



# Reader's Guide



Other novels by Ruth Ozeki  
*All Over Creation* (2003)  
*My Year of Meats* (1998)

## A Tale for the Time Being Ruth Ozeki

Canongate

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## About the author

Ruth Ozeki was born and raised in New Haven, Connecticut, by an American father and a Japanese mother. She graduated from Smith College and then moved to Japan to study classical Japanese literature. Upon her return to New York, she worked as a television producer and director and made several independent films. In June 2010 she was ordained as a Zen Buddhist priest. She lives in British Columbia and New York.

She is the author of three novels: *My Year of Meats* (1998), which won the Kiriya Pacific Rim Award, the Imus/Barnes and Noble American Book Award, and a Special Jury Prize of the World Cookbook Awards in Versailles; *All Over Creation* (2002), the recipient of a 2004 American Book Award from the Before Columbus Foundation, as well as the Willa Literary Award for Contemporary Fiction; and *A Tale for the Time Being* (2013), longlisted for the Man Booker Prize in 2013.

## *A Tale for the Time Being*

Ruth, a novelist living on a remote island of Canada's Pacific northwest shore, discovers a Hello Kitty lunchbox washed up on the beach. Within it lies a diary that expresses the hopes and dreams of a young Japanese schoolgirl. Ruth suspects it might have arrived on a drift of debris from the 2011 tsunami. With every turn of the page, she is sucked deeper into an enchanting mystery.

In a small cafe in Tokyo, 16-year-old Nao Yasutani is navigating the challenges thrown up by modern life. In the face of cyberbullying, the mysteries of a 104-year-old Buddhist nun and great-grandmother, and the joy and heartbreak of family, Nao is trying to find her own place - and voice - through a diary she hopes will find a reader and friend who finally understands her.

## Discussion points

*A Tale for the Time Being* starts with the first-person narrator expressing curiosity about the unknown person who might be reading her narrative. How did you respond to this opening and its unusual focus on the reader?

Is there a way in which Nao and Ruth form two halves of the same character?

In a recent interview Ruth Ozeki said "I would be happy if the book conveys the ways in which we and the world are intimately interconnected in time and space. I would be happy if readers came away feeling grateful for the precious and fleeting moments we have here on earth. And I would be overjoyed if readers felt an appreciation of the earth, itself, and resolved to treat it more kindly". Did *A Tale for the Time Being* leave you with any of these feelings?

*A Tale for the Time Being* expresses concern about the environment. How do Ruth Ozeki's observations about the environment affect the mood of her novel?

Do you agree with the reviewer (Beth Jones, *The Telegraph*) who wrote "What binds it all together is the voice of Nao, who manages to be both a convincingly self-obsessed Tokyo teenager and a sympathetic and engaging narrator".

## Themed reading

John Gribbin *In Search of Schrödinger's Cat*

## Useful links

[Author's website](#)

<http://www.ruthozeki.com>

[Publisher's website](#)

<http://www.canongate.tv>

[Guardian interview](#)

<http://www.guardian.co.uk/books/2013/mar/07/ruth-ozeki-interview-time-being>