The Peony Lantern
By Frances Watts

Book Summary:

When Kasumi leaves her remote village for the teeming city of Edo, her life is transformed. As a lady-in-waiting in a samurai mansion she discovers a rare talent for art and falls in love with a young samurai. How could she ever return to the life of a simple mountain girl?

But Kasumi must set aside her own concerns. Her country is on the brink of change and Edo is simmering with tension. And her mistress has a dangerous secret—a secret that Kasumi is gradually drawn into...

Set against the vivid backdrop of nineteenth-century Japan, THE PEONY LANTERN is a powerful story of art, love and friendship, and finding your own path.

'Lyrical, fascinating and evocative, Frances Watts' work is always extraordinary' Jackie French, bestselling author of TO LOVE A SUNBURNT COUNTRY

Curriculum Areas and Key Learning Outcomes:

ENGLISH, HISTORY, SOSE, ART.

Appropriate Ages: 12+
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INTRODUCTION

‘Mist drapes the valley
Closing its hand on each branch
Stroking ev’ry leaf’ (p 66)

Kasumi, her sister Hana and their parents live and work at the Kira Inn in the village of Tsumago, in Kiso Valley, Japan. On the eve of her sixteenth birthday, Kasumi’s powers of observation, which have often brought her trouble with her father, are noticed by the visiting Lord Shimizu, a samurai. He regards her as the perfect companion for his wife, Misaki, and offers her position, much to the surprise of her family and resentment of her sister. Shimizu takes her to Edo and installs her in his home. They are accompanied on the journey by his newly adopted son (his nephew Isamu). Kasumi is stunned by these developments in her life, but also excited. ‘Perhaps in Edo I would find a life that suited me.’ (p 27)

This is a work of romance, mystery, adventure and historical fiction combined, a charming and riveting tale of intrigue and self-actualisation. It is (like Frances Watts’ The Raven’s Wing) a story about a feisty young girl overcoming prejudice in a male-dominated society and battling against arbitrary class divisions as well. It’s a tale of honour and shame, resilience and weakness, love and hatred, honesty and treachery, fealty and betrayal.

SYNOPSIS

‘The stake that sticks up gets hammered down, as my father always said, but I would not be hammered down, I vowed.’ (p 287)

The year is Ansei 4 (1857) and European ships have just arrived again (four years earlier) after a 250-year hiatus. So change is afoot in this Shogun-ruled society. The ruling Shogun has been trying to negotiate with these foreigners, but many people feel that they should simply be expelled and want the Emperor to return to power: ‘sonnō jōi: revere the Emperor, expel the barbarians’ (p 36).

Kasumi becomes part of a household that is in the thick of this controversy. Shimizu becomes increasingly worried about the outbreaks of violence occurring around them. He tries to protect his much younger wife, Misaki, but there is a mystery surrounding her background, which Kasumi endeavours to understand. Meanwhile, Kasumi has formed an instant attraction to Isamu, Shimizu’s nephew, but because of her independent and spiky nature she resists his charms, and in her insecurity, forms the opinion that he’s in love with Misaki.

Misaki is unaware that some of the local women are plotting against her, and even suspect her of being a spy. Kasumi is worried for her, and does her best to protect her: ‘I was stuck in this still and silent house, shut up with its secrets’ (p 56). She is also puzzled when she observes Misaki speaking with a young man at a Kabuki performance, and whom she later sees at an artist’s shop, with which Isamu has some further mysterious connection. After several government officials are killed, the stakes rise even higher, when Taro, Shimizu’s friend, is killed. Kasumi eventually discovers the answers to both Misaki’s background and to the origin of these political threats, which leads to a series of dramatic and harrowing events.

In the course of the narrative, Kasumi learns to distrust, or to be cautious of, those around her, and to fight for what she wants. She also discovers a love for art and painting under a mentor named Daiki, and vows not to live the life of an ordinary woman bound to marriage and
subservience. Her love for Isamu will not prevent her from following her aspirations, and challenging the tenets of the society in which she lives.

THEMES

The themes and topics in this book include:
Japanese History and Culture, Individuality and Rite of Passage, Female Rights, Nature Versus Nurture: Japanese Gardens and Cultivation, Political Power and Negotiation in Nineteenth-Century Japan and Honour and Morality in Samurai Culture. [See also Related Activities and Discussion Points in Study Notes below.]

WRITING STYLE
Interpretation and Reading Comprehension is also encouraged by this text, which is enhanced by drawings that will stimulate both Visual Literacy Skills and Creative Arts Activities. [See also Related Activities and Discussion Points in Study Notes below.]

AUTHOR MOTIVATION
Frances Watts says: ‘To me, one of the great privileges of being a writer is the opportunity to follow tendrils of curiosity and see where they lead. My interest in Japan’s Edo period was first aroused a few years ago, when my artist partner bought a book of Japanese woodblock prints (ukiyo-e). Leafing through it one day, I was particularly drawn to the works of artist Hiroshige Utagawa (1797–1858). His prints, both in composition and subject matter — with their colourful scenes of busy city life — were so fresh and vivid and contemporary, and so different from my impression of nineteenth-century Japan, which I’d always thought of as highly refined and delicate with its rituals of flower-arranging and the tea ceremony. It made me realise how little I knew about this fascinating time in Japanese history.

‘I began to read about Edo period customs and beliefs, architecture, dress, food, art and literature, social and political structures — and the more I learned, the more interested I became in Edo as a setting for a book. As with my previous book (The Raven’s Wing, set in Ancient Rome), I was especially interested in what life would have been like for a spirited young woman in a male-dominated society. My research culminated in a visit to Japan, where I spent time in both Tokyo (Edo) and the Kiso Valley, walking along the Nakasendo highway that Kasumi travelled from Tsumago to Edo. To find myself walking through a forest in a remote valley in Central Honshu, following in the footsteps of shoguns ... it was a journey I had never imagined I might make — and such journeys, I think, is what reading and writing is all about ...’

AUTHOR BACKGROUND
Frances Watts was born in Switzerland and grew up in Australia. Her bestselling picture books include Goodnight, Mice! (illustrated by Judy Watson), the winner of the 2012 Prime Minister’s Award for Children’s Fiction; CBCA Honour Book Kisses for Daddy (illustrated by David Legge); and Children’s Book Council of Australia award-winner Parsley Rabbit’s Book about Books (illustrated by David Legge). Frances is also the author of fantasy/adventure series such as the Gerander Trilogy and the Sword Girl series (illustrated by Gregory Rogers), as well as The Raven’s Wing, a middle fiction/YA novel set in Ancient Rome.

For more information, see her website www.franceswatts.com
The following activities and discussion points relate to the themes, writing style and other curriculum areas such as Interpretation and Reading Comprehension, Visual Literacy and Creative Arts.

A. THEMATIC ACTIVITIES AND DISCUSSION POINTS:

- **Japanese History and Culture**

  *Activity:* Research the history of Japan.

  *Activity:* Study some of the cultural and religious beliefs of feudal Shogun Japan.

  *Activity:* Draw a timeline of this story, based on both the novel and actual historical events.

  **Discussion Point:** Meal preparation, presentation and etiquette are strict in traditional Japanese society, e.g. the way a family meal is eaten: ‘Finally Father bade the pilgrims a good journey and returned to sit in the head position on the tatami by the hearth. Mother took her place to his right, from where she could serve him his lunch, while Hana and I sat quietly on bare wood at the bottom place.’ (p 15) **Research this further.**

  **Discussion Point:** Intriguing customs associated with dress, fashion and adornment are suggested by asides in the text, e.g. ‘her teeth had been blackened with dye, presumably recently given she hadn’t been married long’ (p 50). Misaki’s hair and dress are described in detail (pp 53–4). Japanese fashions are carefully crafted and based on traditional beliefs, e.g. in this novel Misaki wears a kimono selected to match each season. Research this topic further on sites such as ‘Japanese Clothing’ Wikipedia <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Japanese_clothing>.

  **Activity:** Matsuyama and Morioko provinces have different customs as suggested by Isamu (p 61). Research the different provinces in Japan. ‘Provinces of Japan’ Wikipedia <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Provinces_of_Japan>.

  **Activity:** In modern Japan, provinces have become forty-seven ‘prefectures’ grouped as eight regions. Research these as well. ‘Prefectures of Japan’ Wikipedia http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Prefectures_of_Japan.

  **Activity:** Ikebana (pp 70–3), the art of floral arrangement, is taught to Kasumi and Misaki. Conduct some classes for students in this craft. Research on sites such as ‘Virtual Culture Ikebana’ Kids Web Japan <http://web-japan.org/kidsweb/virtual/ikebana/> Study other such traditional crafts on sites, e.g. origami. See Origami Club <http://en.origami-club.com/>.

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Activity:

The tea ceremony is another custom to be researched. See The Japanese Tea Ceremony <http://japanese-tea-ceremony.net/> 

Discussion Point: Painting is a central theme in the novel. Misaki and Kasumi take lessons from a master, and so does Isamu. He has also collected prints in the style of ukiyo-e artists who ‘have painted series ... of places in the city or famous beauty spots; there have been series about the highways too — even the Nakasendo’ (p 123), including some from a series entitled One Hundred Views of Edo by the artist Hiroshige. Study Japanese art.

Discussion Point: Several traditional festivals are mentioned in the text, e.g. Tanabata. Research and discuss these further. ‘Tanabata’ Wikipedia <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/>Tanabata Research and discuss these further.

Discussion Point: Class is evident in the three gates to the daimyo’s residence (p 147), which indicate hierarchy in this society.


- Individuality and Rite of Passage 

Discussion Point: ‘I couldn’t be who I wasn’t. No more daydreaming about Isamu, I told myself sternly. At least if I was to marry the yam back in Tsumago, I would be doing so as myself. Yet the Kasumi of the Kira Inn didn’t feel like my true self either ...’ (p 175) Kasumi suffers the uncertainties and lack of confidence that all teenagers do when growing up. But her problems are exacerbated by her class and position. How does she manage to overcome her feelings of insecurity?

Discussion Point: Both Misaki and Kasumi are girls who are still finding out who they are. What signs of growing maturity do either evince in the course of the novel?

Discussion Point: ‘Coming to Edo had taught me to yearn for more than I could ever have’ (p 160). How much does aspiration determine the lives of the characters in this novel?

Discussion Point: What are Isamu’s aspirations?

- Female Rights 

Discussion Point: What sort of life might Kasumi have had if she’d stayed in her father’s inn? For example, she had never learned to read.

Discussion Point: ‘My head was spinning. A woman artist. Her husband — himself a great artist — serving tea. It was like waking up in a spirit world.’ (p 230) Kasumi is pleasantly surprised when she finds out that Daiki’s wife, Chica, is also an artist and that he actually encourages her. This offers Kasumi incentive to pursue her own artistic dreams.
Discussion Point: ‘And if you ask me, a marriage such as yours is not so grievous a crime these days. Things are changing. Only in old families like ours is rank treated so seriously. In special circumstances surely a man may marry for love — and given how you have suffered ...’ (p 86) Shimizu has married beneath him and Misaki has suffered; she loves Shimizu, but has given up both brother and father to marry him. Was this typical of marriage in traditional Japanese society, when one married out of one's own class?

Discussion Point: ‘The problem was ... the problem was Isamu. A few months earlier I would have accepted without question the husband my father chose for me, yam-headed though he might be. But now I would detest a yam-headed husband and yearn for someone who was clever and curious and cultured.’ (p 160) Kasumi feels an instant attraction to Isamu. The novel is a romantic drama, as Kasumi feels she is beneath Isamu in her station in life as an innkeeper’s daughter, but still feels that they are meant to be together in a marriage of equals.

• Nature Versus Nurture: Japanese Gardens and Cultivation

Discussion Point: Kasumi has been highly regarded for her ability to observe things in nature; she is regularly sent by her family into the woods to collect herbs and vegetables for their meals, and has an uncanny knack of finding what others don’t see. Later when she finds herself in the beautiful but manufactured gardens of Shimizu’s house, she admires the beauty but is unsettled by the artifice. Study Japanese gardening techniques (e.g. Bonsai) and discuss in comparison to the wilderness of nature.

Discussion Point: ‘While I appreciated the master’s work, I preferred irises in the meadow; the deep blue against lush green’ (p 71). Ikebana is another Japanese craft that entails nature being moulded into a very strict form. Discuss in relation to these contrasting views, as well.

• Political Power and Negotiation in Nineteenth-Century Japan

Discussion Point: ‘The Shogun had agreed to grant an audience to the American consul, Townsend Harris, and his interpreter. They had travelled from Shimoda, where they had established an embassy, and were even now in the city.’ (p 240) Read about the issues involved in this conflict with the West. How did it evolve later?

Discussion Point: ‘I’m afraid their idealism doesn’t allow for pragmatism’ (p 169). Discuss the conflict between these two concepts.

Discussion Point: ‘His uncle looked pained at the mention of his first wife. “Don’t you see? The timing of the great earthquake was no coincidence; it was a sign. The world is out of alignment because the Shogun’s government is too weak to keep the foreigners out: that is what caused the earth to rock.”’ (p 270) Discuss the relationship between cultural beliefs and the conflict with the West.

• Honour and Morality in Samurai Law

Discussion Point: Lord Shimizu follows a long-held Japanese custom in committing seppuku when his treachery is discovered. Isamu also feels the weight of the crime as a family member.

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- **The following quotations relate to themes in the novel.** Choose one and discuss its significance in the work.

<p>| Quotations | The quotes below offer two contrasting views or perspectives on an issue. Choose two quotes and discuss and debate in class. | | |
|---|---|---|
| <strong>Japanese History and Culture</strong> | ‘In the fourth month particularly, the highway was busy with daimyo, the lords of the different domains, going to and from Edo, where they were required by the Shogun to spend every second year.’ (p 4) | ‘Their faces were painted white with their eyebrows drawn in black and their lips coloured blood-red. Their hair was twisted into extravagant arrangements and bristling with decorative pins and combs. With their gorgeous kimonos and quick, darting movements, they resembled colourful birds. “Geisha,” said Isamu, staring.’ (p 39) |
| <strong>Individuality and Rite of Passage</strong> | ‘Sometimes it seemed that the life of a samurai lady was like that of a rock in a stream, still and quiet as the fast-moving water flowed around it.’ (p 82) | ‘Between last year’s rains and this year’s, my old life had ended and another had begun. And who knew what the time between the next rains would bring? We were like the plum trees themselves, our flowers blooming briefly, fruit ripening then falling. I would think not of the future but appreciate the present, this moment. We lived in a floating world, and I would grasp every minute.’ (p 290) |
| <strong>Female Rights</strong> | ‘As a daughter, it was my duty to serve Father quietly and obey him unquestioningly, to keep my thoughts and opinions to myself ... but somehow I always forgot to hold my tongue when he was around.’ (p 2) | ‘Walking home with Isamu, I couldn’t stop thinking about Daiki and Chika. The way they had acted towards each other it was almost like they were ... equals. Partners. I had never seen a husband treat his wife with so much admiration and courtesy; had never imagined it was possible. I thought of the timidity with which my mother spoke to my father. My grandparents had always treated each other respectfully, but never with the open affection of the two artists. Even Shimizu and Misaki — there was still a hesitancy in Misaki when she spoke to her husband.’ (p 232) |</p>
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Nature Versus Nurture: Japanese Gardens and Cultivation</th>
<th>‘To calm myself, I breathed in the spicy, woody scent of the trees — cypress, pines and conifers — the Kiso Valley was famed for.’ (p 4)</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>‘It was the surprise, the irregularity that caused delight, not manufactured nature.’ (p 73)</td>
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<td></td>
<td>‘Whoever had designed the garden had ensured there was a colour for every season, I noted. It was like the world in miniature.’ (p 56)</td>
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</tbody>
</table>
| Political Power and Negotiation in Nineteenth-Century Japan | “Many people think the Shogun should have refused to negotiate with the foreigners when they demanded a treaty, but they’re not seeing things from all sides. It’s all very well to spout slogans —”
|                                                       | “You mean like sonnō jōi: revere the Emperor, expel the barbarians?” his nephew interrupted.’ (p 36) |
|                                                       | ‘They’ve been increasing. Many young, low-ranking samurai are leaving their domains and becoming rōnin in order to join the movement to restore the Emperor to power.’ (p 141) |
|                                                       | ‘The poetry circle is just a cover. In fact the group is made up of men representing the domains that support the Shogun, and senior members of the Shogun’s government. Some domains are reluctant to be seen to be publicly condoning the negotiations with the foreigners, so we have been holding secret meetings to discuss the treaty terms. Only high-ranking officials are included, and we always dress informally and meet in restaurants and teahouses.’ (p 167) |
| Honour and Morality in Samurai Law | ‘Yes, I knew. The deference due a samurai was so great that if a member of a lower class — a farmer or a merchant, say — refused to bow when he passed, the samurai was entitled to cut off his head right then and there.’ (p 13) |
|                                                       | “Our master is a true samurai,” Ishi declared with pride. “He might be of the highest rank, but he believes in working hard and living humbly.”’ (p 49) |
|                                                       | ‘I was excited by the prospect of my new life, but the pain of Isamu’s death cloaked me like a shroud. I knew it was what honour demanded, but he had done nothing wrong. His death was a waste.’ (p 287) |
B. WRITING STYLE ACTIVITIES AND DISCUSSION POINTS:

- **Narrative Person and Point of View**

**Discussion Point:** This novel is written in first person from Kasumi’s perspective. Imagine if Isamu or Misaki had told the story. How would that have changed it?

- **Historical Fiction**

**Discussion Point:** This novel is set in the time of Japanese invasion by foreign powers in the late nineteenth century. The author has invented the characters, but based the novel on extensive research into Japanese history and culture. How does Frances Watts make such historical events and times come alive in this fiction? What strategies does she employ to engage the reader?

- **Comparative Fiction**

**Activity:**

Read other historical fiction about early Japan, e.g. Lian Hearn’s Tales of the Otori series (Hachette), Samurai Kids Trilogy by Sandy Fussell (Walker Books), Tomadachi: the edge of the world by Simon Higgins (Pulp Fiction Press, 2007) or his Moonshadow series (Random House).

**Activity:**

Read novels about contemporary Japan, e.g. Briony Stewart’s Kumiko and the Dragon (UQP, 2007) and Kumiko and the Dragon’s Secret (UQP, 2010), or Kieran Meehan’s Hannah’s Winter (Penguin, 2001), Night Singing (Penguin, 2003) and In the Monkey Forest (Penguin, 2005). The Vermonia series by Yo-Yo (Walker Books UK) is a series of manga graphic novels.

- **Haiku Poetry**

**Activity:**

Each chapter opens with a haiku. Study the form, then write your own haiku. [See Bibliography.]

- **Mystery**

**Discussion Point:** The novel opens with the mysterious arrival of Shimizu, the samurai who chooses the outspoken Kasumi to be his wife’s lady-in-waiting. There are many mysteries and revelations to follow:

On the night she arrives in Edo, Kasumi overhears Shimizu and Misaki speaking of something mysterious with reference to her. Misaki has a sudden change in temperament the morning after Kasumi’s arrival, and reveals her scar, which is supposedly the result of a fire (p 50). Misaki also discovers that Kasumi was not a trained lady-in-waiting from Nagoya (p 67).

Taro quizzes Shimizu re Misaki not being seen outside their home, and Shimizu has to confess that she is not of a noble family (p 85).

Kasumi hears Aiko and two other ladies (obabas) gossiping about Shimizu’s first wife, Aimi, a daughter and someone called Rin (pp 101–2).
Kasumi overhears Misaki giving Isamu a secret letter and is dismayed and suspicious that Isamu may be in love with Misaki. Isamu explains (p 131) that Aya (Shimizu’s daughter) and her mother had been killed by fires after an earthquake in Ansei 2.

We meet Rin (p 151), who is Lady Sayuri’s sister and every bit as vindictive as the three obabas. Rin suspiciously invites Misaki on an excursion to Hakone, and while she is away, an intruder slashes Kasumi’s futon to ribbons in a mysterious evening attack.

Misaki talks Kasumi into visiting a Kabuki performance, and there Kasumi sees Misaki speaking to a man who had been loitering at the gate the day Kasumi arrived, but Misaki lies about speaking to him (p 212). ‘I felt there was a barrier between Isamu and me now. He had a secret, one he couldn’t — wouldn’t — share with me. And I had kept something from him: the fact that I had recognised Kenta. But why had I kept that a secret?’ (p 227) Later Kasumi meets him in an artist’s shop, which Isamu has taken her to, and she still can’t fathom the men’s connection to Misaki, until ‘Isamu snapped, “I’m here to talk about your daughter”’ (p 246).

Kasumi also guesses the connection between Misaki’s artist father and local events (pp 250–1). She confesses her suspicions to Isamu (p 255) and the intrigue deepens.

**Discussion Point:** Thus, a pattern of mysteries unravels, with Kasumi at the heart of the intrigue. Discuss the various tropes of mystery (such as clues, secrets and revelations) which create suspense and reader engagement in this novel.

- **Literary Reference**

**Activity:**

There are references to Japanese and Chinese writers in the text: Confucius’ *The Way of the Warrior* (p 63), ‘The Treasury of Loyal Retainers!’ It’s based on the tale of the forty-seven rōnin’ (p 198) and ‘Okiku and the Nine Plates’ (p 201). What role do such texts play in the advancement of theme or plot? Choose an example and explain its significance.

- **Japanese Language and Expression**

**Activity:**

Students may wish to learn some basic Japanese language. [See Bibliography below.]

**Activity:**

Research the meaning of Japanese words that appear in this text referring to customs of the time. (The context may give you a hint as to their meaning before you seek their definition.)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Word</th>
<th>Meaning</th>
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<tbody>
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<td>Warabi</td>
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<td>Daimyo</td>
<td>(p 4)</td>
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<td>Tanuki</td>
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<td>Tokonoma</td>
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<td>Churo</td>
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<td>Amazake</td>
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<td>Obaba</td>
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<td>Seppuku</td>
<td>(p 199)</td>
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• **Journey or Quest**

*Discussion Point:* The **Journey or Quest** is a motif used in this novel and in many other narratives. Kasumi’s ‘journey’ is central to the thematic action in this novel. Use the table to identify the stages of Kasumi’s journey as outlined below. (You may add rows to allow you to include all the obstacles, foes, etc.)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>STAGES OF JOURNEY</th>
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<tr>
<td>Catalyst for Journey</td>
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<tr>
<td>Embark on Journey</td>
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<tr>
<td>Meet Adviser(s)/Helper(s)</td>
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<td>Encounter Foe(s)</td>
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<td>Encounter Obstacle(s)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Final Conflict</td>
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<td>Journey Home</td>
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<tr>
<td>Resolution</td>
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• **Wise Sayings**

*Activity:*

Discuss the meaning of some of the wise sayings included in this novel, e.g.:

‘But the stake that sticks up gets hammered down’ (p 20)

‘Like the moon and the turtle’ (p 60)

‘The pen and the sword in accord’ (p 62)

• **Characterisation**

**Kasumi’s Family:** Hana, her sister; her mother; Hiroshi, her father. (Her late grandmother, the poet, and her late grandfather were also influences in Kasumi’s life.)

**The Village:** Chiyó, Kasumi’s childhood friend; Ayame, another childhood friend; Mami, the servant of Kasumi’s family; Kimura, a village man, whose youngest son Hiroshi had hoped to marry to Kasumi.

**Lord Minoru Shimizu’s Household:** Misaki, his wife; Isamu, his adopted nephew; Haru, servant to Lord Shimizu; Ishi, the house servant and cook; Otami, who does the cleaning and laundry; a gardener; Goro, the night guard; the ikebana teacher; Daiki, the painting teacher; his wife, Chika, also an artist.

**Other:** Kuroda Taro, an old friend of Shimizu’s from the domain (p 77); his wife, Miri; Lord Kinoyoshi, the daimyo; Lady Sayuri, the wife of the daimyo; Shunsho-san, who is Lord Kinoyoshi’s most senior retainer; Aiko and her two friends (the three obabas); Rin, Lady Sayuri’s sister; Kenta, Misaki’s brother; **her father**, an artist of actor portraits.
**Activity:**

Choose a major character and trace the various events that reveal their personality.

**Activity:**

Choose a minor character and record what you gleaned about their character via description or dialogue.

**Discussion Point:** Discuss the positive and negative aspects of Kasumi’s character, e.g. she rebels against her father's strictures but is also aware of her own lack of tact: 'This morning I had been feeling resentful of his bad opinion of me, but the truth was I deserved it' (p 9). When Isamu tries to compliment her, she is sarcastic (p 37).

**Discussion Point:** 'I heard Misaki greeting them at the door, that sweet note in her voice that seemed to be reserved for her husband alone' (pp 59–60). How does this quote reflect Misaki’s state of mind at this time?

- **Tropes of Fairy Tale**

**Discussion Point:** This novel contains a number of tropes of fairy tale, e.g. the Cinderella-like daughter Kasumi who is always in trouble, and her jealous, resentful and pragmatic sister Hana. Identify any others.

- **Symbolism**

**Discussion Point:** The Peony Lantern is the title of the novel. What does it signify?

**Discussion Point:** What other symbolic references did you discover?

**Activity:**

Imagine an incident that might have occurred on Kasumi’s forthcoming journey with Daiko and Chika. Write a story about it.

- **Author Study**

**Activity:**

Study Frances Watts’ other works and discuss and compare her writing style.

**C. INTERPRETATION AND READING COMPREHENSION ACTIVITIES AND DISCUSSION POINTS:**

- **Comprehension Quiz**
  1. What relationship has Hana to Kasumi?
  2. Who was Chiyo in the novel?
3. What is ‘Kagome Kagome’?
4. What does Shimizu buy for Misaki in the town of Yabuhara, on their journey to Edo?
5. Where were the first two government officials killed?
6. How is Misaki transported to her social engagements?
7. What sort of performance does Misaki convince Kasumi to accompany her to, secretly?
8. What other name does Kasumi use for the Tanabata festival?
9. Who invites Misaki on an excursion to Hakone?
10. Where did Kasumi find the clues that linked the various attacks and murders?

Answers: 1. Sister. 2. Kasumi’s childhood friend. 3. A children’s game in which children are ‘dancing in a ring around a girl in the centre who, when the singing stopped, would have to guess who was behind her’ (p 22). 4. A red-lacquered decorative hair comb. 5. At a restaurant called the Golden Plum, at Yoshiwara, on the outskirts of the city. 6. On a palanquin. 7. Kabuki. 8. ‘The festival of the Weaver-maiden and the Cowherd’ (p 130). 9. Rin, Lady Sayuri’s sister. 10. In Misaki’s father’s Festivals of Edo series of paintings.

D. VISUAL LITERACY AND ILLUSTRATION ACTIVITIES AND DISCUSSION POINTS:

- **Activity:**
  The cover needs to convey a lot about a book’s contents. Design a new cover for this book. Write a blurb to go on the cover.

- **Activity:**
  Paint a portrait of Misaki wearing the dress and hairstyle she dons on Kasumi’s first day in her service.

- **Activity:**
  Shimizu’s garden is carefully described (pp 55–6) when Misaki and Kasumi take a walk there. Draw what you see after reading this description.

- **Activity:**
  Graphic novels and comics can offer new insights into classical texts. Create a one-page comic strip (or graphic novel) version of any incident in this novel. Use varied formats in the design of each strip, speech balloons, think bubbles, captions and sound effect, to create effects. See Mike Chinn’s Writing and Illustrating the Graphic Novel (New Burlington Books, 2006).

- **Activity:**
  Create a book trailer for this novel. Use resources to prepare for this activity:

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'Book Trailers — Resources: Ipswich District Teacher Librarian Network'


'Book Trailers for Readers' by Michelle Harclerode
<http://www.booktrailersforreaders.com/How+to+make+a+book+trailer>

**E. CREATIVE ARTS ACTIVITIES AND DISCUSSION POINTS:**

**Activity:**
Create a **Classroom Display** with some of the stories and illustrations you’ve created, inspired by *The Peony Lantern*.

**Activity:**
Design an outfit for Kasumi that denotes something of her personality.

**Activity:**
Design a menu for a Japanese feast.

**Activity:**
Make a model of the Kira Inn where Kasumi’s family live.

**CONCLUSION**
Kasumi is a heroine of real calibre. She develops her skills as an artist, and a goal in life to become an artist. She also discovers love with Isamu, but doesn’t abandon her artistic aspirations, and vows to continue her journey of self-discovery.

This is an inspiring story of a young woman’s growth to independence set against the fascinating culture of nineteenth-century Japan.

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