

UNUSUAL FRAGMENTS: JAPANESE STORIES

1. How do the stories in *Unusual Fragments* represent everyday habits, such as going to and from work, grocery shopping, cleaning, and being at home? What “rare and unusual fragments” (pg. 79) under the surface of everyday life do they draw attention to, and what are their strategies for doing so?
2. In “The Hole in the Sky,” Toyoko chooses one interpretation of the boy’s origins over several others. What impact does this choice have on her and on the reader? How do other stories in the collection similarly invite or withhold resolution?
3. The woman in “Hot Day” comments that the men around her are “perpetually on the verge of violence” (pg.100). What perspective does this story, and others in the collection, have on prevailing gender norms?
4. Embodiment is a central theme in *Unusual Fragments*. How do characters relate to their bodies and the bodies of others? What larger social paradigms are reflected through representations of embodiment?
5. Like many characters in this collection, the boy in “The False Mustache” is unable to express his desires in words. What strategies do he, and other characters, employ instead?
6. How does “Husband in a Box” represent expectations of gendered and classed caregiving, as well as the relationship between caregivers? How does the story defamiliarize these conventions?
7. The female protagonist of “Cage of Sand” says only a few words, but she has a complex interior life. What literary strategies do this story, and others in the collection, use to make readers aware of characters’ thoughts, needs, and desires?
8. What thematic, stylistic, or other links are evident between the stories and writers in *Unusual Fragments*, and the work of more well-known Japanese writers like Kobo Abe, Osamu Dazai, Haruki Murakami, Yoko Ogawa, and Yoko Tawada?



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