

The Enemy

by
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Book Information

Pearl S. Buck, The Enemy
Quiz Number: 7910
Creative Education, 1969
ISBN 0-88682-059-6; LCCN
64 Pages
Book Level: 5.0
Interest Level: UG

This classic story of compassion takes place in Japan during World War II.

Topics: Classics, Classics (All); Countries/Regions, Japan; Series, Creative Short Stories; Short Stories, Short Stories (All)

Main Characters

Dr. Sadao Hoki a doctor who suffers intense conflict because he wants to save the life of an American sailor yet remain loyal to his own country

Hana Sadao's wife, who also suffers conflicting feelings about the American sailor

the General the Japanese officer who offers to have his men kill the American

Tom the young American sailor whose life is saved by Sadao

Yumi a servant of the Hokis who refuses to help care for the American sailor

Vocabulary

anesthetic an agent that causes unconsciousness or insensitivity to pain

kimono a long, loose wide-sleeved Japanese robe worn with a broad sash

sulfur a pale yellow non-metallic element, which is used in the manufacture of gunpowder and pharmaceuticals

wistaria a woody vine having compound leaves and drooping clusters of purple or white flowers

Synopsis

Dr. Sadao Hoki stands near his home, looking out at the ocean. When his wife, Hana, joins him, they notice a man being thrown from the sea. When they go to the wounded man's aid, they discover that he

is an American. Sadao, a surgeon trained in America, decides to take the man home with them and save his life despite the opposition of their servants. Sadao suffers intense conflicting emotions because Japan is at war with America. He knows this man is his enemy, yet he has been trained to save lives. He performs surgery on the man, and it is a success, though Hana and Sadao are very concerned that the authorities will discover their deed. Their servants suspect they are siding with the Americans and leave the home a week later.

When the wounded man recovers, he thanks Sadao for saving his life. That afternoon, a messenger tells Sadao that he is to attend to the General who is in pain again. Sadao confesses everything to the General. The General, who was also educated in the United States, understands Sadao's predicament and offers to have one of his assassins kill the American at night. Sadao agrees and awaits the assassination. Yet each morning, Sadao discovers the young man still alive. After the third night of waiting, Sadao decides to help the American escape. He prepares his boat and some clothes for the man. Sadao then instructs the man to leave the coast and row to a nearby island. As the man readies to leave, he once again thanks Sadao for saving his life.

Sadao tells the General that the man escaped. The General was surprised, and he explains that he "forgot" to send his assassins to kill the man. The General and Sadao reassure each other of their loyalty to their country, and Sadao is left wondering why he could not kill the American.

Open-Ended Questions

Use these open-ended questions as the basis for class discussions, student presentations, or extended writing assignments.

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Initial Understanding

When Sadao treats the General after the man escapes, he does not tell the General that he helped the man escape. Why do you think Sadao leaves this important detail out of his story?

While it is apparent from the story that the General has "forgotten" to send the assassins on purpose, the two men prefer to allow their secrets to remain unspoken so they do not have to confront their conflicting feelings of mercy and loyalty.

Literary Analysis

Sadao's father is greatly pleased when Sadao marries Hana because she is considered "pure in race." In your opinion, how might Sadao's father have reacted if Sadao chose to marry a woman who was not Japanese?

Sadao's father was very concerned with tradition and loyalty to Japanese culture. If his son had violated tradition, it would have broken his father's heart. It is likely that this event would have ruined the father and son's relationship.

Inferential Comprehension

Sadao's father was very serious about his son's education. Why do you think he was so serious?

Sadao's father was probably very serious about his son's education because he cared deeply for his son and knew that a good education could provide a successful career during Japan's growth and expansion in future years. His father saw Sadao's potential and was determined that his son receive the best education possible.

Constructing Meaning

At the end of the story, the wounded man escapes. How do you feel about this ending? Would you have written a different ending? Why?

Most students will be pleased that Tom is able to escape with Sadao's help. However, these students may be surprised that Sadao still shows some hostile feelings toward Americans. These students may want the story to end with Sadao's change of heart.

Teachable Skills

Recognizing Setting Much of this story takes place within Sadao's home in Japan. Ask your students to find features of the Japanese home in the story. Then ask them to research Japanese homes. The students should then write a short report on their findings, explaining the purpose of these features and their significance to Japanese culture.

Understanding Hist./Cultural Factors This story takes place during World War II. Give your students a brief summary of the war. Then, ask them to write a one-page paper that explains why Sadao may have felt conflict when he helped the wounded man.

Recognizing Feelings Sadao and Tom have very different personalities. Sadao is serious and reserved, whereas Tom is friendly and straightforward. Have your students work in pairs and ask one to imagine he or she is Sadao and the other Tom. Ask the students to discuss how they might have felt if they were in their character's place. Then, have a short class discussion about these feelings.

Responding to Literature This story may evoke many different feelings in readers, from anger and horror to sympathy and relief. Ask your students to write a short reaction that describes how they felt when they read this story. They should include their opinions about Tom, Sadao, Hana, the sergeants, and the general.