is why Kinshi and the other boys seem upset when Jiro decides to steal one of the scrolls, and later when Jiro goes to Okada to ask for the latest play. It is Kinshi's role as leader to procure the play scripts, and Jiro is usurping that role. Although Jiro is trying to be sensible and to help his friend, he soon learns that it is not alright for him to take on a new role for himself.

If the theater is like a play, then the city also resembles a play because the citizens stick to their positions according to the strict hierarchy of Feudal Japan. Each person has a role and cannot step out of it. As a result, people's behavior tends to be predictable, which allows Okada to manipulate and control others so easily. The reader is reminded of the puppet analogy again where Okada is the puppet master, controlling every person in the city as if they are puppets in one of his plays.



Friendship and Love

Friendship and love are extremely important in this story. It is the love that the boys feel for Kinshi that inspires loyalty to him. Kinshi is a kind-hearted and generous boy who is determined to help anyone who is in trouble. He makes friends easily with the apprentice boys, and once he is friends with someone he will do anything for them. He steals the play scripts and puppets so that they can practice, despite the fact that his father will punish him if he finds out. When the night rovers begin roaming the city, he cannot bear to stand by and not help. He also shows how important Jiro's friendship is to him by going out to search for and help Jiro's mother. His bravery and sacrifice for others is admirable, and it inspires the same in his friends. Jiro will do anything for Kinshi, and begins trying to think of ways to keep Kinshi out of trouble. He tries to save him from punishment by stealing scripts for him, but later realizes that this upsets his friend because he is stealing his role. When Kinshi is missing and Jiro is chosen to take his place in the performance, Jiro is determined to give Kinshi his part back, despite the fact that he will be severely punished. Jiro sometimes feels jealous of his friend, but berates himself heavily for it because Kinshi's friendship is so important to him. When Kinshi goes out at night to help the night rovers, Jiro knows he is in danger and risks his own life to help him. Even when Jiro's life hangs in the balance because he knows Okada's secret, he still thinks only of Kinshi. This is an extremely deep friendship, and nothing can break it. Kinshi and Jiro prove how love inspires loyalty and bravery, and the amazing things that can be done in the name of friendship.

Jiro also feels deep love for his family. His father has always been gentle and kind to him, and Jiro worries about him a great deal because he is sick. Jiro feels guilty, thinking that his abandonment may have contributed to his father's illness. Jiro leaves his family at the beginning of the story so that they will have more food. He hopes that he will eventually get a paid job with the theater and so that he will be able to look after them for the rest of their lives. He is willing to sacrifice his own needs for his family, and is a very loyal and loving son. Jiro's mother is less kind to him than his father is, and constantly nags at him and criticizes him. She even tells him that she curses the day he was born. At first, she seems like a terrible parent, but later the reader can sympathize with her. She has faced tragedy, losing her previous children. Now she is trying to survive in a time of famine and never has enough food. She must worry a lot about her family. Jiro abandons her and does not tell her why, and she does not understand that he is trying to do what is best for her. She thinks that he is just being selfish, and this hurts her. Later, she finds out that her husband has also abandoned her, and that while she starves he is healthy and eating well. He has joined Saburo's men, and switched his loyalty from her to Saburo. She feels like she has been failed by everyone in her life. Jiro longs for her love and respect, but is too scared to ever talk to her properly about his intentions. However, he never lets her mean comments stop him from caring for her, and his love for her drives him to risk his own life to help her. At the end of the book, she sees that Jiro is a good person who loves her and is loyal to her, unlike her husband. She shows Jiro love and affection, and their relationship can begin to mend.



Jiro shows love and loyalty to his friends and family, but unfortunately others are not so loving. Hanji, Jiro's father, completely fails the people that he is supposed to love. He abandons his son and his wife to join Saburo, and does not help them when they are starving. He puts Jiro through a great amount of worry and guilt, and causes his wife to go mad with desperation. Jiro would never even think of abandoning the people he loves in this way, and seems very disappointed with his father. When Hanji offers to help him search for his mother and Kinshi, Jiro refuses. He does not want anything else from a man who chose a stranger over his own family. Kinshi also has father trouble in the story. Yoshida is not a good father, as he is too harsh with his son. He explains that he is trying to discipline his son to discourage his soft-hearted ways. However, Yoshida only makes his son hate him. When Kinshi really needs someone to talk to and be there for him, he does not find it in his father. Both Kinshi and Jiro know what it is like to be let down by their father. In the end, they have each other, and they will never let each other down. They have built a new family. Kinshi and Jiro are good examples of how love and friendship should work.

Honor

Honor is an incredibly important concept in Japanese society, particularly at the time this book is set. A person's honor is tied to their place in society, as each person has a specific position on the feudal social ladder. People are expected to respect those more important than themselves, to pay their taxes and live their lives according to their position, and not to step out of their place. It is considered dishonorable behavior if someone does not do this. Social etiquette dictates how people should act in certain situations. For example, when a person has guests, it is polite to offer them hospitality. The guest should refuse three times, and if the offer is still there after three refusals, it can be accepted. To break this rule is to bring shame on oneself for acting dishonorably. This is why Jiro is so ashamed when he accepts Yoshida's offer of food before three refusals. This is also why Jiro takes such care to stick to the rules of polite conversation in the rest of the book. Other ways of showing respect are to bow one's head when talking to someone of higher status, or when asking for a favor, and to always obey parents and superiors. Looking after one's parents is considered the duty of every child, and to abandon this duty would be dishonorable.

Honor is also a very personal matter. Acting honorably includes acting with dignity and humility, and not letting others down. It is dishonorable to have too much pride or ambition, and to put oneself ahead of one's superiors or elders. This is why Jiro feels guilty and ashamed when his own ambition causes him to be jealous of Jiro. His personal honor tells him that he should be loyal to his friend above his own desires, and that he should not think bad thoughts about him. Many consider it dishonorable to be rude or cruel, as Kinshi and Jiro clearly do. Yoshida takes a different view, considering his family's honor to rest on being good puppeteers. To Yoshida, this depends on being more ambitious and driven than Kinshi is willing to be. Whereas Yoshida's sense of honor rests on being successful, Kinshi's rests on being a good person. It is also very dishonorable to betray friends and family, as most characters in the book show at



various points. Kinshi berates Jiro for not helping his mother when she is begging for food with the other night rovers, and Jiro immediately feels guilty.

It is often considered to harm a person's honor if they make too many mistakes or show too much fear, which is why Isako often talks of being ashamed of Jiro's clumsiness, and why Yoshida punishes mistakes so harshly. For some people, honor also includes helping others and being a good person. Kinshi considers it important to his honor to help the night rovers, which is why Jiro has such a hard time persuading him not to. For Jiro, it is not his duty to help the night rovers, who have become violent and little more than animals. By behaving as they do, they have given up their own honor, so it is not a matter of honor to help them. Isako shows that she holds a similar view when she apologizes for shaming Jiro by joining the night rovers. To her, the night rovers lack honor, so it is dishonorable to join them. This apology also highlights another important fact about honor, that a family member can dishonor others in their family by behaving badly. In these ways, personal honor drives most of the characters' actions in this story.

Honor is most important to a particular group of people in Japanese society: the samurai. The samurai are military elite who work for a master such as a lord or daimyo. Some samurai are wealthier than others, and own land. Others live off the stipends given to them by their masters. They are expected to live by a very strict code of honor. They are supposed to be brave and strong, and not fear death. They must be willing to give up their lives for their master, and to obey him no matter what. They could be compared to the knights of western medieval tales of chivalry, but with a much stronger sense of personal honor than even those fictional knights displayed. Samurai have such a strict sense of honor that those who dishonor themselves are expected to commit suicide. A samurai who loses his master is considered to be dishonored, and he becomes a ronin. A ronin no longer receives stipends and must fend for himself. Ronin have a bad reputation and are often considered dangerous.

Kinshi is descended from a samurai, as his grandfather was a samurai who became a ronin. Yoshida does not display the same deep sense of honor and bravery that Kinshi does, and it is clear that Kinshi comes closer to the samurai ideal. Kinshi displays great honor when he charges in to save Jiro's mother without any thought for his own safety. He does not seem to fear death, and puts others' welfare above his own life. His samurai ancestors would be proud of him.

Although unexpected, there is also honor among thieves in this story. The fictional bandit gang of Joman and the real bandit gang of Saburo, all display honor among themselves. It is extremely dishonorable to be a thief, but to do so in a good cause restores some of that honor. The bandits are not bad people who want to keep riches for themselves, but are actually trying to help the city's poor. They see the corrupt merchants and authorities as being just as dishonorable as thieves, so they do not mind robbing them. In fact, they see themselves as restoring some of the social order that has been lost in the famine, which is so important to an honorable society. The merchants have stepped out of their place and now consider themselves to be as important as lords. This is dishonorable, and the merchants must be taught a lesson. This seems to be the reasoning of Saburo and his men. This is also the view of Hanji,



who points out at the beginning of the book that a corrupt rice merchant is just as much a thief as Saburo is. There is also honor among the bandit gangs in terms of loyalty. None of the followers would ever betray their leader, and they would not break the solemn oath that they have sworn. This is why Hanji has abandoned his own family, as his honor demands that he show loyalty first and foremost to Saburo. This is ironic, as some might argue that he also loses honor by letting his family down. In the end, the deepest and most pure form of honor is shown by Kinshi and Jiro through their unbroken love and loyalty for each other and the brave actions they take for each other.



Style

Point of View

The story is told in the third-person perspective of Jiro rather than an omniscient narrator. Jiro is the main character and it is his story that is being told. Jiro is new to the theater, so by following his point of view things can be explained to both him and the reader. The reader is given a close view of Jiro's thoughts and feelings, so they can understand his reactions and how events affect him. This helps the reader to sympathize with him and to be on his side. The reader can also understand Jiro's guilt and worry about his parents, as well as his fear for Kinshi. This makes events later in the story, when Jiro finds out that his father has abandoned him and that his mother and Kinshi are in danger, much more dramatic. Jiro's point of view also increases suspense and tension during times of danger. For example, when Okada confronts him in the storehouse or when the assistant magistrate calls him back at the constabulary, having the story told from Jiro's perspective makes it far more suspenseful.

Setting

The story is set in the 18th century in feudal Japan. This is a time in which the whole of Japanese society is arranged according to a strict hierarchy. At the top is the emperor, but he is more of a figurehead at this point. The shogun is the ruler of Japan and the man with all the actual power. At this point the Tokugawa family is in charge, and each shogun is a member of that family. Under the shogun are the daimyos, powerful land-owning lords. They rule over large areas and cities, and farmers and citizens pay taxes to them. The daimyos have many samurai, who are military elite, and other noble families under their control. Under these elite members of society are the normal citizens. These include farmers, artisans, entertainers and merchants. Technically, the farmers are socially higher than the merchants, but in reality the merchants are much richer and more powerful. This is because the farmers have to pay so much to the daimyo in taxes. In this story the city is suffering from a famine, so this gap between actual wealth and social position is even bigger.

The story is set in a large city called Osaka. This is where Jiro and his family live in a small house. There are a few scenes set in the city, in which it seems that the city has become a very dangerous place. Desperate, hungry people roam the streets, and are easily provoked into violence. There are also a lot of ronin, samurai who have lost their masters, who have turned to banditry or violence to survive. Jiro braves the dangers of the city several times in the story, to see his mother at New Year, and to save his mother and Kinshi when he thinks that they are in trouble.

Jiro apprentices himself to the Hanaza, the local puppet theater run by Yoshida. This is located on the Dotombori, the street of entertainers in the city. The Hanaza is a fairly large complex with dressing rooms, living quarters, a courtyard, the stage, a storehouse



and kitchens. Jiro lives here with the other apprentice boys, sleeping in one of the dressing rooms. The storehouse is off limits to the boys, but Kinshi goes there to steal puppets for the boys to practice with. Later, Jiro goes there to practice and finds a samurai sword that proves Saburo is connected to the theater. Jiro realizes that the whole Hanaza is a performance, not just what happens on stage. Each person knows their role and has to remember their place, like remembering lines. He compares stepping out of his place to forgetting his lines. There is a set way of doing things at the theater, and even if it does not always seem sensible, it is important to do things as they have always been done. It is appropriate that the theater functions like a play, with all members acting their roles, as the symbolism of puppets and plays is important in the story. Okada turns out to be Saburo, and he claims that he is the real master puppeteer, controlling all the puppets in the play, or in other words, the people at the theater.

Language and Meaning

The language in the story is often a little stilted and old-fashioned, representing the fact that the story deals with a different culture and a historical period. The characters often use set phrases when they talk to each other, such as acknowledging that another person is busy and apologizing for interrupting them. Another example is the way in which people are expected to show hospitality to guests, and guests are expected to refuse three times. This happens several times in the story, most notably at the beginning when Jiro breaks the rules. This is a necessary part of social etiquette, which is strongly linked to the characters' honor. Honor is considered of utmost importance in this society, so characters stick rigidly to the rules of polite conversation. In particular, these conventions need to be upheld when speaking to an elder or a person who is more important. This is why Jiro is always very polite to characters such as Yoshida and Okada. He uses less social formalities when talking to Kinshi and the other boys, but he does still adhere to certain rules of politeness. For example, there is a set way that the characters say goodbye to each other, and they all stick to this no matter who they are talking to. To flaunt these rules is to shame oneself. This is why Jiro feels so bad when he is rude to Yoshida at the beginning of the story.

Although Jiro follows the rules of social etiquette, he is less formal when talking to his friends. He tends to use fairly simple language, and does not talk a lot. When he does speak to people, he tends to use minimal words to say what needs to be said. In contrast to this, many other characters talk a lot, such as using stories or sayings to get across their meaning. Mochida always wakes the boys up with a proverb, and seems to enjoy giving them little bites of wisdom in the form of riddles or short sayings. Okada sometimes uses stories to say something, such as his story about the girl and the serpent when he is confronting Jiro in the storehouse. This is his way of testing the intelligence or the intent of the person he is talking to. As a result, his speech can sometimes be confusing. Kinshi also likes to talk a lot, but he is more direct than Mochida and Okada. He likes to lighten the mood by telling jokes and teasing the other boys. His speech is very natural and easy-going, and he comes across as a friendly and open boy. Yoshida is completely different from his son, and usually only talks to give commands or insults, or to shout at people.

Structure

The story has a very simple structure, following the story of Jiro and not branching off or sidetracking to follow anyone else. It does not use flashbacks. This is necessary, as the reader is already being asked to imagine a different culture and a different time. It would be confusing to also follow several different stories. It is also more effective to stay with Jiro, as the story is told completely from his point of view. This makes sure that the reader sympathizes with Jiro and sees events from his eyes. Jiro's story is told in fairly short chapters with titles that reflect their events. Each chapter deals with a specific event or part of Jiro's life, meaning that the story is broken down naturally into sections that are easier to read and think about. Many of the chapters end with a cliff-hanger or mystery that creates suspense and makes the reader want to continue with the book.

Within Jiro's story there are some smaller stories included. These tend to be the scenes or storylines from the plays performed at the Hanaza. There is also a story told by Okada, about a girl and a serpent when he is confronting Jiro in the storehouse. These short stories all relate to what is happening to Jiro and will usually provide an interesting parallel, symbolism, irony, or a message that Jiro can learn from.



Quotes

"Now for nearly five years, there had been famine. The Shogun blamed the daimyo, and the daimyo blamed the rice merchants, and the merchants blamed the farm landlords, and the landlords blamed the peasants, who, as they died, blamed the gods." (Chapter 1, p. 4).

"It is always bad to be a thief, whether your name is Furukawa the rice merchant or Saburo the rogue. But as long as the government does not see fit to punish the one, we must hope that it fails to catch the other." (Chapter 1, p. 7).

"He had completely humiliated his kind father in front of Yoshida - the man upon whom all their livelihood depended. In the old days men had committed suicide for less." (Chapter 2, p. 15).

""Saburo!" everyone whispered. Once more the people's hero had outwitted the wealthy." (Chapter 3, p. 21).

"But Jiro soon forgot the presence of the men. They became far less real than the dolls, whose tragedy was being played out as Okada's magic voice spun a web of dread about his audience." (Chapter 3, p. 27).

"It was easy to see that they all adored Kinshi. And it was not hard to see why. The elder boy had such a way about him." (Chapter 4, p. 33).

"We all learn here by the honorable path of horrible mistakes." (Chapter 4, p. 37).

"An artist guards his secrets the way a rice broker guards his money. Nothing is ever given away." - Kinshi explaining why Jiro cannot expect help at the Hanaza, and why they have to steal texts. (Chapter 4, p. 38).

""He said," Kinshi replied in a hard thin voice, "that in this world there are only four things to be feared: earthquake, thunder, fire, and - father."" - Kinshi speaking. (Chapter 4, p. 44).

"...into the feeling of fear and respect that Jiro had for Yoshida, there appeared a new strain - hatred." (Chapter 5, p. 55).

"There is no honor among the hungry." - Isako speaking. (Chapter 6, p. 73).

"Ten Saburos are not worth one day of your father's life - or my own, when I am hungry enough." (Chapter 6, p. 73-4).

"Yoshida's cruelty was as much of an act as his subservience in his dealings with the police had been." (Chapter 9, p. 99).



"Jiro blushed and prayed that no one could read his mind, for he knew in his heart he was more ambitious than any junior boy had a right to be." (Chapter 9, p. 100).

"All of the Hanaza was a play - not just what they did upon the stage, but off it as well. Each person had a part - that was why when someone like himself didn't know the lines, he could disturb the whole drama." (Chapter 9, p. 102).

"For once, Yoshida had been right. There is no way to help people once they've turned the corner towards beastliness. One can only protect oneself." (Chapter 10, p. 113).

"Yes, Saburo has many puppets. The whole east wing belongs to him as well as Yoshida and a chosen few on the outside who have sworn their life's blood to his cause. But Saburo is only one. I alone am the master puppeteer." (Chapter 13, p. 149).

"If Hanji had sworn allegiance to Saburo - it was like The Thief of the Tokaido, was it not? Joman's son is cheered because he dies for his father. Hanji would be cheered for sacrificing his son for his master's sake." (Chapter 14, p. 157).



Topics for Discussion

Discuss the theme of loyalty and betrayal in this story. Who is loyal to who and why? Does anyone betray anyone else or think about doing so?

Is Jiro a hero? Give reasons and examples from the text to back up your answer.

Discuss the symbolism of puppets and the master puppeteer in this story. What do puppets represent, and how is the setting in a puppet theater appropriate to the story? Who is the real puppet master? Why?

Discuss honor in this story. What is honor and who has it? How does honor affect the characters' actions?

Do you think any of the characters in this story provide good examples of how to behave? If so who does this and why? If not, then explain your reasoning.

Discuss disguise and deceit in this story. Who is lying or hiding something and why do they do this? Does anyone put up a disguise, or hide behind something or someone else? Is anyone completely honest?

In what ways is Feudal Japan different from our own society and time? Use only examples from the story to form your answer. Is there anything you like about the society in the book? Is there anything you dislike?

Discuss the theme of love and friendship in this story. Who is friends with whom? Who proves their love for others? Who is the most loving character? Who fails the people they should love?

Is there a 'bad guy' in this book, and if so, who is it? Give reasons for your answer. Can anyone be blamed for their actions, or does everyone have good motivations for what they do? In your answer you might consider the daimyo, the assistant magistrate, the policeman, the rice merchants, Okada, and Yoshida, but feel free to bring in any other characters if you like.

Discuss stealing in this book. Many of the characters steal at various points. Jiro and Kinshi steal play scripts and puppets to practice with. Kinshi steals food and money to give to Jiro's mother. Saburo steals from the rich to give to the poor. Saburo also steals clothes and equipment from other people to use as disguises, such as the policemen's outfits and the Komuso priests' basket hats. Is stealing shown as being wrong in this story or can it be forgiven depending on the circumstances? When is stealing okay? What do you think?