

**Review of *The Color of the Sky is the Shape of the Heart* by Chesil, translated
by Takoma Nieda**

Why I Chose It: As an educator in an urban school system where many students, though born in the United States, are simultaneously growing up with other backgrounds-linguistically, culturally, and societally-I know this work will resonate with those I teach. As a middle and high school ELA teacher, I know that within students' emotional, physical, and individual journeys, conflicting components of loneliness, friendship, connections, disconnections, loss, conflict, rebelliousness, outreach, retreat, fear, and self-discovery vie within their psyches on any given day. Many of my students also attend schools that nurture their linguistic and/or religious backgrounds after school. They will identify with Ginny's, (Jinhee Korean birth name), experiences as a Zainichi ethnic Korean born in Japan, suffering peer bullying, injustice, and intolerance. Even greater numbers are first generation, mastering colloquial and formal English speech. They share the conflicts of values inherent to their age, plus multicultural and linguistic/national identity pulls because they are children of natives from other lands still loved and missed.

That this work is a translation-done by veteran translator Takami Nieda-creates another connection since so many of my students act as translators for their families outside of the home especially when interacting with the government. Like some of the characters in the book, they also serve as translators for their linguistic peers within the school. My learners can connect with this narrative since the majority of them, even those born in the United States to parents born in the United States, filter the world through an interior monologue that so resonates with Ginny's thinking that:

"High school was as cruel as ever . . .it wasn't school but the whole world, and like the world, class went on without pause."

Even though this work was originally written in Japanese, Chesil's powerful fictive statement of her own childhood and adolescence as a third generation Zainichi connects to the experiences of so many persons of color and multilingual speakers who experience similar ongoing physical and verbal biases. Horrifically as with Ginny, this often comes from peers with comparable backgrounds. This work will also strike a chord with the experiences of non-minority high school students at several points.

What I like most about this book: Ginny's interior monologue, an emotionally-colored perspective that holds reader attention, carries the narrative. This of course makes the book one that teen readers, seeing the world with a similar focus, will enjoy. Chesil wisely intersperses this narrative perspective with a set of letters that disclose other family members, as well as political insights about North Korea including the effect on the Zainichi. The chapter entitled "Taepodong" for example explains the impact media coverage of North Korea's Taepodong missile launch had on Chesil's psyche and on the Kim family. The growth of political

rage coupled with teen rebellion as demonstrated by Ginny toppling the Kim portraits at school as well as her planning for and creating a manifesto, would be gripping for American student leader readers.

The author further focuses teen reader attention through her sparsely titled chapters such as “Not There,” “Shoes,” and “So Long.” Also, Ginny goes around with headphones listening to various bands like Radiohead and Spice Girls. Student readers unfamiliar with her listening choices can check them out later online, a playlist research opportunity. Readers can relate to the scenes taking place in front of high school lockers, inside bathrooms, awkward girl-meets-boy moments, and misinterpreted relationship talk; all are part of the teen school experience, whatever the geographic location.

From an ELA author craft aspect, Chesil deftly interweaves metaphors to message her readers. The very title, “The Color of the Sky is the Shape of the Heart” is a metaphor. Thinking of this metaphor when Ginny’s host mother Stephanie asks, “The sky is falling Ginny, what do you do?” the entire purpose of the narrative becomes clear. Most importantly, the story details violence, physical abuse, emotional abuse, abandonment, loneliness, self-loathing, displacement, and identity issues. Yet it concludes with Ginny realizing metaphorically that she can forgive herself for past actions, catch the sky in its fall, and make human and home connections at last. This is a journey and a destination that teens need to read.

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