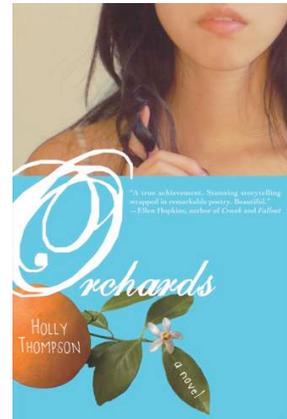


Book Group Discussion Guide

Orchards

by *Holly Thompson*

Orchards (Delacorte/Random House, 2011) is a multilayered novel, dealing with many issues, including identity. Half Japanese and half Jewish-American, Kana has been raised in New York, but her visit to Japan helps her connect with her Japanese roots. The novel also deals with bullying, depression and suicide.



1. Are you bicultural, either by heritage or by circumstances (such as living outside the culture into which you were born)? If yes, how has that shaped you as a person? If no, how do you think being bicultural would affect your sense of identity?
2. School bullying seems to be universal. Early on, Kana tells her mother that she “didn’t do anything.” Her mother’s response is, “Exactly!” and Kana is sent to her relatives in Japan to reflect on her actions. Do you believe a passive bystander can be as guilty as the person who does the overt bullying? If you've been a bystander to or participated in bullying, what made you behave that way? If you have been subjected to bullying, what did you do about it, if anything?
3. In the story, it’s revealed that Ruth, the girl who committed suicide, was probably bipolar. Have you had to cope with any form of depression among your friends and family? Has that made you more aware of how others behave and what behaviors might indicate depression? If you have suffered from depression, have you been able to confide in someone and get help?
4. Has anyone you know ever expressed suicidal thoughts? How did you react? Victims of suicide often give warning signs of their risk for suicide—language or actions that indicate depression, acute distress or vulnerability. Suicide can be prevented! In *Orchards*, what were Ruth and Lisa’s warning signs? What other warning signs do you think Ruth and Lisa might have exhibited? What could you do if a friend gave such warning signs?
5. Jake had become a friend and confidant of Ruth’s. Why do you think this friendship developed? In an email, Jake said to Lisa “Turn yourself into someone/better than you

were/that's all we have to do/that's all we can do." What did Jake mean by this? By the end of the story how is Jake now vulnerable?

6. Why do you think author Holly Thompson chose to write from the point of view of Kana, a girl who contributed to the bullying rather than the girl being bullied? In what ways is Ruth present as a character throughout the novel?
7. Why is the novel called *Orchards*? What roles do the *mikan* and apple orchards play in the story? What might they symbolize at different points in the story?
8. How do Kana's relationships with her relatives change over the summer? How do relationships with her peers evolve?
9. What aspects of Japanese culture were revealed in *Orchards*? Which cultural details interested you the most?
10. *Orchards* is a novel in verse. How does the verse affect the telling of this story? Do you think *Orchards* would have the same impact, or be different, if written in prose?

Some related resources:

American Foundation for Suicide Prevention (see the About Suicide section)

<http://www.afsp.org/>

TeensHealth

www.kidshealth.org/teen

Holly Thompson's website:

www.hatbooks.com

Orchards received the 2012 APALA Asian Pacific American Award for Literature and is a YALSA 2012 Best Fiction for Young Adults book.