



## *Ink and Ashes* by Valynne E. Maetani

### Discussion Questions

1. How does Maetani use Claire's letters to her father throughout the book to demonstrate how Claire has changed? How is Claire the narrator different from Claire the letter writer? What do you think accounts for this difference?
2. What reasons motivate Claire's mother to keep the information about her husband from her children? Is she selfish or selfless in keeping this information? What would you do if you were in her position?
3. What are some signs that Claire's father was a part of the yakuza? What made the yakuza life attractive to Claire's father? Do you think his family and economic circumstances excuse or justify his decision to join the yakuza?
4. Why might Claire's father, Henry Sato, decide to become a judge after leaving the yakuza? How might his experiences in the yakuza help him in his new career as a judge? Is it appropriate for him to be a judge? Do a judge and a member of the yakuza have similar visions or interpretations of justice?
5. How does shame influence both Chase and Arakaki to hurt Claire? What are the roots of their perceived dishonor, respectively? Why do they think hurting Claire will help them find closure? Do you think revenge can bring closure?
6. At several points throughout the novel, Claire struggles with whom to trust. When her stepfather asks if she trusts him, she wonders, "If I felt his love, did that also mean I trusted him?" Do you think that love and trust are always the same? Is it possible to love someone without trusting them, or without knowing the whole truth about them?



7. If Claire were to write one more letter to her father at the end of the book, what do you think she would say or ask him? Do you think she would forgive and accept him or has too much changed?
8. Maetani has said she wanted to create a book she never got to read: a contemporary title with a Japanese protagonist. In your opinion, does the book reinforce or shatter stereotypes of Japanese culture?
9. The book ends with most questions answered, but Maetani leaves the door open for a sequel. Would you want to read a sequel to *Ink and Ashes*? If so, what do you hope would happen in it?

**ABOUT THE AUTHOR: Valynne E. Maetani** grew up in Utah and obtained a Bachelor's degree from the University of Pennsylvania. In a former life, she was a project manager and developed educational software for children with learning disabilities. Her debut novel, *Ink and Ashes*, is the winner of the 2013 New Visions Award and a Junior Library Guild 2015 selection. Maetani is a member of the We Need Diverse Books team and is dedicated to promoting diversity in children's literature because all children should grow up believing their stories deserve to be told.

**BOOK INFORMATION:**

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