

READ GLOBAL

Norwegian Wood by Haruki Murakami

Questions

(adapted from the [Reader's Guide](#) on Murakami's website)

Warm-up: On a scale of 1-10, how would you rate this novel?

1. When Watanabe arrives in Hamburg and hears “Norwegian Wood,” memories come back to him like “kicks.” Why does this particular song have such an effect on Watanabe? What does he understand—or not understand—about it by the end of the novel?
2. *Norwegian Wood* is Murakami's most autobiographical book. What qualities of the novel feel autobiographical rather than purely fictional? Do these qualities enhance your enjoyment of the book?
3. After Watanabe sleeps with Naoko, he says that “her cry was the saddest sound of orgasm I had ever heard” [p. 40]. Later, Naoko tells Reiko: “I just don't want anybody going inside me again. I just don't want to be violated like that again—by anybody” [p. 284]. In what sense did Watanabe “violate” her?
4. Throughout the novel, Watanabe is powerfully drawn to both Naoko and Midori. How are they different from one another? How would you describe the different kinds of love they offer Watanabe? Why do you think he finally chooses Midori?
5. The university is beset with protests and strikes and, in Watanabe's view, pompous “revolutionary” speeches filled with clichés. “The true enemy of this bunch,” Watanabe thinks, “was not State Power but Lack of Imagination” [p. 57]. What qualities of his character make this cynicism inevitable? What is Midori's reaction to student activism?
6. How would you describe Watanabe's friend Nagasawa? What is his view of life, of the right way to live? Why is Watanabe drawn to him? In what important ways—particularly in their treatment of women—are they different?
7. Why do you think Watanabe keeps rereading *The Great Gatsby*? What does this identification with the novel reveal about his character and his worldview?
8. So many young people in *Norwegian Wood* have painful struggles finding themselves and surviving their various troubles. Kizuki, Hatsumi, Naoko's sister, and Naoko herself commit suicide. How do their deaths affect those they leave behind?
9. Do you have any favorite quotes or descriptions from the book?
10. At the center of the novel, Reiko tells the long and painful story of sexual relationship with a young and pathologically dishonest female student. How does this story within the story illuminate other relationships in the novel?
11. What is unusual about the asylum where Reiko and Naoko are staying? How do the asylum and the principles on which it is run illuminate the concerns about being “normal” that nearly all the characters in the novel express?
12. Naoko attributes Kizuki's suicide and her own depression to the fact that they shared such an idyllic childhood together. “We didn't pay when we should have, so now the bills are due” [p. 128]. What alternative explanations would you propose?

13. Towards the end of the book, Watanabe writes: "I had learned one thing from Kizuki's death, and I believed that I had made it part of myself in the form of a philosophy: 'Death is not the opposite of life but an innate part of life'" [p. 273]. Is this view of life and death resigned or affirmative? How would such a philosophy change one's approach to life?
14. How is Midori different from everyone else in the novel? What kind of love does she demand from Watanabe? Is she being selfish in her demands or simply asking for what everyone wants but is afraid to pursue?
15. *Norwegian Wood* appears to end on a happy note with Watanabe calling Midori, but when Midori asks where he is, Watanabe is plunged into a kind of existential confusion. How do you interpret the novel's final mysterious sentence: "Again and again, I called out for Midori from the dead center of this place that was no place."
16. What can you infer about Watanabe's present condition from the way he tells this story of his past? Did he and Midori have remain together?

Wind-down: Did this discussion change your 1-10 rating for this book?

Notes

Music

There's a chapter-by-chapter list of songs/artists mentioned in *Norwegian Wood* at https://www.harukimurakami.com/resource_category/playlist/norwegian-wood

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