

Post-Reading Worksheet for “The Dancing Girl”: Answer Key

1. Paraphrase the two quotes below.

Quote from Story	Paraphrase the Quote
With Aizawa’s help she had not wanted for daily necessities, it was true, but this same benefactor had spiritually killed her” (24).	<i>She was given money to provide for her needs; however, the source of support destroyed her.</i>
“I might lose not only my homeland but also the very means by which I might retrieve my good name. I was suddenly struck by the thought that I might die in this sea of humanity—in this vast European capital. I showed my lack of moral fiber and agreed to go” (23).	<i>I might become an outcast of Japanese society and ruin my reputation. I realized the freedom and kindness of this foreign country was too appealing and not sustainable for me. While I much preferred this life, I realized my nation comes before individual desires.</i>

2. What do the two passages above reveal about views of national identity and obligation to one’s home?

The idea of nation first, individual last really is represented in these passages. Europe and Western values agree with the narrator—yet, they are not sustainable for him. He can “vacation” in this world for a short while, but in the end his duty to Japan supersedes all personal desire.

3. At the end of the story, we are told that “friends like Aizawa Kenkichi are rare indeed, and yet to this very day there remains a part of me that curses him” (24). What did the narrator mean by this?

He realizes that his friend’s priorities are in line with those of the nation state of Japan. The narrator hates the fact that he has to cast away love and his personal enjoyment for his country, but he does so at Aizawa’s not so subtle urging. The choice was essentially made for the narrator to return to Japan—a sad reminder that the wealthy elite were not independent.

4. Why were his countrymen so critical of his decision? What might this reveal about social attitudes of early 20th-century Japan?

Again, the nation is more important than the individual here. Reputation is important. Also, the sense that Japan is superior and foreign is inferior. Japan must work as a group to keep stray thinking and actions suppressed because this is good for the nation

5. If Elise’s madness had not removed the choice, how do you think the narrator would have resolved his dilemma?

Opinions will vary. Allow students to offer opinions and then challenge them to reevaluate those opinions in light of what they have read about early modern Japan (background reading).

6. How does Mori Ogai’s story comment on the social landscape of 20th-century Japan? Before responding, please consider who/what Elise might symbolize.

Elise seems to symbolize Japan’s love with the west. Early modern Japan desired western

goods, ideas, etc. and actively sought these out. Once the love affair was over, so to speak, Japan refocused its energies turning to unifying national identity and devotion to all things Japanese.

7. Do you find the narrator's confusion to be sincere? Why or why not?
Again, opinions will vary; ask students to ground opinions in historical context.
8. What characteristics of modern Japanese literature are reflected in this story? Reference your notes on Japanese Modernism to support your position.
First person narration. Theme of alienation and uncertainty. Rejection of traditional values.
9. What perspective on modernization does this story illuminate?
Modernization is a complicated process often leaving individuals caught between two worlds. The main character in this story is being "modern" by traveling abroad and learning Western ways. However, when the main character begins to feel more at home in a foreign land, conflict builds. Modernization is a complicated process. In the end, Japanese appear to be allowed to adopt foreign ideas but then must adapt those newly acquired traits to fit within the confines of Japanese society.