

Teacher's Guide to *Eight Million Gods* by Wen Spencer



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- A separate guide to the chapters of the book, which includes a plot summary of each chapter and the following:
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Recommended reading levels: Because of the mature nature of some of the material included in the book, including references to rape, scenes of violence, and mature language, classroom use of this book is probably most appropriate for upper-level high school students. The book would be particularly effective for upper-level classes in World History.

Biographical information on Wen Spencer:

Born in Pennsylvania, Wen Spencer published her first novel, *Alien Taste*, in 2001, for which she won the Compton Crook Award. In 2003, she won the John W. Campbell Award for Best New Writer. Spencer has published two series, the *Elfhome* series and the *Ukiah Oregon Series*. This novel, *Eight Million Gods*, is a stand-alone book set mainly in Japan, a place Spencer lived for a time. Currently, Spencer lives in Hawaii with her family and enjoys traveling.

Biographical resources about Spencer on the web:

http://www.goodreads.com/author/show/26546.Wen_Spencer/blog

- Wen Spencer's own site contains autobiographical information as well as information on her books : <http://www.wenspencer.com/>
- Here is the Wikipedia Entry: http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Wen_Spencer
- Wen Spencer keeps a blog here where she talks about writing and current works: http://www.goodreads.com/author/show/26546.Wen_Spencer/blog
- Here is another entry about Wen Spencer including current news updates about her books: <http://www.bookish.com/authors/wen-spencer/97f6f0a0-b077-4a6a-9a07-ec9227e24fd8>

Suggested class activity: Have your students read about Wen Spencer from various sources, including her own site, before beginning the book. Based on what they learn, they can create predictions for what kind of ideas and themes may be present in *Eight Million Gods* with a follow-up reflection after reading. How, for example, would her love of anime and manga show up in a novel set in Japan?

Plot Summary:

Nikki Delany, a 20 year old girl diagnosed with hypergraphia, a compulsion to write, begins the novel on the run from her mother, a United States Senator bent on hospitalizing Nikki. Instead, Nikki runs to Japan and begins a new life there with her best friend, Miriam, and an advance on her second novel. Her new novel, like her first and other writings, flowed out of her from her compulsion to write and includes grisly death scenes and tortured relationships. It was not until a random discussion about her latest plot development in a restaurant that Nikki realized all of the events in her writing were true. Drawn to find out how much of her writing reflected real life events, Nikki

searches the pages for clues and uncovers a supernatural organization called Shiva bent on finding her, keeping her quiet, and possibly using her for her ability, as it makes her what they call a Talent. With the help of a samurai god and Shiva agent Leo, Nikki goes on a quest to find the truth, explore her talent, and free herself and the people she loves.

Character Sketches:

Nikki Delany – Nikki is the protagonist of the novel. She escapes to Japan to evade involuntary commitment to a mental hospital and tries to begin her life anew. During the course of the novel, she discovers that her hypergraphia, a condition that compels her to write, is truly a channel for her Talent. Nikki can write about events before they happen and construct past events with great clarity.

Senator Laverne Delany – Nikki's mother is a United States Senator. She uses this powerful position to leverage others to find her daughter and repeatedly committed to mental institutions. Eventually, she discovers Nikki is in Japan and tries to track her down and take her home.

Miriam Frydman – Nikki's best friend since high school. Miriam helps Nikki get to Japan and believes her when events in Nikki's life take a supernatural turn. Miriam is wealthy and enjoys the nightlife of Japan as well. She is a "Sensitive," which means that she can intuit things about people and situations that some others cannot.

Detective Tanaka – Detective Tanaka initially brings Nikki into the station for questioning in a murder very similar to one Nikki described in her writing, but quickly realizes Nikki's innocence. He tries to help find out the connection between Nikki's writing and the murders in Japan.

Taira no Atsumori – This is a god who was once a samurai and lives in a small shrine. Nikki finds the katana that houses his spirit, and the two become allies in the hunt for the truth. With his help, Nikki gains courage, fighting prowess, and the ability to move unseen on cameras. He also helps explain elements of the Japanese religion, culture, and history to Nikki as she travels.

Leo Watanabe – a.k.a. "Scary Cat Dude" – He may not be completely human as his mother may have been an bakeneko. As a child, he was often referred to as "it" until Simon took him in and cared for him like a son. Leo now works for Shiva and tries to protect Nikki.

Ananth – A supervisor in the Shiva organization. Leo must check in with him regularly and receive instructions. Both are wary of each other.

Simon Fowler – Leo's adoptive father and another member of Shiva. In the beginning of the story, Simon is missing, and Leo tries to find him as well as do Shiva's bidding at the same time.

Pixii – Pixii is a member of Team Banzai and close friend of Nikki and Miriam's. She lives at a mountain shrine as an apprentice to a master potter and provides shelter for the group when needed. She has experience in combat as a medic and earned doctorate in arts and archaeology.

Chevalier – Chevalier is a Frenchman who works for Shiva. He acts as a guard for dangerous Talents since he is impervious to their magical abilities.

Denjiro Sato – Sato is a Japanese agent for Shiva. He claims to be able to trace his lineage to the Japanese Emperors and has been alive for a very long time. Sato is a Talent and considered a dangerous asset to be used cautiously. Haru and Nobu - Haru and Nobu are eight year old twins who live near Kyoto. Haru has been chosen to be the celestial child for a festival, but Nobu plans to take his place as his brother is afraid of heights.

Kenichi Inoue – Kenichi works at a nightclub in Dontonbori where he spends his nights trying to get wealthy women to spend money on alcohol. His family lived in Ishuzi, and he returned to the family house after the death of his father to see if there was anything else he wanted before the area is flooded for dam project. While there, he found the god worshipped by his family had possessed Simon Fowler. He takes both back to Dontonbori and continues in the family tradition of serving the god, even if it means providing her with the body of the woman he loves, Miriam.

Guide to Chapters 1-5:

Prepare to Read...

- Familiarize yourself with the following vocabulary and terms (note – the author has included a glossary of Japanese terms to aid you in the terms marked in italics):
 - mental hygiene law and involuntary commitment
 - Superman’s relationship to kryptonite
 - hypergraphia
 - Chanel and Prada fashion lines
 - interloper
 - fan fiction
 - *gaijin*
 - *irasshaimase*
 - “salaryman”
 - anime
 - manga
 - vivisection
 - anecdotal evidence
 - alpha male
 - tourist visa papers
 - muse
 - doppelganger
 - trump card
 - analytic software
 - expatriate
 - *kanji*
 - nirvana
 - shrine maiden
 - ikuta shrine
 - *katana*
 - *honden*
 - *shintai*
 - *kami*
- Focus questions or initiating activities:
 - Research the genre of urban fantasy. What are some of the characteristics of the genre? What kind of predictions can you make about the story to come?
 - Nikki believes that her mother can sway more influence with people because she is a United States Senator. What are some of the benefits of being a Senator? Why does Nikki believe this?

- Research hypergraphia. What are the characteristics of the condition? What kinds of behavior can we expect from Nikki? How much of this is under her control?
- Research involuntary commitment to a mental hospital. What kind of behavior does Nikki have to exhibit for her mother to be able to commit her? Have you seen any of this from her to date?
- Compare and contrast rights of accused criminals in Japan and the United States. What rights does a foreigner expect in Japan if accused of a crime?
- What are ways authors connect with fans? Why is this relationship between an author and fans important?

Chapter Summaries:

- Chapter One – Nikki Delaney escapes the police and her mother, who have arrived at her friend Sheila’s house to commit her to a mental hospital.
- Chapter Two – Nikki lives in Japan and continues to get used to the cultural differences. While eating with her friend Miriam, Nikki describes her latest murder detailed in her writing. Unfortunately, a nearby customer overhears them and reports the conversation. Detective Tanaka arrives to detain Nikki about a murder.
- Chapter Three – Nikki discovers the murder contains many similarities to a murder she posted on her blog. Using the blog and receipts to prove her innocence, Nikki remains very distressed about the situation. Tanaka believes the murder to be the work of a deranged fan.
- Chapter Four – A man from the consulate arrives and aides in Nikki’s release. Nikki and Miriam begin to wonder if any other of Nikki’s writings could also be real events.
- Chapter Five – Nikki writes about a new character, a man she calls Scary Cat Dude for now, who works for a secret organization and is checking into a fire at a shrine and the murder fitting Nikki’s description in her blog. To help discover the truth, Nikki wants to visit the apartment of the murdered man.

Quiz / Reading Comprehension Questions – multiple choice / short answer questions to test reading comprehension:

1. What does Nikki NOT do to slow down the progress of her mother and the police officers in Sheila’s apartment?
 - a. She jams the door.
 - b. She releases dogs.
 - c. She hides in a closet.
 - d. She quotes law to the officer.
2. What do you think “Bounce” means?
3. Nikki and Miriam are close friends, but they are very different. Contrast what you know about the two characters.
4. The Japanese consider okonomiyaki a kind of Japanese:

- a. sandwich.
 - b. pizza.
 - c. cocktail.
 - d. casserole.
5. How did Nikki kill her character George in her latest novel?
 6. What is the cause of misunderstanding in the restaurant?
 7. Why does Nikki steal pens?
 8. Nikki tells the police that she is in Japan because:
 - a. She is doing research for her writing.
 - b. She is going to marry a Japanese man.
 - c. She is requesting the government to be a citizen.
 - d. She is seeking sanctuary from her mother.
 9. Who is Team Banzai?
 10. What happened to the Ikuta Shrine?
 - a. Nothing.
 - b. The shrine flooded.
 - c. The shrine was closed due to lack of care.
 - d. The shrine burned down.
 11. Who was the shrine dedicated to?
 12. How is the murdered man connected to the shrine fire?

Answers:

1. C
2. "Bounce" means that Nikki had to leave on short notice.
3. Miriam is fluent in Japanese, unlike Nikki. Nikki admires Miriam's outgoing nature, including her dyed hair and short skirts. Nikki is more introverted.
4. B
5. Nikki wrote that someone killed him with a blender.
6. The "salaryman" in a nearby table heard their story of murder and apparently believed they were talking about an actual murder.
7. She steals pens as a part of her compulsion to write. Sometimes just being able to click them staves off her compulsion when writing is not an option.
8. A
9. Team Banzai is a close group of Nikki's fans and friends. They are the only people she trusts.
10. D
11. Taira no Atsumori was a samurai, who is now worshipped as a god.
12. The man murdered by a blender set fire to the shrine after raping and killing a girl.

Suggestions for Reflection and Discussion Questions –

1. Describe Nikki's relationship with her mother. What evidence from the first chapter supports your opinion?
2. Why is it an important detail that her mother would be wearing Chanel and Prada? How does that help us understand the character of her mother?
3. Nikki describes moments of culture shock as "taking a baseball bat to the head labeled 'OMG.'" Why does she make this comparison? What are some examples of moments when she feels culture shock? How did coming to Japan early affect her culture shock?
4. How does Nikki describe her writing process and its relationship to her hypergraphia? Why does she struggle to shape her writing into a more traditional tale with a hero and a love story?
5. Why does Nikki distrust people in authority? What reasons does she give for this suspicion? Do you believe it is founded? Explain your answer.
6. Why does Nikki continue to fear her mother's influence when she is so far away? What lengths does she go to in order to keep herself private? Do you think she is paranoid, or is this smart thinking on her part? Explain your answer.
7. Nikki does not remember until she leaves the station that she wrote about other murders as well. What causes her worry about these other murders? What do you think she will do next?
8. What is the relationship between ashintai, honden and the kami? Can you find any correlations in our culture?

Suggested Activities / Inquiry-Based Exploration:

1. Learn more about the Shinto religion and the importance of shrines at sites such as <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Shinto> or <http://www.japan-guide.com/e/e2056.html> . How are shrines created? Who visits them, and why?
2. Learn more about the steps needed to leave the United States. Nikki has been planning her escape for some time. What would she have had to do? How easy is this?
3. Research the history of swords in Japanese culture at sites such as http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Japanese_sword or <http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/nova/ancient/secrets-samurai-sword.html> . Why would the Japanese have more laws about swords than guns?
4. Learn more about how some writers describe their writing process. What kinds of similarities do you see? How do you write?
5. Japan is full of rituals that citizens enact throughout the day. What are some of those daily rituals? What do they mean, and what is the importance of keeping them? Read more about daily life in Japan at <http://factsanddetails.com/japan.php?itemid=647> or http://www.tokyo-top-guide.com/life_in_japanese_culture.html/

Guide to Chapters 6-10

Prepare to Read...

- Familiarize yourself with the following vocabulary and terms (items in italics can be found in the author's glossary):
 - Subletting
 - Kimono
 - Lady Macbeth and "out damn'd spot"
 - Histrionic
 - *Tanuki*
 - Cram school
 - *Kaguraden*
 - Edo period
 - *Kanji*
 - *Susanoo*
 - *Amaterasu*
 - *Sarutahiko*
 - Tale of Genji
 - Oracle
 - Keen
 - Juggernaut
 - *Ghostbusters* movie and crossing the streams
 - *Yakuza*
 - *Inari*
- Focus questions or initiating activities:
 - Examine the underground malls in parts of Japan, such as at the Umeda Station. Why does Nikki call it mazelike? What is confusing?
 - Perform a thought experiment: imagine a famous person. If that person's spirit could continue to live on in an object, which object would it be for that person and why? How would people take care of the object? Who would help care for it over time?
 - Learn more about the yakuza. Who are they and why do people fear them? Why would their involvement in any of the events of the story complicate matters?
 - Read about the Japanese gods, such as Susanoo and Amaterasu, and what they represent to the Japanese people. Why do what some gods represent, like Inari, change over time? How do they stay relevant?

Chapter Summaries:

- Chapter 6 – Nikki visits the apartment of Gregory, the man who was murdered in a way identical to the method described in her blog. While there, she finds information consistent with her writing that she did not blog, which disturbs her. She retrieves the katana Gregory left in a locker.
- Chapter 7 – Nikki returns home and decides to flee. As she packs, Detective Tanaka appears at her home, but Nikki quickly feels something is wrong. She hides in the bathroom as Tanaka attacks her, hearing the voice of a man beside her telling her what to do. The next thing Nikki knows, she is looking at a body of a dead man/creature who was killed by her katana. She does not remember killing him and begins to be afraid.
- Chapter 8 – Nikki struggles with her missing memory and recent events, beginning to wonder if she is truly insane. Scary Cat Dude finds Nikki's apartment and discovers Nikki's writing about him, his organization, and others. He takes Nikki's notebooks with him and convinces his boss to let him find her. Nikki tries to go to a safe place and worries about her blackouts.
- Chapter 9 – Nikki tries to return home for her passport and credit cards. Instead, she finds herself at the burned shrine, unable to explain how she got there. Atsumori, the kami of the shrine, appears to her and explains that he has been with her since she found his katana. He has been possessing her body when needed to guide and protect her. He tells Nikki that she is an oracle, and her writing has been all true. This horrifies Nikki, as she has written of more deaths and based a character on herself.
- Chapter 10 – Nikki calls Pixii, a friend and member of Team Banzai, and makes plans to stay with her. Atsumori wants his blade purified, and they decide to do that first. On the way Nikki and Atsumori piece together what has been happening at his shrine and with the murders. Nikki agrees to purification of herself and the sword. She also agrees to help Atsumori but draws the line at helping him seek out revenge. At the shrine Inari explains to Nikki how gods can take over the bodies of some humans more easily than others.

Quiz / Reading Comprehension Questions – multiple choice / short answer questions to test reading comprehension:

1. Why does Nikki tell a tenant in the building she is staying at Gregory's apartment?
2. What is the importance of the discovery of the plastic bag at the apartment?
 - a. It proves Gregory was near Nikki's home.
 - b. It proves Gregory bought an incriminating item linking him to the shrine fire.
 - c. It proves Gregory lived with one of Nikki's fans.
 - d. It proves Gregory could not have burned the shrine.
3. Why does Nikki believe the killer will stick to her version of events?
4. Why is Nikki finding it harder to "bounce"?
5. Why does Detective Tanaka appear different in her apartment?
6. Who is Natasha Demming?

- a. Another victim.
 - b. A girlfriend of Gregory's.
 - c. Another name for Nikki.
 - d. A member of Team Banzai.
7. What does "Scary Cat Dude" find at Nikki's place that interests him?
 8. How does Atsumori explain Nikki's blackouts?
 - a. He confirms she is going insane.
 - b. He explains that he has drugged Nikki during certain incidents.
 - c. He hypnotized Nikki.
 - d. He has been taking over Nikki's body at certain times to protect and guide her.
 9. According to the boy at the shrine, some humans are easier for kami to enter than others. He compares those humans to:
 - a. wine.
 - b. water.
 - c. sand.
 - d. marble.
 10. Why must Nikki and the sword be purified?

Answers:

1. She needs to get in the door and investigate the murder scene for herself.
2. B
3. She thinks the killer is a Japanese fan, and the Japanese are lawful.
4. Nikki has never had to flee her own home, and she had begun to create a life for herself.
5. He seems taller and has a stronger cologne scent to him. He seems more dangerous. He also did not observe customs with his shoes and lack of bow to her. In reality, it is not him.
6. C
7. Aside from the dead tanuki, he finds a series of notes and papers that connect to his life but contain information no one else knows.
8. D
9. C
10. The spilt blood makes them 'unclean.'

Suggestions for Reflection and Discussion Questions –

1. Nikki makes deliberate choices about what she puts on her blog and in other public places and what she keeps private. Why is she so careful? Do you believe she has blogged too much information? Explain your opinion.
2. Continue to take note of Nikki's writing process. What more do we learn in this section about how she writes, when she writes, and the degree of control, if any, she has over her work?

3. When Detective Tanaka comes to Nikki's apartment, she starts to hear voices. She fears she is going insane. Later, she attributes her blackouts to insanity as well. Why? Do you believe she is going insane?
4. Nikki and Atsumori differ in their interpretations of recent events, yet each seems plausible to the reader. What are both explanations for what has been happening, and which do you believe to be the most believable? Why?
5. Why does Nikki feel dread because she has written herself into her story?
6. Why does it bother Nikki that Atsumori takes over her body at times?
7. Atsumori says that "Prayer is to ask earnestly for help from one greater than yourself. That is begging." Do you agree or disagree? Why?

Suggested Activities / Inquiry-Based Exploration:

1. Use the details in chapter nine to map out the shrine. How do all the pieces of the shrine fit together to create a sacred space? Do all shrines have similar components?
2. In chapter nine, Atsumori explains the title of the book, *Eight Million Gods*. What does he say? How does this outlook compare to yours? What are the implications of having so many beings to worship? How would it change the way a person looks at the world? There is more information about the kami at <http://www.jref.com/japan/culture/religion/kami.shtml>
3. The need for purification echoes the ideas of Rene Girard. Investigate his notions of violence and the sacred here http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ren%C3%A9_Girard and explain in your own words the need for purification after a violent act. What are some modern-day ways to purify after being exposed to something violent? Do we still need purification?

Guide to Chapters 11-15

Prepare to Read...

- Familiarize yourself with the following vocabulary and terms (terms in italics can be found in the author's glossary at the back):
 - *Yokai*
 - *Yukata*
 - *Toryanse*
 - *Tenjin shrine*
 - *Obakemono*
- Focus questions or initiating activities:
 - Perform a thought experiment: if you could have a special talent or ability, what would you choose? Think in-depth about your choice. What would be the positive and negative consequences of that choice? Are you willing to take on both?
 - Research schizophrenia. What are the symptoms? Nikki wonders if what is happening to her fits this diagnosis. Is she correct? Do you think that none of this is true and that Nikki is truly going insane?
 - Nikki sometimes leaves out sensory details in her writing because she focuses on plot, especially when someone is being murdered. She realizes in this section, however, that some of those details she leaves out may help hone in on important information. Try to write about a special place from memory. How many sensory details can you recall? How does adding them make the writing more vivid?
 - Nikki likes to have the katana near her for safety. What items comfort you when you are scared or stressed? What makes those items important? What do they represent?

Chapter Summaries:

- Chapter 11 – Nikki finishes the purification process and decides to return to her apartment to get her passport, wallet, and other essentials. She uses her ability to write about her apartment to see if it is safe to go there. By doing so, she realizes that Scary Cat Dude and two other members of a secret organization are in her apartment cleaning up the mess with the tanuki. In the end, Scary Cat Dude leaves with her wallet and passport. Nikki still wants to return home to see if what she wrote is true.
- Chapter 12 – Nikki returns home and finds the room clean, just as she wrote about it. She also sees, as she wrote, that her notes and other belongings are gone, just as her writing portrayed. She leaves ready to find Scary Cat Dude and get her belongings back.
- Chapter 13 – Scary Cat Dude meets with Miriam and finds out more about Nikki. Without Atsumori's knowledge, Nikki contacts Scary Cat Dude to get back her passport and wallet. When they meet face-to-face, the man gives his name as Leo Watanabe. Several tanuki attack, and Atsumori takes over Nikki's body to fight them, but Nikki is injured in the battle.

- Chapter 14 – Nikki heals and tries to write about Simon, Leo’s father. She sees him in a hotel room in Japan, but her ability to tap into Simon keeps getting cut off, and she is not sure why. She agrees to go with Leo to Izushi, which was where Simon was last seen.
- Chapter 15 – Nikki and Leo prepare to leave for Izushi, and Nikki writes about Leo’s background in hopes of learning more about him. By doing so, she discovers that Leo may not be completely human and was treated badly as a boy until Simon intervened and took him in.

Quiz / Reading Comprehension Questions – multiple choice / short answer questions to test reading comprehension:

1. Why does Nikki feel that she has no other source of money than writing?
2. Why does Scary Cat Dude want to keep it a secret that Nikki is a “Talent”?
 - a. He is afraid that his bosses will take over and bring her in.
 - b. He is afraid that his bosses will kill her.
 - c. He is afraid that his bosses will send her back to American.
 - d. He is afraid that his bosses will tell him to leave her alone.
3. Why did Chevalier say that they followed the police?
4. What more have we learned about Scary Cat Dude? Is this a good name for him?
5. Why can the Scary Cat Dude find no information on Nikki’s phone?
6. What do you think Scary Cat Dude means when he calls Miriam a “Sensitive”?
7. Scary Cat Dude tries to gain Miriam’s trust by claiming to be working for:
 - a. the CIA.
 - b. the police.
 - c. the Senator’s office.
 - d. the FBI.
8. How does Nikki get Scary Cat Dude’s phone number?
9. Who is Simon Fowler?

Answers:

1. Nikki does not speak or read Japanese, does not have a college degree necessary for most jobs for foreigners, and does not have a work permit.
2. A
3. Leo was sent to Nikki’s apartment because Shiva learned that she was “a person of interest” in the police investigation of Gregory’s murder. Chevalier is hinting that another organization has access to the police files.
4. We know that he works for an organization that keeps him on a tight leash. He wants to find someone named Simon, and the Chevalier holds that over his head when Scary Cat Dude wants to step out of line. Both he and Chevalier refer to Scary Cat Dude as a monster, but we do not know why. We also know that he is armed, and he is looking for Nikki. Even though he is in the presence of superiors, he does not trust them. He hides information from them about Nikki’s

abilities. He has already put together that the god has taken over her at times, and he does not share this, either. Later, in Chapter 15, Nikki writes about when Leo was seven and Simon first takes him in.

5. Nikki wiped the data in the phone as just one of her many security measures.
6. He means that she can sense, or intuit, things about people and situations that others cannot. This was why she was uncomfortable near him in the subway.
7. D
8. She writes about his encounter with Miriam and gets the phone number from a card he gives her.
9. Simon is Leo's adoptive father and the person Nikki has referred to in her writing as "The Brit."

Suggestions for Reflection and Discussion Questions –

1. Nikki continues to wrestle with what is true and what is not. She decides to assume that odd events she has witnessed are true. What are the implications of this assumption?
2. Continue to observe how Nikki's writing process changes the more she finds out about her writing. How does her attitude towards her writing and her approach to writing change? In particular, what does she say about the process of writing minor characters or witnesses?
3. Why do you think Sato cleans up Nikki's apartment? Why would it benefit Sato's organization for the police NOT to know what happened with the tanuki?
4. Both Scary Cat Dude and Chevalier refer to a missing person named Simon. Who do you think Simon is, and how does he connect to this story?
5. Miriam tells Scary Cat Dude a lot about Nikki, trusting he is with the FBI. What makes her more trusting than Nikki? Was she right to give out so much information?
6. What does Scary Cat Dude mean when he says "People don't want the truth. It's big and scary. It has sharp teeth and it's hiding under the bed, just waiting for the lights to go out"? Do you agree or disagree with that sentiment? Why?
7. Why does Nikki continue to keep some things from Atsumori? What do you think it will take for her to trust him? Do you think her willingness to turn over the katana to Leo was truly betrayal?
8. Nikki has more awareness of the battle with the tanuki this time when Atsumori takes over her body. What are her feelings about the experience? How does this change her? How do you think she will feel about Atsumori taking over her body in the future?
9. Do you think Nikki's loneliness stems from her reluctance to trust others and talk about her life? Why or why not?
10. Nikki seems to put more faith in Leo than she has almost any other person, especially since she has not known him long. Why? Why does she look to how he cares for the kitten as evidence of Leo's personality?

Suggested Activities / Inquiry-Based Exploration:

1. Find out more about monsters in Japanese mythology. One place to start would be: http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/List_of_legendary_creatures_from_Japan Monsters generally represent things people fear and are forbidden. Here is a list of other types of monsters: <http://www.gods-and-monsters.com/list-of-mythical-creatures.html> If you had to create a monster today, what fear would it represent? Why? What can fight it?
2. Learn more about the spirit behind an offering or gift to a god by exploring the work of Marcel Mauss at sites such as <http://www.studymode.com/essays/Article-Review-Mauss-Gift-Form-Reason-93972.html> Nikki seems uncomfortable with Atsumori's explanation of how he "eats." What does an offering mean? Where does it really go? What expectations lie behind such a gift? Is it fair to expect something in return?
3. Nikki mentioned a character sheet for her writing when she needs to know more information about one of her characters. Some writers use character sheets to make sure their characters have depth and complexity. Create a character using a character sheet like the one at <http://www.nanowrimo.org/en/forums/character-cafe/threads/70798> or <http://www.suspense.net/profile.htm> and share with a partner or two. Afterwards, reflect on the process. How easy was it to create a character? Where would this kind of character fit in a story?

Guide to Chapters 16-20

Prepare to Read...

- Familiarize yourself with the following vocabulary and terms (items in italics can be found in the author's glossary at the end of the book):
 - déjà vu
 - *kendo*
 - sanitized
 - Hello Kitty
 - *Chigo*
 - *Gion Matsuri*
 - Inquisition in Europe
 - *Bakeneko*
 - *geisha*
 - *Shikansen*
 - *Onsen*
 - *Namazu*
- Focus questions or initiating activities:
 - Research the ideas of multiple/alternate universes.
 - Perform a thought experiment: if you could travel to a library that held the details of your future and the future of your family and country, would you want to go? What information would you want? Would you try to change anything, or would you accept what the books represented as your life? (ch. 1)
 - Find out more about the effects of the 2012 tsunami in Japan. Why would some seek for a supernatural cause? What are some ramifications of the tsunami in Japan today?
 - Research the dropping of the atomic bomb on Hiroshima in 1945. Why did this happen? How did the bombing affect the residents there? Why is this an important piece of history?

Chapter Summaries:

- Chapter 16 – Nikki and Leo check into a hotel at Ishuzi and begin to retrace Simon's last steps. Once there, Nikki tries to sort through her notes and find a common thread. Leo tells her more about the Shiva organization and why Simon was alone when he went missing.
- Chapter 17 – As Nikki continues to sort through her notes, Atsumori appears and explains more about what a yokai is and reminds Nikki that she still needs to help him. Nikki tries to write more about Simon but gets poor results.
- Chapter 18 – Nikki goes with Leo to the place where Simon was last seen and begins to write about Simon's experience there. She discovers that the kami the family worshipped possessed

Simon and confronted Kenichi. The kami demanded that Kenichi continued his family's tradition of service and take them to Osaka.

- Chapter 19 – Nikki fills in Leo about what she has learned about Kenichi and the situation with the kami and Simon. She also tells Leo that the yakuza have a strong presence there. Both Leo and Atsumori want Nikki to stay away from the situation because they do not want the kami to possess Nikki.
- Chapter 20 – Nikki logs into a secret Team Banzai website and reads that her mother has arrived in Japan to find her. Sato and Chevalier surprises Nikki and Leo, having been sent to find and capture Leo. Leo tells the Shiva agents about what happened to Simon. Chevalier agrees to help save Simon by following Leo and Nikki to Osaka.

Quiz / Reading Comprehension Questions – multiple choice / short answer questions to test reading comprehension:

1. Why does Nikki demand that Leo not refer to her as his wife?
2. Why does Nikki like her Hello Kitty clothing?
3. Nikki now understands why she cannot always write what is happening with Simon. What causes these missing moments?
 - a. The Kami possesses him.
 - b. Simon is asleep.
 - c. Simon can shield his thoughts from her.
 - d. Nothing important happens.
4. Why does Chevalier think Nikki is a monster?
5. What does Nikki compare love to?
 - a. An illness.
 - b. A drug.
 - c. A storm.
 - d. A sunset.

Answers:

1. Calling her “wife” reminds Nikki that she will never have a normal life, and this saddens her.
2. She feels that Hello Kitty is a role model because she is “beautiful by always being herself” and does not need anything fancy to be happy.
3. A
4. He thinks all people with abilities are monsters of some sort, and he classified Nikki as a “good monster.”
5. B

Suggestions for Reflection and Discussion Questions –

1. How does Leo feel about Shiva? Why does this help explain his reluctance to tell them that he already found Nikki? Based on Leo's description, Nikki compares Shiva to her mother. Do you feel this is a fair comparison? Why or why not?

2. Why does Nikki continue to fear her mother more than Shiva?
3. Continue to note Nikki's writing process. In this section, she discusses the way that she ties characters together and works on plot threads. How does this coincide with her life and the events unfolding around her?
4. Nikki feels pulled in more than one direction between the needs of Atsumori and the needs of Leo. While she feels that helping find Simon will ultimately be good for Atsumori as well, she cannot explain why. Where do you believe Nikki should spend her time? What are Nikki's needs in this situation, and is she ignoring them?
5. What does Nikki mean by the "comfort of belief"? Since Nikki believed in nothing before this experience, how is she changing?
6. Why does the kami hope that Kenichi has several Sensitives in his group of adoring women? How will that help the kami?
7. Why would the kami be raiding shrines? What would a shrine have that the kami needs?
8. Why is Nikki uneasy about falling in love with Leo? Because she writes about Leo, she knows how he feels about her, but this does not reassure her. Why?

Suggested Activities / Inquiry-Based Exploration:

1. Fear can be a powerful force. Leo believes that Kenichi's fear of the kami keeps him from protecting the women he knows, specifically the woman he loves. Read more about how fear affects the body at <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Fear> or <http://www.psychologytoday.com/basics/fear> and decide whether or not you agree. How can fear interfere with people meeting their goals?
2. How do you define love? Here is one entry about love that looks at how love has been described over the years and in different cultures: <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Love> and a site with quotes about love at <http://en.wikiquote.org/wiki/Love> . Choose a quote about love and defend or reject its claim about love using the dictionary definition. Now, take this knowledge back to the situation with Nikki. Do you feel like either is really in love? Have a debate and see which side wins out.
3. Choose an important natural or man-made event in American history and write about how that event shaped America and changed America in a significant way. How does this compare with the events in Japanese history mentioned in this section, the bombing of Hiroshima and the tsunami?

Guide to Chapters 21-25

Prepare to Read...

- Familiarize yourself with the following vocabulary and terms:
 - Belle from *Beauty and the Beast*
 - Sailor Moon
 - manga
- Focus questions or initiating activities:
 - Research the long-standing debate of fate vs. free will. Where do you stand on the issue? Nikki struggles with whether or not she can change the stories she writes. What do you think? How much control do you feel you have over your future?
 - Perform a thought experiment: if you could travel to a library that held the details of your future and the future of your family and country, would you want to go? What information would you want? Would you try to change anything, or would you accept what the books represented as your life? (ch. 1)
 - Find out more about manga, a genre Miriam loves and introduces to Nikki. What are some characteristics of manga? How is it different from comics or graphic novels? What do some of the more popular manga have in common?
 - Learn more about the character Cruella De Vil. Why would this be an appropriate code name for Nikki's mother, based on Nikki's perception of their relationship?

Chapter Summaries:

- Chapter 21 – Leo and Nikki drive to Osaka to find Simon. On the way, they try to piece together what they know. Nikki realizes that some of the yakuza may be tanuki.
- Chapter 22 – Leo reserves a room at a Love Motel for himself and Nikki. He tells her to wait until dawn and then leave if he does not return. Nikki wants to tell him she loves him before he leaves, but she cannot bring herself to do it.
- Chapter 23 – Nikki waits at the hotel and writes about Leo, only to learn that on his way to meet Sato and Chevalier a car hits Leo. Nikki rushes to the crash site and tries to determine what

happened to Leo. She discovers he's been taken prisoner. Nikki calls Miriam who warns Nikki that her mother has people following Miriam, and that Miriam is dating Kenichi.

- Chapter 24 – This chapter flashes back to Nikki and Miriam’s first meeting at Foxcroft. In that meeting, Miriam shows a love of Nikki’s writing and introduces her to manga and a love of things Japanese.
- Chapter 25 – Nikki finds Miriam, and they catch up on events since last they met. Once both realize Miriam’s relationship with Kenichi puts her in danger, both decide to move forward, find Simon, and help Leo.

Quiz / Reading Comprehension Questions – multiple choice / short answer questions to test reading comprehension:

1. Why does Nikki believe that the kami possessing Simon is a female?
2. If the yakuza at the club are tanuki, how does that make finding Simon more difficult?
3. If Leo does not return to the hotel by dawn, what does he want Nikki to do?
 - a. Try to write more about Simon.
 - b. Sleep, because Nikki is still healing.
 - c. Leave and disappear.
 - d. Call Sato and Chevalier.
4. Why does Nikki seem surprised to find Leo’s gun left at the scene of the accident?
5. Why does Nikki’s mother enroll Nikki into Foxcroft under a different name?
 - a. So that Nikki can be safe from the paparazzi.
 - b. So that Nikki can start with a clean slate.
 - c. So that Nikki cannot be found by Shiva.
 - d. So that Nikki does not embarrass her.
6. Why does Nikki lie at Foxcroft about her past?
7. How does Miriam respond to Nikki’s information that her writing reveal true events?
 - a. Miriam is horrified.
 - b. Miriam thinks it is cool.
 - c. Miriam is scared.

d. Miriam is angry.

Answers:

1. Kenichi referred to her as a “princess,” and before that it seemed he was conflicted about the kami’s gender. The wording seemed feminine.
2. If the yakuza are tanuki, they can change shape and are much more dangerous.
3. C
4. Finding the gun means that there were more attackers, and now she is unsure of who has Leo and why.
5. D
6. She wants to fit in and pretend she has a normal life.
7. B

Suggestions for Reflection and Discussion Questions –

1. How does Nikki’s feelings for Leo affect her decision making?
2. Why is the allusion to *Beauty and the Beast* an appropriate allusion for Nikki and Leo?
3. In the past, Nikki has tried to write in ways to prevent a character’s death, but nothing changed. Now that she is beginning to believe that what she writes is true, she wonders if she has any chances to alter the direction a plot takes. What do you think?
4. Why should Nikki be concerned about Kenichi and Miriam’s relationship?
5. Miriam tells Nikki at Foxcroft that “Happiness comes from knowing your heart and giving it what it wants.” Do you agree? Why or why not? Using Miriam’s definition, what would make you happy?
6. After Nikki reveals her Talent to Miriam, what does Miriam share about herself with Nikki? Why does she wait until now to tell her these things?

Suggested Activities / Inquiry-Based Exploration:

1. When Nikki becomes too overwhelmed and cannot write, she often visualizes a beach. Later, she visualizes a specific place in Hawaii with Leo far away from Shiva and the danger they face. What is it about visualization that helps? Read more about the science behind visualization in this article at <http://www.psychologytoday.com/blog/flourish/200912/seeing-is-believing-the->

[power-visualization](#) and then write about other visualizations that might produce a calming or relaxing effect.

2. Nikki tells Miriam at Foxcroft that she is writing stories with a friend by adding chapters. Sometimes whole books are constructed this way. Take a look at either *Sorcery and Cecilia*, a book written by two friends through corresponding letters (an excerpt is at <http://www.npr.org/templates/story/story.php?storyId=4662966>) or *Naked Came the Manatee*, a book with each chapter written by a different author (there is an article about it here http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Naked_Came_the_Manatee) and see how writers can co-create together. Try something similar in class. Place an image on the screen and let students write for a period of time. When that time is up, have students pass their writing to the next person who should read and add more to the story. Let that continue for some time and then give the writing back to the original author. Share some of the results.
3. Miriam feels a sense of duty to help people Nikki wrote into the story. Because she knows them, she feels she cannot sit by as bad things happen to them. This line of thinking follows the philosophy of moral proximity, the idea that the closer we are to the problem, the more we feel the need to become involved in the solution. A video with another author discussing this idea and how it applies outside of fiction can be found at <http://armchairarchives.blogspot.com/2010/12/friends-lovers-chocolate-isabel.html> . When you are finished exploring this idea, make a map of events in your life that inspired you to take action. How did a close connection to the event move you?

Guide to Chapters 26-30

Prepare to Read...

- Familiarize yourself with the following vocabulary and terms (terms in italics can be found in the author glossary at the back of the book):
 - *Maneki Neko* statues
 - *Iwanaga Hime*
 - *Ohkuninushi*
 - *Amaterasu*
 - *Ama-no Uzume*
 - *Ninigi*
 - *Izanagi*
 - *Jorogumo*
 - *Shide*
 - *Kojiki*
 - Joan of Arc
 - Buddha
 - Kannon
 - Zeniari Benten Shrine
 - Gion festival
- Focus questions or initiating activities:
 - Research the Japanese creation myth. What deities are responsible for the creation of Japan, and why is that important? How does your version compare to what Nikki is told in Chapter 26?
 - Find out more about the role breadcrumbs play in the fairy tale “Hansel and Gretel.” How are they used? What could Nikki be doing that would require similar actions?
 - Research the story of Amenonuboku. Why is it an important object? What would Iwanaga want with it? How does it compare to Kusanagi or Excalibur? What are the names of some other famous objects, and what power do they hold?
 - Learn more about some of the Japanese gods. How do the elements they represent help characterize their nature?

Chapter Summaries:

- Chapter 26 – Miriam, Nikki, and Atsumori go to Kenichi’s club. After some pressure, Kenichi tells them the name of the hotel where the goddess stays and why Miriam is important to her plan. All three have to fight many yakuza to leave the club successfully.
- Chapter 27 – Miriam, Nikki, and Atsumori enter the hotel and rescue Simon.

- Chapter 28 – Miriam, Nikki, and Atsumori take Simon to Pixii’s home on the mountain. On the way, they discuss what they know and try to determine why Iwanaga has been visiting so many shrines. Once they arrive, Pixii starts to address Simon’s wounds, and the others meet her mentor, Yamauchi.
- Chapter 29 – Nikki wakes early and writes about Leo to see if she can find out more about where he is and how he is doing. Leo is caged and being questioned by Williams, a member of Shiva. She then intentionally writes from the perspective of Chevalier to determine what he knows and discovers that Sato killed Chevalier in Izushi. The chapter then flashes back to Sato’s presence at the bombing of Hiroshima.
- Chapter 30 – Simon recovers enough to hear about what has happened since his escape. He tells Nikki, Miriam, and Atsumori that Iwanaga wants Amenonuboku, a mythical spear.

Quiz / Reading Comprehension Questions – multiple choice / short answer questions to test reading comprehension:

1. The goddess needs Miriam so that she can inhabit her body for longer periods of time. What happens when she tries this with the shrine maidens?
 - a. She kills them.
 - b. She cannot try this with shrine maidens as part of their oath.
 - c. She cannot enter them because they are Sensitive.
 - d. She becomes too young.
2. Why are the yakuza at the club difficult to fight?
3. Why can’t Atsumori enter the hotel room initially?
4. Why is Iwanaga searching shrines?
5. What is unique about Yamauchi, Pixii’s mentor?
 - a. He is younger than Pixii.
 - b. He is also samurai.
 - c. He is a mountain god.
 - d. He is secretly yakuza.
6. Chapter 29 is called “Betrayal.” Who performs an act of betrayal and why?
7. What is important about the Gion festival?

Answers:

1. A
2. They are taunki.
3. A paper shade prevents him from doing so until Miriam tears it down.
4. She is looking for ashintai that can hold her.
5. C
6. Sato does when he shoots Chevalier. He does this because he has been in league with Iwanaga.
7. The festival is dedicated to Susanoo and may be a time when the spear is in motion and can be taken by Iwanaga, which would be dangerous.

Suggestions for Reflection and Discussion Questions –

1. Why does Nikki struggle with the fact that the Japanese story of creation may contain true elements?
2. Why does one of the tanuki say that Nikki is too small a vessel to be useful to Atsumori? In the Nikki / Atsumori combination, what are the strengths and weaknesses of each? How do those weaknesses affect the success of their encounters?
3. Nikki finds out Atsumori's background in Chapter 27. How does this information about Atsumori help Nikki (and us) understand his nature and personality? Why does it help explain his impatience with Kenichi?
4. Why does Nikki fear becoming addicted to her powers when Atsumori takes over?
5. Why is Atsumori's opinion about humans different from Iwanaga's?
6. Miriam encourages Nikki to write purposefully for important and immediate information, and this changes Nikki's perception about her writing Talent. What does Miriam want her to do? Is Nikki able to change her process and help herself?
7. Why does Chevalier believe that love between Leo and Nikki changes everything?
8. Why does Iwanaga want the spear?

Suggested Activities / Inquiry-Based Exploration:

1. What is the purpose of a myth? Compare other creation myths to the Japanese creation myth recounted in Chapter 26. What are some similarities and differences? How do the elements and values of each culture fit into those creation myths? A collection of creation stories can be found at <http://www.gly.uga.edu/railsback/CS/CSIndex.html>.
2. Explore the possibilities of writing from multiple points of view. A great example is "The True Story of the Three Pigs" found at <http://www.shol.com/agita/wolfside.htm>. Pick a favorite story or a short piece and brainstorm all possible points of view the story could use. Choose one and write from that new point of view. Afterwards, reflect on changes to the story based on changes in point of view.
3. Here is an interview with a Hiroshima survivor at <http://teacher.scholastic.com/activities/wwii/interview/trans.htm>. Compare this survivor's story to Sato's account of the event. What do first person accounts of tragedies offer to us that is unique and valuable?

Guide to Chapters 31-35

Prepare to Read...

- Familiarize yourself with the following vocabulary and terms (words in italics can be found in the author glossary at the back of the book):
 - *Yoiyama*
 - *Yamaboko Junko*
 - *Mikoshi*
 - Noh actors
 - *Haiden*
- Focus questions or initiating activities:
 - What takes place at a typical Gion festival?
 - What does the phrase “needle in a haystack” mean? How does it apply to the task Nikki and others are taking on?
 - How does a girl become a shrine maiden? How long does it last?
 - The line “these are not the droids you are looking for” comes from *Star Wars*. What is the context for the line? Miriam will use this line in Chapter 35. Predict the context appropriate for such a moment.

Chapter Summaries:

- Chapter 31 – Nikki, Miriam, Atsumori, and Pixii head to the festival to find the spear and stop Iwanaga. While at a shrine, Inari appears and tells Nikki to leave. Atsumori obeys because he can tell that the spear is not at the shrine.
- Chapter 32 – At Lawson’s, Nikki and Atsumori find one of Iwanaga’s shrine maidens. She tells them that Iwanaga has not found the spear yet but continues to look. Atsumori makes the shrine maiden forget the encounter for their safety.
- Chapter 33 -- Nikki and Atsumori meet back with Miriam and Pixii. They wander the festival, exploring the floats as they search for the spear, and eventually check into a hotel for the night.

- Chapter 34 – Settled into the hotel, Nikki writes about Leo and discovers that Leo remains caged and needs water. She then organizes her thoughts and writings up to this point and realizes that all things point at Haru having possession of the spear. She writes from Haru’s perspective to confirm this and discovers that Susanoo hid the spear in Haru’s eye. Knowing that Haru planned to switch places with his twin brother, Nobu, she writes another scene. Something is going to attack Nobu.
- Chapter 35 – Nikki and her friends save Nobu and go to the parade to find his brother and the spear. In the streets, they fight tanuki, but the crowd mistakenly thinks it is part of the show and applauds. A tanuki retrieves the spear.

Quiz / Reading Comprehension Questions – multiple choice / short answer questions to test reading comprehension:

1. Why does Inari want Nikki to leave the shrine?
2. Who does Nikki encounter at Lawson’s?
 - a. Pixii.
 - b. One of Iwanaga’s shrine maidens.
 - c. Her mother.
 - d. Leo.
3. Why did Atsumori want to kill Umeko?
4. What does Miriam mean when she says that the “Japanese acknowledge it’s all real”?
5. Why does Pixii say that Atsumori is all that is keeping Nikki “upright”?
6. What does Pixii bring to Nikki that shows she knows her friend well?
 - a. Hair ties.
 - b. Plum wine.
 - c. Notebooks.
 - d. Shoes.
7. By placing her ideas on the wall with Post-It notes, what does Nikki realize?
8. What is the supernatural explanation for the tsunami?
9. What does Nikki realize about her writing at the beginning of Chapter 35?

Answers:

1. He does not want Nikki and others to cause trouble and disturb his father.
2. B

3. He was afraid the shrine maiden would tell the goddess that Nikki and others were at the festival.
4. She means that the Japanese believe in ghosts and spirits.
5. As a medic, Pixii sees that Nikki is fatigued and needs rest. Atsumori's powers are keeping Nikki walking, but Nikki needs to heal from being shot earlier.
6. C
7. She realizes that the twins are the center of the upcoming activity. This gives Nikki a focal point for her writing and for her later actions.
8. The supernatural explanation is that the Gion festival "went wrong" and did not banish the evil spirits that cause tsunamis and earthquakes.
9. She realizes she can change the ending because she saved Nobu.

Suggestions for Reflection and Discussion Questions –

1. Why does Pixii say that Yamauchi is playing a "reality game" at an easy level, and that hers is much harder? Is life a game? If so, how does that view of life shape looking at the world?
2. Atsumori says that "to say a god's name aloud is to call their attention to you." What does he mean by this? Do you believe that names have that kind of power? Where else have you seen this idea?
3. Why does Iwanaga's sister compare the shrine maidens to blossoms? How does this comparison justify the way Iwanaga uses them? What would be another comparison that would serve the same purpose?
4. Why does Pixii think that belief can be dangerous? What are some real-life examples of the "danger of belief"?
5. How has Nikki gained more control over her writing process? What does this mean for her mental state?
6. How does Nikki's belief that "people are like dominos" relate to the earlier ideas of moral proximity?
7. What lies behind the symbolism of making Haru the Chigo, or celestial child?
8. What does the "man" mean when he says that "the only way you can truly save someone is to let them save themselves"? What is the example in the story? What would some other examples be?
9. Why are the tanuki fighting on the side of Iwanaga?

Suggested Activities / Inquiry-Based Exploration:

1. Learn about other Japanese festivals at http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Japanese_festivals and determine common elements at these festivals. If you were going to create a festival to honor a person, what would your festival look like? What events would you help? How would your choices show you are honoring that person?
2. Learn more about the close connection that twins, particularly identical twins, share. Some interesting facts about twins can be found at <http://www.livescience.com/16466-twins->

[multiple-birthsfascinating-facts.html](#). What are some ways they communicate with each other? Why are they so close? Compare this to the differences presented in Horu and Nobu. Why select Horu to be the celestial child?

3. Nikki learns in this section that she can change the outcome of her stories. What is one event in your life you wish you could change? How would you change it? How would changing that event change everything? This is a dilemma often faced in science fiction when writing about time travel. What should be some rules about time travel and why?

Guide to Chapters 36-40

Prepare to Read...

- Familiarize yourself with the following vocabulary and terms (terms in italics can be found in the author's glossary in the back of the novel):
 - *Jorgumo yokai*
 - *Kinmata*
- Focus questions or initiating activities:
 - Research the term "Mommie Dearest," and brainstorm how this title could be an apt allusion to Nikki's mother.
 - Perform a thought experiment: if you could go back in time and rewrite a piece of history, what element of history would you change? What other historical moments would have to alter because of it?
 - Find out more about Pearl Harbor. What happened there, and why would Sato refer to it when talking to Nikki?
 - Learn more about *Lilo and Stitch*. What about their situation corresponds to the novel so far? Why would someone want to quote from that film?

Chapter Summaries:

- Chapter 36 – Nikki writes more about Leo and discovers that he is being interviewed by her mother, Laverne, who works for Shiva and is the head of the U.S. branch. Angry and looking for answers, Nikki writes from the perspective of her mother. In doing so, Nikki learns that her grandmother had the same Talent that emerged through writing, and that Laverne committed her mother so no one would know that Laverne killed her father, who had molested her. To keep that secret, Laverne killed her mother.
- Chapter 37 – Nikki confronts her mother at a shrine. While there, she sees Williams and fills him in on Sato's betrayal and the plans of Iwanaga.
- Chapter 38 – Nikki goes with Williams to Shiva and sees Leo in his animal form in a cage. After talking to him and reassuring him that Simon was safe, Nikki must wait in a temporary cell. While there, she writes and learns that Sato is coming for her. Locked in, she can do nothing but wait for him to find her and hurt her.
- Chapter 39 – Nikki awakens after being drugged and finds herself in a car with Sato. On the bridge to the heavens, Nikki fights Sato and wins. When faced with Iwanaga and the spear, Nikki shows the kami the shintai made by Yamauchi. Iwanaga agrees to enter the shintai and be transported to the place she desires.
- Chapter 40 – Nikki finds Leo, and together they return to Susanoo's shrine and give Inari the shintai holding Iwanaga. News of Nikki's mother's death becomes public. Leo and Nikki finally find time to be alone together. Simon and Leo reunite at Yamauchi's home.

Quiz / Reading Comprehension Questions – multiple choice / short answer questions to test reading comprehension:

1. How does Leo try to continue to protect Nikki during his interrogation?
2. What does Nikki discover when she writes about her mother?
3. What does Nikki's mother fear most?
 - a. That Nikki will work for Shiva.
 - b. That Nikki will expose her as a murderer.
 - c. That Nikki will form a relationship with Leo.
 - d. That Nikki will not leave Japan.
4. Why does Nikki choose a shrine as a place to confront her mother?
5. Why does Nikki hesitate to leave the katana on the shelf before seeing Leo?
6. Why does Nikki believe Williams when he said she could go free when this was over?
 - a. She believes he has honest eyes.
 - b. She does not have much choice.
 - c. She has written from his perspective and knows he means what he says.
 - d. She has written out the ending of the situation and knows Williams will not be around to deter her from leaving.
7. Why does Nikki hide paper and a pen on her body?
8. What does Nikki sneak to Leo to help him go free?
 - a. A key card.
 - b. A blade.
 - c. A screwdriver.
 - d. A gun.
9. How does Nikki kill the spider woman?
10. Nikki gives theshintai to:
 - a. Leo.
 - b. Williams.
 - c. Atsumori.
 - d. Inari.
11. Why does Nikki want to go to Louisiana when this is all over?

Answers:

1. He claims that all of Nikki's actions are the result of being possessed by Atsumori. This makes it unclear as to whether or not Nikki has any powers of her own.
2. She discovers that her mother knows her Talent is real. She also learns that her mother killed two people and has been keeping Nikki medicated and institutionalized so that Nikki would not discover this and expose her.
3. B
4. Her mother is touring shrines thinking that Atsumori is choosing where they go, and he would pick holy ground.
5. She feels more confident with Atsumori's presence.

6. C
7. Nikki knows that she may feel compelled to write and wants a way to do so if Shiva takes her backpack.
8. A
9. She writes “die” on the monster's arm in blood.
10. D
11. She wants to visit the site of an earlier piece of writing to see if there is truly a demon there who needs to be handled.

Suggestions for Reflection and Discussion Questions –

1. Why does Nikki believe that her mother betrayed her to protect herself? Do you believe Nikki is correct to believe this? Why or why not?
2. Why does Atsumori say to Nikki that “this anger will destroy you”? Do you believe that anger can be a destructive force? Why or why not? What would be some examples?
3. Nikki and Atsumori develop a strong relationship. In what ways have they learned to work together? How have they changed over the course of the novel?
4. Atsumori says that he learned “the mind is the greatest weapon.” What does he mean by that? What would be some examples?
5. What does Sato mean when he says “The best way to remake the world is to completely level the old one first”? Why does this outlook explain his choices in the novel?
6. Nikki tries to identify with Iwanaga in order to dissuade her. What do they have in common? How successful was she in this attempt?
7. Why does Nikki feel she can guarantee an outcome to Iwanaga? Do you believe she is correct in this assumption? Why or why not?
8. What does Miriam mean when she tells Nikki that she is free? Why does this idea overwhelm Nikki?
9. Why did Nikki rewrite elements of her past?
10. Do you believe Nikki wrote the best outcome for herself? Why or why not?

Suggested Activities / Inquiry-Based Exploration:

1. Nikki’s writing process continues to change. How so in this final section? How has the information she has learned important to her confidence in her Talent?
2. Read the story of the creation of man that Sato alludes to at <http://www.st.rim.or.jp/~cycle/MyKONOHE.HTML> and compare it to Sato’s account. Afterwards, write your own creation story for man. Be sure to include, as this myth does, a symbol or element in the process that explains why humans are the way they are.
3. Nikki wants to return to America to the site of an earlier piece of writing now that she no longer has to worry about hiding from her mother. Over time, many people have told about supernatural experiences throughout America. Read about some of those accounts at

<http://www.history.com/topics/historical-ghost-stories> and then share your favorite one. Afterwards, create your own supernatural explanation for an event in American history.

4. Final reflection: Nikki reconciles herself to her hypergraphia when she learns that her writing contains information about real life events that she can tap into and shape into a better end. By doing so, she must accept that she now sees the world in a different way, as she did not believe in supernatural elements earlier in the novel. Describe a belief you had to abandon or modify over time. What was the old belief? Why did that belief need to change? What do you believe now?