

## Post-Reading Worksheet for “The Broken Ring: Answer Key

1. Paraphrase the two quotes below.

Textual Quote	Paraphrase the quote to the left.
“I know you are bothered by this ring of mine with no stone” (232).	“you” = <i>society is troubled by unmarried women</i>
“Knowing that this misfortune was a result of my own lack of foresight and understanding, my unhappiness multiplied, and I spent all my days for the next two years deep in sorrow” (238).	<i>Becoming aware that my selfishness and self-pity resulted in my mother’s death, I became deeply depressed for two years.</i>

2. What do the two passages above reveal about views of female identity and female duty?  
*The first passage communicates how society feels about unmarried women—they are deeply confused and troubled by them. The “I know” indicates acceptance. Yet, even though the narrator realizes her marital status upsets people, she holds her head high and perseveres. The second passage reinforces the personal costs one may encounter as a result of going against social norms. The narrator’s dissatisfaction with her marriage and expectations for her marriage challenged social norms of the day. This insistence on change resulted in a great deal of strife.*
3. At the end of the story, we are told that “my only remaining hope is that this broken ring may somehow be restored to its perfect form by the hand that gave it to me. But I know, of course, that such a thing is not yet . . .”(239). What did the narrator mean by this? Why end the statement with an ellipsis? What is the effect of this punctuation?  
*The narrator seems to realize that her quest to break away from tradition came at great personal cost to herself and those she loves. She hopes her husband will one day forgive her and once again seek her hand in marriage. Ironically, her husband didn’t seem too excited to marry her either—and given the chance for freedom, he took it. Now, the narrator wants to go back to the way things were; however, once the ring is broken, one can never go back. The ellipsis indicates that the narrator will forever be in an ongoing state of mental anguish over her circumstance. The optimistic reader might say the use of the ellipsis implies that enough time will pass and the narrator will be reunited with her husband. The ending is unclear; the reader is left to make sense of it all.*
4. The narrator reports that her father “has now come to have great sympathy for my long years of suffering” (239). How might the father’s change of heart serve as a symbol? What might this reveal about social attitudes of early 20<sup>th</sup>-century Japan?  
*The father could symbolize tradition and old thinking. The fact that he changes his mind shows that ideas, institutions, and gender roles are not fixed in 20<sup>th</sup>-century Japan. If the father can come to accept his daughter, then maybe others can too.*

5. How does Shimizu Shikin's story comment on the social landscape of 20<sup>th</sup>-century Japan?  
*This story was written in 1891; during this time women in Japan had very few rights. Women were forbidden to give political speeches, participate in any political activity, and form any political organization. The social roles of women were still entrenched in the feudal era, in which women were suppressed. Men were the dominant gender and in charge; fathers were in charge of their daughters and husbands in charge of wives. In 1898 the Meiji Civil Code was passed, which further worked to suppress the rights of women. The fact that Shimizu Shikin wrote this story in 1891 suggests the underground women's movement was thriving.*
6. The narrator asked, "Ah, will it take a hundred years before even a few will come to understand the precious value of this ring?" ( 232). Do you find the narrator's confusion to be sincere? Why or why not? What do you think she hoped people would realize?  
*Will it take 100 years for woman to achieve equal status with men? What will it take for society to view marriage differently? Will society ever come to value women and realize that unmarried, highly educated women can powerfully benefit society? The narrator seems to want society to accept women as equals; yet, for herself personally, she would like to be married.*
7. Why did the narrator never tell us her name? What was achieved by her anonymity?  
*She conceals her name because it really doesn't matter what her name is. This could be any woman's story. Many women in 20<sup>th</sup>-century Japan would be able to relate to the narrator's story: arranged marriage, unfaithful and unloving husband, feeling sorrow and hopelessness to change one's life. By remaining anonymous, the reader refrains from pre-judgment, as this could be any woman.*
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 in a stream of consciousness form—at the beginning she is reflecting, contemplating, and obsessing over her ruined marriage. Also the ending is unclear (use of ellipsis) leaving readers to reflect on marriage, the roles of women, and the reconciliation. Themes of alienation, loss, and uncertainty run throughout this piece.*
9. What perspectives on modernization does this story illuminate?  
*The roles of women were being redefined during modern Japan. The Meiji Civil Code, while progressive, did not fully ensure parity for women. Japanese women were denied political participation, including the right to attend or speak at political meetings; however, it was also during this time that women gained widespread access to education. Women's suffrage associations were formed, anti-prostitution protests were held, and other actions challenged female individualism. The "good wife and wise mother" mindset seems to be the center of "The Broken Ring."*