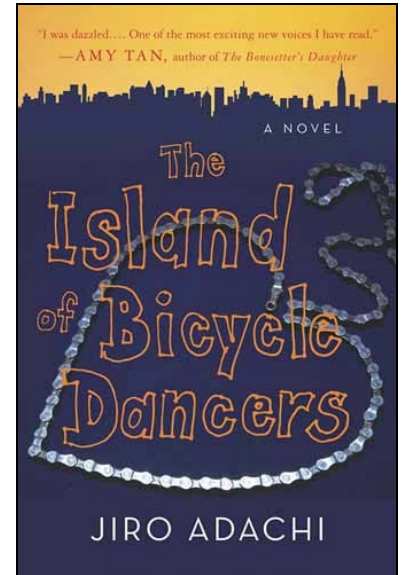


READING GROUP GUIDE

The Island of Bicycle Dancers by Jiro Adachi

St. Martin's Press

ISBN: 0-312-31245-8 (hardcover)



Introduction to *The Island of Bicycle Dancers*

Love, sex, death....and English as a foreign language.

The Island of Bicycle Dancers is the coming-of-age-story of twenty-year-old Yurika Song, a Korean-Japanese woman who comes from Japan to New York City for a summer to work with her Korean relatives and improve her English. Yurika's friends back home have always joked that she is half-sushi/half-kim-chi. But cross-Asian ethnicities turn out to be far less jarring than her introduction to New York life, the world of bicycle messengers and the street culture in which they thrive.

On one level this is a splendid tale of mistaken love-Yurika falls hard for an attractive, but dangerous, Puerto Rican bicycle messenger nicknamed "Bone." But on another, deeper level, our heroine finds freedom in this new language, which to her "is like a huge octopus, very clever and sometimes hard to catch but with so many wild and beautiful writhing limbs."

Reading Group Guide Questions

1. In what ways do you, the reader, identify with Yurika's struggles with a new language and being an outsider?
2. Yurika is drawn to the world of bike messengers, a world that is generally not "acceptable" to her aunt and uncle – and by extension her parents. Have you ever felt yourself drawn to a subculture that you know would be jarring to your friends and family?

3. Our pasts are always intruding upon our presents. How is this dynamic present in the characters' struggles with each other and in their respective situations?
4. Often, setting takes on the trappings of a character. In what ways does New York City act as a character in this story?
5. Music, it is often said, is the language of the soul. In the case of this story, an argument can be made that language is the music of the soul. How do you think this belief relates to the relationships in this novel?
6. In what ways does the English language change Yurika's perception of her world and of herself? Are there any kinds of vocabulary or ways of speaking you have used to make yourself feel differently?
7. Do you believe that the death in this story is representative of the life that was lived by this character? Why or why not?
8. One of the themes of the novel is, "What goes around comes around." Based on this idea, where do you picture the characters in this book five years from now? Ten years? What in the book makes you think this?

About the Author

Born and raised in New York City to a Japanese father and Hungarian mother, **Jiro Adachi's** first language was not exactly broken English—more like malleable English. Mr. Adachi drew on both his experiences as a bike messenger and a teacher of English as a Foreign Language for this novel's portrait of bike boys and immigrants in New York. He lives with his wife and daughter in New York City.