

Great Books Discussion Questions – *The Sailor Who Fell From Grace with the Sea*

Yukio Mishima, in addition to being a writer, was an advocate of returning to an earlier era in Japanese history. He did not like the sanctions imposed on Japan by the allies after the Second World War, and wanted Japan to arm itself, reject Western values, and return to a culture of bushido (honor) and samurai values. After forming a private army, Mishima called for the people of Japan to recognize Emperor Hirohito as divine, and to rearm and reject Western culture. His calls for reform were largely rejected, and he committed seppuku (hara-kiri) as a result of the rejection of his beliefs.

1. Why does Ryuji believe that he would experience a special fate (glory) at the beginning of the book? By the time he is scheduled to marry Fusako, he no longer believes that he will experience a special fate. At the end of the book, does he in fact experience a special fate, and is it the same type of fate that he originally expected?
2. Why does Noburo believe that he has to have a “hard heart”? Why do his friends believe this as well? How much of the beliefs of his friends emanate from the chief’s familial problems?
3. Why does the chief say that the worst thing in the world is a father? What does he mean by this? How much of the beliefs of the chief stem from normal adolescent tendencies, and how much is a result of his uncaring family?
4. Why does Noburo write down charges against Ryuji? Does this in some way justify his actions?
5. Does Noburo’s hatred of Ryuji correspond to Ryuji’s acceptance of Western values and customs?
6. Why do the boys think that the sea is the most perfect form of existence, and seafaring the most perfect job for a man? Does Noburo hate Ryuji more after he gives up being a sailor?
7. Why do the boys and Ryuji believe that self control is so important? Are they trying to repress their emotions? If so, why?
8. Why does Noburo only spy on his mother when he is angry at her?