

A Tale for the Time Being Study Guide

A Tale for the Time Being

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Plot Summary

A Tale for the Time Being by Ruth Ozeki is a story of a sixteen year-old girl in Japan named Nao and a writer in Canada named Ruth who are connected through a diary. Ruth finds Nao's diary when she is walking along a beach on her remote Canadian island. She believes it to be part of the debris from the tsunami of 2011. She sets out to prove her suspicions. Her husband and others tell her that they are too far inland for the debris and it is too early to be reaching them.

Nao writes of how her family returned to Japan after years in America. Nao only remembers living in America; so, she is disconnected from the Japanese culture. She is bullied by her classmates because she is different. She feels out of place and is contemplating suicide. Her father makes several attempts to kill himself. In the Japanese culture suicide is considered an honorable way to die.

Ruth reads Nao's diary at first as a distraction from the memoir she is writing that is not going well. She gets caught up in Nao's story and becomes worried about her. She attempts to find any proof that Nao and her family actually exist. Ruth gets so caught up in the story that time merges. She does not remember that Nao's story is not unfolding right now. It happened several years ago. She feels an urgent need to help Nao, but Ruth is reading is Nao's past.

Nao's diary is supposed to tell the story of her great grandmother who was a Buddhist nun, feminist, and poet. However, the diary focuses on Nao and her father as they struggle to deal with the harsh reality of their lives in Japan. Ruth feels for this young girl and strives to learn more than what is written within the pages of the diary. This quest leads her to learn more about herself and her mother. The story slips between time and connects the two writers and gives them both the strength to control their fears and begin to enjoy their lives again.



Section 1

Summary

Section 1

Nao introduces herself and says that she is a time being. A time being is someone who lives in time. She is sitting in a French maid café in Akiba Electricity Town. It is in the past of the person who is reading, but it is Nao's present. She is writing and wondering about the reader and where they are and what they are doing. This is her diary of her last days on earth.

Her name is Nao Yasutani. She sits in the café drinking coffee. Her new friend Babette is a maid in the café. Nao is wearing her school uniform and a man sitting near her is staring. He has a schoolgirl fetish. Nao is writing to tell the life story of her one hundred-and-four year old great-grandmother who is a Zen Buddhist nun, Yasutani Jiko. She was a nun, novelist, an anarchist, and feminist. Nao is writing her story to give her life a goal before she kills herself.

Ruth is walking on the beach and a sparkle catches her eye. She finds a scarred freezer bag encrusted with barnacles. She surmises that it was in the water a long time. She can see a hint of red in the bag. She believes it is someone's garbage tossed overboard or left behind after a picnic. She will take it home and throw it out.

Her husband finds the bag in the mud room and asks what it is. She tells him it is garbage just something she picked up on the beach. He tells her that there is something in it and asks if she does not want to know what is inside. She says no. Oliver opens the bag. It is bags within bags. He finds a Hello Kitty lunchbox with something inside. Oliver stacks the contents on the table. There is a small stack of handwritten letters, a bound book with a faded red cover, an antique wristwatch and next to that the Hello Kitty lunchbox. The letters are written in Japanese. The cover of the red book is in French. The watch has Japanese writing on the back.

Ruth and Oliver love books. Their house is full of books. Ruth is a novelist. Books are her consolation for moving to a remote island in the middle of Desolation Sound. The book is entitled 'In search of lost time' by Marcel Proust. When Ruth opens the cover expecting to see printed antique font, she finds adolescent handwriting in purple ink upon the page. The writing is in English with some Japanese characters. Ruth surmises that the handwriting is a teenager's.

Ruth and Oliver wonder how it came to be on the beach. He explains to her about the currents in the ocean that could bring the package from Japan to their island in Canada. They believe the lunchbox may be debris from the tsunami.

Nao is in Fifi's Lovely Apron. Fifi's is one of many maid cafes in Akiba Electricity Town. It is decorated like a French salon. She does not know if the decor is authentic and does



not think there are many cafes like it in Paris. Nao tells Jiko about modern life since she does not leave the temple often. Nao says Jiko is a hundred and four, but they do not know for sure. Jiko does not remember and the ward office was firebombed during World War II. A couple years ago she got fixated on one hundred and four and that is what she has been ever since. Nao tells her about cultural trends and new items. She tells her about the high school girls who get raped and suffocated with plastic bags. Nao believes it keeps her alive. It gives her something to pray for and as a nun that is what she does. One of her vows is to save all beings.

Nao explains why her diary has the cover of a philosophical masterpiece of Marcel Proust. She bought it in a handicraft boutique. Handicraft is a big fad in Japan. Nao is not handy so she buys her handicrafts. The girl who makes the diaries is famous for her craft.. She buys containers of old books from all over the world. Then, she neatly replaces the printed pages with blank paper. The hack is not even noticed. It makes a person think the letters just slipped off the pages. Nao bought the diary when she was skipping school and feeling down. It was not cheap, but she loved the feel of the worn cover. It also does not look like a diary so no one would beat her up to steal it to use against her. She bought a book in a language she did not understand so the meaning of the title would not interfere with her own creative expression.

Nao wanted to write in it the minute she got so she went to the nearest coffee shop. She takes out her purple gel ink pen and waits for the words to come, but they do not. It happens to her every time she attempts to write in the book. She thinks that perhaps Proust's ghost is keeping her from writing trivial stuff in his famous book. Nao decides she wants to write something important, something real to leave behind when she is gone. Whenever she thinks about her empty life, she feels that she is wasting her time. She feels everyone she knows is wasting their time except Jiko. She keeps getting distracted so she decides to find out what the title means. She googles it and discovers it is 'In search of lost time.' She finds this fascinating because she was thinking of lost time, while she was sitting attempting to write.

The idea of time being comes from Zen master Dogen Zenji. Nao thinks how Jiko's books are no longer in print for anyone to read, but she tells Nao wonderful stories and so Nao decides to write down Jiko's life. Jiko is the only person she knows who understands time. Nao knows that Jiko is old and does not have much time left and she does not want to think of a world without Jiko. She does not mind thinking of a world without her because she is unexceptional, but she hates the idea of a world without Jiko. Nao had Jiko buy a computer so that she could email and keep in touch. She also texts, which Nao says is pretty good for someone with cataracts and arthritis in both thumbs.

Nao decides to write down everything she knows in Proust's book and when she is done will leave it somewhere for someone to find. She sees it as reaching forward through time to touch someone. The person reading it will reach back through time to touch her. Nao knows she cannot write everything about Jiko's life and she wishes that Jiko's books were not out of print and that the reader could have the opportunity to read them.



Ruth feels an odd urgency to help the girl or save her, which she thinks is ridiculous. Her first impulse was to read the diary quickly, but the handwriting was hard to read and she used slang. It has been years since Ruth lived in Japan and her vocabulary is out of date. She is only vaguely familiar with Japanese pop culture. Ruth has to find the information on the Internet. She has even started making notes about maid cafes and Akiba. She googles Jiko Yasutani and gets nothing and she googles Nao Yasutani and gets nothing. She does find Dogen Zenji and reads about time beings. He explains that everything in the entire universe is intimately linked with each other as moments in time, continuous and separate.

Ruth thinks about Nao. She wonders where she is now and if she really means to commit suicide. She wonders if she fell victim to the tsunami, but since that was in northern Japan she is confused why Nao would be there. She wonders why she is in a maid's café. It sounds like a brothel.

Ruth is working on a memoir of the time she spent taking care of her mother, who suffered from Alzheimer's. She thinks of her own lost time and the confused mess she had made of the first draft and what needed to be done. She wonders why she was wasting time on someone else's story when she had her own to tell. She flips through the pages of the diary to see if it continuous to the end of the book or if the girl got bored and left it unfinished. The writing goes to the very last page.

Muriel, a friend of Ruth's, examines the freezer bag and tells her to have it examined to figure out how old the barnacles are and from that she can calculate how long the bag has been in the water. Muriel does not think it is from the tsunami. She says it is more likely from a cruise ship. Muriel is a retired anthropologist and an avid beachcomber. She is jealous that she did not find the Hello Kitty lunchbox and its contents.

Ruth reads the first few entries of the diary to her husband. When she comes to the part where Nao asks if the person reading feels special for finding her diary and having her write specifically to them, he asks Ruth if she feels special. She believes that is ridiculous. He then tells her that he has been thinking about garbage and that there are enormous masses of garbage and debris floating in the ocean. There are at least eight of them in the world's oceans. He says if her freezer bag had not escaped it would have been sucked up in one of these masses and would be slowly disintegrating. It is amazing the diary made it to them at all. While he is talking, Oliver is messing with the watch and is able to get it to work. Ruth puts the watch on her wrist. That night Ruth dreams about a nun. It takes place on a mountainside somewhere in Japan. An old nun kneels on the floor in front of a computer. It takes her awhile to type with her crooked arthritic fingers.

Nao writes that she and her father are having a fight. She is not talking to him and he has probably not noticed because he is oblivious to other's feeling these days. Nao screwed up her high school entrance exams so cannot get into a good school. Her only option is to go to a trade school where the stupid kids go and she does not want to do that. She would rather become a nun and go live with Jiko, but her parents say she has to graduate high school first.



Nao says she cannot be blamed for screwing up her entrance exams. With her educational background, she could not hope to get into a good Japanese school no matter how much she crammed. Her father wants her to apply for an international high school. He wants her to go to Canada. He likes Canada. He says it is like America only with health care and no guns. Her father used to love America. He was a hotshot computer programmer. He was headhunted when Nao was three to join a company in the Silicon Valley. Her mother was not thrilled, but she went along. Nao has no memory of Japan when she was a baby. For her, her life started and ended in Sunnyvale, CA, which makes her American. Her mother never got the hang of English or made many friends, but she was okay because Mr. Yastuani was making tons of money and she could buy nice clothes.

Things were great, but then her father's company goes bankrupt and they lost everything and had to go back to Japan. A big percentage of her father's salary was in stock options so they had no savings and Tokyo is not cheap. Her father was sulking and her mother was grim and tight and righteous, but at least they identified as Japanese and could speak the language fluently. Nao identified as American and even though she spoke Japanese at home her skills were limited to basic, daily-life stuff. In Japan, they have special catch up schools, but her family could not afford to send her. Nao is thrown into a public school where she has no clue how to act in a Japanese classroom. She is older than the other students and her Japanese is not good plus her family is broke so she was tortured by her classmates.

Her father wants her to go to Canada to be safe. Nao says it is typical of fathers to want their daughters to be safe. Her father, however keeps trying to kill himself and she wonders if he wants her to be safe so he will feel less guilty when he finally succeeds. The first time he tried was a year ago. They were living in a tiny two-room apartment on the west side of Tokyo. They could only afford that because the landlord was a friend of her father's. It was a horrible apartment and they can hear the neighbors having sex.

Her father was going out every day to look for work. He and Nao would leave the apartment together in the morning. They would leave early so they could take the long route. They wanted to get away from her mother who was emanating a toxic vibe at that time. She and her father never discussed it, but also did not want to be around it. On one of their walks, her father mentions Jiko and he tells her about her. The moment her dad would leave from dropping her off at school the other students would move harass her. They circle her and pinch and cut her. This torture would go on all day. Nao ignored them or pretended she did not exist. At the end of the day, they would chase her home to her apartment. Her mother was almost never home at that time because she would go to the aquarium and watch the jellyfish. It was supposed to reduce stress levels. Nao thinks back on it now and believes her mother was having a nervous breakdown.

After a couple months, her father comes home to announce that he has been hired at a new start-up that is developing empathic productivity software. Her dad would leave early in the morning and come home late at night. Nao is still bullied and they still did not seem to have any money, but they were feeling optimistic about the future. Her mother stopped going to the aquarium and starting fixing up the apartment. At



Christmas, it is the first that Nao remembers in Japan. Her parents tried to believe that everything was fine and their lives are one big adventure and Nao goes along with it.

Nao's parents start arguing about money. Her mother wanted her father to hand over his weekly pay to her so she could manage it. That is the way it is done in Japan. The husband gives the wife all the money and she gives him allowances that he can spend on whatever he likes. Her mother may have been more insist because her father had handled the money in America and the ended up with nothing. One day Mrs. Yasutani finds off track betting stubs in her husband's pocket and confronts him. Instead of confessing, he goes out and jumps in front of a train. The train had already started slowing down as it approached the station and the conductor saw him wobbling on the platform and was able to slam on the emergency brakes in time. The train just missed him. The police arrested him for causing a disturbance and interfering with the timely operation of the transit system. It was unclear if he jumped or was just drunk and stumbled so they released him into Mrs. Yasutani's custody.

Nao's father then admitted that he did not have a job. He spent his time at Ueno Park studying the racing form and feeding the crows. He sold his old computer peripherals to raise some cash, which he used to bet on the horses. Occasionally he would win and hold back some of the money to bet again and give the rest to his wife. Recently he had been losing more than winning until finally his cash was gone. Nao's mother decides to believe that his incident with the train was an accident and he goes along with her, but Nao can tell it is not the truth.

Ruth sometimes does not understand her husband. After hearing about Nao's life, her father and her situation at school he says it is interesting about the crows. Ruth asks what about them. He says that he has just been reading about Japanese crows or Jungle Crow. Oliver thinks that he saw a Jungle Crow when he was out in the garden. He believes it rode over on the flotsam and is part of the drift.

Oliver is seen as different, an anomaly. Ruth has always been fascinated by the currents of his mind even when she does not follow his thoughts. His observations were often the most interesting. Ruth and Oliver met in the early 1990s at an artists' colony in the Canadian Rockies. Oliver was leading a thematic residency called End of the Nation-State and Ruth was there to do postproduction on a film she was making at the time. He is a passionate devotee of midcentury Japanese cinema so they soon became friends. After the end of the residency, she went back to New York City and he to the island farm in British Columbia where he taught permaculture. They emailed one another. They tried living together in New York. They moved to Desolation Sound because Oliver always thought of his island and he had a mysterious flulike illness and they were broke and needed affordable health insurance.

Whaletown is a small town with a scattered population of 50 or less. It was once a whaling station, but the whales were hunted out in 1869. Oliver and Ruth have a house with a small cottage at the foot of the drive. Her mother lived in the cottage. She has Alzheimer's and Ruth wanted her close. Their house is made of cedar from the forest. It is a two-story structure built by hippies in the 1970s.



Ruth dozes in her chair in her office with her memoir that she has been working on for the last ten years. It had been possibly a year since she added anything to it. She knows she needs to read through the draft again and start editing. She places Nao's diary on the far edge of her desk away from her so she was not tempted by it. While her mother was still alive, Ruth thought the memoir was a good idea. Nao's diary is distracting when she is not reading it she is researching on the internet. She thinks of Nao and what she was thinking when her mother brought her father home from the police station.

Oliver tells Ruth that the Jungle Crow is back. He tells her that they are a huge problem in Japan. They're very clever. They memorize the schedule for trash pickup and rip open the trash. They have special crow patrols to hunt the crows and dismantle their nests, but the crows outsmart them and build dummy nests.

Nao details the ancestry of her family. Jiko Yasutani is her great-grandmother on her father's side. She had three kids a son, Haruki and two daughters Sugako and Ema. Ema is Nao's grandmother. Jiko adopted Ema's husband Kenji to take the place of Haruki who died in World War II. The family needed a son to keep the Yasutani name alive. Ema named Nao's father after his uncle Haruki. Haruki #1 was a kamikaze pilot and a philosophy student. Nao finds it weird since her father Haruki #2 like philosophy and keeps trying to kill himself. She says that suicide and philosophy must run in the family among the Harukis.

Jiko said that Haruki #1 did not actually want to commit suicide. They made everyone fight in the war whether they wanted to or not. Haruki got bullied a lot in the army. Nao sees French culture and bullying as another family interest. It is because of Haruki #1's death that Nao's father now carries on the Yasutani family name. It makes Nao nervous when she thinks of her family tree. It is all up to her and since she does not intend to get married or have children the family name is doomed. Jiko named her daughters after famous anarchists. Their life changed after the Chuo Rapid Express Incident. Her father starts withdrawing from the world. Her mother gets a job as an administrative assistant at a publishing house.

Nao had been able to hide all of the cuts and bruises her classmates inflicted upon her, but one night their bathtub broke and the landlord would not fix it so they had to start going to a public bath. Nao likes to watch the bar hostess and their beauty routines. She admires them. She believes they are bold and liberated and do exactly what they want. Her mother does not like her being around the hostess so she makes her wait until after dinner so they can go to the baths together. It is there that a woman comments on Nao's bruises. When they got home her mother examined her and found all the bruises, scars and scabs made from the scissor points. She also found the bald patch at the back of her head where they boy who sits behind her pulls out her hair, one by one. Nao tries to lie about the cause, but she has to tell her the truth. Her mother decides to go talk to her teacher about the abuse. After her mother talks to her teacher, the students pretend not to notice her. She walks the halls as if she is invisible. The invisibility is in the classroom as well. The teacher ignores her and marks her absent every day.



Nao's father has stopped going online. He spends his time reading Western philosophy books and making insects out of origami. Her mother brought home a series of books called *The Great Minds of Western Philosophy* because it did not sell well. She thought it might help him find the meaning of life. When he finished reading about a philosopher, he would cut out the pages and make paper insects. He only uses the philosophers he does not like for origami. Nao sits and does her homework, while her father folds the beautiful paper insects. She worries about her father.

Ruth has been wearing the antique watch every day. She finds the ticking reassuring. She looks up the words printed on the watch. It translates to sky soldier. Ruth researches the antique watch. She discovers that the watch was manufactured during World War II and was favored by the kamikaze troops. The numbers engraved on the back was a serial number for the soldier who owned it. She wonders if it was Haruki #1. Ruth searches the internet for Haruki Yasutani and then for the second Haruki. She does not find anything. She then tries searching for Zen temples and Jiko Yasutani. She types certain death, suicide, Chuo Rapid Express and Haruki into the search engine.

The website of Professor Rongstad Leistiko comes on the screen. Dr. Leistiko was doing research on first-person narrative of suicide and self-killing. The site has an excerpt from a letter from a man named Harry. Harry writes that the Japanese have always appreciated suicide. It gives meaning, shape and honor to their lives. Death is certain, but life is always changing. He writes that he does not care for himself, but is afraid his attitude is unhealthy for his daughter. He thought he should commit suicide so his daughter would no longer feel shame, but after he tried jumping in front of a train and saw the sadness on her face he changed his mind. He thinks he must stay alive, but has no confidence. He wants to find the meaning of life for his daughter.

Ruth writes Professor Leistiko an email. She tells him that she is a novelist and is doing research on the subject of suicide in Japan for a project. He thinks that Harry is a computer engineer name Haruki Yasutani who lived in Sunnyvale, California during the dot-com days. She is trying to get in touch with Mr. Yasutani and his daughter Naoko. She has items that belong to his daughter that have come into her possession in a mysterious way and she is concerned about her well-being. She would like any information he could provide.

Muriel arrives for a visit. Ruth sits listening to Oliver and Muriel's conversation and fingering the stack of letters from the Hello Kitty lunchbox. The last letter seems thicker than the rest. It is wrapped in a packet of several layers of oily wax paper. Ruth unpeels it. Inside she found a thin composition book. She opens it and expects to see Japanese script, but finds French. Ruth shows them the composition book. Muriel says to call Benoit LeBec, the dump guy, to translate it. They see the Jungle Crow when Muriel is leaving.

Nao finds it hard to write about the past. It makes her think that the past never really existed and is just her imagination. She says that when you write you are always writing in the then and not the now. For her now is just sitting in a maid café or on a stone bench writing trying to catch up with herself.



Her father has his birthday in May. He is feeling optimistic after winning third place in the Great Bug Wars for his flying *Cyclommatus imperator*. The kids were still pretending that she was invisible. When they talked about her they always called her Transfer Student Yasutani. They would comment that she had not been to school in weeks. They would push her down and step on her like she was not there and then ask if someone stepped in dog shit. A week before summer vacation the students stop pushing her over and making comments. They are walking around and looking very sad. She notices the students passing something around during lunch. Nao knows she has to find out what it is. She goes home as usual after school, but later offers to go buy her father some cigarettes.

Nao slips a small kitchen knife in her pocket and goes out. She runs to the alleyway and ducks behind the row of vending machines. She is waiting for a boy from her homeroom, Daisuke-kun. He is younger than her and small. She jumps out at him and pulls him into the alley. She makes him empty his book bag. She tells him she wants the card that they were handing out at school. The card is a funeral announcement for the deceased former transfer student Yasutani Naoko. Nao asks him if this makes him happy and he says no. She knows it is a lie because when you are a nobody you are happy someone besides you is being tortured. She places the blade against his neck. She contemplates killing him and giving the students a real body to mourn. She ends up releasing him.

Daisuke-kun tells her that she should have cut him that he wants to die. Nao feels sorry for him. She apologizes. Her funeral is beautiful and very real. The students wear black armbands and set an altar on her desk with a candle, incense burner and her school photo enlarged and framed and decorated with black and white ribbons. One by one they took turns going to her desk and paying their respects. They lay white paper flowers in front of her picture. While the students were doing this, the teacher was chanting a Buddhist hymn. Nao did not go to school that day so did not see it in person. She pretended to be sick. Nao is emailed a link to a video-sharing website. Someone had made a video of the funeral and posted it on the internet. The video was getting thousands of hits. Nao is kind of proud. It feels good to be popular.

Analysis

Nao, a young sixteen year-old Japanese girl, is writing a diary and wonders about the person who could be reading it. She is going to kill herself, but wants to write her great-grandmother's story before she does. Ruth finds Nao's diary on a beach in Canada. She believes it to be trash until her husband opens it. They believe it may be debris from the 2011 tsunami.

Nao writes in a cafe in Akiba Electricity Town. Nao loves her great-grandmother and keeps her informed of what is happening outside of the temple. She believes Jiko is the most amazing person. Nao writes in a hacked copy of Proust's 'In search of lost time.' This is poignant because Nao is writing about Jiko to keep her from being forgotten and her writing is the only thing keeping Nao from killing herself.



Ruth feels a connection to the young girl. She wants to learn more about her so tries to research what she knows on the Internet, but comes up with nothing. Ruth is of Japanese descent, but feels little connection to her heritage. She learns more about the culture through Nao's diary. Ruth feels such a connection that she dreams about Jiko.

Nao has a rough time adjusting to her new country. She identifies as American and does not know what it means to be Japanese. This makes her feel alienated in her native country. The transition is difficult for everyone. They have gone from being rich in America to being poor in Japan. Nao tells about her family history and how suicide runs in the family. She is worried that she will be the last of the Yasutani line. This weighs on her mind when her father tries to commit suicide. Her mother finds out about the abuse that she suffers and school and worries about her daughter. She has had to take control of her family by getting a job and watching over her husband and daughter.

Ruth becomes obsessed with the lives of the Yasutani. She wears the watch that was in the lunchbox. She wants to know more about the family. She is willing to go to any lengths to learn about them.

Nao is tortured by her fellow classmates. When her mother talks to someone at the school about the physical abuse, the students go on to psychological abuse. They pretend they cannot see her, which makes Nao question if she exists. This is pure loneliness to her. She can speak to no one about what is happening to her. The funeral that the students hold makes Nao feel that she has truly died. It's as though she no longer exists in this world.

Discussion Question 1

How is life in Tokyo different from life in Sunnyvale, California, for the Yasutani's?

Discussion Question 2

Why does Nao want to write her great-grandmother's story? Why is it so important to her for Jiko to be remembered?

Discussion Question 3

Why does Nao identify as American? What does this mean?

Vocabulary

Condescend, converse, hentai, fetish, anarchist, feminist, parapet, assumptions, dissect, corrosive, decipher, desecration, pique, prurient, ambiance, nonexistent, righteous, prefecture, dilemma, impermanence, laissez-faire, incursion, decipher, colloquialism, annotate, albeit, nuance, opaque indiscernible, marginalia, languish, axial, incongruous,



solemnity, sinuous, improbable, sadist, emanate, idiomatic, subtle, anomaly, deviation, anarchy, succulent, refuge, portent, crepuscular, luminous, etymology, inexorable, arboreal, indigenous, futile, rampancy, malevolent, euphemism, decadence, edifice, copious, elegiac, cessation, liberate, rapprochement, aggregate, tedious.



Section 2

Summary

Section 2

Ruth remembers sitting in front of her computer screen trawling the Internet for new friends and family following the earthquake and tsunami of March 2011. Ruth spends the afternoon watching clips of bullying and harassment on video-sharing sites. The clip of “The Tragic and Untimely Death of Transfer Student Nao Yasutani” is not to be found. She needed to know if Nao was dead or alive.

Ruth has her friend Callie come to examine the barnacles on the freezer bag. She dates the barnacles for three or four years. Oliver says that three years puts it before the tsunami. When Callie is leaving, she sees the Jungle Crow. She says the locals are upset. They see it as an invasive species. Callie says that in Sliammon mythology crows are magical ancestors who can shape-shift and change into human form.

Oliver is upset when Ruth reads him the part of the diary about the bullying. He cannot understand how the teacher can participate. That night Ruth has another dream about the nun. The old nun is seated at the desk on the floor. She looks up from the screen and is wearing black glasses that are similar to the ones Ruth wears. She takes them off to rub her eyes and sees Ruth. The nun beckons her to her. She hands the glasses to Ruth. Ruth takes them and puts them on. The lenses are thick and murky and it takes her a moment to adjust. The lenses are too thick and strong. She begins to panic. The glasses are stuck to her face and will not come off. The world begins to absorb her pushing her back into a place or condition that is unformed. She cannot find words for it. It is dark and not a human. She cries out and brings her hands to her face to discover that she has no face, no hands, nothing but emptiness. There was no forward or back. Then she feels a feather-light touch and hears a chuckle and the darkness recedes and is replaced by utter calm and well-being. When she wakes in the morning, she is at peace and well rested.

Nao has started having metal-binding, waking up in the middle of the night unable to move. You open your eyes and stare into darkness and sometimes you hear voices that sound like angry demons, but you cannot speak. Sometimes your body feels like you are floating away. She was getting metal-bound a lot before her funeral, but it stopped after her funeral. She believes it is because she is a ghost. Inside she is dead. Her friendship with Kayla from Sunnyvale ends. She has nothing to write to her about and feels like a loser. Kayla is pretty and super confident so Nao is surprised she was ever her friend. They have nothing to talk about and Kayla has been taking longer and longer to respond to her emails. After her funeral, Nao tried to share her feelings with Kayla and wrote how she hated school and being in Japan and how much she missed Sunnyvale. When Kayla wrote back it was a cheerful email that makes it clear that she



is not interested in Nao. Nao forwards her the link of her funeral. It was mostly to shock her. Kayla never answers. Nao feels like she is a ghost.

One night Nao has a dream about one of her classmates, Reiko. She is like a Japanese Kayla, super smart and popular. She never bullied Nao directly because all the other kids did it for her. She would just have to give a look and the other kids would do her bidding. Nao thinks she has the cruelest and emptiest eye. Her dream is about Reiko's eye. She was in the schoolyard, metal-bound and lying on her back in a box. Her classmates are looking down at her their eyes glittering like animals in a dark forest. The eyes disappear one by one until there is only Reiko's eye left emitting a laser beam of light, but it is cold dark and empty. It presses down on Nao enveloping her. The only way to save herself is to plunge her little kitchen knife into the pupil. She closes her eyes and plunges the knife in over and over. A thick, cold liquid oozes from the eye. The clank of the bolt wakes her up. Her father is returning from his nighttime walk. Nao realizes it was a dream.

The next day she corners Daisuke to find out about Reiko. She finds out that she came to school wearing an eye patch a couple days earlier. She had the eye patch on Monday and Nao had her dream on Sunday. At first the other students thought that she had a sty, but told them that she was playing the role of Jubei-chan the Samurai Girl in *The Secret of the Lovely Eye Patch*. The eye patch is pink and shaped like a heart. Nao believes that she is a living ghost and it fills her with an awesome sense of power.

Jiko comes to their apartment. They normally ignore the doorbell because they have no friends and it is usually bill collectors. Her father spends his time sitting on the balcony on a bucket smoking cigarettes. He has become very paranoid. When the doorbell rings for the fourth or fifth time, Nao answers it. She sees two men in identical light grey pajamas and straw sun hats. One is old and one is young. They bow to her. They ask to see her father. Nao realizes that they are actually female. The older one goes in past her and goes toward the balcony. Her father is up and leaning over the edge looking at the sidewalk below like he is going to jump. The woman says something to him and he steps away from the railing and sits on the bucket with his face in his hands. Nao realizes the woman is her great-grandmother. They make polite conversation about nothing until her mother comes home. Nao can tell by how surprised she pretends to be that there are two Buddhist nuns in her home that she arranged the whole thing.

After dinner Nao goes to the bedroom, she can hear their hushed voices talking about her being bullied so she puts on her headphones. She listens to music, but eventually goes back out into the living room. Her mother's eyes are red-rimmed from crying. Nao's mother tells her that Jiko has invited Nao to spend the summer with her in her temple in Miyagi. Nao sees it as a setup. Her dad tells her that she should go. Her father tells her that he is going to see special doctors who can teach him to cope with his problems and by the time she gets back he will be better.

Miyagi prefecture is located in the Tohoku region in the northeastern part of Japan. It was one of the areas hardest hit by the 2011 earthquake and tsunami. The island that Ruth and Oliver live on is named for a famous Spanish conquistador. The nickname of



the island is Island of the Dead. Ruth walks to the post office to get her mail. It is raining and Ruth gets soaked. Dora, the postmistress, is also a poet and sees Ruth as a colleague. Dora knows everything about everyone not only because she reads their mail, but because she is nosy. The post office was where one went when they needed information. Dora knows about the diary and letters. The people in the post office want to see the watch.

When she gets home, she finds Oliver in the basement trying to fire up the generator to get it ready in case the storm takes out the power. Unfortunately a generator could not power the Internet. The Internet was their portal to the outside world, a portal that was always slamming shut. Storms always caused a problem. Ruth decides to surf the net before the power goes out. She finds one result when she types in Yasutani Jiko, Zen, nun, novelist, Taisho and Miyagi. The article is called “Japanese Shishosetsu and the Instability of the Female ‘I.’” In the preview of the article it states that the author will assert that one early woman author was groundbreaking and radical. This writer is unknown in the West and was born in Miyagi prefecture and moved to Tokyo where she became involved with radical left-wing politics. In 1945, after the death of her son, she took the tonsure and vows of a Zen Buddhist nun. Her name is Yasutani Jiko, a woman pioneer of the “I-novel”. Ruth is stunned by the name Yasutani Jiko on the screen. It is the corroboration that she has been looking for. She clicks the read more link at the end of the preview. The power goes out.

Ruth and Oliver go to the beach the next morning to collect seaweed for their garden. There are lots of people on the beach. Muriel is there. She tells them they are looking for stuff from Japan. Muriel says it is Ruth’s fault because word got out about the freezer bag and someone mentioned that money had washed up in Japan. Ruth blames Muriel for telling about the freezer bag. Muriel apologizes and says that she only told a few people. She could not help it. She finds it exciting. She lives for garbage.

Jiko loves Nao’s dad in spite of his problems and he loves her. She lives in a tiny temple on the side of a mountain near the coastline. The buildings cling to the mountainside. Nao’s father takes Nao on the train to Sendai, which is a big deal because it means leaving the apartment during the day. It is stressing him out and Nao’s does not help. She wants to make a detour to Tokyo Disneyland and shake hands with Mickey-chan. Her father freaks out in crowds, but Nao begs because Mickey-chan is from California. Her father refuses. Nao sulks and makes him feel guilty and miserable the entire trip. When they get to Sendai, they must take a bus to the temple. When they are let off the bus on a small mountainside road with only a stone gate in front of them, Nao wants to throw a tantrum, but she sees his face lit up as he looks at the mountainside. Nao has not seen him look like this since they left Sunnyvale. It is nice to see so she follows him up the steps. Nao wants him to stay there with her. She is worried that the doctors will not be able to fix him. She is worried he will attempt to kill himself again.

Nao takes a bath with Jiko. She feels like hippopotamus next to the small woman. Jiko has a way of making a person feel okay with themselves. During her stay, Nao baths with Jiko and helps shave her head. Nao is shy at first and does not want to talk to Jiko especially after her father sneaks out early the next morning while she is sleeping. He



left her a note telling her he would return at summer's end and not to worry about him. In the bath one night, Jiko asks her if she is very angry. She touches the scars on Nao's back and says that she must be very angry. Nao says nothing just dresses quickly once they are done and goes to her room. The next morning she finds Jiko and tells her that yes she is angry so what. Jiko says she asked for Nao so that she could hear the answer. Nao opens up to her after this and talks to her about her life.

The power is off for four days. When it comes back on, she runs to check her email. There is no response from the professor. She searches for the journal entry that she had found before the power went out. She clicks on the read more link and then the order now button. A message appears that the article has been removed from the database and is no longer available.

Nao believes that writing in her diary is becoming a problem in the cafe. Babette asks her if she is interested in a date and she tells her that she has her period. She thinks her antisocial behavior is pissing off Babette and the other maids. Nao shares with the reader Jiko's instructions on how to develop your superpower. Nao was in the temple kitchen talking to Jiko about her funeral and her attack on Reiko and being a living ghost when Jiko told her that she is not really dead because the funeral was not real. They chanted the wrong sutra. She tells Nao that she needs a true power. She teaches Nao how to do a form of meditation.

Nao tells of how Jiko became a nun. It was right after World War II. Jiko's only son Haruki #1 was studying philosophy and French literature at Tokyo University when he got drafted into the army. He was nineteen and freaked out. Jiko says he was a peaceful boy. He was a cheerful, optimistic boy who enjoyed being alive. Not the kind of person to be trained as a kamikaze pilot and killed by slamming a plane into an American battleship. Nao likens it to a cold fish dying in your stomach. She explains this to Jiko. Jiko says she had fish too for many years. She had lots of fishes, small were small like sardines, some medium-sized like carp and the biggest fish belonged to Haruki #1, it was the size of a whale. When she became a nun and renounced the world, she learned how to open her heart so that the whale could swim away. Nao is trying to learn to do this. When Jiko found out her only son was going to die, she wanted to die too, but her youngest daughter was fifteen and needed her. So Jiko waited until her daughter was old enough to become independent and she became a nun. Zazen will wake up the mind and help develop a superpower.

Ruth tries zazen. She tries over and over and keeps falling asleep. Oliver asks Ruth to go clamming. They sit on the beach eating oysters and Oliver tells her that the oysters are originally from Miyagi and Ruth feels the smallness of the world.

Jiko takes Nao to the beach. She asks if she has ever bullied a wave. She tells her to go to the water and wait for the biggest wave and give it a punch, a kick and hit it with a stick. She hands Nao her walking stick. Nao takes Jiko's stick and runs to the edge of the ocean. She ran into the first one that came to her. She yelled like a samurai going into battle. She smacks the wave, but the water keeps coming. Over and over she runs at the sea. She tells Jiko that the ocean won.



Ruth reads about the reactor meltdown at Fukushima in 2011. The Japanese government and Tepco tried to contain news of the meltdown. They were successful in covering up crucial data about dangerous radiation levels in the region surrounding the plant, but eventually the information was leaked. This news upset the Japanese people. Oliver tells Ruth that the earthquake caused Japan to move closer to them. It jumped thirteen feet in their direction. It also caused the planet mass to shift making the earth spin faster. This has made the days shorter by about one point eight millionth of a second a day.

Nao is getting strong in body and mind at the temple. She is cultivating her superpower by meditating every day and by not killing anything, not even the mosquitoes. Jiko tells her that everything has a spirit and they must console and honor the things that have served them well. Jiko would make her run all the way down the mountain to the road and back up to the temple. She made Nao's father do the same thing when he came to visit as a boy. Nao thinks it would be good for her father to come back to the temple and meditate and exercise and learn to be strong again. Nao tells Jiko how her father fell in front of the train and how he goes out at night and how Nao followed him one night. She tells her how happy he looked when they were walking up to the temple. Jiko says that he always liked it there.

Obon is approaching. It is a time for ghosts to visit from the land of the dead. Nao is excited because she has never experienced Obon before. She thinks the family ghosts will come to the temple where they were expected and people knew how to treat them. Nao helps Jiko and Muji prepare the altars and dust and clean. They even make food because the ghosts will be hungry after their long journey. The night of Obon Nao sneaks out of her room when Muji and Jiko are asleep. She sits on the top step of the temple to wait. Nao wonders what a ghost will look like. Nao feels something settle beside her and she turns to see her father. He is not dressed in a business suit, but she knows he is dead. She thinks he has killed himself at last and has come to tell her.

Nao asks if the ghost is her father. She speaks in Japanese and the ghost turns. She notices that he looks really young and is wearing a uniform. He asks who she is. She cannot believe that her father has forgotten her. She introduces herself. Looking at him again, Nao realizes it is the ghost of her great uncle, Haruki #1. She explains who she is and he says that he was unaware that he had a nephew or a great-niece. The ghost is moody and withdrawn. Nao can think of nothing to talk about so she hums and quietly sings a song by Monique Serf that she does not even understand. The ghost chuckles and disappears. Nao is upset with herself. She believes Haruki #1 is the most fascinating person she will ever meet and she sang a stupid song to him.

In the morning, Nao sneaks into Jiko's study. The family altar is in this room. Nao picks up the photo of Haruki. She notices that one of the fasteners is loose and when she tries to fix it the frame comes apart in her hands. She tries to fix it, but something is jamming it. She finds a letter there and takes it. She fixes the frame the best she can and puts it back on the mantle. The letter is his formal farewell to his mother before he goes on his kamikaze mission the next day. He tells her that he is not a warlike man and



everything that he does will be in accordance with the love of peace that she has taught him.

Ruth goes to see Benoit at the dump to help with the translation of the French diary. He tells Ruth that her mother and he were great friends. Ruth remembered Oliver bringing her mother to the dump every Saturday morning. She liked to go to the Free store. He already knows about the freezer bag and its contents. He asks to see the sky soldier watch. Ruth hands it to him. She then hands him the diary. He tells her the writing is a man's and more than likely written by the sky soldier. Ruth goes home and tells Oliver that the diary could be written by Haruki #1 and it was in French so no one else could read it.

When they are lying in bed, Ruth asks Oliver if she is going crazy. She had a dream about Jiko where she had written up, down, same thing. She later read in the diary where Jiko said that same thing to Nao. She wonders how she could dream about it a week before she read about it. He says that premonitions are coincidences waiting to happen. She then mentions the disappearing article and how Professor Leistiko will not answer her email. Oliver tells her how he just found an article in New Science about a recent development in the construction of qubits for quantum computing by H. Yasudani. She wonders if it could be the same person and it was just a typo on the name.

Oliver and Ruth take a trip to Campbell River to get the generator fixed and to have dinner at a Japanese sushi bar. The owners Akira Inoue and his wife Kimi cannot go back to their hometown because it was evacuated after the reactor meltdown. Their family and friends just had to walk out of their homes and leave everything behind. The owners are friends of Oliver and Ruth's. Ruth shows Kimi the letters. She agrees to translate the letters and her son will help her with the English.

Nao is worried about taking the letter and breaking the picture frame. She wonders if she should tell Jiko about seeing the ghost of Haruki #1, but then wonders if she will be upset if he did not come to her. She sneaks out to the steps and tries to summons his ghost. It does not work so she goes to the temple. Jiko sits in the temple and reads the names of the dead. It is very long and Jiko's voice drones on and on. The names feel alive and no one seems sad. Nao is allowed to play the drum during the ceremony. After the ceremony and party for the guests, Nao sees a man in Jiko's study. She is worried about the picture being broken so she goes over to see what is happening. The man is kneeling before the altar. Nao notices that Jiko is there too. While she is standing there, Nao hears the voice of Haruki. He says that they were taught to kill themselves before they were showed how to kill the enemy. He shows her how. He voice asks her if she knows what is in the box on the altar next to the photograph. Muji has told her that it contains the remains of Haruki #1, but it does not make sense to her. He tells her no sense, no sense at all and then he is gone. Inside the study, Jiko and the man bow to one another.

Nao's summer vacation is coming to an end and she is bummed so Jiko and Muji decide to throw her a going away party. They make a pizza, have chocolate and sing karaoke. Someone had donated a computer to the temple so Nao is able to download



songs for them to sing from a karaoke website. Nao sings “Material Girl” by Madonna. Muji sang R. Kelly’s “I Believe I Can Fly” and Jiko won for singing “Impossible Dream.” She put her heart into it and Nao believes she sang it for her. When Jiko came to say goodnight to her that night, she tells her about Haruki #1’s ghost and how she sang the stupid song so went to apologize at the altar and broke the picture and took the letter. She then begged him to come back and he did and told her about being a soldier and taught her how to shoot herself in the throat. Nao feels like Jiko is drawing her thoughts out of her head by just having her hand on her forehead.

Jiko tells her that that was how they were trained. They were student soldiers and very bright so the military men despised them. They bullied them and beat them every day trying to crush their spirits, but they did not crush Haruki’s. Nao asks if she is the enemy since she grew up in America. Jiko tells her no that she is not the enemy and no one hates her. Haruki hated the war and fascism, the government and its bullying politics of imperialism and capitalism and exploitation. He hated the idea of killing people he did not hate. Nao says that his letter said that he was giving his life for his country. How could he be a suicide bomber and not kill people? Jiko tells her that the letter was for show and not his true feelings. He was made to join the war. Japan was losing and they had drafted all the men and only students and little boys were left. She cried when he received his letter. He was a kind boy, so gentle and wry, not a warrior type.

There was a pageant where twenty-five thousand student draftees marched outside Meiji Shrine. One of Haruki’s classmates gave a speech. He said that they do not expect to return alive because they knew they would die. They had all heard of the mass suicides of soldiers at a place called Attu. The prime minister, Tojo Hideki was there. Jiko hated him. He was a war criminal and after the war, he was hanged. Jiko was happy. She wept for joy when she heard he was dead and then she shaved her head and took a vow to stop hating. The boy who gave the speech survived and every year at Obon comes to apologize. Nao asks what is in the box on the altar. Jiko tells her nothing.

In the morning, Nao goes to Jiko’s study one last time. She unwraps the box and finds a slip of paper inside. Jiko tells her that the Naval Authority sent that to her. If they bodies were not found, they put in a piece of paper because they could not send an empty box. The word on the slip of paper is remains. She gives Nao a freezer bag with papers inside. They are the letters that Haruki wrote to her before he died. She tells her to keep them with the other one she found. She can read them, but to remember that they are not Haruki’s last words either. She also gives Nao an old wristwatch. Jiko tells her to wind it every day and never let it stop. Jiko tells her that Haruki would have liked her. Nao puts back the remains, lights and candle and tells Haruki that it was very nice meeting him. She asks if he can check up on her dad from time to time.

Nao does not want to leave, but she is happy when her dad shows up. Part of her was worried that he wouldn’t. In her mind she keeps comparing him to Haruki #1 and he comes up short.



Analysis

Ruth feels such a connection to Nao's life that she dreams about Jiko. The nun hands her some glasses and Ruth is absorbed into darkness. She panics, but she feels a calming presence and realizes that this is what she has been seeking with meditation. She has utter calm and a feeling of well-being. When she awakes she is at peace and well-rested.

Nao starts having metal-binding because of the stress in her life. She worries about school and her father. The metal binding begins when he leaves at night for his walks and does not disappear until he returns. It stops after her funeral because she has a sense of letting go. She does not return to school so there is no pressure there and she feels that she does not essentially exist so does not think of anything. Her dream about her classmate is her need to exact revenge on the one who caused her so much pain. The eye patch that Reiko wore is merely a coincidence.

Jiko comes to their apartment at the behest of Nao's mother. She is worried about her family and needs help. Going to the temple will help Nao to get away from the pressures of the family and give her mother and father time to themselves to help work out their problems and get her father some help.

Ruth is upset that everyone on the island knows about her finding the lunchbox and its contents. She does not want to share Nao. She searches the Internet to try and find verification that the Yasutani family exists. She is excited when she finds an article, but is unable to get it before the power leaves her without a connection to the outside world.

Nao is upset at being left at the temple for the summer. She wants her father to stay with her. She sees that being there makes him happy and she wants to help him recover. She feels like she is being left out. Nao ends up enjoying her time at the temple. She helps the nuns in their daily chores and learns about Jiko. Jiko tells her about Haruki #1 and how he was drafted into the war and became a kamikaze pilot. Jiko teaches her how to let go of her anger and to meditate so that she kind find her power within to become who she is meant to become. Jiko teaches Nao how to strengthen her mind and body. She confides in Jiko about the horrors in her life and about her father. She wants to be able to help him. Nao becomes immersed in the Japanese traditions and is excited to experience her first Obon where the dead visit for four days. She meets her great-uncle Haruki and becomes obsessed with learning all about him. He becomes her hero.

Ruth worries that she is going crazy because of her dreams and premonitions. She is disconnected from her heritage so does not understand the forces that are affecting her.

Nao feels a connection to Haruki and wants to know all about him. Jiko feels this connection and gives Nao the letters that he wrote to her the last days of his life. She warns that they are not his last words, but will give the girl a sense of who he was. She wants Nao to understand what kind of man her son was so that she understands what he did in the war.



Discussion Question 1

What is metal-binding? Why is it important when Nao feels the metal-binding?

Discussion Question 2

What is Obon? Whose ghost does Nao meet? Why does she think it is her father? Why does she feel that she shamed herself?

Discussion Question 3

What does Jiko give to Nao before she leaves to go home? Why does she want Nao to have them? What warning does she give about them?

Vocabulary

Correlate, gregarious, hermaphroditic, deign, covenant, crepuscular, inchoate, pheromone, nonchalant, catastrophic, optimism, eponymous, sanguinary, gravitas, curmudgeon, ambient, profound, sentient, spastic, interstice, exhortation, ironic, acclimate, claustrophobic, intricate, stoic, malevolent, benevolent, prevalent, anomalous, stagnation, satirical, collateral, enclave, cultivate, liberation, refrain, chanson, emanate, adjourn, iconography, rueful, condescension, paradoxical, lassitude, premonitions, pertinent, galumph, fascism, imperialism, capitalism, exploitation, gaudy, consolation.



Section 3

Summary

Section 3

On December 10, 1943, Haruki #1 writes to his mother telling her that it has been three months have passed since the Measures to Strengthen the Internal Situation announced terminating student deferments and shutting down the Department of Philosophy. So Philosophy, Law, Literature, and the Economy departments are all being shut down so the students can join the army to fight in the war.

It has been two months since they had a send off from Meiji Shrine and one week since he bid goodbye to his family and he entered the barracks of the Navy Airbase. He tells her that she would not recognize him he has changed so much.

On January 2, 1944, he writes that he has believed he would die ever since he learned that the student exemptions were terminated. His life at the university seemed trivial on learning he would be joining the army and would most likely die. His mother's tears at his having to join the army made him feel ashamed. He now knows that he should have been happy to have a mother who loved him so much.

During their training the men are told to switch off their hearts and mind completely. They are to cut off their love and attachments with family because their loyalty should lie solely with the Emperor and their homeland of Japan. Haruki #1 is determined not to be a coward. He plans to reflect upon his thoughts and emotions to try and improve himself so that he will die with honor.

On February 23, 1944, Haruki #1 writes to his mother about his training. It is very severe. The superior officers see the student soldiers as privileged and effete. Haruki #1 has a lack of physical stature and is clumsy so he is not a favorite. He feels sorry for his friend K. He is a true philosopher. He loses himself in his train of thought staring off into space and not paying attention to his commanding officers. They nickname K "The Professor."

On February 26, 1944, Haruki #1 is making progress in his training and advancing in rank and status. In a recent exercise, he became concerned about K's health so Haruki #1 volunteered to take his place. F, the commanding officer, enjoys this because with K he was not able to get a significant reaction from his tormenting. He makes each exercise more exquisite than the last.

On April 14, 1944, Haruki #1 tells his mother that F suggests silly games to improve the morale of their squadron after the evening meal. Haruki #1 is the center of the game. Some of the members of the squadron laugh and enjoy themselves, but K never laughs. When he tries to step forward to take Haruki #1's place he is brushed aside. In an attempt to protect K, Haruki # 1 has only cause him greater suffering.



On June 16, 1944, He writes that K disappeared. They were questioned, but no one knew anything. They later received news that he was dead. Haruki does not know how. He feels grief for his friend and hopes that he is reborn into a far better world than this one.

On August 3, 1944, Haruki #1 writes about his visit from his family. Their images comfort him at night. He remembers his mother's shocked expression when she first saw him. She touched his bruised face and he knows she did not believe him when he told her his injuries were minor. He is upset that he did not prepare her for the routine banalities of military life. He did not want her to suffer on his behalf by writing to her of them, but saw that that was selfish. He has graduated from his training and is now going to learn to fly.

In December, 1944, He tells his mother that he volunteered for accelerated training as a Special Attack Force pilot. He sees death as inevitable no matter what he chooses to do. By choosing this death, he will be guaranteed a posthumous promotion of two ranks, which will increase the pension paid upon his death. He knows his life is more important to his mother than money, but he feels it gives meaning to his life and gives him profound satisfaction.

He also sees it as a way of taking control of the time he has remaining in life. This death is pure, clean, and purposeful. He will be able to choose when and how he will die. He feels that his death is inevitable. Since he will not be able to live his life, he has chosen the death that will most benefit the people that they love.

On March 27, 1945, Haruki #1 writes that he has been reading poetry and novels as he waits to die. Reading women writers makes him feel closer to his mother. He asks if she is still writing. He would like to think that she is, but knows she probably does not have the time.

While he is flying, he thinks of a children's tale about the Crow Wars. He recalled the Crow Captain lifting off from his honey locust tree to take wing to battle. Haruki #1 sees himself as Crow. He loves to fly. He tells her that his day is approaching and his next "official" letter may be the last one that she receives from him. He tells her to no matter what nonsense he writes in it, to know that they are not his last words. There are other words and other worlds. His mother taught him that.

Analysis

Haruki # 1 is forced to join the Japanese Army. He likes his life as a student of philosophy and does not want to join the army, but he is not given a choice. He feels that he is destined to die. He writes letters to his mother telling her about his feeling and his life in the army because they are very close and he knows that she will understand how he feels.

He is bullied by his commanding officers who feel that students are inferior to other soldiers. They do not see them as proper soldiers as they do not see themselves as



soldiers. Haruki #1 does not believe in war or violence. He worries about the comfort of others and does not harden his heart like he is trained to do. He will not sever the emotional ties with his family and instead tries to become enlightened before he is destined to die. He is a philosophy student who gets caught up in a war he does not believe in; but, he will have to give his life because it is the honorable thing to do. Honor is important in the Japanese culture. His bullying and suicide are precursors to what is happening to Nao and Haruki #2.

Discussion Question 1

Why does Haruki #1 join the army? Why could he not refuse?

Discussion Question 2

Why does Haruki #1 step up to take K's place as the one the commanding officer bullies? Does this help the situation or make it worse? How?

Discussion Question 3

Why does Haruki #1 volunteer for the Special Attack Force? Why does he feel that he is destined to die?

Vocabulary

Deferments, fallacy, suffice, totalitarianism, preemptive, existential, euphoria, chagrin, effete, ingenuity, morale, posthumous, modicum, transcendental.



Section 4

Summary

Section 4

Haruki #1's letters make Nao feel like a coward. The bullying that he suffered was much more than she has had to suffer. She feels weak. She sees him as only a few years older, but he was mature, brave, and intelligent. He cared about his education. This makes her feel inferior to him because she feels stupid and trivial compared to him. After returning from the temple, she is mad at herself and her father. She feels that he is a grown man and he should have his life together.

Nao would go to her mother when she was having problems with certain words, while reading Haruki #1's letters. Her mother asks her if she has shown the letters to her father. Nao does not believe that he deserves to see them. Her mother tells her that he is trying to reform and they need to help him. Nao thinks about what her mother said and believes that if her father knew how cool his namesake was, he could be inspired to turn his life around.

The next day after school, she decides to show her father the letters. She finds her father sitting. He is folding a Japanese rhinoceros beetle. Nao is now interested in philosophy due to Haruki #1, and she becomes upset that her father is using pages of *The Great Minds of Western Philosophy*. She tells him that his uncle Haruki studied philosophy for real and did not sit around a home playing origami like a child. Her father goes pale and still and puts down the beetle. Nao knows her words are harsh. She wants to inspire him so she slaps the letters on the table in front of him. Nao tells her if he reads them he may stop feeling sorry for himself. She tells him that Haruki #1 was a Japanese warrior not a coward and her father should be more like him.

When school starts again, Nao decides things were going to be different. She will not let them bully her anymore or break her spirit. She is going to be brave and calm and peaceful, like Jiko and Haruki #1. The students do not harass her. Nao's focus improves, and she is able to concentrate on her studies. She feels ashamed of her ignorance after reading her great-uncle's letters. School becomes more interesting.

September 11th changed everything. Her father was already complaining of insomnia because his sleeping pills were not working. He was still walking at night. Nao wakes up to find her father watching the news coverage of the attacks.

He became obsessed with the people who jumped from the towers. He would search on the internet for the pictures. Nao knows that if she and her father had been in the building, they would have held hands and jumped out the window. When she was in Sunnyvale, Nao never thought about suicide, but when her family moved to Tokyo her



father fell in front of the train and she started thinking about it a lot. She thought of the many different ways to commit suicide.

Ruth thinks of where she was on September 11, 2001. She was with Oliver in Wisconsin. They learned the news when a neighbor arrived to tell them that something happened in New York. They turned on the radio to listen to NPR just as the second plane hit the North Tower. Ruth had to stand on a picnic table on a small rise so she could get a signal so she could call friends in New York. They drove to Madison turned on the television and spent the rest of the day watching the planes slice into the towers and the towers collapsing.

Ruth tried calling her mother at home in Canada, but could not get hold of her. She calls around to the neighbors to check on her. They have not heard the news. The airports were closed so they rent a car and drive to Seattle and take a hydrofoil back to Canada where they feel safe. As they traveled across America, flags popped up everywhere. They make it home to her mother who suffers from Alzheimer's. She does not understand what she is watching on the television.

For Nao, after 9/11 her classmates are nice to her for a while. During this time, Nao gets her period. She has not had it for almost a year because of the stress she has been experiencing. Even though it is not safe for her to stay after school, she has to because she cannot make it home without an incident. While she is in the restroom, the students come in and attack her. They take pictures of her. She tries to push past them. They pin her down and pull her skirt over her head. They tie a jump rope around her so her skirt is over her head and she cannot see. They hold her legs and pull off her panties. They video the attack and try to make one of the boys rape her. They post the video on the internet and email her the link. Next to the video is a fetish site where people can bid on her blood-stained panties. The auction was scheduled to last for a week.

Nao stops going to school. She would leave the house dressed in her school uniform, but would go to an Internet cafe where she would change clothes and then change back before she returned home. It was at this time that she found the diary. When she returns home, the apartment smells like garbage and throw up. She calls for her father. He does not answer. She finds him in the toilet laying in his own vomit. She calls for an ambulance and he is taken to the hospital. Nao cleans the bathroom. She finds a note from her father in the Philosophy book. She does open it, but puts it in her pocket. She later reads it. He wrote Socrates dying words to his friend before he drank poison. Underneath that he writes that it is ridiculous to cling to life and hug it when he has no more to offer.

Nao goes to the computer and finds the site selling her panties. She had forgotten to clear the cache in the web browser and her father found the site. The auction is over. Near the end of the auction, a new bidder entered. He was outbid during the last bid.

They pump her father's stomach. When he is discharged from the hospital, they have a family meeting. He apologizes to Nao. He said it was an accident. He said he could not sleep and lost track of how many pills he took. He does not mention the note or the



auction. Her mother concurs that it was an accident and says that she and Nao will keep his medication and he will have to ask when he needs a pill. After her mother goes to bed, she hands her father a sheet of stationery folded in thirds. It looks exactly like his Socrates note and he turns pale. It reads that his uncle Haruki #1 would not keep screwing up like this and if he is going to do something, do it properly. He says she is right.

When her parents are asleep, Nao sneaks into the bathroom and shaves her head. She covers her head with her hoodie and sits under the covers the rest of the night. She wears her hoodie under her school blazer, which is against the rules. She waits until the last bell before entering the school. She throws open the door to her classroom and does not bother to apologize for interrupting. Reiko's friends start snickering and she catches the words auction, panties and bottom line. She ignores the whispering and marches to her seat. She climbs onto her desk. When everyone is looking, she flips back her hoodie. She emits a piercing cry making her classmates put their hands over their ears. She stops climbs off her desk bows to her classmates and leaves the room never planning to return.

Her dad does not look at her so does not notice that she has shaved her head. Her mother notices the minute she walks in the door. She demands to know what happened. Nao announces she is dropping out of school and leaving home to become a nun. Half of her would like to do this. Her mother says she is too young and that she must finish school. Nao agrees to take the entrance exams. He means nothing to her because she knows she will not get in anywhere good, but it gets her mother off her back.

Nao meets one of the bar hostesses in the public baths. She says that her baldness is cute. She tells her that her mother is freaked out and wants her to buy a wig. Babette says that she will take her. She knows a good place. She changed her name to Babette to get a job at Fifi's Lovely Apron. Her life's passion is cosplay. Babette takes her to Electricity Town. On one of the TVs, Nao sees Insect Gladiators. One of the fights is a Staghorn Beetle versus Yellow Scorpion. The Staghorn Beetle dies and Nao begins to cry. She never cried not through everything that had happened to her, but watching the bugs and thinking of the humans who thought this was fun to watch made her cry. She crouched next to the building and hugged herself, while Babette stood guard over her.

Nao tells Babette that her dad likes bugs and folds them out of paper. He won third prize in the Great Origami Bug War for his flying stag horn beetle. For a moment she is proud of him. Babette helps her buy a wig and takes her to Fifi's where she meets the maids.

Oliver says that Babette seems cool and a nice friend for Nao that he would like to go to Akiba and that it was sad about the bugs. Ruth tells him good night and switches off the light. Oliver lays there for a bit and then asks if he said something wrong. She cannot understand after hearing about Nao's attack, her panties being auctioned off and her father attempting suicide that his only reply is Babette is cool and it is sad about the bugs. He sees her point, but thinks it is good that Nao has a friend. Ruth tells him that Babette is a pimp. She wants to recruit Nao. The Fifi's is a brothel.



Oliver admits that he was wrong about Babette, but that Nao's father tried to help her. Ruth gets angry and pounds her fists onto the folds of the comforter. The cat runs out of the room and they hear the cat door slam as he slips out into the night. She questions how his attempting suicide is helping. Oliver said her father was bidding, but he lost. C.imperator was Nao's father. Cyclommatus imperator is the Latin name for staghorn beetle. Ruth hates that he remembers the Latin name and seems to speak down to her. Oliver says Nao was so upset because she recognized the Latin name. As soon as she saw the suicide note she knew. He was referring to the bidding. Her father was trying to rescue her panties so no one else would get them. He said it is not like her father would get off on them and Ruth says how does he know. Oliver contends that Nao's father may be a loser and she counters with you should know. Ruth tries to apologize, but Oliver puts down a wall. He tells Ruth that Nao's father loves her.

Ruth and Oliver do not fight often and they knew there was certain places they did not go. He did not needle her about her memory and she knew better than to call him a loser. He was not a loser. He is very intelligent and artistic before he got sick and they moved to the island he used to get grants and the occasional land art commission and supplement their income by teaching and giving talks. He does many interesting things, but they are not financially sound. He laments that he does not make more money to help pay their bills. It makes him feel like a loser.

Nao sits at Fifi's thinking about who is reading the journal. She admits that she sometimes feels female and sometimes feels female. The first date Babette sets Nao up on is with a guy who works for a famous advertising agency. He is rich and he takes Nao to the Love Hill Hotel. He gives her champagne and gets her very drunk. They take a bath together and then he takes her to bed. It is Nao's first time so she is scared. She starts to cry. Ryu gives her his handkerchief and drapes his shirt around her shoulders. Nao slips her arms through the sleeves and Ryu buttons the shirt. He then puts his necktie on her and his pants. This makes Nao stop crying. She thinks she is beautiful in his suit. This turns him on and they have sex. Afterwards Nao remembers that it is her birthday and Ryu gives her his lighter as a present.

Nao and Ryu go on more dates and she always wears his suit. One date she has him put on her school uniform, but this makes her angry and she begins to hit him. He stops her when she becomes hysterical. He says she is only hurting herself. Sometimes after they had sex Nao would put on Ryu's suit and go out. She would keep to the shadows and enjoy being male. Sometimes she would text Jiko, but she is feeling alienated from her. Nao and Ryu date for almost a month, but when her hair starts getting longer he disappears. She would ask Babette about him, but she would say she had not heard from him. Babette says she must have done something wrong.

Nao is grateful to Babette. She is her only friend. She does not know where she would go if she did not hang out at Fifi's. Her mother has gotten a promotion and is now an editor, which means she is working more overtime. Her father is preparing for his third and final suicide challenge. He is more depressed than Nao has ever seen him. He avoids any contact with she or her mother. Nao finds links to an online suicide club in their search browser. Her father had made some friends and they were making plans.



She finds it pathetic that he cannot do it alone and has to find a stranger to hold his hand. One is a high school student and her father has been attempting to talk her out of suicide. Nao sees it as hypocritical. Nao decides not to become a nun, but to kill herself and be done with it.

Ruth receives an email reply from Professor Leistiko. He agrees that the Harry who authored the testimonial on his website is the father of Nao Yasutani. Mr. Yasutani was a computer scientist working in Silicon Valley in the '90s. He says they were friends and he did have a daughter named Naoko. He is no longer in touch with Mr. Yasutani. After his return to Japan, their correspondence was sporadic and they soon fell out of touch. He met Mr. Yasutani in 1991, a year after he moved to Sunnyvale. He came to the professor's office. Mr. Yasutani wanted help to understand how to understand people. He wants to know about the human conscience.

Mr. Yasutani worked for a company that developed interface development for the gaming market. The U.S. military became interested in the potential his research might have in developing a semi-autonomous weapons technology. Harry worried that the seamless design would make it easy and fun to carry out a destructive bombing mission. He wanted to build a conscience into the interface design that would trigger an ethical sense of right and wrong and the compulsion would be to do right. He says that the Japanese culture is a culture of shame and not conscience. Shame comes from the outside, but conscience is a natural feeling that comes from deep inside.

This conversation leads to other ones about shame, honor and self-killing. The Japanese view suicide is triggered by a sense of honor or shame. Mr. Yasutani told him about his uncle and how he was a kamikaze pilot. He believes that if his plane had a conscience he could not have done such a bombing. He believes that now it is possible for technology to do this. He began having trouble with his employer who did not want to jeopardize its relationship with the military. They ended up firing him in March 2000. The professor made some of his research available online and he received an email from Harry. They corresponded for several months and the professor gave him names of doctors in Tokyo to help him. He lost track of Mr. Yasutani after the 9/11 bombings.

The professor had one exchange with him a few years after that, but a virus infected his computer about that time and he lost his computer files and much of his archived email. He wanted to contact him after the tsunami, but he no longer had his email address. Ruth's email has left him motivated to track him down. He asks her why she feels it is a matter of urgency about Nao's well-being. He asks how the diary and letter got into her possession.

Ruth skims the email and immediately writes back describing her discovery of the diary and how she believes it is debris from the tsunami. She summarizes passages of Nao's diary telling him about her father's suicide attempts and Nao's decision to commit suicide. Ruth feels a karmic connection with Nao and her father. She wants to help Nao and her father. She ends her email by mentioning the article about qubits in New



Science that Oliver found citing H. Yasudani. She is excited and relieved. She has found the corroboration that she has been looking for. Nao and her family are real.

Ruth goes across the hall to Oliver's office. Pesto is not there. He has not been there all day. Oliver and Ruth made up at breakfast, but there was still tension between them. She tells him about her email from Professor Leistiko. She tells him about her reply, but breaks off when she notices that he is looking at her strangely. She asks what is wrong. He questions why she told the professor it was a matter of urgency. Ruth says the whole diary is a cry for help. Nao and her father are suicidal. They need help. Oliver is still confused. He tells her that it is not like it is happening right now. He does the math for her and explains that Nao was writing the diary more than a decade ago. If she was going to kill herself, she would have done it by now and if not she would not be in her twenties. Urgency is not the word he would use to describe the situation. Ruth feels suddenly stupid she forgot about the time difference. Oliver says it is crazy that she forgot. Ruth leaves the room. He calls after her that he did not mean that she is crazy.

Ruth goes to their bedroom. She crawls into bed and pulls the covers up around her. She feels embarrassed about the email that she sent the professor. Time gets confused when she gets into her writing and entangled in a fictional world, the same had happened here. Oliver comes to see her. She tells him that she got confused. In her mind, Nao is sixteen and she will always be sixteen. Oliver says that it is the eternal now that Nao was trying to catch. Ruth wonders if she committed suicide. Oliver tells her to finish the diary to find out. Ruth says that it is too late to help her so what was the point of reading the diary. It is a distraction. Oliver says that she wrote to the end and Ruth owes it to her to at least finish it. She asks if she is crazy. She feels crazy sometimes. He tells her that crazy is the price she pays for her imagination that it is her superpower.

Ruth goes to see Benoit. His wife is not happy. Benoit has finished translating the French diary. He is very melancholy. He says it means evil, sorrow and suffering. He asks how there can be so much pain in the world. She takes the pages and the diary. Ruth tries to thank him, but he stares into the flames of the fire. His wife leads Ruth to the door and tells her that he has been drinking. His dog got snatched by wolves the night before. Benoit saw the wolves attack him and tear him to shreds and eat him. He could not get across the ravine in time.

Analysis

Nao feels that compared to Haruki #1's bullying hers is nothing. It makes her feel weak and immature. He had his whole life ahead of him and knew what he wanted in life and she is directionless and does not care about life. She admires her great uncle for his strength and courage and wishes that she had that herself. She wants her father to be like his namesake, but sees him as weak.

Nao attempts to use the lessons she learns from Jiko and Haruki #1 to turn her life around, but her classmates physically attack her and attempt to rape her. Nao stops



going to school after this assault because she is humiliated and does not feel safe. Her father tries to help his daughter by attempting to get back her panties that he discovers being sold on line after Nao's assault. Feeling like a loser for failing, he attempts to kill himself. Nao is disappointed in him. She wants him to be like Haruki #1 and have the strength to face anything.

Nao shaves her head in defiance wishing to become more like Jiko and feel some peace in her life. Her father cannot look at her because he knows how he has failed her. He feels that he cannot protect her and as a father that is his most important job. It is at this time that Nao meets Babette and is drawn into the world of prostitution.

Ruth and Oliver fight about Nao's father. Ruth sees him as weak and useless. Oliver protests that he tried to protect Nao by bidding on her panties. He was C. Imperator who entered the bidding late and lost at the last bid. He wanted to get the panties back for Nao so that some strange man would not have them.

Nao has some gender confusion issues. When she shaves her head it makes her feel like a boy. This confusion is expounded when she goes on her first date at the brothel. The man dresses her up in his clothes and she enjoys it. She likes to wear his clothes outside. It makes her feel more confident about herself. At this time, she feels alienated from Jiko because she knows Jiko would not approve of her life as a prostitute. She is disconnected from her life and who she is.

Ruth is excited to hear from Professor Leistiko and about the Yasutani's life in Sunnyvale. It helps her learn about Mr. Yasutani and why he feels shame and how he views suicide. He gave up his job because he did not want to be part of a project that promoted killing. He does not admire Haruki #1 as Nao does. He believes that he died killing innocent people. Mr. Yasutani is a man of principal and he fought for his beliefs and lost his job because of it. Ruth immediately writes him back telling him of the diary and how she wants to get in contact with the family to help them. When she tells Oliver this, he is confused. He explains to her about the passage of time and asks why she feels that this is an urgent need. Ruth is horrified by her mistake and how she so easily lost the sense of time. It scares her because her mother had Alzheimer's and she is worried that she will too. She feels crazy and it scares her.

Discussion Question 1

Why does Nao's father attempt to take his life again? How did he try and protect his daughter?

Discussion Question 2

Why does Nao feel alienated from Jiko during this time in her life? Would Jiko approve of how she is living her life? Why or Why not?



Discussion Question 3

Why is Ruth so upset about losing track of time and not realizing that Nao's diary was written a decade before? What does she think is happening to her?

Vocabulary

Diligent, hypocritical, decompose, glaciations, relevance, futile, fetish, imbecile, autodidact, egotistical artifice, impenetrable, sabbatical, empathy, atrocity, aesthetic, corroborate, invasive, immortality.



Section 5

Summary

Section 5

Haruki #1's writes a secret diary in French during his military training. The soldiers have been instructed to keep a diary of their training and feelings, but they are warned by another student soldier that the senior officers will inspect these diaries. They are instructed not to write their true feelings in these diaries. Haruki #1 decides to write a private journal in French.

He writes of how K is tortured by the commanding officer. K does not react to this torture. Haruki steps in front of K during one attack and the commanding officer is delighted and continues the attack on Haruki. Haruki is wrapping his journal in oilskin and hiding it under the rice in the bottom of his lunchbox. He cannot write candidly in his letters, but wants his mother to know the full truth one day.

Haruki is made to play a humiliating game. K turns away so as not to witness it. He can hear K weeping some nights after the lights are out. Haruki hates his commanding officer and would like to kill him. He is counting the blows that F gives him. He knows he is going to die. It is the only outcome for them. He hopes that he will die before he gets his revenge on F.

K escapes and they are told he committed suicide in front of a supply train. One of the men who sees his body says that he was shot in the back. Haruki longs to cry, but his heart is frozen. He cannot feel. Even the blows from F cannot bring him to anger.

Haruki plans to give his diary to his mother on her visit, but her shocked expression when she sees him changes his mind. He lied and told her it was because of a training accident rather than tell her the truth that he is beaten by his commanding officer. Because he lied, he cannot give her the diary which details the horrors of military life. His feelings toward his commanding officer are changing. At first, he was afraid. He had never been beaten before joining the military. His mother taught him the value of kindness, education, independent thinking and liberal ideals. Haruki's feelings then transformed into resentment and then into rage. After a severe beating, Haruki finds inner peace. He no longer cares about exacting revenge. He believes he is finally a man.

The war is not going well. American forces have landed on Guam and they are worried an invasion of Japan will be next. Haruki can feel his life slipping past him. He does not want to die. He feels ashamed of saying this. He writes it only for himself so that he can learn about himself. He sees his not wanting to die as cowardice. He finds time interesting now that he does not have much left. He philosophizes on what it means to be alive. He wonders what he will do when he is faced with flying his plane into a ship.



He does not see people he has never met as enemies and he does not hate them. He does not want to affect other people's lives in an adverse manner.

Two veteran soldiers have been called up for a second tour of duty. They have been assigned to Haruki's squadron. They are hard men and know evil. They tell stories of raping and mutilating elderly women and skewering babies on their bayonets. They tortured the Chinese people degrading them. The young Japanese soldiers were ordered to do bayonet practice on living Chinese prisoners to build a fighting spirit. This was done to teach the Chinese a lesson. Haruki is thankful that he will not live long enough to grow accustomed to such barbarity. He is scheduled to sortie the next day. The men are going to have a party and write their wills and official letters of farewell. Haruki has decided not to include his diary to his mother. He fears it will affect any compensation to his mother if the contents are known. He knows that his mother knows his heart and does not need a diary to know how he feels.

Haruki has decided to wear the insignia of the Rising Sun on his head and fly south to Okinawa where he will give his life for his country. He believes the war is wrong and so he will steer his plane away from the target and into the sea. It is better to do battle with the waves who may forgive him. He feels as if he is already dead.

Analysis

Haruki writes his true feelings in his diary. He cannot tell his mother the truth in his letters because they are read by his commanding officers. He cannot tell her of how he is tortured and beaten. Haruki keeps the journal for himself so that he can ponder his feelings and become a better man as he waits to die. He knows that he will die because that is what he is training to do. The journal allows him to see himself for who he truly is without attempting to hide his fear of being beaten and his fear of death.

Haruki becomes at peace with who he is and what he must do. He does not like the war and never wanted to be part of it, but his fate has led him into the military and he must play his part. He decides to make his mark by keeping true to his beliefs and not negatively affecting the lives of others. He does not see the Americans as his enemy and does not wish them harm. He cannot hate them. This leads him to decide to crash his plane into the ocean rather than take the lives of innocent people that he has no desire to harm.

Discussion Question 1

Why does Haruki write his journal in French? How could its content affect his family?

Discussion Question 2

Why does Haruki decide not to give his diary to his mother? What kind of relationship do he and his mother have?



Discussion Question 3

Why does Haruki decide to crash his plane into the sea rather than into the American ship? What does he mean by doing battle with the waves?

Vocabulary

Duplicity, imbecilic, banal, punitive, circumscription, excise, sortie, grandiose, temporality, Teutonic, inure, hubris, depravity.



Section 6

Summary

Section 6

Ruth thinks about Haruki #1 and how Nao does not know that her great uncle did not die carrying out his mission. She wonders why Nao has not mentioned the French diary. Ruth wonders how the diary came to be in the freezer bag and here in her hands. She thinks that Nao and her father must know the truth. Ruth wonders where Oliver is. She cannot believe that Haruki #1 is struggling with profound moral and existential issues of genocide and war and imminent death and they are worried about a missing cat. They have both been distracted since the cat had run away. Ruth blames herself for getting angry and scaring Pesto making him run out into the night.

Ruth goes out to the woodpile to get firewood. It is raining and the wind is picking up. It is not safe to be out in winds like this. She thought about looking for Oliver, but knows it will be foolish in this weather. Ruth looks up to see the Jungle Crow in its usual spot on the branch of the cedar tree. It caws at her with an urgency that sounds like a warning. She looks toward the house to see that the power has gone out and she feels afraid. She tells the crow to please go and find him. As she heads back toward the house with the firewood, the crow calls and she turns to see Oliver emerging from the trees. His hands are wet and empty. He had not found the cat.

Nao feels that deciding to end her life has made her appreciate life more. She has started enjoying nature. For the first time in her life, she feels that she has a project and a goal to on which to focus. She has to decide what she wishes to accomplish in the time she has left. This is when she decides to write about Jiko's life. She feels she has failed.

Nao spends her time in Ueno Park because Babette is mad at her and she still is not going to school. She has not gone to school since shaving her head and finding her superpower. She feels some regret as the school year is coming to a close. She took the high school entrance exam and failed. She knew a lot of the material, but did not bother to answer most of the questions. Her scores are very low. It bothers her a little that she will never go to high school and learn all the things her great-uncle Haruki #1 had learned.

After deciding to kill herself, Nao does not want to go on any more dates and this has upset Babette. Babette does not want her taking up her valuable table space. She told Nao to go on a date or get out of the café. Babette sets Nao up on a date with a creepy hentai with greasy hair and bad complexion who likes to watch Nao pull up her socks. She believed him to be just a peeper. Babette gives her a few bills, which Nao scoffs at saying she has more self-respect than that. Babette tells her to get over it. She pinches Nao's cheeks so hard that her eyes fill with tears. She tells Nao that she is too American.



She is lazy and selfish and she needs to learn to be loyal and work hard. Nao leaves with the man.

When they get on the elevator, they end up jammed against one another. The man gropes underneath her skirt. Nao follows the man down the street. He has no social skills. Nao follows because he paid and that is the honorable thing to do. He takes her to a cheap motel. While the man has sex with her, Nao goes to a silent frozen place in her mind. Halfway through Nao's phone begins to ring. She thinks it could be Jiko and she starts to cry because she knows what she is doing would make Jiko sad. Nao has a thought that may be Jiko knew she was in trouble and that is why she was calling. Thinking of Jiko makes her realize she should not be doing what she was doing. She could end up going with the wrong guy and end up murdered. At this point, the man did something that hurts her and makes her cry out. She reacts pushing him off her then pushing him on his back straddling him and smacking him in the face. The man enjoys it. As soon as he falls asleep, she checks her phone and sees that it was Jiko who called. The text is not from Jiko, but from Muji. It reads, "Sensei's last moments." Come quickly. Nao starts to cry as she stands naked in the shabby hotel room. She puts on her clothes and rifles through the man's taking his money. She bundles his clothes and takes them with her and dumps them in the stairwell at the end of the hall.

Nao runs through Electricity Town. She wants to get home to her dad to tell him that Jiko is dying so that he can take her to the station and they can catch the next express train to Sendai. It would take them five to six hours. She sees them arriving at the temple and Muji telling them that everything is fine and it was a false alarm. She wants to find her dad and to know that Jiko is fine and to take a bath. She concentrates on this on the train ride home.

The apartment is quiet. She sees a shopping bag by the door. She opens it and looks inside. She finds her dad in the bedroom. He is dressed in a dark blue suit and has shaved. He comments that she is home early and asks if she is not going out with her school friends that night. Her mother is still at work. She asks if he is going out. He tells her he is going to meet a friend. Nao asks if anyone called. He tells her no. She follows him and tells him not to forget his bag. He acts like he is confused and does not know what she means. She can tell he wonders if she knows what is in it. Nao turns away from him into the kitchen. He calls out to her a saying meaning I will be back. Nao cannot say the reply, which translates to yes, please go and come back. She cannot say it because he is standing there with a shopping bag full of charcoal briquettes and his Nick Drake songs. He says it again and leaves.

Nao catches the last train to Sendai on her own and gets to the closet town to the temple. The buses have stopped running for the night and she does not have enough money for a taxi. She sits on a bench in the station to wait. In the morning the stationmaster wakes her and shows her where to catch the bus. She tries to call the temple, but there is no answer. Nao writes in the diary pretending she has a friend to write to. She believes no one will ever read what she has written and the reader is a lie. She made up a reason to keep from killing herself because she was not ready to die. She cannot keep up the pretense of the reader of the diary being her friend. She is all



alone. Her great-grandmother is dying, her father is probably already dead and she does not believe in her existence anymore.

Nao believes that Babette was right and she is selfish. She only cares about her own life as her father only cares about his. She has not accomplished writing about Jiko's life, but her own.

Ruth reads Nao's diary entry to Oliver about being alone and invisible in the small station. He comments that she has caught up with herself. He tells her to read on. Ruth turns the pages, but they are blank. She had looked through the diary when she first opened it and knew the writing went all the way to the end. She does not understand how the pages are now blank. She tells Oliver that the words are all gone. He asks her what she means. She tells him that they were there, but now they are gone. Oliver asks if she is sure and tells her that words cannot just disappear. Ruth thinks that Nao took the words back. It is like her life got shorter that time is slipping away from her page by page.

Oliver surmises if time is slipping away that it would not just affect Nao, but everyone. It calls their existence into question. He ponders that if she stops writing then they could stop being because there is nothing to read. Oliver tells her that if she is sure that the words were there she has to go find them. She tells him that he is ridiculous. It is her job to know where the words went because she is a writer. Ruth cries out that she is not the words are just not there for her anymore. She cannot write. Oliver tells her that she could be looking in the wrong place. Words come from the dead. The living inherit them. Where else to find words than on the Island of the Dead? Ruth tells him that he is freaking her out. Oliver laughs tells her sweet dreams and blows out the light.

In her dream, Ruth searches for the words. It is like she is going back in time. She feels anxious and scared. Jiko hands Ruth her glasses and she puts them on because she knows she must. Fragments of the nun's life flood through her. She lets go of Jiko's past to find Nao. She catches a glimpse of Nao, but loses her.

The Jungle Crow comes and leads her to a man sitting on a bench in a park. He asks Ruth if she is the one he is waiting on. She tells him that she does not know. He asks if she is a member of the club. She sees a shopping bag at his feet. She sees briquettes in the bag and comments that it is a funny time for a barbecue. He asks if she is there to meet someone too. She tells him that she is there to meet him and questions if he is Haruki #2. Ruth tells him his daughter told her he might be there. She wanted her to give him a message. He asks how she knows his daughter. Ruth tells him that they are pen pals. They met when she was walking on the beach. Haruki #2 tells her that Nao has dropped out of school, but he does not blame her. She was being bullied and posting horrible things on the Internet. He is a programmer and there is nothing he can do about it. Once it is out there you cannot get it back. Ruth tells him that she has found the opposite. Something is there one minute and gone the next.

Ruth tells Haruki #2 that his daughter's message is to please don't do it. She points to the bag at his feet. She tells him that Nao worries about him. She tells him that if he



goes through with this Nao will kill herself too. He is the only one who can stop her. She needs him. He says he must go home and talk to her. Ruth tells him that she is not home, but at a bus stop in Sendai. She is trying to get to the temple. Ruth has more to tell him, but the words will not come.

Ruth finds herself in a temple graveyard at night. She has Haruki #1's diary in her hands. She goes to the altar in the study. She unwraps the box on the altar and places the diary inside. She sees an old nun dressed in black watching her. Ruth finally relaxes and falls into silence and darkness.

Ruth stands at the kitchen counter waiting for tea to boil. It is nearly noon. Oliver has gone to see how many trees had blown down and whether Pesto had returned. He was back now sitting at the counter drinking tea and checking email on his phone, while Ruth told him about her dream. She tells him that she could not find Nao's words. She came back empty-handed. She felt she had them at her fingertips, but realized it was Jiko's story and not Nao's so she let it go. The only other words she found were Haruki #1's and she had already read those so she left them behind in the box of his remains. It seemed the right thing to do. Oliver asks if she has checked the diary. Ruth asks if he thinks she should.

Analysis

Ruth is confused why Nao has not mentioned the French diary and how she does not know that her great uncle did not die carrying out his mission. She wonders how this would affect her view of him. Ruth thinks about how the Yasutani family has such weighty thoughts that worry them and her and Oliver's biggest thought is missing their cat. Ruth blames herself for the cat's running out that night.

Nao feels guilty about her life as a prostitute when she receives the text from Muji telling her that her great-grandmother is dying. She feels ashamed at what she was doing while Jiko lay dying. She goes home to tell her father, but when discovering that he is going out to kill himself, she becomes angry and refuses to tell him. She lets him go out and then goes and catches a train to see her great-grandmother on her own. Nao is feeling alone and scared. She writes in her diary, but feels that no one will read it and she is writing it all in vain. She feels selfish for ending up not writing about Jiko's life, but her own.

Ruth is upset to find Nao's diary with blank pages when she knows that before the pages were written on until the end. She thinks she is going crazy. She feels that time is slipping by her and life is getting shorter and shorter. Ruth dreams that she meets with Nao's father and tells him to help Nao and where to find her. She then goes to the temple to put Haruki #1's diary into the box on the mantle where they will find it and discover the truth about Haruki #1's death. They both need to know the kind of man he was.



Discussion Question 1

Why does Nao not tell her father that his grandmother is dying? Why does she feel that she has to go alone to see her great-grandmother?

Discussion Question 2

Why do the words disappear from Nao's diary? Why is Ruth so upset?

Discussion Question 3

What does the Jungle Crow represent in the story? Why does it lead Ruth to Haruki #2 in her dream?

Vocabulary

Striation, genocide, ultimatum, maelstrom, insipid, paradoxical, tenacity, periphery, coalesce, cacophony, rhetorical.



Section 7

Summary

Section 7

Nao asks if the reader is still there. She does not blame the person for giving up on her since she gave up on herself. Nao is sitting on a bench at the bus station waiting for the bus to take her to the temple. She sees the station manager point her out to a man in a suit. It is Nao's father. Nao is surprised because she thought he would be dead. Haruki # 2 asks Nao if she is there to see her great-grandmother and if she is dying. He asks why she did not tell him. She laughs and he understands and says nothing. When the bus pulls to a stop Nao says that she thought he was dead. He says that no he is not dead yet.

When they arrive at the temple, Jiko is still alive, but there are lots of people waiting around for her to die. As family, they get VIP treatment and are allowed right in to see her. Jiko is laying on a futon. She says she is glad that they made it in time. She has Muji to help her sit up. Muji gives her a brush and ink and paper. It is an old tradition among Zen Masters to write a final poem on their deathbeds. She writes only a single character. She writes, to live. She looks at Nao and Haruki #2 and says for now, for the time being. Jiko then dies.

Nao helps bath her and she and Muji dress Jiko in a special pure white kimono. A knife is laid on her chest to cut her remaining ties to the world. The people are then allowed to see her. Jiko funeral is grand and attended by many people. Nao's mother comes and brings a dark suit for Haruki #2 to wear and a clean uniform for Nao. Nao slips Melty Kisses in Jiko's coffin because she liked them so much. She then worries that they will melt when her great-grandmother is cremated. After she is cremated, they take chopsticks and pick up the pieces of Jiko to place in the funeral urn. They find the nodobotoke, which is a good sign. This is what the Japanese call the Throat Buddha. Finding it means the dead person will enter nirvana and return to the ocean of eternal tranquility. They put her urn on the family altar next to Haruki #1's.

Nao finds herself alone with her father sitting in front of the family altar. Her father wonders what is in the box containing Haruki #1's remains. Nao tells him the story. She opens the box to show her father the piece of paper. There is something else in the box. It is a small packet. Nao opens to find it is written in French. Haruki #2 says that his grandmother had mention that his uncle had kept a diary, but it was feared lost. He asks if they should take it home with them. Nao is happy because she wants to know what is in the diary and is glad they will have a project to work on together. Her father tells her that they must live.

Ruth goes to visit her parent's graves at the cemetery in Whaletown. She apologizes to her mother for not taking better care of their graves. Her mother's funeral was very low-



key and she now feels guilty after reading about Jiko's funeral. Ruth's mother developed mandibular cancer and was too frail to survive the surgery. Oliver and Ruth were with her mother when she died. She and Oliver were the only ones who attended her funeral and cremation. She chose a spot in the Whaletown cemetery for her mother and father's ashes and planted a Japanese dogwood.

Ruth, Oliver and Muriel are standing on the deck of their house testing out the birding lens mount that Oliver ordered for his phone. Muriel wants another look at the Jungle Crow. Ruth wants Oliver to take a picture of it to send to the Cornell Ornithology Lab's Citizen Science database along with the GPS coordinates. Ruth is telling them that the Japanese take funerals and memorials very seriously. His tells her that her mother did not and she agrees saying her mother was not very Japanese. Oliver says that neither is she. Ruth says she tries.

Muriel laments that they did not have a memorial service for Ruth's mother. She had many friends on the island. Benoit visits her grave and takes her toys from the Free Store. Ruth feels shame so she changes the subject. She says she meant Nao and Jiko. Jiko would have died in March and if Nao promised to return to the temple every year, which means that Nao could have been in the path of the tsunami if she was at the temple. Oliver said she needs to finish reading rather than speculating. Muriel cannot believe she has not finished reading it. She says she would have read it from start to finish and found out everything she could before looking for evidence to support her conclusions.

Ruth feels that she owes it to Nao to take her time to read at the same rate that she lived. She says the end keeps changing. She explains how she riffled through the end of the book to make sure that the pages were filled only to have the pages suddenly go blank just when she was going to read them. Muriel asks if they smoke a lot of pot. She is fascinated by what Ruth has told her. She says it is like writer's block in reverse. Ruth says that Nao had caught up with the now of her story and the pages went blank. She tells Muriel about her dream and how the next morning when she checked the diary there was a new entry. Every time she opens the diary there are more pages. Muriel suggests that the Jungle Crow is Ruth's familiar as Pesto was Oliver's. She says that the crow from Nao's world came here to lead Ruth into the dream so she could change the end of her story. Muriel's other theory is that it is not about Nao, but about Ruth. Ruth has not caught up with her now so cannot reach the end until she does.

Oliver spots the crow in a tree. The crow flies toward them and when it is directly overhead it releases something from its talon. The object bounces on the deck at their feet and rolls to come to rest in the gap between two rotten planks. It is a hazelnut. Oliver pries the nut from the boards. He sees something under the deck. He goes under the deck and comes out with Pesto. He is badly injured and was attacked days earlier. The cat is in terrible pain and Oliver talks about putting him out of his misery. Ruth will not let this happen she makes him take the cat to the vet. Oliver agrees and is glad that he knows what happened. He if he was dead or alive was driving him crazy.



Ruth receives an email from the Professor telling her that he found Harry's email address and wrote to him, but has not received a reply as of yet. He gave Harry Ruth's email address and told him about her urgent concerns. He is forwarding Ruth an old email that he found on his computer that he does not remember receiving from him. The email predates the earthquake and tsunami. The email says that Harry's wife continues her job at the textbook company and recently has a new hobby of deep sea diving. He is grateful to her for supporting her during his troubled times. He is also grateful to Nao. He tells of how Nao had trouble when they first returned to Japan and even dropped out of school. Later she was able to apply herself and passed the equivalency exam and received a good scholarship for an international high school in Montreal. She studied French.

Harry launched his own Internet start-up company, which is an online encryption and security company. Nao gave him the idea. She was a victim of harsh bullying, which included making videos that they posted to the internet. He was very angry when he saw them and cried. It is his duty to keep his daughter safe and he failed her. He thought only of himself at first, but then he began researching and was able to develop a little spider that can crawl into search engine databases and sanitize all instances of his daughter's name and personal information. All the pictures and videos disappeared. Nao was happy to have a fresh start in her new life in Montreal, Canada. He turned the idea into a company.

He now sees suicide as an old way of thinking. It is messy. With his software one can neatly undo themselves if they do not want to be. Nao says that true freedom comes from being unknown. Harry can now provide a comfortable living for his family again since leaving California.

Nao's diary entry tells what happened after Jiko's funeral. Her father took her to Disneyland, but it seems weird to do after a funeral. Nao is too old to get excited about shaking hands with Mickey-chan. It was fun watching her father in Futureland. One night a month after returning home Nao and her father went to the park and sat on the swings to watch the stars. They had finished reading Haruki #1's secret diary that day. Reading the diary, Nao learned how evil people can be. Muji gave Nao Jiko's juzu beads that belonged to Haruki #1. She carries them all the time. Nao and her father were surprised to learn the Haruki #1 decided not to crash his plane into the enemy aircraft carrier. It makes Nao feel ashamed of when she would ambush Daisuke.

When they read about Haruki's decision to fly into the waves, Haruki #2 put down the page, snorted loudly and went into the bathroom and shut the door. Nao could hear him crying in a deep, gulping way. It freaks Nao out to hear him fall apart. She worries because he has committed suicide several times. He eventually came out of the bathroom and started to cook dinner. At the park, Nao asks him why his uncle's decision so affected him. He tells her it is about his job in California. He was making interfaces for a computer gaming company. The interfaces were really good and he was prototyping first-person operator perspectives. The company signed an agreement with a U.S. military contractor that was going to apply his interfaces in designing weapons



controllers for soldiers to use. Haruki #2 believed it to be wrong. The men would be killing people and killing people should not be fun.

Haruki #2 went into a depression and stopped sleeping at night. He tried to convince the members of his development team to let him program some kind of reality check into the interface design so the pilots would wake up and understand the madness of what they were doing. The military contractor did not like the idea and his company and team members got tired of hearing about his feelings so they fired him. He was so ashamed. Nao thinks she is the one who should feel ashamed because she was mad at him for losing their money and ruining her life. Haruki #2 cried when he read the diary because he knew how his uncle felt. When 9/11 happened, he saw that the war was inevitable. American soldiers would be using his interfaces to hunt and kill Afghani and Iraqi people. He felt it was his fault. He also knew that the American soldiers would be affected too. It would seem unreal to them and exciting and fun, but then the reality of they had done would hit them. He tells Nao that he was twisted up with guilt and was not there for her when she needed him.

He asks Nao how her panties had gotten onto the website and she is honest with him and tells him. He thanks her for telling him. To her, it sounds like he made up his mind about something and since that night he has been working at the computer. He spends all his time programming. She believes her dad has found his superpower. She thinks her superpower is writing in the journal to the unknown reader. Nao knows that she and her father are no longer thinking of suicide. As soon as she finishes the last pages of her journal, she plans to buy a new blank book and keep her promise, which is to write the story of Jiko's life. She does not want anything to happen to her until she has written Jiko's story. Nao has also discovered that Proust wrote a series of books and the last volume is entitled *Time Regained*. She plans to find it and take it to the craft shop to get the hacker to make her a journal in which to write Jiko's story. She then thinks that she will learn French and read Proust's book instead and buy paper to tell Jiko's story.

Ruth finishes Nao's journal and asks what now. It is almost 4:00 in the morning and Oliver is asleep beside of her. Pesto is asleep in a box by the bed. Ruth woke an hour earlier and lay awake unable to sleep. She started reading the diary when she came to the last page and wondered if they would multiply again, but it did not. She was surprised when it came to an end. Ruth thinks about the disappearing words and wonders if she found them and brought them back. She thinks about when she is writing and a story takes a complete turn and she does not know where the words have come from. This time she had been reading not writing. She wonders who had conjured whom. Was Ruth the dream and Nao is writing her into existence?

Ruth wants to know if she is crazy or not. Oliver is reluctant to have the conversation because he thinks it will not turn out well. She asks him about Muriel's theory that in her dream she was able to follow the Jungle Crow into Ueno Park and find Nao's father and send him to Sendai. She wants to know if the Jungle Crow led her back in time and if she had not had the dream would Nao's father have committed suicide. She asks if she did not put Haruki #1's diary in the box than how did it get there.



Oliver talks to her about multiple worlds. How physicists look at the world. He uses Schrodinger's cat as an example. The scientist put the cat in a box with poison and while the box remains unopened it is unknown if the cat is dead or alive. So the cat can be dead and alive at the same time. The truth will not be known until the box is opened. Another theorist put forth an idea to support multiple worlds. The cat is both dead and alive and now exists as two cats in two different worlds. A person is plural, but cannot interact with the other self and does not know about the other existence because you cannot remember. Ruth wonders if this explains her lousy memory.

Ruth asks Oliver if he believes in multiple worlds. He says there is no way of knowing, but it is sad to think there is a world where they never met. Ruth asks if he thinks Nao is still alive. Oliver does not know. Ruth thought she would know when she finished the journal. Oliver asks Ruth if she is happy in this world and she says she is for now and he says that is good enough.

In the Epilogue, Ruth writes a letter to Nao. She says that she wonders about her and what she is doing. She pictures a young woman of twenty-six or twenty-seven in Tokyo or Paris in a real French café looking up from her page while searching for a word and watching people go by. She does not think she is dead. Wherever Nao is she knows that she is writing. Ruth believes she might be in graduate school. She hopes Nao has finished her book about Jiko's life. She would like to read it.

Ruth does not know why she is writing the letter. She knows she cannot find her if she wishes not to be found and will be found if she wants to be. Ruth would like to know about Nao, but not knowing keeps all the possibilities open. It keeps all the worlds alive. If Nao every wishes to be found, Ruth will be waiting.

Analysis

Nao is scared and alone and wonders if anyone is still reading her diary. She is surprised when her father comes into the station she thought he was dead. Jiko is happy to see them and her dying words are addressed to them. She wants them to live. She knows they are having difficulties and wants them to know that life is the answer, death is not. Nao and her father find Haruki #1's diary in the box supposed to contain his remains. They agree to translate it together and that they must live.

Ruth is inspired by Nao's diary to visit her parents' graves. She feels guilty that she had no memorial service for her mother. The Japanese take funerals and memorials very seriously, but that her mother was not very Japanese and Oliver says that neither is Ruth. Ruth wishes she was more in tune with her cultural heritage. The crow helps Oliver to find Pesto who is hiding under the deck after being attacked by raccoons. Ruth will not let the cat die and insists that they take him to the vet.

Ruth learns part of the fate of the Yasutani family. Nao ended up going to high school in Montreal and studied French. Haruki #2 spurred by the abuse his daughter suffered from the videos posted to the Internet developed a software that can go through the



search engine databases and delete all instances of a person's name and personal information. It in essence erases his daughter's past. She can now go forward without the abuse of the past always there for anyone to find on the Internet. He is able to turn this enterprise into a company to support his family.

Nao learns the truth about Haruki #1's death and the real reason of why her father lost his job. She is proud of both of them for sticking to their principles. They are very alike. She and her father have found their superpowers and no longer think of suicide. They have found their purpose and are ready to face their futures.

Ruth finishes the journal and wonders who the writer is and who the reader is. She feels that Nao conjured her into existence by needing a friend to which to write. She wants to know if she is crazy, but Oliver will not discuss it with her. She wonders if she had not had her dream if Nao's father would have committed suicide and if she did not put Haruki #1's diary in the box than how did it get there. She has so many questions and no answers.

Ruth writes a letter to Nao just to let her know that she is thinking of her and that she hopes that she is well. The letter can never get to Nao because Ruth does not know where she is, but she hopes one day that Nao will want to be found and she will be able to get to know her.

Discussion Question 1

How does reading Haruki #1's diary together affect Nao and her father's relationship? What does Nao learn about her father?

Discussion Question 2

Do Nao and her father end up committing suicide? What is Nao and her father's superpowers? How do they use them?

Discussion Question 3

Why does Ruth write a letter to Nao? How does she plan to get it to her?

Vocabulary

Etheric, ascertain, reconciliation, emaciate, enigmatic, penultimate, askance, conjuration, empirical, pacifist, oligarch.



Characters

Nao Yasutani

Nao Yasutani is a sixteen year-old Japanese girl who is writing in a diary so that she can tell someone about her life. Her family has recently moved back to Japan after thirteen years in Sunnyvale, California. She is bullied by her classmates. They pinch and cut her. This eventually leads to an assault and attempted rape. They even pretend she is dead and have a funeral for her. This makes Nao question her existence.

Nao spends the summer with her great-grandmother a Buddhist nun, who helps her to talk about what is happening to her and to develop her superpower. She loves Jiko and wants to be strong and courageous like her and her great uncle Haruki. Nao takes a few missteps along the way. She drops out of school and becomes entangled in the world of prostitution.

Nao is able to find her way back with the help of her great-grandmother and her father. She eventually is able to get into a high school in Montreal away from the bullying culture of Japan and she studies French. Nao believes her superpower is writing and plans to write the story of her great-grandmother who she admires and wants to live up to her memory.

Ruth

Ruth is a novelist who lives on a small island in Canada. She finds the diary of Nao Yasutani, letters from Haruki #1, the secret diary of Haruki #1 and his sky captain's watch. She is drawn into the life of Nao Yasutani. She becomes obsessed with the girl and her father who have decided to take her own life. She wants to help them see that suicide is not the answer.

Ruth is scared of developing Alzheimer's like her mother. When she experiences time distortion, she becomes frightened that she is experiencing the early affects of the disease. Her husband, Oliver, helps her believe in herself and that she her imagination is what causes her slippage of time.

They are left without power often on their island because of rain storms that knock out the power. Ruth enjoys the privacy of the island and her home. She moved there from New York City because of Oliver's health. She has become accustomed to the island and cannot think of living anywhere else.

Ruth researches the Yasutani family to discover more about them so that she can find Nao. She sees the sixteen year old as smart and wishes to meet her and tell her that she should not take her life. When Oliver explains that Nao wrote her diary a decade before and is no longer a sixteen year old girl, Ruth is crushed that she could make



such a mistake. She still worries about the girl and wonders what could have happened to her and what she could be doing now.

Haruki # 2

Haruki #2 is Nao's father. He is a computer scientist who lost his job in California because he did not want his interface technology to be used by the military to desensitize soldiers. He is named after his uncle Haruki #1. Haruki #2 feels shame for letting his family down and not being able to protect and provide for them so he attempts to kill himself several times. The second attempt is after he finds Nao's panties being sold on the internet and he attempts to win them to keep them from a stranger. He loses and attempts to take his life for being a failure.

He later develops a technology that can wipe a person from the internet. He does this for his daughter so that she is not followed by the bullying of her classmates for the rest of her life. He loves his daughter and wants to protect her.

Nao's mother

Nao's mother must take control of the family when the family returns to Japan. She gets a job in a publishing company and works through the ranks. She is worried about her husband and daughter so gets in contact with Jiko to help them. She is a quiet woman who quietly helps her family.

Jiko

Jiko is Nao's great-grandmother. She is a feminist, poet, writer, nun, and mother. Nao looks up to her and wants to be like her. She is one hundred and four years old and is revered by those in the Buddhist community. Her son, Haruki #1 looked up to her and credits her for his intelligence and value of other's lives. Jiko gets Nao to open up about her life and helps her learn about the Japanese culture.

Muji

Muji is Jiko's assistant at the Buddhist temple. She helps the woman with the duties of the temple and when Jiko dies takes over as head of the temple.

Reiko

Reiko is Nao's nemesis. She is the leader of the students who bully Nao. Nao dreams that she stabs Reiko in the eye and the next day she comes to school with a patch. This makes Nao believe she can harm people with her mind.



Babette

Babette is a pimp who recruits Nao to work for her. She asks like she is Nao's friend, but only wants to use her to make money. Babette works at Fifi's Lovely Apron.

Haruki #1

Haruki #1 is Nao's great-uncle. He died in World War II as a kamikaze pilot. He was a student of philosophy and did not believe in war. He was made to fight; and, his last act of deviance against the war was to crash his plane into the ocean rather than kill an enemy that he had no reason to hate.

Oliver

Oliver is Ruth's husband. They came to live on the small Canadian island because he became ill. Ruth reads Nao's diary to him, and he keeps her grounded in the here and now. He is her sounding board and offers logical reasoning and explanations.

Muriel

Muriel is a friend of Ruth and Oliver's. She is an anthropologist. She is jealous that Ruth found the Hello Kitty lunchbox and she did not.

Benoit

Benoit lives on the Canadian island with Oliver and Ruth. He was friends with Ruth's mother and leaves toys at her gravesite. He translates Haruki #1's secret French diary for Ruth.



Symbols and Symbolism

Trains

Jumping in front of a train is a common way to commit suicide in Japan. Nao's father attempts to fall in front of a train when he cannot find a job to support his family.

Jungle Crow

The Jungle Crow is native to Japan. Ruth and Oliver are surprised to see the Jungle Crow in Canada. Ruth follows the Jungle Crow in her dream to find Haruki #2 to tell him that his daughter needs him. The crow also is key to helping Oliver find Pesto.

Pesto

Pesto is Oliver and Ruth's cat. The cat runs out into the night after Ruth and Oliver have a fight. The cat does not return and Oliver is upset and searches for him periodically even in rain storms.

Nao's Diary

Nao writes a diary when she is sixteen that documents the bullying and torture of her classmates and her decision to commit suicide. The diary gets into the hands of Ruth who becomes engrossed in her story. It leads her to look at her life and think about her cultural heritage.

Haruki #1's Secret French Diary

Haruki #1 writes a secret diary while in training in the military. He writes it in French so that his commanding officers cannot read it. This way he is allowed to tell the truth about his feelings about the war and how he is tortured by his commanding officers.

Haruki #1's Letters

Haruki #1 wrote letters to his mother, while he was in training during World War II. He was not able to write the truth because his letters were read by his commanding officers.



Internet

The Internet plays an important role in the story. The Internet is Ruth's source of information on the outside world. When the storm knocks out the power, she is cutoff from researching Nao and her family. The bullies of Nao's school use the internet to post videos of their abuse of Nao and to sell her bloodstained panties online.

Buddhist Temple

Nao's stay at her great-grandmother's Buddhist temple helps her to become more centered and able to handle the bullying of her classmates.

Nao's panties

Nao's panties are put up for sale on the internet by her classmates. Her father finds them and bids for them so that a stranger will not have his daughter's underwear. He loses and is ashamed that he cannot help his daughter even in such a small way.

Fifi's Lovely Apron

Fifi's Lovely Apron is where Nao writes in her diary. It is akin to a brothel. Nao is seduced into the atmosphere where she is paid to have sex with men.

Hello Kitty Lunchbox

Ruth finds Nao's diary, Haruki #1's letters and diary, and Haruki's sky captain's watch in a Hello Kitty Lunchbox. It washes up on the shores of a small Canadian island.

Box containing Haruki #1's remains

The box of Haruki #1's remains resides on the family altar. It does not contain his remains because he died in a kamikaze attack, but contains a piece of paper that says remains. In her dream, Ruth puts Haruki #1's secret French diary in the box and it is found by Nao and her father.

Island of the Dead

Island of the Dead is the nickname of the island where Ruth and Oliver live. Ruth finds it an apt name because she brought her mother there to die and also brought her father's ashes. When her mother died, she interred both of her parents' ashes in the local cemetery.

Settings

Tokyo

Nao and her family live in Tokyo. They have moved from Sunnyvale, California. They have lived in California for thirteen years. The Yasutani Family lives on the west side of Tokyo, the poor side of the city. When they lived in Sunnyvale, they had a large home and lots of money. In Tokyo, they have a two room apartment. Nao must share a bedroom with her parents. Nao is bullied by her classmates and her father becomes fascinated with suicide. Nao skips school and spends her time in Akiba, Electricity City. It is the bustling part of the city with cosplay cafes and interesting shops. Nao loves this part of the city.

Island in Desolation Sound, Canada

Oliver and Ruth live on an island in Desolation Sound, Canada. They live there for Oliver's health. It is off the coast of British Columbia. There are not many residents. The island only has two months of nice weather when it is overrun by tourists. The other ten months of the year it rains. They often lose electricity, which loses their only connection with the outside world, Internet. It is a quiet life, which they both enjoy. Whaletown used to be a whaling station, but once the whales disappeared it was abandoned.

Temple in Miyagi

Nao spends the summer with Jiko, her great-grandmother, at her Buddhist temple in Miyagi, Japan. It is on the northern coast of Japan. The temple is on the side of a mountain. Jiko has lived there since taking her vows as a nun. Nao enjoys her time at the temple learning about Jiko.



Themes and Motifs

Suicide

Suicide is a theme of the novel. Nao's father attempts suicide twice and was going for a third attempt. He believes he has failed his family and that they would be better off without him. He says that the Japanese commit suicide for honor or out of shame. Nao decides to commit suicide because her of her father. She does not see any reason to live. She knows that if she and her father were in the towers when they were attacked on 9/11 they would have been with the people jumping out of the windows.

Haruki #1, Nao's great uncle, was a kamikaze pilot. He was trained to take his own life in an attempt to hurt the enemy. Haruki #1 does not believe in the war, but he sees this as a way to provide for his family and if he does have to die in a war that he does not believe in his family should have some compensation. Haruki #1 decides on the evening before his mission that he will not hurt others in his death. He will crash his plane into the ocean and not into a battleship. He wants his death to be peaceful like his life.

Cultural differences

Cultural differences are a theme of the novel. Nao is in culture shock when she returns to Japan after spending most of her life in California. She is not prepared for the change academically or mentally. She is far behind her classmates academically so is put in a class with much younger students. Growing up in America, she has the sense of individuality and that she can take charge of her destiny. The Japanese culture believes in predestination and that one decision will affect the rest of their lives so they must work hard to get into a good school or they will not have a good life. Nao has a more laid back look at life. She believes she has control over whom or what she will become.

The Japanese are very hard workers and their corporate life is difficult. They must work long hours and have very little time for family. This is the opposite of what Nao is used to. California was about working to obtain luxuries to enjoy life. She feels that what they are doing in Tokyo is not living. The cultural differences make her feel alienated from her classmates and even her parents.

Bullying

Bullying is a theme of the novel. Nao is bullied by her classmates because she is different. They do not use her name, but call her Transfer Student Yasutani. She is bigger than her fellow students because of her eating habits in America and the fact that she is older than her classmates because she is behind academically after spending most of her life in America. The students pinch and cut her in the hallways. They assault her in the bathroom tying up her hands and videotaping as they take her panties and try to make a boy rape her.



This bullying is not done by only a few students it is her entire class and even the teacher takes part in shunning her and playing a part in the funeral that the students prepare for her after pretending that she does not exist for months. This mental bullying affects her greatly and is incomprehensible to Ruth and Oliver. Oliver does not understand how a teacher who is meant to protect the students from such abuse could join in on the terrorizing of this young girl.

Haruki #1 is also bullied. He is physically and mentally abused by his commanding officer because he is seen as weak. He is a college student who studied philosophy and does not believe in war, but has been drafted to fight for his country. Haruki is seen as privileged and not having the stomach for fighting. His commanding officer takes pleasure in making him do whatever he asks and also physically abusing him. Bullying is a way of making a person feel superior over who they are torturing, while making the person being tortured feel beneath those bullying them.

Time

Time is a theme of a novel. The novel slips in and out of time from Nao's time to Ruth's and the passage of time becomes blurred and confusing. This confusion leads Ruth to feel an urgent need to help Nao and her father when in reality the events from the diary happened a decade before and there is nothing she can do to help. As a time being, Nao says she can be anywhere in time and through her diary she is able to slip between her time and Ruth's affecting everyone in each timeline.

Ruth is affected by time because she is scared that she will develop Alzheimer's like her mother. It robs a person of their memories and the times of their lives. She is worried that her loss of time is a symptom of the disease. Ruth confuses the Nao's past and the present because she wants to help the young sixteen year-old not thinking that any time has passed. This slippage from one time to another makes Ruth feel a connection to the young girl. She wants so much to know what happened to her and if she has a good life. She can only hope that she has such a life.



Styles

Point of View

The point of view switches from first person to third person. Nao's sections are told in first person from Nao's point of view. She is writing her diary so it is in her voice. Nao is a sixteen year-old girl who has just moved back to Tokyo from California and is finding life difficult. Haruki #1's diary entries and letters are also written in first person. These are letters he has written to his mother when he was training during World War II. He also kept a diary, which tells of his personal thoughts on his training and his commanding officers. Ruth's sections are written in third person. It is told in the viewpoint of Ruth. Ruth is a novelist who finds Nao's diary and the letters and diary of Haruki #1. Her actions are seen through her eyes so that the reader can get to know her and understand why she reacts the way that she does.

The story is told through exposition and dialogue. This allows the reader to become acquainted with Nao, Haruki #1 and Ruth. Nao and Haruki's sections are told through their diary entries. The reader gets more of a sense of Ruth through her dialogue with her husband and friends. The timeline of the story is jumbled. Nao is thinking back as she writes so her life is not told on a strict timeline. She jumps around back and forth depending on the story she wishes to tell at the time she is writing. Ruth's narrative is on a strict timeline, but she does think back to her past when Nao mentions a date like 9/11. Haruki #1's diary and letters are dated and go in order. The viewpoint switches from Nao to Ruth and back and is interspersed with the letters and diary entries of Haruki #1. The reader is able to follow the stories of all the characters and see how their stories interlink.

Language and Meaning

The language of the novel is simple when Nao is narrating. She is a sixteen year old, and her language is that of a teenager. The sentences are short and simple and make her diary sections quick and easy to read. Ruth's narrative is more complex because she is a writer. She and Oliver have intellectual conversations about physics and alternate realities. The sentences are more complex and the ideas can make Ruth's sections harder to read. The diary and letters of Haruki #1 are more complex than Nao's diary entries. He quotes philosophers and expounds on becoming a better person.

The language of the novel is simple and complex. The narrative swings from a young girl who skips school, a novelist, and a philosophy student turned soldier. Nao's language is simple and interspersed with slang. Ruth and Oliver have complex thoughts and conversations that has more complex language. Haruki's writing includes philosophical incites and can be complex, but also simple when he discusses the bullying by his commanding officer. The reader follows all of the characters' stories from the simple to the complex.



The author's style differs between characters. Nao writes in short and concise sentences with simple thoughts. Ruth's language is powerful and intense to show her anxiety over Nao's welfare and her struggle with time. Haruki's language is complex and simple. The intensity of their language shows their passion and the intensity of their lives. The reader is pulled into all of their lives and becomes part of the story.

Structure

A Tale For the Time Being is comprised of four parts. The parts are long and broken up into sections. These sections are short and titled Nao or Ruth. Nao's sections are fast paced. Ruth's sections can be fast paced or slow depending on what is happening in the character's lives. When Ruth and Oliver are discussing alternate universes and Schrodinger's cat the pace is slow. The pace speeds up when she is upset about Nao and feels an urgent need to help her. Nao and Ruth's narratives are broken up by diary entries and letters of Nao's great uncle, Haruki #1, a kamikaze pilot during World War II.

The plot of the novel is the interaction of time. Haruki #1 touches the life of Nao and Ruth from the 1940's with his diary entries and letters. Nao touches the life of Ruth through her diary, which was written in the early 2000's. Ruth feels that time bleeds together as she dreams that she sends Nao's father a message to help her and, thus, keeps both Nao and her father from committing suicide. Each character touches the life of another even though they are living in different time frames. This interaction leaves each feeling positive and with a better sense of direction in their lives.

The novel is a normal paced read with long and short sections comprising four separate parts of the book. The book shows the effect one can have on someone else's life. It is the story of a young man who gave up his life, but kept his morality. It tells of a young girl who faces bullying, but she overcomes it to learn she is strong and can do anything she sets her mind to do. Finally, it is the story of a woman who is scared of what she will become, but she learns that no matter what happens her words will always be there to influence others even through time.



Quotes

We live in a bully culture. Politicians, corporations, the banks, the military. All bullies and crooks. They steal, they torture people, they make these insane rules and set the tone.

-- Oliver (Part II paragraph 8)

Importance: It shows the prevalence of bullying in our society and how some see it as a rite of passage. Bullying the weak is a way to get ahead in society.

I think I'm going crazy.

-- Ruth (Part II paragraph 1)

Importance: Ruth is worried that she is getting Alzheimer's like her mother.

Well, maybe that's the wrong way to put it, but I'm just thinking that if everything you're looking for disappears, maybe you should stop looking. Maybe you should focus on what's tangible in the here and now.

-- Oliver (Part II paragraph 7)

Importance: Oliver thinks that Ruth is obsessing over Nao and that she needs to step back and focus on her own life.

Life is full of stories. Or maybe life is only stories.

-- Jiko (Part II paragraph 18)

Importance: Jiko is emphasizing how people can live their lives and have stories to tell or listen to stories and have no lives to speak of.

He was a kamikaze pilot, only his suicide was totally different. He wasn't a coward.

-- Nao (Part II paragraph 2)

Importance: Nao is proud of her great uncle. She does not see his suicide as an escape as she does her father's attempts to kill himself. She sees him as a hero and wants her father to be like him and not the failure that he is.

I mean, it's not like this is happening now, right?

-- Oliver (Part III paragraph 13)

Importance: Oliver does not understand why Ruth thinks that helping Nao and her father is so urgent. He has to explain to her that what happened in the diary happened years ago and there is nothing Ruth can do to help them now.

In my mind, she's still sixteen. She'll always be sixteen.

-- Ruth (Part III paragraph 3)

Importance: Ruth sees Nao as the vulnerable sixteen year old from her diary and



cannot think of her in any other way. She felt the urgency to help her because to her the events are unfolding as they speak and not from a diary that is many years old.

Everyone calls barbarity that to which he is not accustomed.

-- Haruki #1 (Part III paragraph 3)

Importance: Haruki #1 is quoting a philosopher. Barbarity to one person may not be the same to another. It depends on what kind of circumstances one has faced in their life.

I thought you were dead.

-- Nao (Part IV paragraph 14)

Importance: Nao talks about her father's suicide attempts for the first time. It is a break through in their relationship.

I let you down. I was twisted up with my guilt. I wasn't there for you when you really need me.

-- Haruki #2 (Part IV paragraph 7)

Importance: Nao's father feels guilty for not being there for his daughter. He is ashamed for thinking only of himself and not realizing she was so miserable and being bullied.

Maybe he's figured out how to use quantum entanglement to make parallel worlds talk to one another and exchange information.

-- Oliver (Part IV paragraph 9)

Importance: Time is seen as translucent and the characters can pass through time to enter one another's stories.

Until that moment of observation, there's only an array of possibilities, ergo, the cat exists in this so-called smeared state of being. It's both alive and dead.

-- Oliver (Part IV paragraph 5)

Importance: This applies to Nao and Ruth. If Ruth does not observe how Nao's life turned out, she will never know if Nao is alive or dead. She could have committed suicide or she could be living anywhere in the world. The possibilities are endless. Without finding out Nao's story there can be no end.