

A PALE VIEW OF HILLS: DEBATE EXERCISE

This exercise is designed to help us explore the concept of the unreliable narrator, a technique that marks all of Kazuo Ishiguro's novels and for which he is justifiably famous. In *A Pale View of Hills*, full awareness of the instability of Etsuko's narrative voice becomes clear only at the end of the novel, when some surprising details about her dead daughter and her former life in Japan emerge.

We form into two teams in order to debate the two sides of the following question: "Is Etsuko responsible for the bizarre child murders that punctuate the novel?"

Each team will have 15 minutes to prepare their case. We will then reconvene as a seminar to watch the debate unfold. Although all members of the team should participate in the oral debate, you will want to elect a leader to help guide the discussion and keep the debate focused.

In preparing for this debate here are some points to consider:

- How does Ishiguro present the scene of the mother who drowns her baby during the war? Who is this mother, and what drives her to kill her child?
- How do infanticide and suicide haunt the novel as a whole?
- What are the other child murders that take place during the summer of Etsuko's supposed friendship with Sachiko?
- Does Mariko exist?
- Why do all the female names in this book, with the exception of the British-born Niki, end in *ko*, meaning child (and a common ending for girls' names in Japan)?
- Given the trauma of the memory of Nagasaki, how do we distinguish truth from reality in a novel such as *A Pale View of Hills*?

Enjoy!