



# Memoirs of a Geisha

Photocopiable

## While reading

1 Read the Introduction. The words below are all in the Introduction. Explain the meaning of the words. Some words are the names of people. If they are names of people, explain who the people are.

- a the Depression
- b Kyoto
- c Jakob Haarhuis
- d kuraitani
- e geisha
- f Sayuri
- g Gion
- h Hatsumomo

## Translator's Note and Chapters 1-3

2 Complete these sentences.

- a Nitta Sayuri lived in New York for .....
- b Sayuri wanted to tell her story, not write it down, because .....
- c She wanted her story to be published after her death because .....
- d A geisha's work is to .....
- e A geisha makes real money by .....
- f A geisha never stops learning to .....

3 Say what you know about the following people.

- Mr. Tanako Ichuro
- Mr. Bekku
- Hatsumomo
- Mrs. Nitta
- Pumpkin

4 Write.

Imagine that you are Chiyo's father. Write her a letter explaining why you allowed her to go to Kyoto to live in an okiya.

5 Answer these questions.

- a How does Hatsumomo make life miserable for Chiyo?  
.....
- b Why does Chiyo run away?  
.....
- c Why does Hatsumomo say to Chiyo, "You'll never be a geisha now?"  
.....

6 Write one or two paragraphs from an imaginary letter in which Chiyo tells Hatsumomo what she really thinks of her. What might she say?

7 Who says these words? Who to? Explain the situation.

- a "Oh, the day's too pretty for such unhappiness."  
.....
- b "Don't make yourself late because of me. I'm only a silly girl."  
.....
- c "Hatsumomo has driven other attractive girls out of Gion."  
.....
- d "I'm like a river that's stopped flowing because Hatsumomo is in the way."  
.....
- e "If you think you can make Chiyo into a more successful geisha than Pumpkin, you can expect a big surprise."  
.....
- f "I had no idea what a fine day this would be."  
.....

## Chapters 4-6

8 Find the word "prospectus" in your dictionary. Imagine that you are the head of the school for geishas. Write a prospectus for the school.

9 Write a letter of recommendation.

Pumpkin's abilities are described in detail (page 25). Imagine you want her to leave Hatsumomo to have a better life. Write a letter recommending Pumpkin as a geisha to an okiya in a different city. Try to make her look good without directly lying.

10 Explain the following.

What preparations does Chiyo make for her life as a novice geisha?

11 Answer these questions.

- a Why doesn't Sayuri go to many formal parties?  
.....
- b Why do Mameha and Sayuri have to keep leaving parties?  
.....
- c Why do Hatsumomo and Pumpkin keep following Sayuri and Mameha?  
.....
- d Why does Mameha tell Sayuri that she must stay at home and not go to parties?  
.....



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e Why does Mrs. Nitta decide to adopt Pumpkin?  
.....

**12 Answer these questions.**

- a Describe Sayuri’s meeting with the Chairman and Nobu. What are her feelings towards both of them and what are her hopes and fears?  
.....
- b Describe the relationship between the Chairman and Nobu.  
.....
- c Explain the meaning of these words: mizuage, sumo, Hataki-komi.  
.....

**Chapters 7–9**

**13 Are these statements true or false?**

- a Sayuri’s kimono was accidentally torn.
- b Sayuri visits Dr. Crab in order to be treated for a small wound on her leg.
- c Dr. Crab was called by this name because of the way he walked.
- d Mameha tells Sayuri to behave in a very innocent way with the doctor.
- e During Sayuri’s visit to Ichikiri Teahouse, Hatsumomo defeats Sayuri yet again.
- f Nobu’s presentation of an antique comb to Sayuri pleases the Chairman.
- g Hatsumomo told Dr. Crab a vicious lie about Sayuri.
- h Dr. Crab’s acceptance of Sayuri’s gift of a box of ekubo proved that he had chosen to believe Mameha rather than Hatsumomo.
- i Dr. Crab wins the bidding for Sayuri’s mizuage.

**14 Write a description.**

The way we view people affects our opinion of them. Write one or two paragraphs describing Sayuri from the point of view of Pumpkin.

**15 Put the following sentences in context and explain the situation.**

- a “One day the okiya will be yours.”
- b “When you go downstairs, ask the maid to bring tea for Sayuri and me.”
- c “... Pumpkin passed me in the okiya with a worried look, avoiding my eyes ...”
- d “Only a fool would turn down an offer like the one Nobu Toshikazu has made.”
- e “I couldn’t give myself to the one man who would put him out of reach forever.”

f “Maybe what you mean is that you want something more than kindness. And that is something you’re in no position to ask for.”

**16 Explain.**

- a How Mameha persuades Mrs. Nitta that General Tottori Junnosuke would be a good danna for Sayuri.
- b How Hatsumomo is defeated by Mameha and sent away from Mrs. Nitta’s okiya.

**Chapters 10–12**

**17 Explain the importance of these dates.**

- a March 1939
- b December 1942
- c January 1943
- d Spring 1944
- e August 1945
- f Spring 1946
- g November 1948

**18 Explain the part that the following men play in Sayuri’s life during this period.**

General Tottori  
The Chairman  
Nobu

**19 Answer these questions.**

- a What do Nobu and Sato want from Sayuri, or what do they want her to do for them? Does she give them what they want?  
.....
- b What does Sayuri want from Pumpkin? Does she succeed? Say why/why not.  
.....

**20 Complete these sentences.**

- a Sayuri plans to end her relationship with Nobu by .....
- b Sayuri asks Pumpkin to help her by .....
- c Sayuri’s plan doesn’t work because .....

**Chapters 13–14**

**21 Make a list.** In this chapter, Pumpkin and the Chairman tell Sayuri several things that surprise her. What are they?

**22 Write one or two paragraphs describing Sayuri’s life, first in Kyoto and then in New York.**

**After reading**

**23 Prepare a poster and a speech to describe how these characters change during the course of the story: Sayuri; Pumpkin; Hatsumomo.**



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**1 Who is who in the story? Match the name to the description.**

Hatsumomo Pumpkin Nobu The Chairman  
Mameha

- a One of the most famous and beautiful geisha in Gion. She is also cruel, and uses her power at the Nitta okiya to make the lives of those around her miserable.
- b Hatsumomo's most serious rival. A confident, popular geisha, she transforms Chiyo into the incomparable geisha Sayuri.
- c Another young girl who has come to the Nitta okiya to train as a geisha. She and Chiyo are good friends while both work as maids, but they become rivals as geisha.
- d He is the head of the Iwamura Electric Company. His kindness to young Chiyo makes him her idol.
- e He is the Chairman's right hand man. His face is horribly burnt but he is generous and loyal.

**2 What happened first in the book? Number the sentences, 1–10.**

- a  Chiyo arrives at the okiya.
- b  Sayuri goes to parties with Mameha and Hatsumomo starts following her and interfering with her guests.
- c  As arranged, Sayuri meets Nobu Toshikazu as an apprentice geisha at a sumo competition.
- d  Pumpkin comes to Mrs. Nitta's okiya after her uncle loses his business.
- e  The Chairman is also there.
- f  After two years of hard work, Chiyo becomes a novice geisha: Sayuri.
- g  Mameha announces to Sayuri that Nobu will be her rescuer from Hatsumomo.
- h  Mameha discovers that Hatsumomo has paid the maids in the teahouses to telephone her at the okiya when Sayuri arrived.
- i  Pumpkin and Chiyo start geisha school together. They call their teacher "Mouse".
- j  Nobu makes an offer for her mizuage.

**3 Complete the following sentences.**

- a Chiyo cut her leg and wore a torn kimono so that .....
- b Nitta finally adopted Chiyo instead of Pumpkin because she managed .....
- c Sayuri would not like to have to give herself to Nobu because .....

- d Mrs. Nitta prefers Nobu to General Tottori as Sayuri's danna because .....
- e However, General Tottori would be more useful to the okiya during the war because .....

**4 Choose the correct option.**

- a During the war, the government closed the geisha district, so Sayuri .....
  - 1) was offered a job at Iwamura Electric.
  - 2) accepted General Tottori's help.
  - 3) stayed with a family outside Kyoto and helped them make parachutes instead of kimonos.
- b Nobu asked Sayuri to entertain Minister Sato because .....
  - 1) he was sure this would help Iwamura start trading again.
  - 2) he did not want her to be close to the Chairman.
  - 3) he was her danna and she had to obey him.
- c Sayuri looked for Pumpkin after the war because she .....
  - 1) had had a hard life in the streets.
  - 2) needed more geisha to entertain the party of Iwamura businessmen.
  - 3) had a message from Hatsumomo.
- d If Sayuri agreed to give herself to the Minister just for one night, .....
  - 1) he would become her new danna.
  - 2) she would defeat Pumpkin again.
  - 3) Nobu would be so upset that he would never speak to her again.
- e Pumpkin agreed to help Sayuri with her plan to get rid of Nobu so as to .....
  - 1) hurt Sayuri for being Mrs. Nitta's favourite.
  - 2) upset the Chairman.
  - 3) persuade Nobu to be her danna.

**5 Are these true or false?**

- a Pumpkin took the Chairman to the theater in Amami instead of Nobu because she wanted to take revenge on Sayuri.
- b Mameha became Sayuri's older sister because she hated Hasumomo.
- c The Chairman treat Sayuri coldly because he could not take her away from Nobu.
- d The Chairman did not find life in New York very different from that in Kyoto.
- e Sayuri worked in the Iwamura company in New York.