

READER RESPONSE QUESTIONS

Come, Japanese!

Who are the “we” in the chapter? Why are they asking so many questions?

On page 7, the women describe their limited understanding of America – and they worry about how they will be treated. Do you think they are right to worry? Why or why not?

On page 9, the women list items that they brought on the trip. Why those items? And what would you choose to bring if you were emigrating to a foreign land?

Why end the chapter with such a negative statement? What effect does this have on the reader?

First Night

Many different sexual experiences are shared in this chapter. How do you think their experiences compare to those of newly married couples today?

Whites

On page 25, the women give a long list of things that confuse them about white people. What do these items reveal about Japanese culture? (You may need to do some research to find out how some Japanese traditions are different.)

At the bottom of page 25, some stern advice is given to the women. Do you think this is the right way to deal with outsiders? Are they right to “say nothing at all” and “belong to the invisible world?”

Why can’t the Japanese get better jobs? Why are they stuck doing the work “that no self-respecting American would do?” (29)

On page 33, the women describe being propositioned by different men. Are they right to assume that “in America, you got nothing for free?”

On page 37, the women describe being harassed and attacked by Americans. Answer their question: “Is there any tribe more savage than the Americans?”

What is the relationship between Japanese and American women like? Can these groups trust each other, or not?

Why do the Americans give the women different names? Would you accept a name like this?

How do the women find an escape from their lives, full of work and their husbands? Which do you think are better off – those who escape forever, or those who escape for just a short time?

At the end of the chapter, the women provide a long list of services they perform for white people. Who does this work for you in your life? What would it be like if those people disappeared?

Babies

What is the story of your own birth? Does your story have anything in common with the many stories told in this chapter?

Only a few of the births take place in a hospital. How does the setting of each birth influence the mother?

As the chapter continues, the women face more difficult and unwanted births. Why does the author shift from positive to negative? What effect does this have on the reader?

For names in Japanese and descriptions of meanings, visit <http://www.behindthename.com/names/usage/japanese>

The Children

On page 61, the women describe how they cared for their infant children. Do you think they made the right choices?

Why do the women have favorite children?

Many of the children struggle with work; one wishes that she had never been born – and the women lament that they could never buy their children toys.

What kind of world were you born into? How did you play pretend? What worlds did you create?

What lessons do the women teach their children? Who do they teach them to trust and distrust? Why?

Why do the children forget Japanese as they grow older? How does this help the women, and how does this hurt them? What did you leave behind or forget as you grew up?

What do the Japanese children do to fit in? Does it work? Why or why not? By the end of the chapter, do the grown children seem “American” to you?

On page 78, it says that, “some people are born luckier than others and that things in the world do not always go as you plan.” Do you agree?

At the very end of the chapter, the children are dreaming of their futures. How do their dreams compare to the dreams of their mothers? And why do the mothers let them keep dreaming?

Traitors

What “war” is being referred to in the first sentence of the chapter? What event started this war for America?

What are the rumors about? Why do the women spread them even if they don’t believe them?

On page 84, dozens of rumors about “the list” are put together in a paragraph. Does this paragraph make “the list” seem more or less real? What does it reflect about the women and their feelings?

Why do their American neighbors stop trusting the Japanese?

Why do the women burn all of their old belongings?

Which country is “the enemy” referred to on page 89? Is it just the radio that is referring to “our battleships,” or do the women now consider themselves American as well?

Sometimes the women say they will be better off if their husbands are taken, but on page 96 they give a long list of tasks that their husbands help with. How do they feel about their husbands now that they might be separated from them?

Why do the women rely on chores and order to keep their mind off of the disappearing men?

On page 99, information about their evacuation is finally made public – and this is the first time that we see dialogue with quotation marks around it. Why did the author choose this moment to give individual women a voice in the story?

Why do the Japanese families sell off their possessions? Do you think this was the right choice?

Last Day

What physical objects do the Japanese choose to take with them? What does this show about their states of mind?

Why leave the Buddha in the Attic? Why is it “still laughing to this day?”

Why do the younger children leave “without looking back?” Do you think this is a good way to leave?

A Disappearance

Who narrates this chapter? What effect does that have on your understanding of the end of the book?

When do they start to forget about the Japanese? Why?

What makes them miss their Japanese neighbors?

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The last line of the book states, "we shall probably not meet them again in this world." Do you agree with this statement? Do you think the Japanese are gone forever?