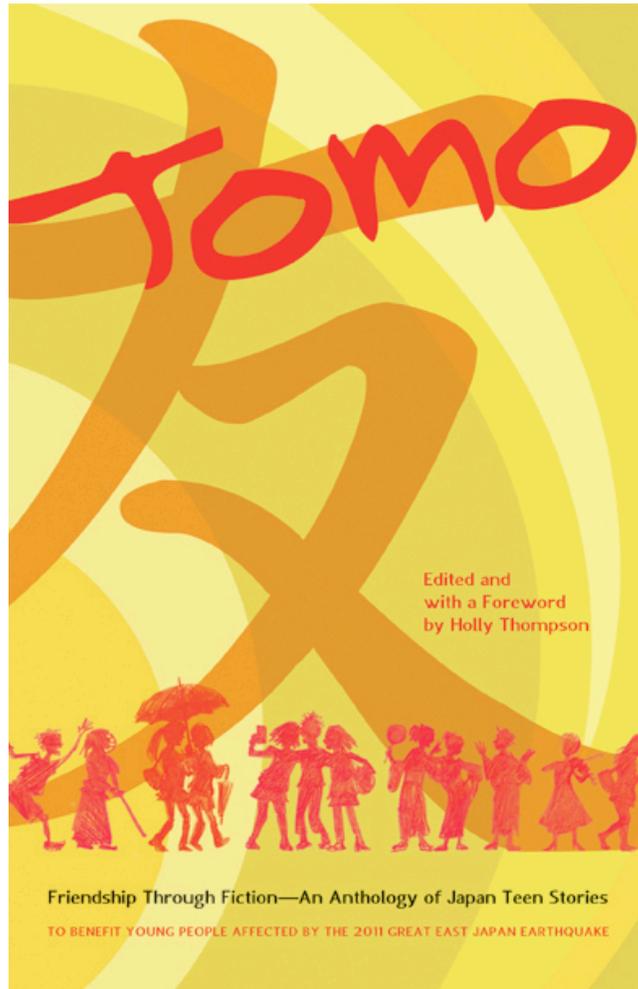


# The *Tomo* Reader's Guide

## Writing Activities and Discussion Questions for *Tomo: Friendship Through Fiction*



*Edited and with a Foreword by Holly Thompson*

**Stone Bridge Press, 2012**

978-1-61172-006-8 | \$14.95 US • \$16.50 CAN |

Trade Paper | 384 pages | 5 ½" x 8 ½" B&W illustrations

\*also available as an eBook: 978-1-61172-518-6

**Published one year after the 2011 Japan earthquake, this collection brings teens closer to Japan and contributes to long-term relief efforts.**

## About *Tomo: Friendship Through Fiction*

*Tomo* (meaning “friend” in Japanese) is an anthology of young adult short fiction in prose, verse and graphic art set in or related to Japan. This collection for readers age 12 and up features thirty-six stories—including ten in translation and two graphic narratives—contributed by authors and artists from around the world, all of whom share a connection to Japan. English-language readers will be able to connect with Japan through a wide variety of unique stories, including tales of friendship, mystery, fantasy, science fiction and history.

By sharing “friendship through fiction,” *Tomo* aims to bring Japan stories to readers worldwide, and in doing so, to help support young people affected or displaced by the March 11, 2011 Japan earthquake and tsunami disasters. Proceeds from the sales of this book will go directly toward long-term relief efforts for teens in Tohoku, the area most affected by the disasters, in the northeast region of Japan’s main island, Honshu.

Edited and with a Foreword by Holly Thompson, *Tomo* contributing authors and artists include Andrew Fukuda (*Crossing*), Liza Dalby (*The Tale of Murasaki*), Tak Toyoshima (*Secret Asian Man* syndicated comic), Alan Gratz (*The Brooklyn Nine*), Wendy Nelson Tokunaga (*Love in Translation*), Deni Y. Béchard (*Vandal Love*), Debbie Ridpath Ohi (illustrator of *I’m Bored*), Graham Salisbury (*Under the Blood-Red Sun*), Naoko Awa (*The Fox’s Window and Other Stories*), Suzanne Kamata (*The Beautiful One Has Come*) and Shogo Oketani (*J-Boys*), among others.

Visit the *Tomo* blog at [tomoanthology.blogspot.com](http://tomoanthology.blogspot.com)

**Holly Thompson**, whose novel *Orchards* won the 2012 APALA Asian/Pacific American Award for Young Adult Literature, is a longtime writing teacher and resident of Japan. She serves as the regional advisor for the Tokyo chapter of the Society of Children’s Book Writers and Illustrators. Visit her website at [www.hatbooks.com](http://www.hatbooks.com).

## The *Tomo* Reader’s Guide

### Writing Activities and Discussion Questions for *Tomo: Friendship Through Fiction*

1. *Tomo* Author and Translator Interviews
2. *Tomo* Writing Connections
3. *Tomo* Discussion Questions—General
4. *Tomo* Discussion Questions—Story by Story

## 1. *Tomo* Author and Translator Interviews

Be sure to visit the Tomo Blog (<http://tomoanthology.blogspot.com>) Contributors and Interviews page and click on the links to interviews with the many *Tomo* authors and translators.

The interviews offer information about the settings and cultural details of the stories, historical contexts, photos, links, and background information about the authors and translators. At the end of each interview is a message for teens in the Tohoku region of Japan affected by the 2011 Great East Japan Earthquake and Tsunami.

## 2. *Tomo* Writing Connections

Following are some creative writing, translation, and academic writing suggestions for writers of all ages.

### Creative Writing

1. Write a short story that would fit into one of the six thematic sections of Tomo.
2. Read *Borne on the Wind*, *Shuya's Commute* and *Anton and Kiyohime*. Write a story that contains another story or legend woven in as part of the plot.
3. Read the stories in the *Tomo* Powers and Feats section. Create a short story with a character who has a particular power or accomplishes a particular feat.
4. Read *Half a Heart*, *Bridge to Lillooet*, and *Bad Day for Baseball*. Write a historical fiction story about a fictional character during a particular moment in history, in verse or in prose.
5. Read *Where the Silver Droplets Fall*. Research then retell a legend or folktale from one of the cultures in your heritage or your environment.
6. Read *Hachiro*. Search for legends or folktales about bodies of water or land features near where you live and create a lively retelling of the tale.
7. Read *Kazoku* and *Kodama*. Write a short story in sketch book or comic format.
8. Read *Wings on the Wind* and the interview with the author on the Tomo Blog. Write a story about animals in the wild that have human emotions that feel true within the context of the story.
9. Read *A Song for Benzaiten*. Write a story that moves back and forth in time to gradually reveal a major incident in the past that affects the character and the character's actions in the story's present.
10. Author Yuko Katakawa first wrote a version of *The Law of Gravity* when she was fourteen. Write a story that derives from an emotional turning point in your teen years, whether that is now or in your past.

### Translation

1. Read the ten stories in translation and read the interviews with the translators on the Tomo Blog. Try translating a short story from another language into English.
2. Translate a *Tomo* story from English into another language.

## Academic Writing

1. Compare and contrast the protagonists from two different stories in the same thematic section of *Tomo*.
2. Choose two outsiders from two different *Tomo* stories and compare and contrast their circumstances and the issues that result from being outsiders.
3. Trace and evaluate the insider/outsider theme through several *Tomo* stories.
4. Analyze the appearance of spirits in *Tomo* stories such as *Kodama*, *Staring at the Haiku*, *House of Trust* and *Where the Silver Droplets Fall*.
5. Choose one of the stories with a historical connection (*Half a Heart*, *Bridge to Lillooet*, *Bad Day for Baseball*, *Borne on the Wind*, *Peace on Earth*) and analyze how the author has drawn on or transformed moments in history to build the story.
6. Formulate a specific question on one of the following topics or another *Tomo*-related topic of your own: Ainu culture, language and people; internment of people of Japanese ancestry in North America during WWII; Japanese pop culture; or Japanese *yokai*. Then research and present your findings in a paper, poster or slide presentation.

## 3. *Tomo* Discussion Questions—General

1. Japanese foods like *onigiri*, *okonomiyaki*, *ochazuke*, *natto*, *udon*, *kakigori* and *taiyaki* are mentioned in the stories. Have you eaten any of these foods? Prepare or purchase some of the foods mentioned in *Tomo* to share during your *Tomo* discussions.
2. The *Tomo* stories are grouped in thematic sections. How does each story related to the section's theme? Which thematic sections did you like best and why? Which stories could have fit into a different thematic section and why?
3. Which major events affecting Japan are mentioned in the stories? How do the events impact the character(s) in the story?
4. How do the characters in *Tomo* stories identify themselves? Do they have one identity or several? Explain with examples.
5. Read one of the many *Tomo* stories whose author is featured in an interview on the *Tomo* blog. Then read the author interview. What insights did you gain from reading the interview? What questions would you like to ask the author?
6. Which characters in the stories are considered outsiders? What makes them outsiders? What would make them insiders? Have you ever felt like an outsider? Explain.
7. To what degree is Japanese history and culture important to the characters? In what ways?
8. Cherry blossoms appear in some of the *Tomo* stories, such as *Aftershocks*, *Anton and Kiyohime* and *A Song for Benzaiten*. Where do they appear in the stories? How are cherry blossoms significant? Explain.
9. How is technology important to the stories? How do the characters use computers, cell phones, *purikura* booths and other technology? How does the technology help advance the plots?
10. Read *Ichinichi on the Yamanote* and *Half a Heart*. How are the two verse styles different? Read the interviews with the authors. What do you learn about the style used?
11. Which stories include aspects of Japan's pop culture? Do any references get repeated in stories?
12. Read the Ghosts and Spirits stories. What role does the ghost or spirit play in each story? How do the ghosts or spirits affect the characters and the action of the story?
13. The epigraph of *Tomo* is an excerpt from the Kenji Miyazawa poem *Ame ni mo makezu*. On the *Tomo* Blog read the interview with translator David Sulz, then read the discussion between David Sulz and Hart Larrabee about their very different approaches to translating this poem. Why do you think the editor felt that an excerpt from this poem was so fitting for *Tomo*?

## 4. *Tomo* Discussion Questions—Story by Story

### Shocks and Tremors

#### *Lost*

1. What happened to Noriko?
2. Research the 1995 Great Hanshin or Kobe earthquake. What details do you learn that aid in your understanding of the story?
3. What does the journal mean to Noriko? What does it mean to other characters in the story?
4. What was lost in this story? Are there tangible as well as intangible things that were lost?
5. This story is the opening story in the anthology. Why do you think it was placed at the beginning?

#### *Shuya's Commute*

1. This story contains various cell phone or *keitai* stories. Have you ever read cell phone fiction or poetry—stories written specifically for cell phone format? What do you think of these short short stories?
2. From this story, what do you learn about commuting to school in urban Japan?
3. Why does Shuya suggest uploading Literature Club stories anonymously?
4. How do stories help Shuya in his day-to-day life? How do stories help Shuya and Ryu during the earthquake?

#### *Half Life*

1. Why does Kenji get out of bed in the middle of the night?
2. How does Kenji find ways to “fit in” in Japanese society? In what ways does he succeed and/or fail?
3. What does Kenji realize about his grandfather? What was his grandfather’s work in New Mexico? How was he affected by radiation?
4. Kenji asks Miho if she and her family are leaving Japan because of the radiation. She responds, “Where would we go? This is our home.” Then Kenji comes to a realization. What does he realize?
5. Why does Kenji decide to stay in Japan? How does he come to this decision?

#### *Kazoku*

1. How does Sam feel about his Japanese background in the beginning of the story?
2. How does Sam’s attitude toward his identity change through this story?
3. What role does technology play in this story?
4. Discuss the significance of the title.
5. This story is told in comic book style. How do the pictures add meaning to the text? How does the text add meaning to the pictures?

#### *Aftershocks*

1. What do cherry blossoms symbolize in Japan? Why do the parents argue about *hanami* (cherry blossom viewing)?
2. What are the sources of stress for the different family members in this story?
3. What are the literal and metaphorical aftershocks that are revealed in this story?
4. What changes occur to make Katie go running again? What does she realize during her run?
5. Do you think the family will stay in Japan? Do you think they will remain together?

## Friends and Enemies

### *Bad Day for Baseball*

1. What does baseball mean to Tomio? Why is it a bad day for baseball?
2. How does Tomio end up with the ROTC guys?
3. What nearly happened up on the ridge? Why do they later keep it secret from Captain Smith?
4. What tensions are revealed when Tomio is paired with “the haole guy”?
5. What does the final line of the story “for now” mean?
6. Research the historical context for this story, and read the interview with Graham Salisbury on the Tomo Blog. What do you think the future holds for Tomio?

### *Half a Heart*

1. What details show Masako’s emotions in this story?
2. What are examples of metaphors and similes used in this story?
3. How does the verse format serve the story?
4. What does the heart half represent to Masako?
5. Research the internment of Japanese-Americans during WWII in the U.S. and Canada. What did you learn that adds to your understanding of this story?

### *The Bridge to Lillooet*

1. Where does the story take place?
2. What does Japan mean to Tom?
3. What does the town of Lillooet represent to Tom and Ken?
4. What are some of the differences that exist between Tom and Ken and their father?
5. Why is the baseball game so important to the boys and to Dupont?
6. How does the baseball game represent “a start”?

### *Blue Shells*

1. Why does Michiru leave town? What is her family’s secret?
2. Why do people gather outside Michiru’s house after they’ve left? Why do neighbors gossip?
3. How is the blue skirt mysterious? Why is it considered a “foreigner’s skirt”? Why does Yae-chan choose to wear it after she hears that Michiru and her mother may have died?
4. What is the significance of Yae-chan’s dream?
5. This story is called *Blue Shells*, not *Blue Skirt*. Why? What is the significance of the shells in the story?

### *Borne by the Wind*

1. What are the circumstances that lead to Toshio living with his aunt and uncle? Where is his father? How about his mother?
2. How is Toshio received at his school in the village in coastal Ishikawa?
3. Find Ishikawa and Tokyo on a map. What is the distance between the two regions?
4. This story contains a mythical legend within a historical fiction story. How does the legend serve the story about Toshio during his stay with his aunt and uncle? How are the stories connected?
5. What is the importance of the Isle of Cats?
6. What events in Japanese history are mentioned in this story?

## Ghosts and Spirits

### *The Ghost Who Came to Breakfast*

1. Why are the parents in this story so eager to please the *zashiki warashi*—the ghost girl?
2. What details foreshadow trouble for Mayumi?
3. What are the humorous moments in the story? What makes them funny?
4. What other *yokai* are there in Japanese folklore?
5. What do you think happens after this story ends?

### *House of Trust*

1. Why does the boy study kimono dressing (the art of dressing others in kimono)? Why in secret? Why does his mother object?
2. Dressing in Japanese kimono requires practice and training and often requires the assistance of others, particularly for tying the long *obi* sash. What are the different styles of obi-tying referred to in this story?
3. Discuss the title. What do you think trust means to each of the characters?
4. What can you learn about *kami* (spirit or god) and particularly about a *yama no kami* (mountain spirit)?

### *Staring at the Haiku*

1. Find out about the celebrations of Doll's Day (*hina matsuri*) in March and Children's Day (*kodomo no hi*) in May. How do these Japanese traditions weave into this story?
2. What is the mystery in the calligraphy room?
3. How does Tomoe solve the mystery of the *kanji* in the calligraphy room?
4. Try learning some basic *kanji* characters and the stroke orders for writing them.

### *Kodama*

1. What is the situation at the start of the story? Why do you think Nikki is in Japan?
2. How does exaggeration serve the story?
3. Who is the mysterious boy? Why is Nikki interested in him?
4. Why does Nikki become so tired? What do you think her nightmares are about?
5. What is the "Becoming" ritual? Why does she want to belong? Why does she run away?
6. What does the art in Nikki's journal reveal that the words do not? How does the journal format enhance this story?

### *Where the Silver Droplets Fall*

1. Read the interview with the translator of this story and learn about Yukie Chiri. Does her life story affect the way you feel about reading the story?
2. Research Ainu and share some details of the culture, the people and their history, and the Ainu language.
3. This is a *yukar* or traditional Ainu tale. How does it relate to contemporary life where you live?

## **Powers and Feats**

### *Yamada-san's Toaster*

1. How does the toaster episode begin?
2. How is the main character involved? Can you think of other jobs like Keisuke's that would enable a person to get to know a whole town?
3. Why does Yamada-san pour the beer over her?
4. What do you think Keisuke is thinking at the end?

### *Jet Black and the Ninja Wind*

1. How does Jet feel at the party?
2. What is "the game" and what is its purpose?
3. What must Satoko "make her see"? Why is Jet's training important?
4. What does the story of the Emishi have to do with Jet's family?
5. Why is the wind important?

### *Hachiro*

1. In this story what style and techniques did the translator use to capture the Akita-ben style of speaking?
2. What similes are used to illustrate the size of Hachiro? the size of the Warashi?
3. Which details in this story illustrate the setting?
4. What can you learn about Akita Prefecture and the setting for this folktale?
5. Read the interview with the translator on the *Tomo* blog.
6. Research about Hachiro Lake. What is its current state?

### *The Lost Property Office*

1. At what point in the story is an element of fantasy introduced? What is the effect?
2. Learn about Tokyo Station and its size and design. Lost and Found or Lost Property offices for Japan's rail lines are busy places. What other objects besides homework or school bags do you think are frequently left on trains?
3. Can you think of other ordinary departments or businesses like a Lost Property Office that could lead to a fantasy or magical realism type of story?
4. Find dialogue in the story that effectively reveals Yuki's personality or the personalities of other characters.

### *Anton and Kiyohime*

1. What is the original legend of Anton and Kiyohime? What happens to Anton? What happens to Kiyohime?
2. What are the clues that tell Olegs that things were becoming strange during his day in the Yanaka area?
3. What might be the significance of setting this story during the cherry blossom season?
4. How do the happenings in Russia relate to what is happening in Ueno Park?
5. What do you think happens to Olegs after the end of the story?

## Talents and Curses

### *Love Right on the Yesterday*

1. What do you know about J-Pop and Japanese idol singers? Research one idol singer or group.
2. How does Yumi (Yu-chan) get discovered?
3. What details show Yumi's perseverance?
4. Part of the story is set in the Harajuku area of Tokyo. Research Harajuku and what the area is famous for.
5. What do you think Yumi's future holds for her?

### *The Dragon and the Poet*

1. Why is Chanata the dragon confined to his cave?
2. What is the dilemma that the poet Surudatta faces?
3. How does the dragon respond to Surudatta? Why does this comfort Surudatta?
4. How does Surudatta provide Chanata the dragon with a sense of hope and contentment?

### *Just Wan-derful*

1. How does Takeshi's attitude evolve through the story?
2. What do the "Note to self" points reveal about Takeshi?
3. What does Takeshi mean by a "*chanto shita* girl"? Why does he dislike Rena?
4. What does the title "Just Wan-derful" mean?
5. What discovery leads Tak to soften toward Rena?

### *Ichinichi on the Yamanote*

1. Why does the main character decide to spend a day alone with Kou?
2. What identity issues does the protagonist struggle with? Where are her parents from originally?
3. Why does Kou consider her a *gaijin* (foreigner) even though she's always lived in Japan?
4. What are the moments of conflict in the story?
5. Find the locations mentioned in the story and follow the route the couple takes through the day.

### *A Song for Benzaiten*

1. This story moves back and forth in time. Create a timeline for the story.
2. What happened to Rain's brother Rigel?
3. Why did Rain/Aya go to Japan originally?
4. What significance did the hegalong hold for Rain/Aya? What was its significance for Hiro?
5. Why doesn't Rain/Aya want to play the hegalong at Inokashira Koen?
6. Do you agree with Hiro's point that "the curses that are hardest to break are those that we place on ourselves"?

## Insiders and Outsiders

### *Fleecy Clouds*

1. What details show the character's keen interest in Saki?
2. What does the incident with Saki crying reveal to the main character? Why doesn't the main character cry, too?
3. What is the meaning of the title? Why does the boutique become so important to the protagonist?
4. What does the main character come to understand in the dressing room?
5. What does the author (and translator!) do to make the voice in this story so distinctive?

### *The Zodiac Tree*

1. Why do you think the girls are cruel to Izumi? What is Izumi's family situation?
2. Why does the tree provide comfort to Izumi?
3. What do you know about the zodiac animals? How does she know that there is only one more animal left to collect?
4. What do Hiromu and Izumi have in common?
5. The story takes place during a Japanese festival. Research Japanese summer festivals and find out what the typical features of a festival are.

### *One*

1. What is *kendo*? What other Japanese martial arts do you know?
2. According to the dance team leader, why is she captain?
3. Why is the main character disdainful of the *kendo* club and Jiro?
4. What role does the typhoon play in the story? Why does Jiro apologize to his coach? What was his coach angry about?
5. What does the protagonist say or do to make Jiro "understand" dance team? Was his lack of understanding due to miscommunication or something else? How does the *okonomiyaki* restaurant setting help them come to an understanding?

### *Love Letter*

1. Why does Jellyfish feel comforted by Kanako's smile?
2. Why do Kanako's friends tease Jellyfish? How is he different from them?
3. Why does Kanako "practically gag" when she reads the letter?
4. Why doesn't Kanako share serious things with her friends? Are there things you don't share with your friends or times when you aren't honest with your friends? When and why?
5. Have you ever felt like you were in Jellyfish's situation?
6. How does the letter make Kanako feel better? What do you think she means to say when near the end of the story she says, "That day, if only I could have been more . . . more . . .?"

### *Signs*

1. What are the many different types of "signs" that appear in this story? Find examples.
2. What is *purikura*? Have you ever used a *purikura* booth?
3. How do Genki and Kana communicate?
4. How is the mystery solved? Why is Kana disappointed in the final outcome at the shrine?

*Wings on the Wind*

1. Read the author interview on the *Tomo* blog. After what major world event did he write this story?
2. How might this story be relevant to readers today?
3. How Kururu become an outcast?
4. When Kururu did not fly south, why did Karara's appearance and saying nothing cause Kururu to take action?
5. Have you ever helped a friend by saying nothing? Have you ever helped a friend by just being present?

## Families and Connections

### *The Law of Gravity*

1. In what way was breaking his arm a turning point for Kai?
2. Why is Kai so resentful of his mother?
3. In what ways is the educational pressure destructive for Kai and Maika?
4. What role does the elephant play in this story?
5. Why does Maika's loss of hope frighten Kai, even though he'd felt the same?
6. How do the siblings manage to help each other in this story?

### *The Mountain Drum*

1. The story features drums and *tanuki*. What is the connection?
2. Research *tanuki* and *taiko* drumming. What information do you discover that relates to the story?
3. Why did Junko choose to follow in her father's path? What appeals to her about his vocation?
4. How would you describe the relationship Junko has with her father? What action or dialogue supports this?
5. Read the author interview. How do you think Chloe Dalby's own experiences fed this story?

### *Paper Lanterns*

1. Why does Mina continue talking to Michelle?
2. The story takes place during the *OBon* holiday. Research this holiday when the spirits of the dead are believed to visit the living. What facts do you learn that relate to this story?
3. How does Mina feel about not being able to speak much Japanese even though she is half Japanese? What details support your ideas?
4. Why doesn't Mina light a lantern for Michelle?

### *I Hate Harajuku Girls*

1. Why does Sady say she's sick of Harajuku girls? What does she mean by Harajuku girls?
2. What is the importance of Sady's memory about being called *otenba* by her father?
3. On a map find the Tokyo locations mentioned in the story. Research about Harajuku and Meiji Shrine.
4. What methods does Sady use to try to feel closer to her father?
5. Why does Sady feel she is a freak? Why does the Little Bo Peep character feel like she is a freak? Why does she dress like Little Bo Peep?

### *Peace on Earth*

1. What are some of the sources of conflict for Taiga and Maya's parents?
2. Why does the family decide to go to Okinawa?
3. What role does A&W play in the story?
4. Research Himeyuri-kan and Okinawa during World War II. How do your findings add meaning to the story?
5. How does the visit to Himeyuri-kan end up uniting the family?
6. What is the significance of the title?

These questions and activities were prepared by *Tomo* editor Holly Thompson ([www.hatbooks.com](http://www.hatbooks.com)). Several questions were contributed by Danielle Sherwood ([45th Parallel Communications](#)).