

A Tale for the Time Being

Ruth Ozeki

Reviewed by: Drishti Upadhyaya, 16

Star Teen Book Reviewer of Be the Star You Are! Charity

www.bethestaryouare.org

A Tale for the Time Being follows a young author, Ruth, attempting to piece together a stranger's life story after she finds her diary washed ashore after a tsunami. Ruth is instantly drawn in by the stranger's struggles of moving to Japan and feeling completely out of place. The stranger, Nao, is unable to connect with Japan the way she did America. She faces bullying and depression, but is able to hold onto her life by learning about her grandmother's. Nao quickly bonds with her grandmother and learns more about her family and herself. The diary, of course, is incomplete. Ruth feels drawn to her, though, and begins searching for Nao, wanting to know if she was lost to the sea that nearly stole her story. The two narratives work together to create an emotionally charged novel that you won't be able to put down.

The book had very high highs and very low lows. It was overall fantastic, but the plot could be a little disconnected at times. Any nonlinear narrative is going to have some continuity issues, and A Tale for the Time Being was no different. The writing style was a little hard to get into at first, with its sudden shifts from metaphors to everyday language, but you'll get used to it after a couple chapters. Ozeki explores each aspect of Japanese culture beautifully and isn't afraid to shy away from the negatives.

Anyone interested in stories immersed in culture would love this book, but the heavy material makes it a little too much for younger audiences. Older teenagers in high school and young adults are the ideal audience. There's many discussions on depression, suicide, and rape, so be careful if you find that triggering.

This book is pretty heavy, so you'll either love it or hate it. I'd suggest checking it out from your library, first, and only buying a copy if you enjoy it. It's great as a one time read, but with all the metaphors and symbolism, I found something new to enjoy every reread. The plot and the writing are something you'll never get tired of, even after reading it many times.

Recommended Titles:

We Are All Completely Beside Ourselves by Karen Joy Fowler

The Lowland by Jhumpa Lahiri

Circe by Madeline Miller