

## A Single Shard Study Questions

The highlighted questions are the ones I think are the most important and/or interesting questions to reflect on and discuss.

Note that the page numbers given in some questions below may differ from those in other editions of the book.

### Chapters 1 & 2

1. Describe Tree-Ear and Crane-Man based on their actions and words in these chapters. (What is their relationship like? How do they treat each other? How do they treat other people? What does their attitude toward life seem to be? How can they still be happy even though they are so unlucky?)
2. What does Crane-Man say to Tree-Ear about how people like them must learn? What does Tree-Ear learn from his encounter with the man who spilled his rice?
3. How is Min's pottery craft both amazing and mysterious to Tree-Ear? Why is Min willing to work in the open, while the other potters are not? How is pottery craft a metaphor for Tree-Ear's life?
4. Describe Min based on the way he treats Tree-Ear. What is your opinion of him? How does Tree-Ear handle the situation after he is discovered, and what does this show about him? Why is he so excited about the prospect of nine days of unpaid work?
5. How does Tree-Ear react to the difficulty of the labor, and what does this show about him? Why do you think he is so highly motivated?
6. What are some ways in which traditional Korean society was different from the society we live in?
7. What predictions can you make about the way the story will progress?

### Chapters 3 & 4

1. How does Min treat Tree-Ear? Why does he scold Tree-Ear even for mistakes that aren't his fault? (See page 42.) Can you think of a good reason why he might do this? (Hint: If you've seen the movie *The Karate Kid*, think about the way Mr. Miyagi treats Daniel at the beginning of Daniel's training.) What advantage is there for Tree-Ear in having to learn this way? What is significant about the fact that Min never hits Tree-Ear?
2. Describe Min's wife, and discuss examples of things she does in these two chapters that support your description. What do you think it means that her eyes are "like Crane-Man's" (p. 30)?
3. What lessons do you think Tree-Ear learns from cutting blocks of clay for Min? What makes the mid-day meal he eats that day so satisfying? Can you relate to that feeling—have you ever had a similar experience?
4. Explain why Crane-Man's attitude about his deformed leg is wise. What does Tree-Ear's comment about having four legs mean? How do think believing in karma and reincarnation affects people's behavior?

5. What makes celadon so special? How was it probably first created, and what does this show about inventions and human progress?

6. According to Crane-man, in what other way is Tree-Ear's name appropriate, and how does this fit his philosophy about the way they must live? What does Tree-Ear learn about why Min's business isn't good? What is Min's dream, and how is his attitude toward his work different from the other potters?

## Chapters 5 & 6

1. What does Tree-Ear discover about Kang? What conclusion does he come to, with Crane-Man's help, about whether to tell Min about Kang's secret? (See page 64.) Do you agree with his reasoning—does it apply to all ideas and other intangible things that people produce, such as technological advances and books?

2. Explain why a plum branch placed in a celadon vase creates such a beautiful effect. What principle of art is embodied in this combination? How is it like the food masterpieces that Min's wife creates and the chrysanthemums on Kang's pottery? (See page 41 and page 69.)

3. What does Tree-Ear discover about Min when Min's wife gives him the gift of a jacket and pants? How does this explain Min's obsession with his work, and what can we guess about what Min used to be like? What does this gift symbolize about Tree-Ear's relationship with Min and his wife? How does Tree-Ear conclude that it is all right for him to give the jacket to Crane-Man?

4. What exciting news does Tree-Ear learn at the wine shop? Why is this news so important to the potters? (See page 72.) What does this news suggest about the timing of Kang's pottery experiment—do you think his experiment with a new technique at this time is a coincidence? What is Min's best quality as a potter, and what is Kang's?

5. Why does Min instruct Tree-Ear to set up his stall so that the emissary will be facing the sea as he inspects Min's pottery? What is meant by "the elusive green and blue and gray hues of the waves"? What last-minute contribution does Tree-Ear make to the beauty of Min's presentation? What secret does he know about one of Min's pots, and what does this foreshadow about Tree-Ear's future as a potter? How does the emissary show his appreciation for Min's work?

## Chapters 7 & 8

1. Why do you think Min is so grumpy in the days after the emissary's visit? Why do you think he didn't visit Kang's display, and why does he wait so long to ask Tree-Ear about Kang's pottery? Why does he laugh so hard and show affection for Tree-Ear after Tree-Ear comments on Kang's pottery?

2. What story does Crane-Man tell Tree-Ear about why he didn't go to the temple? What does this story show about Crane-Man, and why does he decide to share it with Tree-Ear? How is this event important in establishing the background for the plot of this novel—how does it make the plot possible?

3. What explanation does the emissary give for his decision to give Kang a commission? What offer does he make to Min, and why? Why isn't Min willing to show the emissary the shards of

his pots and explain why he has nothing new to display? Why do you think Tree-Ear doesn't show the shards to the emissary himself?

4. What worries does Tree-Ear have about his journey to Songdo? Why do you think he can't change his mind even though he regrets making the offer? What advice does Crane-Man give Tree-Ear about how to mentally prepare, and why is this an effective approach? Discuss how this advice could be useful in many situations we face in life.

5. What question does Tree-Ear ask Min at the end of Chapter 8, and how does Min respond? Why do you think this question makes Min so angry? How is Min's attitude toward Tree-Ear different from his wife's, and what evidence of her feelings is there in this chapter?

6. What predictions can you make about Tree-Ear's relationship with Min and his wife, Tree-Ear's journey to Songdo, and Tree-Ear's future as a potter? Why?

### Chapters 9 & 10

1. Describe Tree-Ear's reaction to his rejection by Min. What does Crane-Man tell him about the tradition of pottery craft being passed down to sons, and why does Tree-Ear want to know about this? What do you think Crane-Man means when he says, "My friend, the same wind that blows one door shut often blows another open"? How does this prove to be true for Tree-Ear?

2. What happens to Tree-Ear's attitude now that he has lost the hope of someday learning how to make pots? What does he use as his motivation for continuing to work?

3. What has been Tree-Ear's greatest worry about his journey, and how does Ajima address this worry? Why does Crane-Man at first refuse to work for Ajima? How does Tree-Ear try to get him to change his mind? What is it that actually makes Crane-Man change his mind?

4. What gift does Tree-Ear give Crane-Man before he leaves, and why? Why is Crane-Man's voice "rusty" after he receives the gift—what does this expression mean? What gift does he give in exchange, and what does this foreshadow? (*Foreshadowing* is a hint about future events.)

5. What custom makes Tree-Ear's journey much easier than it would otherwise have been? How does Tree-Ear react to Min's farewell gesture, and why do you think Tree-Ear "[feels] [Min's] touch on his shoulder for a long time after" he leaves? What does the *gokkam* Ajima gives him symbolize to Tree-Ear?

6. What encounter does Tree-Ear have in the forest at night, and what wisdom does he gain from this experience?

7. How is Puyo different from all of the villages Tree-Ear has seen before? Which do you think he prefers, and why? What does he see in Puyo that shocks him?

### Chapters 11 & 12

1. What clues tell Tree-Ear that the man who speaks with him at the summit of the Rock of the Falling Flowers is a bandit? What things enable Tree-Ear to resist the first bandit even though he is only a boy? Why don't the bandits steal the pots that he is carrying?

2. Why do you think Crane-Man suggested that Tree-Ear visit the Rock of the Falling Flowers? Why does Tree-Ear vomit after the robbery? What does he consider doing, and why does he change his mind?
3. Why do you think the author decided to have such an incident happen to Tree-Ear? What solution does Tree-Ear find to his seemingly hopeless situation? Why does he eat very little in the days after he leaves the Rock of the Falling Flowers?
4. What does Tree-Ear think about while walking around Songdo? What stimulates these thoughts?
5. How does Tree-Ear convince the guards to summon someone to see him, even though he is merely “a scrawny scarecrow of a child”? How does Tree-Ear cleverly convince Emissary Kim’s assistant to let him in to see Emissary Kim, even though he doesn’t have the pots with him? Why do you think he decides to trick the official this way?
6. Describe Emissary Kim based on the way he acted in Ch’ulp’o and the way he treats Tree-Ear now. How does he explain his decision to award a commission to Min? How does Tree-Ear express his thanks?
7. What do the following words mean? pallor (122), retch (125), heedless (127), skeptically (133), quell (134), brazen (136)

### Chapter 13 & Author’s Note

1. Why do you think the author doesn’t spend much time describing Tree-Ear’s stay at the palace and journey back to Ch’ulp’o?
2. Why do you think Ajima hesitates before asking Tree-Ear, “You have news for him?” Why doesn’t Min seem very excited to hear the news that he has been awarded a commission?
3. How is it *ironic* that Crane-Man put so much effort into making a straw container to protect the vases from harm? How is it ironic that he died by falling off the bridge?
4. What change does Tree-Ear see in Min when Min tells him the news about Crane-Man? Why do you think Crane-Man was clutching the ceramic monkey when he died? What effect do you think seeing the monkey had on Min’s attitude toward Tree-Ear? Why do you think he doesn’t trust his ears when he hears Min tell him that “it is fine work”?
5. What does Tree-Ear mean by what he whispers to Crane-Man when he visits the stream the next morning, and why do you think this enables him to cry?
6. In what ways do Min and Ajima show their acceptance of and love for Tree-Ear at the end of the story?
7. How does Tree-Ear apply Crane-Man’s philosophy to his search for a design for the prunus vase he has always dreamed of making? Why do you think the author mentions the “Thousand Cranes Vase” at the end of Chapter 13—what is she suggesting about its origin?
8. What has been discovered to be the cause of “brown spots and impure glaze tint” in celadon pottery? What information does the author give that shows that it was truly amazing that potters of hundreds of years ago had the ability to produce pure celadon color?

9. What does the author compare Koreans' traditional fear of foxes to in order to explain it to readers of the book?

10. What does the author say about why she chose to have Min and Ajima give Tree-Ear the name Hyung-pil?

11. What do you think are the themes (the main ideas and messages) of the book?

12. What things do you like best about the book? What did you learn from it? Who is your favorite character, and why?