Exploring the presentation of Kabuo Miyamoto

| Trial takes place: | December 1954. |
| Carl dies: | 16th September 1954. |
| Kabuo’s ages: | aged 19, 29th March 1942 when transported to internment camp |
| | aged 20 in Nov 1942 |
| | aged 33 in Dec 1954, at trial. |

Task one

Working as groups, explore each of these episodes in the novel. Pick out relevant quotations to back up your ideas and answers. Be prepared to share these with the group.

Group one: Courtroom opening, pp. 1-3

- How does Guterson give the reader access to Kabuo’s mind?
- What do we learn about Kabuo?
- Guterson chooses to describe only certain things about Kabuo. Do any of these choices seem strange to you, and what insights do they give us into Kabuo’s character?

Group two: Kabuo and Hatsue’s wedding night pp.77-80

- What does this scene tell us about Kabuo?
- Why do you think Guterson chose to describe the wedding night from Hatsue’s perspective?
- What is the effect of contrasting the details of the camp with the sensuous descriptions of their sexual intimacy?

Group three: Kabuo goes to war, pp.80-81.

- Why does Kabuo go?
- What does seeing this from Hatsue’s perspective add to our understanding of Kabuo?
- What does she come to realise about her husband?

Group four: Kabuo’s wartime experiences, pp. 133-136.

- What do you find interesting in Kabuo’s reflections on his appearance?
- List the ways in which his wartime experiences change Kabuo.
- What kinds of emotional burdens does Kabuo have to carry?
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Task two

Now in pairs, find at least one quote for each of the following ideas on pp. 137-148.

- Kabuo’s fear of death
- His view of Hatsue
- His life at sea and in the landscape
- Kabuo’s religion
- His understanding of his own family history and responsibilities

Task three

Working individually now, focus on pp. 137-148 again. Answer the following points, using key words or quotes where appropriate.

- What is Kabuo’s relationship with the natural world around him? (pp. 138-140)
- How does that world, atmosphere and landscape feed his understanding of Hatsue? (p.141)
- Read Kabuo’s recollection of seeing Hatsue in the strawberry fields, pp.140-141. What examples of poetic language has Guterson used here? Make a list of techniques and quotes (including metaphor, simile, and accumulation).
- What is the ‘rightness’ in their relationship? (p.143)
- How does this relationship change post-war?
- Why is what Zenhichi says about his grandfather (Kabuo’s great-grandfather) connected with Kabuo and his position?
- If Kabuo is ‘fated to carry dark ferocity’ into the next generation, what would happen if he were to be acquitted?
Task four

Exploring symbolism in the novel
Guterson makes extensive use of symbols in the novel, many of which have a whole cluster of meanings, rather than a one-to-one correspondence. Make a list of as many symbols in the novel as you can think of, with a description of their symbolic effects. A couple of suggestions with notes have been done for you as examples:

Symbolic of destructiveness, or hate within the community, or war?  Symbolic of effect of trial on San Pedro’s community?

Is the storm an example of pathetic fallacy (a type of personification, where nature, animals or inanimate objects are used to reflect a character’s mood/emotions)? Does it reflect Ishmael’s passionate feelings? See pp.272-286, p.340, and pp.375-6.

Task five

Detailed analysis
You’ve probably identified a range of natural symbols in the novel. Consider the following symbols in detail:

What do strawberries and the strawberry fields in the novel signify for different characters?

- Zenhichi
- Carl Sr. and Etta
- Kabuo
- Hatsue
- Ishmael
- the Islanders (think of the Festival)

The island and the sandy wind of Manzanar are also important. Find two examples where each symbol is described. What is happening in the story at each of these points? What symbolic meaning do they convey to you as reader?