



STUDENT PACKET

GRADES 6-8

The Samurai's Tale

Erik Christian Haugaard

READ, WRITE, THINK, DISCUSS AND CONNECT

The Samurai's Tale

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NOTE:

The trade book edition of the novel used to prepare this guide is found in the Novel Units catalog and on the Novel Units website. Using other editions may have varied page references.

Please note: We have assigned Interest Levels based on our knowledge of the themes and ideas of the books included in the Novel Units sets, however, please assess the appropriateness of this novel or trade book for the age level and maturity of your students prior to reading with them. You know your students best!

ISBN 978-1-50204-941-4

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Name _____

Directions: Test your knowledge about feudal Japan before reading the story. Put an "X" by things and people you think were found in feudal Japan during the 1500s. As you read, check off the items you find in the story and note the page.

| | Items/People | Page |
|-------|-----------------------|-------------|
| _____ | 1. Castles | _____ |
| _____ | 2. Guns | _____ |
| _____ | 3. Tanks | _____ |
| _____ | 4. Horses | _____ |
| _____ | 5. Poems | _____ |
| _____ | 6. Vaccinations | _____ |
| _____ | 7. Archers | _____ |
| _____ | 8. Clocks | _____ |
| _____ | 9. Telegraphs | _____ |
| _____ | 10. Hangings | _____ |
| _____ | 11. Crucifixions | _____ |
| _____ | 12. Beheadings | _____ |
| _____ | 13. Letters | _____ |
| _____ | 14. Zithers | _____ |
| _____ | 15. Trombones | _____ |
| _____ | 16. Wrestling matches | _____ |

Name _____

8. What dangerous mission did Murakami accept?
- * 9. Prediction: Will Murakami have any "close calls" as he makes his way to Kofuchu? Will he bring back help?
- * 10. Why do you think Wada Kansuke seemed reassured by Murakami's observation that a "storm will fell the tallest tree in the forest and only bend the sapling"(p. 197)?

Chapters 31–34, pp. 212-234

1. Why did Murakami decide to leave the castle on a moonless night?
2. When did Murakami speak to Aki for the first time, and what did he say?
3. To whom did Lord Akiyama ask Murakami to deliver the two letters?
4. How did Lord Akiyama and Murakami differ in their opinions about whether they owed loyalty to Takeda Katsuyori?
5. Who was behind the screen in Lord Akiyama's room, and why did that person sob (p. 215)?
6. How did Murakami disguise himself on the way back to Iwamura?
7. Why didn't Katsuyori send help to the castle?
8. How did Murakami and Aki escape Lord Akiyama's and Lady Toyama's fate?
- * 9. Prediction: What is Murakami's life like between the time he escapes to Kofuchu with Aki and the time he tells the tale?
- * 10. Why do you think the narrator says, "What happened later may also be worth the telling"?

Name _____

Directions: In the end, Aki was orphaned and Murakami went off to Kofuchu with her. Suppose, though, that Aki's father had also survived. Imagine how Murakami might have tried to persuade Lord Zakoji to let him marry Aki. What might Lord Zakoji have said to persuade Murakami otherwise? Write two pieces of persuasive writing—one from Murakami's viewpoint and the other from Lord Zakoji's viewpoint.

1. As a group, brainstorm two lists—reasons for (+) and against (–) the match. Jot ideas on the charts below.

| (+) Murakami's reasons for | (1) Zakoji's counterarguments | (–) Zakoji's reasons against | (2) Murakami's counterarguments |
|----------------------------------|-------------------------------------|------------------------------------|---------------------------------------|
| | | | |

Should Murakami and Aki marry?

2. Stage several improvisations in which one student plays Murakami and the other plays Aki's father. Father and suitor debate whether Murakami and Aki should marry.
3. Add to the chart by listing counterarguments. (What's wrong with the pros Murakami comes up with? What's wrong with the cons Lord Zakoji lists?)
4. Draft the two persuasive essays describing Aki's and Lord Zakoji's viewpoints.
5. Read the essays aloud to your group. Ask for comments and suggestions for improvement. Which is more convincing? What points could be added to each? Have the points been listed in the most convincing order? Is the tone consistent with the one each character would take?
6. Revise both essays.
7. Edit for errors in spelling, grammar, and punctuation.

Name _____

Directions: Choose a passage in *The Samurai's Tale* that strikes you for some reason and explain your choice.

1. Copy the passage on another piece of paper.
2. Jot down some reasons why the passage seems important to you. Some questions that might jog your thinking are:
 - How do you interpret what it says?
 - Has Haugaard used language in a special way?
 - Has Haugaard created beautiful word pictures?
 - Has Haugaard expressed an important insight?
 - Has Haugaard raised a question in your mind?
 - Has Haugaard brought a character to life—made him/her seem real?
 - Has Haugaard taught you something about Japan that you didn't know?
 - Does the passage somehow remind you of something in your own life or something you have observed or read about?
 - or, if the passage strikes you as an example of WEAK writing...*
 - Is there internal consistency here—or a contradiction of earlier information?
 - Is Haugaard displaying poor taste or judgment, in your opinion?
 - Is there something unconvincing or unrealistic about this passage?
 - Is this passage pointless—one that doesn't help further the plot or develop characters or theme?
 - Is Haugaard telling us too much too soon in this passage—destroying tension?
 - Is the tone inconsistent here? Is Haugaard intruding? Has this stopped sounding like an old samurai telling his tale?
 - Are the facts (about what you would find in Japan at this time) wrong?
3. Which of the ideas you have jotted down interest you most? Write down a preliminary thesis. This should be a general statement about what you did/didn't like about the way the author wrote the passage. It should be a statement you think you can show to be true—not one that is obviously true. You can always modify this statement later on.