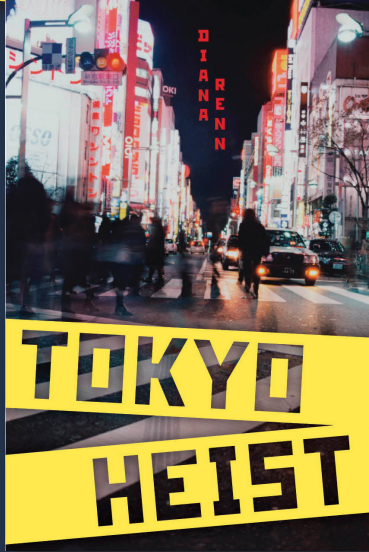


READER GUIDE



Sixteen-year-old Violet is thrilled when her father's new painting commission means a summer trip to Japan. But what starts as an exotic vacation quickly turns sour when a priceless sketch by van Gogh is stolen from her father's client and held ransom for a painting by the artist. The problem is that nobody knows where the painting is hidden, and until they find it, all their lives are in danger.

Joined by her friend Reika, Violet searches for the missing van Gogh in a quest that takes her from the Seattle Art Museum to the yakuza-infested streets of Tokyo to a secluded inn in Kyoto. As the mystery deepens, Violet's not sure whom she can trust. But she knows one thing: she has to find the painting and the criminals--before it's too late.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

- Violet's friends consider her to be a "Japan freak" and one girl even calls her a "mangaloid." Why is being an *otaku* (a person obsessed with manga) sometimes regarded as a negative personality trait? Are you particularly passionate about a certain interest? How do you express this passion?
- Violet frequently utilizes Japanese words and phrases to describe how she feels. When does she usually do this? Why do you think it is sometimes easier for her to express herself using a foreign language? Do you say specific, personally meaningful words in another language? What makes you do so?
- Violet's father, Glenn, says, "If you can't repair something, you can turn it into art." What does this belief say about Glenn's ability to handle difficult situations that need attention and repair? Does he follow his own advice? Does Violet? Have you ever repaired something by transforming it into an artistic project?
- Why do various adults throughout the book dismiss Violet's theories concerning the motives of the yakuza and/or other criminal activities concerning the stolen art?
- How would you compare Glenn's artistic process with Violet's? Are they more similar or different? Are you an artist, or do you have any artists or artistically inclined people in your life? Is the artistic process similar to Glenn's or to Violet's?
- What other jobs in the art world are depicted in the novel? Which of these jobs sound most interesting to you?
- What were your first impressions of Violet's friend Reika? Have you ever felt, as Reika does, like a TCK (Third Culture Kid) -- not quite part of your parents' culture and not quite part of the one you grew up in?

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- The relationship between Violet and Edge is quite complex. Why do you believe they both have such a difficult time expressing their affection for one another?
- On the *shinkansen*, Violet finds a note in her backpack: “In Japan, we have saying, ‘Nail that stands up gets pounded down.’ I strongly urge you follow any rules given. Do not be nail standing up.” What does the first portion of this message say about the Japanese culture? Does Violet adhere to this warning?
- How would you describe Violet’s perspective of Japan throughout the novel? Does it change?
- How has Violet changed by the end of the novel? What do you think most contributed to her growth as a person and an artist: working on solving the mystery, or traveling in Japan? Or something else?
- Throughout the novel, various characters say that “life is more important than art.” What does this mean? How do you feel about this statement? When has art taken precedence over life for you, or vice versa?
- How does the novel portray the world of art theft? Did anything surprise you about the art crimes in the story? Why do you think some people get drawn into the world of art crime?
- Which of the art crimes described in the novel do you think is the worst? Is there one true “villain” in this story? At what point did you become suspicious of one/or more of the characters as untrustworthy? What clues led you to this conclusion? Were your instincts right?
- What do you think of Violet’s talents as a sleuth? How would you describe her sleuthing methods? How are her skills atypical when compared to sleuths in other mysteries you have read? Do you think that you have good mystery-solving skills? How might your own skills help in solving the mystery Violet faces?
- Reading manga partly saved Violet’s life. How have books informed your life decisions, and have they saved your life in any way?
- How is Glenn absent from Violet’s life? Do you believe the reasons Glenn gives for his distance are adequate ones? By the end, do you feel that they have repaired their relationship, or at least bridged the distance between them? Why or why not?
- Violet held onto her passions, talents, and feelings for so long without sharing them with her friends and loved ones. Why do you think she did so? What caused her to start sharing her private art work and her feelings at last?
- Violet’s graphic novel, *The Adventures of Kimono Girl*, is described but not illustrated in the novel. If illustrated excerpts from Kimono Girl had been included, what effect might that have had on your reading experience of this novel? What are some advantages and disadvantages to incorporating art in a novel like this?

*Reader Guide questions produced by Lourdes Keochgerien
YARN (Young Adult Review Network) Editor-at-Large*

SEE FOLLOWING PAGE FOR ACTIVITIES!

READER GUIDE

ACTIVITIES

- Draw or storyboard one of Violet's scenes from *The Adventures of Kimono Girl*. (You can use stick figures or, if you like to draw, you can make it as detailed as you like!) Compare your results with a partner or a small group. How many panels did you take to show that scene? What choices did you make about material to include or exclude in a panel? How is visual storytelling similar to or different from traditional prose?
- Violet learns a lot about Japanese art, especially woodblock prints, and this knowledge comes in handy when she is looking for the missing van Goghs. Visit this PBS website and try making your own woodblock print online: <http://www.pbs.org/empires/japan/woodblock.html>. Then try designing your own woodblock print based on a scene in *Tokyo Heist*. (You can design it on paper if you do not have access to actual printmaking supplies).
- The lost art in this novel is fictitious. However, it is based on fact: Vincent van Gogh collected Japanese woodblock prints, and he was especially inspired by the woodblock print artist Hiroshige Ando. (You can visit Diana Renn's Pinterest site to see the actual images that inspired this book). Compare Hiroshige's bridge paintings with those of van Gogh. Look for ways in which van Gogh made the Hiroshige image his own. Then create your own work of art based on Hiroshige's. (It can be visual art in any medium, a written work, music, or something else). How will you remain faithful to the original art but still make it your own? To what extent are artists always influenced by other artists? What makes art truly "original"?
- Choose a famous art theft to research. The incident could be recent or from long ago. Who was behind it? What were the thief's motives for obtaining the art? How was the art eventually recovered -- or was it? What made the art vulnerable to theft? How is this case similar to or different from the art crimes described in *Tokyo Heist*?

Diana Renn writes contemporary mysteries for young adults *TOKYO HEIST* (Viking/Penguin), an Indie Next Pick, was published in 2012, and her next novel from Viking, *LATITUDE ZERO*, releases in July 2014. Diana has published numerous short stories and essays, and she is also the Fiction Editor at YARN (Young Adult Review Network), an award-winning online magazine featuring short-form writing for teens. A Seattle native, Diana now lives outside of Boston with her husband and young son.



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