

A TEACHER'S GUIDE TO

LETTERS FROM THE LIVING by Kazumi Yumoto



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Themes/issues addressed in this book

Death; suicide; Japanese culture

Book Summary

Chiaki lives in Japan, and her father has died. She has to deal with her grief alone, as her mother is too distracted to help her. Old Mrs Yanagi is the landlady at Poplar House where Chiaki goes to live, and their relationship develops through the book. Mrs Yanagi tells her that she has been given a divine mission to carry letters to the dead when she herself dies, so Chiaki starts writing letters to her father. Through the story, we learn something about daily life in a Japanese household. As Chiaki grows up, she has to come to terms with how her father really died, and work through her confusion about who she is to make a decision about her future.

BEFORE READING

Group Activities

- Discussion: talk about Japan. Where is it and what has happened there? What is the name of the capital city? What sort of products are exported from Japan?
- Discussion: talk about Japanese language. To say “hello” in Japanese is easy – “Konnichiwa”, pronounced kon-ni-chi-wa. What other words of Japanese origin do you know? For example, what is a “futon” (page 9)? Other words to try are “rakugo” (page 21); “kotatsu” (page 27); “origami” (paper folding); “sushi” (raw fish on rice). What noise does a Japanese telephone make (page 110)?
- Discussion: how do you feel when you are worried or sad? What might you do to make yourself feel better?

AFTER READING

Individual Work

- Write a letter to someone who has died, or who you do not see any more.
- List all the Japanese foods which are mentioned in the story. Describe the ones which sound good to eat.

Group Activities

- Discussion: how are our customs at Christmas and New Year different from in Japan?
- Discussion: what do you think happens to someone after they die?

Vocabulary

- Check you know what the following words mean:

traipse	fastidious
monotonous	balderdash
cicada	rapacious
perspiration	revelation
structure	scrawny
sedate	mummified
sophisticated	replica
abhorred	clientele
equinox	combative
oblivious	longevity
forlorn	elated

FLYWAYS

Series Summary

Flyways was conceived in response to the general decline in children's literacy levels. The series provides high quality, imaginative and thought-provoking fiction to children who are currently unchallenged by the majority of available reading material. The Flyways series includes a high percentage of prize-winning international literature, as well as books by new and established authors.

CURRICULUM REQUIREMENTS COVERED

5–14 Curriculum (Scotland)

Years: P6–P7, S1–S3

Reading:

Reading for Information

Reading to Reflect

Awareness of Genre

Talking:

Talking in groups

Talking about texts

Talking about experiences, feeling and opinions

Writing:

Functional

Imaginative

National Curriculum (England, Wales, Northern Ireland)

Key Stages 2 and 3

English: Reading

Reading Strategies

Response to Texts, inc analysing and evaluating

Reading for Information

National Literacy Strategy:

Text-Level Reading

Text-Level Writing

Vocabulary