

An Artist of the Floating World

Questions & Short Notes

1. Write an essay on '[key themes](#)' in 'An Artist of the Floating World'
 - a. Second video: (i) Fallibility of Memory; (ii) Identity; (iii) Moral responsibility
2. **Form of the novel**
 - a. First video - (i) Prose fictional (ii) Unreliable Narrator; (iii) Ambiguous 'You'; (iv) Non-linear narrative structure
3. **"I made many mistakes. I accept that much of what I did was ultimately harmful to our nation, that mine was part of an influence that resulted in untold suffering for our own people." Explain this with reference to the central theme of the novel.**
 - a. The art used for propaganda.
 - b. The art used for nationalistic purpose
 - c. The art used to support the hegemonic ideology
 - d. The art used for the power
 - e. The art used to justify war - and hence supported destruction of the nation
4. **The novel 'An Artist' deals with four functions of art / literature. Name it and explain with illustrations from the novel.**
 - a. (i) Aesthetic Delight; (ii) Voice for the voiceless; (iii) Business / capitalism / profit; (iv) nationalism / power
 - b. (i) Ukiyo-e - Seiji Muriyama; (ii) Karl Marx ref; (iii) Takeda firm; (iv) Chisu Matsuda
5. **Write a short note on 'Burning of Paintings' in the novel 'An Artist of the Floating World'.**
 - a. There are several occasions on which the paintings are burned in the novel:
 - i. Father burned paintings of Masuji when he was a little boy
 - ii. Kuroda's paintings were burned by police
 - iii. Seiji Muriyama took away Masuji's paintings - the fire of lantern symbolizes it being destroyed / burned
 - iv. In the film adaptation by Kazuki Watanabe, Masuji is burning his paintings
 - v. These burnings of paintings symbolizes - (i) debate around various functions of art & the crushing of opposing voice in art, through art;(ii) destructive power of art; the art can become tyrannical if it supports imperialism or war; the art can become a political tool for propaganda which may burn the values of humanity to ashes
6. Write a brief note on '**From Complacency to Eyes on the Horizon**'

a. From Complacency to Eyes on the Horizon

I gave those boys little further thought at the time. Then some days later, that image of the three of them, turning towards us with scowls on their faces, brandishing their sticks, standing there amidst all that squalor, returned to me with some vividness, and I used it as the central image of "Complacency". But I might point out that when the Tortoise stole a look at my unfinished painting that morning, the three boys he saw would have differed from their models in one or two important respects. For although they still stood in front of a squalid shanty

hut, and their clothes were the same rags the original boys wore, the scowls on their faces would not have been guilty, defensive scowls of little criminals caught in the act; rather, they would have worn the manly scowls of samurai warriors ready to fight. It is no coincidence, furthermore, that the boys in my picture held their sticks in classic kendo stances. Above the heads of these three boys, the Tortoise would have seen the painting fading into a second image--that of three fat, well-dressed men, sitting in a comfortable bar laughing together. The looks on their faces seem decadent; perhaps they are exchanging jokes about their mistresses or some such matter. These two contrasting images are moulded together within the coastline of the Japanese islands. Down the right-hand margin, in bold red characters, is the word "Complacency"; down the left-hand side, in smaller characters, is the declaration: "But the young are ready to fight for their dignity." When I describe this early and no doubt unsophisticated work, certain of its features may perhaps strike you as familiar. For it is possible you are acquainted with my painting, "Eyes to the Horizon" which, as a print in the thirties, achieved a certain fame and influence throughout this city. "Eyes to the Horizon" was indeed a reworking of "Complacency", though with such differences as might be expected given the passage of years between the two. The later painting, you may recall, also employed two contrasting images merging into one another, bound by the coastline of Japan; the upper image was again that of three well-dressed men conferring, but this time they wore nervous expressions, looking to each other for initiative. And these faces, I need not remind you, resembled those of three prominent politicians. For the lower, more dominant image, the three poverty stricken boys had become stern-faced soldiers; two of them held bayoneted rifles, flanking an officer who held out his sword, pointing the way forward, west towards Asia. Behind them, there was no longer a backdrop of poverty; simply the military flag of the rising sun. The word "Complacency" down the right-hand margin had been replaced by "Eyes to the Horizon!" and on the left-hand side, the message, "No time for cowardly talking. Japan must go forward."

1. 1

Ono is widely considered to be an example of an unreliable narrator. What does this phrase actually mean and in what way does Ono prove that the moniker fits him?

An unreliable narrator is a first-person narrator whose credibility is seriously compromised and whose version of the narrative is therefore highly skewed and subjective. Sometimes an unreliable narrator's unreliability is obvious immediately; in other instances, their unreliability does not reveal itself until the latter stages of the novel or movie in question. When the latter occurs, it often forces the reader or viewer to completely change their view of a character or a situation, and sometimes changes their thoughts about the events in a story entirely.

Ono is somewhat unique as an unreliable narrator because it is he who tells us at the start of the novel that he is unreliable. He tells us that he cannot remember all of the details of the events he is recounting. He even hints that his memory and cognitive abilities are slipping, describing some of his new absentminded habits. Strangely, though, this honestly causes us to trust him more in certain ways, since he appears self-aware. Later, however, we learn that Ono has exaggerated many facts of his career, trying to match his own feelings of guilt to an external narrative, as well as in an attempt to feel relevant and important as he ages.

Therefore, while we understand him to be somewhat unreliable from the start, the true extent of this tendency is revealed much later.

2. 2

What are the two main artistic ideologies represented in this book, and which does Ono ultimately believe is correct?

Some characters in this novel believe that art exists to capture beauty, especially if that beauty will otherwise go unrecorded. Moriyama, for instance, subscribes to such a belief. Other characters, most notably Matsuda, believe that art should exist as part of social and political movements, and that aesthetics should influence rather than imitate life. Ono begins his career under Moriyama's tutelage and is clearly struck by his ideology of art, but Matsuda manages to eventually convert him to his own side. After the war, at the time of the novel's narration, Ono seems torn. His descriptions come alive when they focus on the floating world of Moriyama's paintings, but he also speaks about his political awakening and political art with vivid conviction. In the end, it seems, Ono believes that art is powerful enough to do both, or else—he fears—powerless enough to do both without causing any disruption or change.

3. 3

Why is Ono so upset by his grandson's pretend games, and how does this conflict relate to the theme of generational divide?

Ichiro enjoys pretending to be a cowboy, specifically the Lone Ranger. While doing so, he pretends to speak English to himself. Ono catches him playing this game, and is disturbed when he finds out that Ichiro likes to pretend to be an iconic American figure rather than a Japanese one. His seeming overreaction occurs because he feels stifled by the American military occupation in Japan, and, to an even greater extent, by the American cultural influence at play in his country. Younger people, including Ichiro's parents, are completely accepting of American influence and even see it as a positive cultural factor. Therefore, when he sees his grandson pretending to be a cowboy, Ono fears that his children's generation is corrupting his grandson's generation, reinforcing their own Westernized values and implicitly rejecting Ono's own values.

4. 4

How does Ishiguro distinguish the atmosphere of the “floating world” from that of the regular world using imagery and figurative language?

For the most part, Ishiguro's language is fairly understated, and he avoids metaphor and simile. The “floating world” is an exception. In Ishiguro's descriptions of this world, as well as in Moriyama's paintings of it, lantern-light plays an essential role. Ishiguro describes the light with metaphors that create an ethereal, spooky mood, such as that of a “grotesque miniature graveyard.” In addition, while Ishiguro tends to use mostly visual images to describe everyday reality, he uses non-visual images to describe the “floating world” and Ono's life in that period. These images include the sound of wooden sandals on the ground and the smell of rotting wood in Moriyama's villa.

5. 5

Discuss the use of Noriko's marriage negotiation as a means to drive this novel's plot forward while revealing Ono's past.

Noriko marries through a traditional arranged marriage, even while Japan goes through a period of rapid economic growth and westernization. The negotiations, then, are a useful way to show how Japan has remained familiar to Ono in certain ways while transforming with overwhelming speed in others. Engagements, marriages, and the subsequent starting of a household and family are a familiar and fairly linear pattern, which makes this sequence useful as the book's main linear plotline. While Ono's tumultuous past appears in bits and pieces, this marriage appears in a chronological order that will be familiar to most readers, even if they are not familiar with specifically Japanese norms and traditions surrounding marriage. At the same time, the negotiation necessitates interviews with people from Ono's past, so that even as it moves forward it helps cast the novel backward. When Ono visits Kuroda and Matsuda, the plot can seamlessly transition into conversations about and descriptions of his younger days.

1

¹ <https://www.gradesaver.com/an-artist-of-the-floating-world/study-guide/essay-questions>