

## *Color of the Sea* by John Hamamura

### READING GUIDE FROM THE SJSU CAMPUS READING PROGRAM

Read for the pleasure and excitement of the story and the reading experience. Since you'll have many opportunities to talk to others at SJSU about the book, as you read, you may want to jot down some notes about characters, events and passages that are interesting to you. Bring your notes to the discussion group you attend. If you have questions, visit the website ([www.sjsu.edu/reading/](http://www.sjsu.edu/reading/)) or send an email to [anellen@sjsu.edu](mailto:anellen@sjsu.edu).

#### CHARACTERS

The key characters and the page where they are first introduced.

Isamu (3) – main character; aka Sam  
Mama (3) – Sam's mother  
Bunji (3) – Sam's brother; 3 years younger  
Akemi (3) – Sam's sister; 6 years younger  
Yasubei (7) – Sam's father  
Kojiro (9) – father's best friend in Hawaii  
Fujiwara-san (17) – master carpenter and stonemason; becomes Sam's sensei  
Yuriko (43) – young Japanese woman with Mr. Bidwell  
Genzo Matsuyama (60) – mother's stepbrother, Sam's uncle; a farmer in Lodi  
Dewey (70) - Genzo's son; Sam's cousin  
Al Yanagi (70) - Dewey's friend; Keiko's brother  
Shoji Yanagi (71) - Al and Keiko's father; Genzo's best friend; owns noodle shop restaurant  
Kuwano (71) - Shoji's wife; Al and Keiko's mother  
Keiko (71) - Al's sister  
Mitsy and Haru (74) - Keiko's friends  
Mrs. Franklin (75) - widow Sam works for in Lodi  
Nobutaro (81) - Kuwano's older brother in Japan  
Misa (127) - Japanese woman Keiko meets on ship to Japan  
Miyazakis (197) - couple who buy the Yanagi's restaurant

#### KEY LOCATIONS

- Honura village in Japan where Sam's family is from; near Hiroshima
- Hilo, Hawaii - location of the plantation where Sam's father works
- Lodi, California - where Sam goes to live with his Uncle Genzo after he finishes high school

#### HISTORICAL TIMELINE

(for some of the events noted in the story)

July 2, 1937 - Amelia Earhart disappears  
December 7, 1941 - Japan attacks Pearl Harbor  
August 6 & 9, 1945 - US drops atomic bombs on Hiroshima and Nagasaki

#### SOME DEFINITIONS

Haole - Hawaiian for foreigner  
Issei - first generation Japanese immigrant  
Mochi - rice cake made from pounded rice

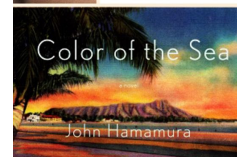
Nisei - children of Japanese parents who are born in a different country

Sensei - teacher

Shogi - a Japanese board game that is like chess, each player has 20 pieces

#### AS YOU READ, THINK ABOUT ...

- What did you like most about the story? What did you like least?
- Who are your favorite characters? Why?
- Who are your least favorite characters? Why?
- Which scene was most memorable for you? Why?
- Who are Sam's most important teachers? Why?
- There are many themes in the story – growing up, survival, love, war, fear, keeping promises, and others. Which resonates most for you? Why?
- How has Sam been shaped by the different places he has lived and the people he has interacted with?
- Where is Sam's home?
- On page 5, Sam's mother told him he was starting a great circle of his life and he would return someday and close the circle? What did she mean? Did Sam close a circle when he returned to his mother's home?
- Why does Sam see his name change as a theft while his father sees it as a gift? Do you agree? (pg 14)
- What did Fujiwara-san mean when he asked Sam what the color of the sea was?
- Why does Keiko apologize to her mother for being so American? (pg 82)
- Would you have given the story a different ending? If yes, what?



#### A FEW FACTS ABOUT THE AUTHOR

- ✓ Born in 1945 in Minnesota in an Army hospital.
- ✓ Says he was born into the stories of *Color of the Sea*. His grandparents and aunt were interned at Rowher in Arkansas. His father's hometown was Hiroshima. His father served in the US army training Japanese-American translators.
- ✓ *Color of the Sea* is his first book.

For more information on the book, online discussion link and fall events visit [www.sjsu.edu/reading/](http://www.sjsu.edu/reading/).