

# Discussion Questions and Related Bibliography for Fay Beauchamp, “Visions of the Sea in Early Japanese Literature,” *Education About Asia* 19, no. 2 (fall 2014): 58-61.

The following questions can lead students into discussion and deeper analysis if they are given primary texts, such as plays or chapters from *The Tale of Genji* and/or *The Tale of the Heike*.

1. *Questions of genre*: In the West, we associate prose with factual accounts and poetry with the imaginary. What is gained or lost when the narratives *The Tale of Genji* and *The Tale of the Heike* interweave prose and poetry?

Related bibliographic note: Translators need to address questions of genre, even deciding how to present prose or poetry on the page. In Royall Tyler's 2012 translation of *The Tale of the Heike*, he gives an extensive defense of his decisions to use both poetry and prose to translate the 1371 version, pp. xvii-xxiii. For a discussion of earlier translations of *The Tale of Genji* both in English and into modern Japanese, see Michael Emmerich, *The Tale of Genji: Translation, Canonization, and World Literature*, Columbia University Press, 2013. Arthur Waley's translation, published in the 1920s, gave the work international prestige as a novel.

2. *Questions of history*: Why do Japanese stories so often revisit certain historical moments such as that of Michizane's exile or Atsumori's death? How do the later works reenvision the historical events rather than just transmit them?

For additional examples, students might be given one or two Nō plays, which are always quite short. There are a number of famous Nō plays that transform historical episodes from *The Tale of the Heike*. Many teachers assign the Nō play *Atsumori*, written by Zeami in the fifteenth century, with the episode recounted in *The Tale of the Heike*. Another Nō play, *Shunkan*, focuses on a pitiful *Heike* character who dies in exile, marooned along a shore without resources, unlike Michizane and Genji, who lived relatively comfortably. The play *Matsukaze* is considered a Zeami masterpiece and is based on a courtier, Yukihiro, who was exiled to Suma and whose life and poetry influenced Murasaki Shikibu. Arthur Waley's translations of Nō have been influential in the West; see *The Nō Plays of Japan: An Anthology*, 1922; reprinted Dover Press, 1998. Also see Royall Tyler's *Japanese Nō Dramas*, Penguin, 1992. For further information on the history recorded by *The Tale of the Heike*, the very useful website developed by Professor Michael Watson is invaluable: [www.meijigakuin.ac.jp/~watson/heike/heike.html](http://www.meijigakuin.ac.jp/~watson/heike/heike.html).

3) *Questions of national identity*: What do these selections in the “Visions of the Sea” article reveal about Japanese identity? To what extent do these “vignettes” belie the notion that “Japan” was “invented” in the modern era?

For books about the formation of Japanese identity, see Koji Mizoguchi, *Archaeology, Society and Identity in Modern Japan*, Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2006 and Stephen Vlastos, ed. *Mirror of Modernity: Invented Traditions of Modern Japan*, Berkeley: University of California Press, 1998.

4) *Questions of symbolism*: Why is the sea such a potent metaphor or symbol? (A further bibliography for this question would be endless!)

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