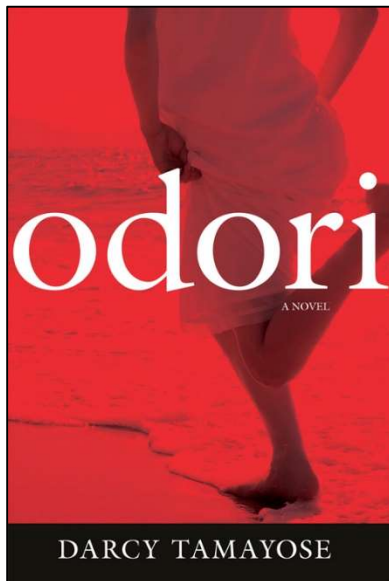


# CORMORANT BOOKS

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## ***Odori* by Darcy Tamayose Teacher's Guide**

Created by Martha Brack Martin with support from Darcy Tamayose and the Cormorant Team



*Odori* is a lush, lyrical masterpiece that not only tells a fascinating, highly original story, but also celebrates the arts as the means by which we can process our feelings, reveal our true natures, communicate, and, inevitably, find healing. It is a moving and magical choice for all English literature classes, as well as for those studying the craft of writing, any of the arts, and Canadian or world history.

### Themes

Some key themes and “big ideas” in this book include:

- Family
- Heritage
- Loss
- The power of story
- The arts as storytelling
- War
- Death

- The importance of place
- Communication

## The Plot

In the spring of 1999, Mai Yoshimoto-Lanier falls into a coma after her husband loses control of the old Ford and drives over a bridge into the Belly River. Eddie dies. But Mai falls into the world of her great-grandmother on the island of Hamahiga somewhere between heaven and earth.

*Odori* is a novel that navigates through the glorious Ryukyuan Kingdom and the Golden Era of the Sho Dynasty, through bloody World War II Okinawa, and over parched prairies of Southern Alberta's Rainmaker Hills — all the while exposing human sorrows, indignities, idiosyncrasies, failed faiths, splintered spirits, and an island culture so resilient, so embedded it becomes mythical. It tells of Mai's journey into the world of an old *kataribe* storyteller, the ghost of her great-grandmother, where she hears of Tree Gods, Sky Gods and human lumps of clay – where her mother's poignant war letters tell of sights and sounds that singe a child's soul. In this dream world she has fallen into, Mai allows her *basan's* tumble of words to fall gently on her ear as she creates painting after painting, sketch after sketch.

## The Setting

This story takes place in Alberta, Canada and the Ryukyu Islands (or Nansei Islands), a chain of islands between Japan and Taiwan that includes the island of Okinawa. It begins in 1999 but goes back in history before returning to that time period.

## What Kind of Reader Will Love This Book? One who...

- Loves stories with a dreamy, lyrical feel
- Is fascinated by Asian history and culture
- Wants to learn more about World War II and the Central Pacific Front
- Appreciates stories with mythical elements and traditional tales
- Sees the world through an artist's eyes
- Enjoys rich sensory descriptions in their novels

## Pre-Teaching Prep

In order to do justice to the novel, you will want to be familiar with the geographical area of the Ryukyu Islands in which the story takes place. Once you get into the book, you will want to share some knowledge of the art of *Odori*, though that could occur during your pre-reading discussion about the cover of the novel. You may want to familiarize your students with the Battle of Okinawa in World War II, though you could also encourage them to research this as part of their learning as they read Part 2 of the book. You will also notice a suggestion for students to record any words with which they aren't familiar and to collate these words in a shared document (online or on chart paper). You may want to hand each student some sticky

notes they can keep in their book, in order to quickly record the words as they find them. This will allow them to easily transfer the words to the chart paper when the class reunites and provide some meaningful discussion as the students take ownership of the research and collating together.

Below are some resources to support you and your students in understanding the book.

### Hamahiga in the Ryukyu Islands

<https://skyticket.com/guide/28477>

<https://visitokinawajapan.com/destinations/okinawa-main-island/central-okinawa-main-island/hamahiga-island/>

### Odori

<https://fb.watch/eFAqmg4EtE/>

[https://www.bunka.go.jp/prmagazine/english/publications/theatre/theatre\\_015.html](https://www.bunka.go.jp/prmagazine/english/publications/theatre/theatre_015.html)

<https://dancetabs.com/2015/09/japan-society-traditional-dance-from-okinawa-new-york/>

### The Gajimaru Tree

<http://www.mapitokinawa.com/2012/11/the-gajimaru-tree-of-igei-kin-town.html>

### Battle of Okinawa

<https://www.history.com/topics/world-war-ii/battle-of-okinawa>

<https://www.iwm.org.uk/history/what-you-need-to-know-about-the-battle-of-okinawa>

<https://www.nationalww2museum.org/war/topics/battle-of-okinawa>

### Himeyuri

<https://www.zentokufoundation.org/himeyuri>

<https://www.nippon.com/en/guide-to-japan/gu900215/>

### Japanese Canadians in Southern Alberta

<https://nikkeiculturalsociety.com/japanese-canadians-history/>

### Old Dutch Potato Chips

<https://www.manitobafoodhistory.ca/story-maps/2021/10/26/old-dutch>

## Chapter Questions (for Independent Work or Class Discussion)

Pick and choose the questions that work for *your* students in *your* classroom. Use as many or as few as you like. All page number references are for the first edition (2007).

### *Pre-Reading*

1. Look at the cover of the book. What do you notice? What do you wonder? Share your observations and questions in a class discussion.

2. As you read this book, you will likely come upon words with which you aren't familiar. Create a glossary in your notebook where you can record these words. As you record them, research their meaning to share with the class. Post these on a shared online document or on chart paper in the class.
3. As you begin the book, you discover two paragraphs that start with "I will tell you the stories slowly..." before the first chapter begins. Why do you think the author includes this prologue?

### *Part One: Crownship Dance*

#### Once Upon a Saffron Death

4. The author uses rich imagery in this chapter as she introduces us to the character of Mai. What do you learn about Mai in these pages? Give evidence from the text to show what inspired your observations.
5. The narrator repeats two phrases several times in the first few pages of this chapter: "The road" and "Mai." What is the author's purpose in repeating them? How do they affect the reader? Explain.
6. Why do you think the author included the cows as part of this chapter?

#### White Floating White

7. We saw Mai being very aware of her surroundings in the first chapter, and again, she describes in detail what she notices. How is her great-grandmother's face like a "map" (p. 15)?
8. Mai also describes her *basan* as being like a bird. Why is a bird a particularly appropriate metaphor for someone who is a storyteller (a *kataribe*)?
9. In your opinion, why does Mai analyze everything she sees in her new surroundings?
10. Where do you think Mai is, and why do you think she is there? Explain your ideas.
11. This chapter has examples of many poetic devices. How many can you find? Make a list of the type of device and an example of it in this chapter. Share your results with your classmates.
12. Basan asks Mai, "Do you think words belong in a drawing?" (p. 20) after seeing Mai's sketches and labels. Mai replies, "Yes...a word is art." Do you agree with Mai? How would you define the meaning of "art"?
13. What were your feelings as Mai described her exploration of the hidden box and its contents, including the letter, on pages 18 through 21? Make predictions about three things that are described in these pages and explain your reasoning.

#### A Golden Time in the Land of the Sun God

14. What do we learn about the golden age of the Ryukyu Kingdom and its culture in this chapter?
15. On page 28, Mai asks Basan, "Do you believe that dreams can predict the future?" How is this a particularly interesting topic of discussion, given the events that happen in this chapter? Explain.

16. What is a *magatama* (p. 31) and how does the author use it to link the stories of the past and present in this chapter? Explain.
17. Yosoi is not just a princess of the kingdom, but its high priestess as well. How would you describe her character, based on the details in this chapter? Prove your ideas with examples from the story.

#### In the Shadows of the Evergreen

18. Mai wonders how the beautiful sun engraving came to be in her *basan's* hands (p. 41). How do you think it happened?
19. Yosoi has a dream journal where "Each page was an illustrated poem of dreams overlapping one another" (p. 46). How does Yosoi's journal parallel Mai's sketches and even the way the author has written the novel? Explain.
20. How would you interpret the meaning behind Yosoi's fourth dream?

#### Part Two: Tanchame: Bountiful Harvest from the Sea

##### Murasaki Quivers of Sky

21. Basan says to Mai, "I was Churi. Now I tell the story just as a *kataribe* would" (p. 53). How does this affect Mai? How would you feel in her place?
22. The girls both thought their great-grandfather "looked like the trunk of an old tree" because of "the deep carvings of skin in his face" (p. 54). What does a tree symbolize to you? Why is this a good choice to describe Zenzo?
23. We learn that some of the villagers wondered "if the spirit of the high priestess, Yosoi, watched over" the two sisters when they arrived in the village. "It was said that royal blood of the Sho Dynasty, Yosoi's blood, trickled through the Shibaku family" (p. 55). What strange event happens to convince them there is something special about the girls?
24. Mai describes Basan as "an experienced circumnavigator of misfortune" (p. 61). What new misfortune do we learn about in this chapter? How do these misfortunes make Basan a good companion for Mai?
25. Mai notices Basan searches incessantly for the pink pearl that should be on the *magatama*. How did she first receive it, and how did she lose it?
26. It seems that almost everyone in the story has a particular gift or "art" in which they excel. What is your particular gift? How do you use it?
27. The author could have set the accident of Mai's grandparents anywhere. Why do you suppose she chose to set it at the Belly River? Explain.

##### Island of Miyako

28. Miyako is named after the island that is known for having star-shaped sand. Research this phenomenon. How does the star-shaped sand fit Miyako's personality?
29. Emiko tells Miyako, "Don't write and don't ever come back" (p. 98). Have you ever said anything you wished you could take back? Share your experience with a friend or with the class.

### Pig's Blood and Other Subjects of Extreme Beauty

30. How do the two Wooden Boxes of Extreme Beauty each reflect their owner? Explain.
31. What does Zeno do to cope with his feelings?
32. Have you ever had anything made especially for you or a treasured object that reflected your hopes and dreams and passions?
  - a. If yes, how did these things make you feel? How did you interact with them?
  - b. If no, how would you design something like this for yourself? What would it look like? What would it contain?

### *Part Three: Sho Chiku Bai: The Evergreen, the Bamboo, and the Plum Dance of the Blessings*

#### A Bowl of Ochazuke to Soothe the Soul

33. Zeno has now found other ways to cope with the impending war.
  - a. What is he creating now?
  - b. What do you do to cope when you feel worried or afraid? How does it help?
34. The character of Mai is very aware of the geography of her surroundings. We see this from the very first chapter as she describes the landscape outside her car window. How does this emphasis on geography and the "importance of place" come into play in this chapter? Give some examples.

#### A Last Glimpse of the Perfect Light

35. The author builds suspense in this chapter by including little words and phrases that hint at impending doom. Find two of these passages that let you know Emiko's world is about to change forever, and share the quotations with the class.

#### Gajimaru of the Trembling Heart

36. Examine the first three paragraphs of this chapter. Look at the imagery and the symbolism used.
  - a. How does the author manage to remind the reader of Mai's past and her present in the same scene?
  - b. Which is your favourite image or description? Why?
37. How did you feel as you read this chapter? Discuss your feelings and reactions with the class.

#### The Cicada Clicked

38. "You have an underlying sadness about you," Basan says (p. 147). She repeats this phrase, comparing Mai to her aunt Miyako. Compare these two characters. Is Basan right that they are similar? Why or why not?
39. "Your mother wrote many letters in the caves during the war. They became her means of survival" (pages 148 and 149). What does Basan mean by this?
40. Summarize how things have progressed in Hamahiga since Emiko joined her family in cave Number Nine.

#### Black Rain

41. Zenzo wonders why Ushi hasn't given her baby a name yet (p. 156). Why do you think she hasn't?
42. When the villagers fled to the caves, they brought their most prized possessions. Chiru brought her dictionaries.
  - a. Why are these so important to Basan?
  - b. Where else have we seen the emphasis on the value of words in this novel?
  - c. Select a word you've always liked. Represent this word using an art form you enjoy. Then explain your choice to the class.
43. Are you surprised by Emiko's brave actions in this chapter? Why or why not?

#### Whispers in the Cascading Day-Day Grass

44. Mai asks, "Why is there war and all the suffering, Basan?" (p. 167). Basan replies:

"There will always be wars and suffering. Maybe it is in the depth of suffering that you will find the secrets of the soul. It is at the bottom, if you should ever find yourself there – in the darkest hours of your life, in the quietest places of your soul – that you will discover all those things you are on earth to discover." (p. 168)

Present-day Mai is surely at the bottom depths of her suffering after her recent experiences. What do you think Mai is meant to discover? What secrets of the soul do you think Basan discovered?

45. Describe five things you learn about the state of Hamahiga from Emiko's letters to Miyako.
46. Emiko is having thoughts about faith, the gods, and heaven. Why is she pondering such deep spiritual matters? How do you yourself feel about these spiritual things? Explain.
47. In your opinion, why is Emiko having nightmares about Miyako? What do her nightmares mean?

#### *Part Four: Hatuma Bushi: The Hope for Abundance*

##### Parched

48. What is the setting for this new part of the novel?
49. We are reintroduced to Mai and Churi as they were in the past, when Mai was a child. Describe their relationship. How does it compare to the way they relate in Mai's post-accident world?
50. How has Basan adapted to life in Mai's rural Albertan homeland? Use evidence from the text and your own ideas to prove your opinion.
51. Why is this chapter titled "Parched"?

##### Nothing Is Forever

52. How do you interpret Basan's *kanji* message in the sand, "like the wind" (p. 196)? Discuss your ideas with a partner and then share them with the class.

53. Emiko dealt with her childhood trauma by immersing herself in the farm, but it wasn't enough. How was Mutts finally able to break through her defenses?
54. Zenzo embraces farming in Alberta like he embraced fishing in Hamahiga, but he never forgot his birthplace. How does the author show this?

#### Hands Her Voice

55. The Belly River again surfaces in this chapter. What do you think the author is saying by setting three critical scenes in this one location? How is this reference different than the previous two?
56. Mai's gift is seeing her world through the eyes of an artist, but her little brother Yukio is born almost blind. Why do you think the author chose to make Yukio vision-impaired?
57. How do you account for what happens to Yukio beside the Belly River when the two kids run away? Explain your reasoning.

#### Rainmaker Hills

58. Mai's perceptions of things with Churi in her post-accident reality are changing. Give two examples where this is demonstrated in the story. Why do you think this is happening?
59. Basan says, "Second lifeline. In your second life, your voice is now your hands" (p. 217). What might she mean by this?

#### Falling

60. How does the author bring the story back full circle?
61. Mai is in wonder at the beauty and complexity of Zenzo's maps of the islands. She says, "...my soul embraces the imagination that created these works of art" (p. 226). What makes something "art?" How would you define it? Explain your ideas with the class.
62. Basan is surprised to find that child-Mai has acquired a second lifeline since she last looked. How do you think this happened?

#### Island of the Two

63. Consider how the author weaves the stories-within-stories in this novel. She starts one thread, which flows into another thread, then back again. Does this remind you of anything? Discuss the form of the novel with a partner or the class. How does it work to reinforce what the author is trying to say?
64. Why do you think Emiko takes herself to the hill with the widespread elm tree at dawn? Explain using evidence from the text and your own ideas.
65. Mai follows her mother, and the author describes her, saying:

"More knowledgeable than her years, her capacity for understanding so broad, she seemed a small emissary from one of Zenzo's charted islands from the Ryukyu Kingdom." (p. 233)



This description could also have described Yosoi earlier in the book. In what other ways is Mai like Yosoi? Why do you think the author chose to describe Mai in this way, in this moment? Explain your thoughts.

66. Mai joins her mother at the top of the hill, and the novel shows how the two examine each other surreptitiously. What changes does Mai see in Emiko? How does Emiko “see” her daughter?
67. There are several references to rocks in the book. In this chapter, Mai studies them, Emiko juggles them, and Churi collects them from the Belly River and stacks them in the garden. What do you think the rocks in this chapter represent to each of these three characters? What does a rock represent to you?
68. What do we learn about Miyako’s last days from her letters? Why has Emiko only read them once in all these years?
69. The farmlands of southern Alberta are desperately in need of rain, yet “Emiko and Mai were not conscious of the threatening rainstorm” (p. 242). What has them so focused, and what does this say about their future, moving forward?

#### Island of Basan

70. When Basan suddenly realizes her death is imminent, she rushes upstairs to get her dictionary and turns it to the word “navigate.” We have seen this word before in the story. Why do you think Basan does this? What is the author trying to say?

#### Awake

71. The author writes this chapter in such a way that it reminds the reader of all the tales that have come before in the novel. She includes subtle references to many of the plot elements, motifs, and imagery.
  - a. Look closely at the words and phrases. Then record any that remind you of the previous chapters and events in the book using a graphic organizer of your choice.
  - b. How important is it to bring images together when you are writing the end of a story? How does it impact the reader?
72. Describe Mai’s return to consciousness. What do you think prompted it? How must she have felt at that moment?

#### Beneath the Widespread Elm

73. How is everyone coping since Mai has returned home from the hospital? What changes have occurred?
74. Mai asks her mother to write “Like the Wind” in *kanji* marks as a title to a watercolour painting she has done.
  - a. What were the circumstances where we heard that phrase before in the story?
  - b. What is the subject of the painting? How do you know?
  - c. What is the meaning behind “like the wind?” Explain using your thoughts as well as the text.
75. Now that you have finished it, how do you feel about *Odori*? Discuss.

## Discussion Questions and Essay Topics

These topics can be used for the traditional assessment options of discussion or essay.

- a) There are many activities done by the characters in this story that take on the aspect of “ritual” in the way they are described. Select at least two of these, explaining the author’s purpose and technique.
- b) “The island of Gajimaru absorbs me until I can no longer decipher the boundary between the island and my being” (p. 185). This quotation is one example where a character is inexorably linked to a place in the story. Find other examples from the text where the author links characters to their setting or “place.” How does this connection make the story richer? What might the author be trying to say by doing this?
- c) *Odori* explores the ways people can use different kinds of artistic expression to tell a story. Discuss how the author does this in the story and what you feel her message is.
- d) Every year the CBC hosts its program entitled Canada Reads (<https://www.cbc.ca/books/canadareads/about-1.4025711>). Familiarize yourself with the program. Now imagine that you have been chosen to participate as one of the panelists, and your book is *Odori*. Write your winning argument for why *Odori* should win this year’s Canada Reads contest.
- e) The motif of water is woven throughout *Odori*. Look for examples where the author uses the recurring image of water in the book. Consider what you know about the symbolism traditionally given to water in both literature and the arts. Does that symbolism work in this book to reinforce the themes and the author’s purpose? Explain.
- f) King Sho Shin wanted his people to “recognize the beauty and the value of small things. For it is in these small things that they will find the inner strength to face the hardships that will come” (p. 44). Consider the two topics below. Select one to answer, and support your answer with evidence from the text and your own ideas:
  - a. How does *Odori* show the reader “the beauty and value of small things?”
  - b. How do the characters in *Odori* find their inner strength through the small things that surround them?

## Culminating Activities

Give students the opportunity to make connections to the world and themselves, as well as to other texts, and to choose their own way of demonstrating them. Here are some other activities to consider at the end of the novel:

### The Sum of Its Parts

Look at the names the author has given to each of the four parts of the book. Research these names using the resources at your disposal.

Discuss as a class why the author chose to give each part its name, using whatever you’ve learned from your research and your own ideas. How do these names support the themes in the book and the events in each part?

## Deep Diving into Your Local Community's Past

Mai learns about the history of her family's homeland when she is reunited with Churi, her *basan*, after her coma. Though she thought she understood her family's roots, listening to Basan's storytelling expanded her horizons and showed her many things she hadn't learned before. The Ryukyu Islands have their own history and culture that make them special.

In groups, consider your own local community and what you know about it. Can you think of any areas where there is missing information about its history or culture? Think about the groups that have contributed to your community's history and culture. Are there groups whose stories haven't been told? Can you identify any obvious missing pieces?

Where could you go to find information about the "missing" stories from your community? What tools are available to you? If resources are not available or don't appear to exist, what could your group do to address this problem? Who could help?

As a class, create a curated list of resources where the answers to those missing stories of local history and culture could be located. Are there resources still missing? If so, create a plan to raise awareness about the need for these resources and then work to locate or craft them.

## Research Roundup

Think about the various topics introduced in the book. These could include the island of Okinawa today, the Himeyuri, the craft of the *Kataribe*, the historic Ryukyu Kingdom, the art of Odori, Japanese calligraphy or Karate, the plants and animals in the Ryukyu Islands, Asian musical instruments, the Asian immigrant experience in Canada, artists of southern Alberta, or any other topic found in the book and of personal interest to you (with permission from your teacher).

Research a topic introduced in the novel, independently or in groups. Use at least four different resources, and cite these in a bibliography you create using a format designated by your teacher. Then present your learning and research through an infographic or other presentation model of your choice.

## Say What?

At the time of the Battle of Okinawa, war propaganda was flourishing on all sides. Today we look at this propaganda and are justifiably horrified by how racist it was.

Consider this video from the time: [America Invades Japan: The Battle of Okinawa \(1945\) | War Archives](#) How does this video's perspective differ from that of the characters in the novel? Think about our media today. How honest and "fair" is it, in your opinion?

Find some examples of biased media reports, videos, etc. from the last five to ten years. Share them with the class. Discuss how perspective changes over time. What can we do to ensure we are being as fair and unbiased as possible, not just in the media we watch, but in our own discussions and daily lives?

## Makers Gonna Make

This novel is a celebration of the arts and the power of storytelling through multiple modalities. This is your chance to jump in and make your own learning visible in a creative way that speaks to you personally.

Consider your feelings as you read the novel and learned about Mai's experiences. Think about the scenes that moved you and the descriptions that made pictures appear in your mind. How would you express your experiences in a way that is personal and meaningful to you?

Using any form of artistic expression (e.g., music, visual arts, writing, dance, drama, photography, media, or any combination), design and create your own response to *Odori*.

### A Picture's Worth a Thousand Words

The idea of "place" is huge in this story. Locations have meaning and value and are described in artistic terms.

Using a camera or phone, take pictures of places that are personally significant to you. Use your creativity to "capture" the value of the place. Then, in the style of Darcy Tamayose in this book, write a descriptive paragraph about your chosen "place."

### True Colours

"Tell me what kinds of paints you would use for Rainmaker Hills...I like the names of your paints" (p. 216).

Mai describes many colours throughout the book as she creates her art. Research these colours and then set out to find them in an art medium of your choice. Once you have gathered them, take your collection of colours and create your own work of art. You may want to portray a picture of your favourite setting from your life, like Mai does, or portray something else that is important to you.

### Interview with the Author

**Martha:** I am so excited to chat with you today! I absolutely *loved* this book!

**Darcy:** Thank you for reading *Odori*, Martha. I appreciate you taking the time and am thrilled that you "absolutely *loved* this book."

**Martha:** I think what captured me right away was the description of everything through Mai's "artist eyes." That and the clearly not accidental way you kept repeating Eddie's observations with the phrases "The road" and "Mai." It was obvious to me that you were more than a



little familiar with drawing and painting – and that something bad was going to happen on that road!

**Darcy:** I was an illustrator before I was a writer. I absolutely love the pencil as an art tool. Growing up I always thought the pencil was magical — when you have nothing but paper and a pencil you can create worlds with lines and shadows. Similarly, you can create worlds with words.

**Martha:** I understand you're not just a writer, but also a graduate student working on this idea of combining different modalities for learning. Which means...?

**Darcy:** I believe a story can be brought to life through one mode or through various strategies of communication. For example, I often see a story in the form of graphic novel, book, film, photography, oral storytelling, or music — multimodally.

**Martha:** Well, *Odori* is definitely a work that celebrates the theme of communication, and the many ways people can share with each other. Mai's post-accident prognosis is a case in point. How autobiographical is the character of Mai?

**Darcy:** Though informed by my own known world, the character of Mai for the most part is from my imagination (that is where I get a lot of joy from writing — in nation and character-building).

**Martha:** What is your writing process like?

**Darcy:** There are different processes in how I write a story. Process 1 is what I will call "Organic." I like to experiment with the creative process and how it can shape story (whether using words or drawing) through a bit of improvisation — and sometimes that doesn't work. After the initial process of establishing a rough path, I can get on with the first draft of the story.

Process 2 is with an outline. Sometimes I have a preconceived story and this is the way my academic essays start out (Intro/Paragraph 1, 2, 3, and Conclusion). That is maybe why I don't usually go this route — longing for a bit more creative freedom. A writer friend of mine has sticky notes that accumulate on his wall to navigate story. This may also be seen as a form of outline, I suppose — but in a more tactile (and fun) sense.

Process 3 is what I call "Layering." I begin with writing a couple of really good first sentences that I then expand into a paragraph. If you make that first paragraph captivating, it will keep you writing. One good sentence for me will keep the story going "layer upon layer" and building momentum. It's a similar process to drawing. If I start with drawing the eye or strands of hair and pay attention to quality, this actually propels me to draw the next element. I think this is one reason I love Photoshop or any of the relatively forgiving Adobe products like InDesign or After Effects: you can critically assess every layer/edit with a blink (and dispose of it if you wish). That kind of licence with artistic agility keeps me propelled and moving forward.

**Martha:** Did you stick closely to your initial vision for this book, or did you find yourself making significant changes?

**Darcy:** In general, the vision of *Odori* remained true. I had an incredible publisher, Cormorant's Marc Côté, who respected the story. The vision was to present an Okinawan Canadian journey through generational characters. When I was growing up there were no books on the Okinawan Canadian experience. In fact, it was difficult to find anything in the library on Okinawa except a sentence or two in U.S. military accounts of the Second World War. My vision was to write a book that I wished I'd had, that reflected who I was or who my parents and family were within the Canadian landscape. That initial vision didn't change significantly.

**Martha:** Did you always plan to have Mai experience her journey because of a coma or was that something that came later?

**Darcy:** There is so much flexibility and opportunity to use your imagination when you write beyond the pragmatic. A coma or a dream state is another world where you can incorporate magic realism or a fantastical journey. The reality of the Battle of Okinawa was very brutal — one out of four civilians perished, young people were conscripted to fight and nurse at the frontlines, civilians committed suicide upon orders, and so on. I remember not being able to write at times and the tears as I typed away. I needed an escape, and Mai being in a coma allowed me to write more poetically and with “healing” in mind. Having a character like Mai in a coma allowed me to poeticize the horrors of war and other harsh realities.

**Martha:** I loved how you sprinkled the book with words in your Basan's language. I loved the authenticity of it. Was that important to you – using the real words?

**Darcy:** *Uchinaaguchi* is the native word for “the Okinawan language.” And yes, there are a few reasons why using the Okinawan and Ryukyuan words in *Odori* was important to me. One reason is because the language is becoming extinct and using it in print keeps it alive. Another reason is because, like Indigenous peoples in Canada, the indigenous people of Okinawa and the Ryukyu Islands were not allowed to speak their own language. This is something that my mom experienced as a *kika nisei* Okinawan Canadian (a person who was born in Canada, lived in Okinawa, and then came back home to Canada). As children, if they spoke the Okinawan language in school, they were penalized by having to wear a *hogen fuda* which was a placard that was hung around the neck of a student. That student would wear the board until another student spoke in the Okinawan language, and the board would be transferred to the next student and so forth. Using the Okinawan words in *Odori* or even in my academic studies recognizes the beauty of the indigenous islandic language and is an exercise in basic freedoms.

**Martha:** What do you like to inspire your readers to do?

**Darcy:** I would like to inspire my readers to:

1. **Read!**

- 2. Write** fiction, poetry, non-fiction, school essays. Create a story of your own — with words, drawings, dance, music, oral storytelling. Write a story about your passion which may be tattoos or gaming or skateboarding culture — I'd personally be interested in hearing your own "student's voice" on these things.
- 3. Find an entry point** that is related to your passion. For example, sometimes when I am learning something that is difficult (or let's face it, boring) in terms of my PhD studies, I need to find an "entry point of interest." Otherwise, I am reading the same paragraph over and over again and not absorbing it. Those "entry points of interest" for me are graphic design, communication arts, drawing and the pencil, Okinawan culture, and family.
- 4. Find something or someone that may inspire you.** Strike up conversations with grandparents or other elderly people. And just listen to them. They have remarkable journeys that have often not been told. *Odori* is inspired by my mom. I listened to her tell stories about her life in Okinawa and living the caves during the Battle of Okinawa.

## About the Author

Darcy Tamayose is a writer, graphic designer, and PhD student. Her work, which includes the novel *Odori* and youth fiction book *Katie Be Quiet*, received the Canada-Japan Literary Award, and has been shortlisted for both the Alberta Writer's Guild Georges Bugnet Award and the ForeWord Indie Juvenile Award. Her short story collection *Ezra's Ghosts* was released by NeWest Press in the spring of 2022. Born and raised in the prairie landscape of southern Alberta, Tamayose lives there today surrounded by her daughter, family, and friends.

## Awards and Recognition for *Odori*

Winner, 2008 Canada-Japan Literary Award

Finalist, 2008 Georges Bugnet Award for Novel

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<https://opus.uleth.ca/handle/10133/5836>

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