

Hyo the Hellmaker

AUTHOR/ILLUSTRATOR
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RECOMMENDED FOR: Upper Secondary
 (Violence, Language, Alcohol and Drug References)

SYNOPSIS

Meet the Hakai Family Hellmakers: Purveyors of artisan hells and unlucky days to inflict upon your enemies.

They'll make it personal . . . But for a price!

Hyo Hakai is a hellmaker. But when a curse destroys her village, she and her brother are forced to flee to the Island of Onogoro—a place where Gods live among humans.

Hyo expects the bodies when they show up, but as she investigates, she is drawn into a tangled web of *ens*, death, conspiracy and secrets.

ABOUT THE CREATOR

Mina Ikemoto Ghosh is a British-Japanese writer, born in Surrey, with family in Wakayama prefecture, Japan. Raised on a diet of Japanese murder-mysteries and British fantasy novels, her writing often ends up in the shadowy zone between the two. She has an MSc in Japanese Studies from the University of Oxford, with focuses on classical Japanese literature and contemporary anthropology, and uses these as sources of inspiration for her stories. She lives in Surrey.

STUDY NOTES

- Before reading the story, discuss the cover and title. Some things to include in your discussion might be:
 - What can you see happening on the cover of this novel?
 - What genre do you predict this novel might be? Why do you think this?
 - Where and when do you think that this novel is most likely to be set?
 - What can you learn about the main character from the cover artwork and title?
 - What different elements can you identify within the cover artwork?
- Having read the prologue, discuss what you now know of the setting of this novel. After your discussion, individually, write a list of key information about the world in which this novel is set, its history and its current state. Write a second list that records what you know of the main character (Hyo), her personal history, how her family came to be Hellmakers and what being a Hellmaker entails.
- At the start of the first chapter, the epigraph reads 'As the world-builders finished stirring the swamp of Earth's chaos with their spear, a drop of silt fell from the spear-tip. It settled on the world's new surface in a shape of its own choosing. This drop was Onogoro, meaning "that which set on its own".' (p 9). What do you think this snippet,

written by a past hellmaker, portends for Hyo and the rest of the story? What does it tell you about the nature of the island of Onogoro?

- Emulate the world-builders of Hyo's world in miniature. Using a paintbrush or teaspoon, guide blobs of liquid paint onto a piece of paper that has been dampened with water. Allow the paint to just fall, then let it dry. Then, create an artwork inspired by the novel, using the shapes resulting from the fallen drips as an initial framework to inspire your creativity.
- How does Hyo feel about being a Hellmaker? In small groups, discuss the positives and negatives that she experiences due to her curse, and her attitude towards them all.
 - Individually, write an analysis of her overall attitude towards bearing the curse, as well as her specific responses to the different features that being a Hellmaker has.
- What, in your opinion, is the most terrifying aspect of the hitodenashi? Why do you find this aspect more terrifying than the others?
- Hyo and Mansaku have no difficulty in immigrating to Onogoro, but citizens of the island are not allowed to emigrate elsewhere, or to leave temporarily, other than as part of a Cultural Expedition and while subject to silencing curses. Why, in your opinion, is Onogoro so possessive of its human population in the face of intense crowding and limited land?
- In pairs or small groups, create an *en* map or web, that shows the relationships between Hyo and the key characters within the novel, and between the other characters themselves.
 - Where there is stronger *en*, draw the connecting lines on your web using a bold dark line, and where the *en* is more tenuous or transient, draw a lighter line.
 - For each character write their key defining features below their name (eg. *en-giri* god, police officer/ghost talker, hellmaker, etc.)
 - Along the lines, write the nature or details of the connection. For example, between Hyo and Mansaku you could write 'siblings', or you could write 'older brother/younger sister' if you wanted to include more details.
 - As a class, discuss your finished *en*-webs, and talk about what they make clear about the plot-structure of the novel as a whole.
 - Choose one pair of characters, and explore in more depth the nature of their relationship, and how and in what ways this relationship drives the choices and behaviour of each member of the pair.
- Individually, identify three separate themes that are explored within the novel.
 - Having identified three key themes, make a dot-point list of the various ways that these themes are realised within the novel.
 - In pairs or small groups, share your work with each other and give feedback on your chosen themes and how they impact the characters, narrative structure and overall plot development.
 - Choose one theme to explore in more depth, and write an analysis of how this theme is realised throughout the novel, being sure to include evidence from the text to support your assertions.
- A key concept within the novel is that of 'luck' and 'un-luck'. What is the difference between 'luck' and 'un-luck', and does this differ from the idea of a 'good luck/bad luck' dichotomy, and if so in what ways?
- What good luck charms or behaviours (lucky socks, charms or special coins, etc.) can you think of from your own family history or culture? What about acts, objects or ideas that are considered to be bad luck (eg. walking under a ladder, breaking a mirror, or Friday the 13th, etc.)? Individually, discuss with your family what you, your relatives, or your ancestors consider to be lucky acts or items, and what is considered to bring bad luck.
 - As a class, discuss the different items, ideas, or behaviours that you all know of within your own personal cultural backgrounds, and make a 'master list' of them all, categorising them into the following categories:
 - Causing good luck
 - Portending good luck
 - Portending bad luck
 - Avoiding bad luck
 - Causing bad luck.

You might find some items or events appear in more than one category, as cultural variance is very much at play.

As a class, discuss what the distinctions between these categories are, and how the events and concepts within the novel relate to them.

- Individually create an artwork that contains or embodies some of the items or concepts on the class list, and caption it with a description of the nature of luck and what aspects you are portraying in your artwork.
- How many rules do the gods appear to have—and how easily can they break them? If a rule can be easily broken without consequence, does it still qualify as a rule?
- Create an artwork that depicts a scene on Onogoro, as viewed from the Zero Floor.
- Bystanders' accounts of events are notoriously inaccurate, as everyone views all situations from their own perspective, and through their own preconceptions. Write a misleading bystander's account of the fire at the theatre from the point of view of one of the fleeing audience members. Be as plausibly inaccurate as possible, making incorrect assumptions about what happened, while still holding true to the reported sequence of events as related from Hyo's point of view.
- What events in the novel came as a complete surprise to you, and which ones did you predict with some degree of accuracy? Choose one event that was a complete surprise, and write a one-to-two paragraph summary relating to what you thought was going to happen, and why you think that this specific event was so completely unexpected for you.
 - As a class, share your different perceptions and predictions with each other, and discuss the importance of predictability, logic, and the completely unexpected as part of plot development and tension, and how you think the author created it within the novel.
- Do you agree or disagree with Natsumi's assessment that he is a little like Hyo, with them both falling somewhere 'between god, human, demon and ghost.'(p 463)? In small groups or pairs, discuss this question, assembling as much evidence from the text as you can to support your conclusions.
- Individually, write a brief analysis of Hyo's supernatural status, based on the information the book shares regarding the different properties, capabilities and known behavioural traits of the different groups mentioned.

AUTHOR OF NOTES
RAE CARLYLE