

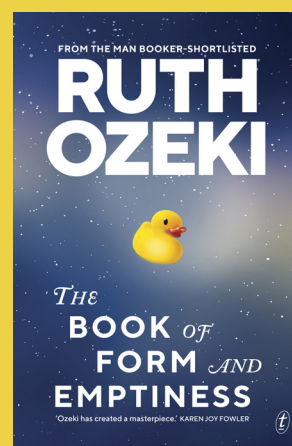
The Book of Form and Emptiness



Ruth Ozeki

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FICTION, TRADE PAPERBACK

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PRaise FOR *THE BOOK OF FORM AND EMPTINESS*

'This compassionate novel of life, love and loss glows in the dark. Its strange, beautiful pages turn themselves. If you've lost your way with fiction over the last year or two, let *The Book of Form and Emptiness* light your way home.'

David Mitchell

'Heart-breaking and heart-healing – a book to not only keep us absorbed but also to help us think and love and live and listen. No one writes quite like Ruth Ozeki and *The Book of Form and Emptiness* is a triumph.'

Matt Haig

'Ingenious and touching, *A Tale for the Time Being* is also highly readable. And interesting: the contrast of cultures is especially well done. I greatly look forward to Ruth Ozeki's next book.'

Philip Pullman

ABOUT RUTH OZEKI

Ruth Ozeki was born and raised in Connecticut by an American father and a Japanese mother. She is a novelist, filmmaker and Zen Buddhist priest whose books have garnered international acclaim. Her first two novels, *My Year of Meats* (1998) and *All Over Creation* (2003), have been translated into eleven languages and published in fourteen countries.

Her third novel, *A Tale for the Time Being* (2013), won the LA Times Book Prize, was shortlisted for the Man Booker Prize and the National Book Critics Circle Award, and has been published in over thirty countries.

CREDIT

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DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. *The Book of Form and Emptiness* is, in many ways, the coming-of-age story of a boy grappling with his own mind, his own creativity, and his own perplexing experiences, at a moment of profound loss. The Book is narrating Benny's life, and sometimes Benny intervenes to challenge or correct or complain. What do you make of the relationship between Benny and his Book? Do you think the Book is creating Benny, or is Benny creating the Book? Which came first, the chicken or the egg?
2. This is a book about books. What is your relationship to books and how have they shaped your life? How do you think hearing the Bottleman's account of Benjamin's life and death affected Benny?
3. The Library is a very important place for Benny and for the wider community, a place where people go to both find and lose themselves, and where objects both behave themselves and come to life. What are the components that make an ideal library? How do Benny's experiences in the library—particularly in the Bindery—alter the course of his life?
4. Research has shown that between 4-10 percent of the population has at least occasionally had some kind of experience hearing voices, and many people who hear voices regularly find them to be a source of inspiration rather than a symptom or problem. And even people like Benny, who start to hear voices after some kind of traumatic experience—like the death of someone close to them—find that their voices, if properly understood, can offer insights into their experiences. Has reading about Benny's voice-hearing experiences changed the way you view the mind? The imagination? Madness?
5. If you have read Ozeki's other novels, would you connect any of the characters from those books to the characters in this one? What themes do you notice running through her work?