

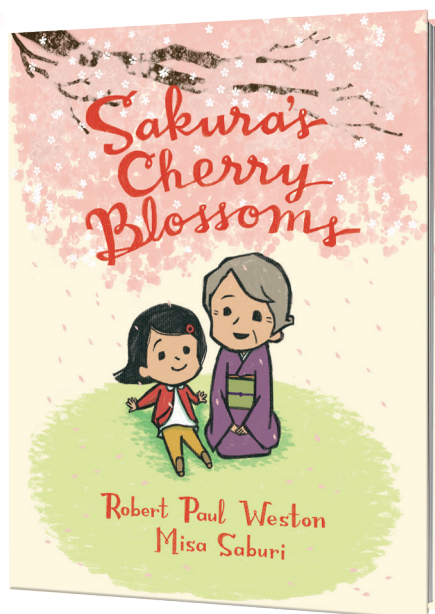
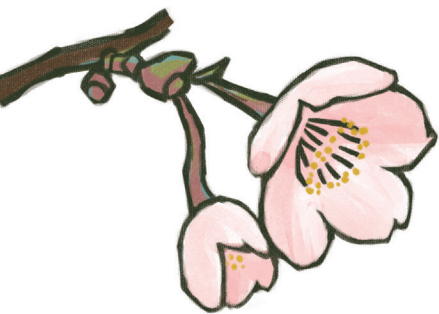
# Sakura's Cherry Blossoms



Discussion  
Guide

Robert Paul Weston  
Misa Saburi





## About the Book

A warm, compassionate exploration of a little girl's experience immigrating to a new country and missing her old home and her obaachan, or grandmother, who stayed behind.

Sakura's dad gets a new job in America, so Sakura and her parents make the move from their home in Japan. When they arrive in the United States, Sakura misses her grandmother and the cherry blossom trees under which they used to play and picnic. Sakura wonders how she'll ever feel at home in this new place with its unfamiliar language and landscape.

One day she meets her neighbor, a boy named Luke, and begins to feel a little more settled. But when her grandmother becomes ill, her family takes a short trip back to Japan.

When they return to America, Sakura once again reflects on all she misses. Luke does his best to cheer her up and tells her about a surprise he knows she'll love — but she'll have to wait until spring to see it. In the meantime, Sakura and Luke's friendship blooms, and finally, when spring comes, Luke takes her to see the cherry blossoms flowering right there in her new city.



## About the Author

**Robert Paul Weston**'s first novel was *Zorgamazoo*, a *Booklist* top ten debut of 2008. In his twenties, he lived in Japan, near the foot of Mount Yoshino, which is renowned for the beauty of its cherry blossoms, the inspiration for this story. Born in the UK and raised in Canada, Robert Paul Weston now lives in London, England.

## About the Illustrator

**Misa Saburi** was born in Sleepy Hollow, New York, and raised in Tokyo, Japan. She makes illustrations using Photoshop, sometimes while watching soccer and silly Japanese TV shows. She now lives and works in Brooklyn, New York.



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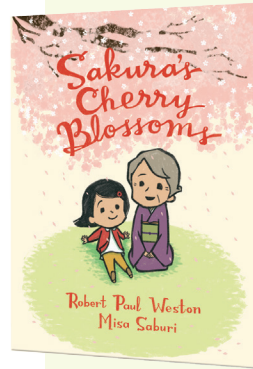


## AFTER-READING Discussion Questions

- What is Sakura’s favorite time of year? Why? What is your favorite time of year? Why?
- The text does not say that Obaachan is Sakura’s grandmother, but the book gives many clues that this is who she is. If you were not familiar with the word “obaachan,” what clues from the book did you use to figure out what it means?
- Obaachan’s voice is described as being “warm, like sunshine.” How can a person’s voice feel warm? Can you think of somebody you know whose voice feels warm, like sunshine?
- The setting of the story changes more than once. What are some of the different settings?
- How much time passes in the story? In what way do the seasons play an important role in the story?
- Obaachan tells Sakura, “This is how I learned / seeing these blossoms in bloom / is always finest with friends.” What does Obaachan mean? How does Sakura come to understand this by the end of the story?
- Moving to a new country with a new culture can be very challenging. What are some of the things that Sakura, and many new immigrants, have to adjust to after moving from where they were born to a new country?
- If a new student were to arrive in your class from a different country and culture, what could you do to help them adjust to their new life?
- The reader is not told directly that Sakura doesn’t know how to speak English fluently. How is this information given to the reader?

## PRE-READING Discussion Prompts

- Look at the cover and read the title of the book. What do you think the story will be about?
- Have you ever seen a cherry tree in bloom in the spring? If so, how would you describe it? If not, what can you learn about cherry trees and their blossoms from the illustrations in this book?



- This story is about a little girl’s special relationship with her grandmother. Think of somebody in your family or community that you have a close relationship with. What makes your relationship special?

- How does meeting Luke help Sakura feel more settled in her new home? How does their friendship help her feel more confident with her English skills?
- What does Luke mean when he says, “When you look up all the time / there are many things you miss”?
- When Sakura returns to the United States from her trip back to Japan, Luke helps her deal with her feelings of loss and sadness. Why was Sakura worried that she would forget about Obaachan? How does Luke’s surprise for Sakura help her with these feelings?
- How do you think Sakura was feeling when she was flying to the United States for the first time?
- How do you think she was feeling as she flew back to Japan?
- How do you think Sakura was feeling when she flew to the United States the second time? How did her dreams represent what she was feeling?





## FOLLOW-UP

### Activity Suggestions

#### Tanka

- At the back of the book, the author describes the special way in which the story was written. Read the description of a tanka poem, then go back and reread a few of the pages in the story. How does the text match this style of poem?
- How are a haiku and a tanka poem similar? How are they different?
- Why do you think the author chose to write the story in this format?
- What would be challenging about writing a story in this format? What would be an advantage of writing a story in this format?
- Try writing a tanka poem of your own. First, choose what you would like to write about. Then start writing. When you start, don't worry too much about the rules of a tanka poem — get your ideas down first before adding, deleting or switching out words to make your poem follow the rules of a tanka (5-7-5 / 7-7).

#### Descriptive language

- The story is written with lyrical and descriptive language. What does the author compare to “rice / scooped fresh from Obaachan's pot”? Find other examples in the story where the author uses descriptive language.
- Choose an example of a line from the book that uses descriptive language and rewrite the sentence using plain, straightforward language. Which sentence do you prefer? Why?



#### Illustrations

- Many important details about the story are revealed to the reader through the book's illustrations. Look through the book again for pages where there is information given to the reader in the pictures that is not given in the text. (It can be information about the plot, the characters or the setting.)
- Choose an illustration in the book that you think is one of the most important for telling the story. Explain why you think it is important.
- Choose your favorite illustration in the story. Explain three reasons why it is your favorite.

#### Cherry blossoms

- Cherry blossoms are an important part of Japanese culture. The blossoms do not bloom for very long, but their bloom is a highly anticipated and special event every year in Japan. Research the significance of cherry blossoms to Japanese culture, and write a short report about what you learn.
- Using books or the internet, look up photographs of cherry blossoms in bloom. What colors do you see? Draw and color a picture of a cherry tree based on what you saw in the photographs as well as in the illustrations in the book.
- Sakura compares the temporary nature of stars to flowers: “Flowers are like stars,” / said Sakura. “They blossom, / they sparkle, and then / they fade, so we treasure them / because one day they vanish.” In your own words, explain why Sakura thinks stars and flowers are alike.