



Are You an Echo?: The Lost Poetry of Misuzu Kaneko

By Misuzu Kaneko

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In early-1900s Japan, Misuzu Kaneko grows from precocious bookworm to instantly-beloved children's poet. But her life ends prematurely, and Misuzu's work is forgotten. Decades later her poems are rediscovered—just in time to touch a new generation devastated by the tsunami of 2011. This picture book features Misuzu's life story plus a trove of her poetry in English and the original Japanese.

Big Catch:

*At sunrise, glorious sunrise
it's a big catch!
A big catch of sardines!*

*On the beach, it's like a festival
but in the sea, they will hold funerals
for the tens of thousands dead.*

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Are You an Echo?: The Lost Poetry of Misuzu Kaneko By Misuzu Kaneko Bibliography

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Editorial Review

From School Library Journal

Gr 3–7—This sensitively crafted picture book offers a glimpse into the life and work of Japanese poet Kaneko (1903–30). Accompanied by colorful, soft illustrations, the first half recounts Kaneko's short life along with a selection of her poems that thematically complement the text. The second half is a larger (also illustrated) collection of her poems in English and Japanese. Young Misuzu is described as a sensitive, inquisitive child; her family encouraged her love of reading and education. When she was 20, her first poems were published and were well received. She would go on to write more than 500 poems. The narrative covers the many challenges Kaneko faced. (She committed suicide at the age of 26.) Framing Kaneko's life story is the account of Setsuo Yazaki, who worked tirelessly to track down and preserve her poetry after it fell into obscurity. Kaneko's brief poems express kinship with the world: sleepy telephone poles, fish, grieving orphaned whale calves, and more. Poems like "The Cicada's Clothes" and "Dewdrop" convey a childlike sense of wonder: "Let's not tell anyone./In the corner of the garden this morning,/a flower shed a tear." Even in translation, her work has an elegant simplicity and clarity. **VERDICT** This wonderfully illustrated book stresses the positive legacy of Kaneko's tragic life. A recommended purchase for all collections, especially those with an interest in international poetry.—Marilyn Taniguchi, Beverly Hills Public Library, CA

Review

"This lovingly wrought text brilliantly honors Kaneko's work and gives readers a welcome opportunity to revel in her unique way of looking at the world."—Sonia Alejandra Rodriguez, *Booklist*, Starred Review

"This wonderfully illustrated book stresses the positive legacy of Kaneko's tragic life. A recommended purchase for all collections, especially those with an interest in international poetry."—Marilyn Taniguchi, *School Library Journal*

"Ito and Tsuboi render Misuzu's plainspoken poems into graceful English ("The fish in the sea—/ no one looks after them;/ they do no harm./ And yet, here I am about to eat one") and Jacobson provides the tragic biography of an artist whose life blazed and ended early...Hajiri's warmhearted illustrations of turn-of-the-century Japanese life recall the work of Allan Say; they dwell on the closeness between Misuzu, her mother, and her daughter."—*Publisher's Weekly*

"Each brief poem addresses nature, children's observations, or both, in language that will be both accessible to the youngest readers and thought-provoking for adult caregivers. Striking, memorable imagery—a lost hat enjoying a new life as a bird's nest, the mystery of a cicada's molted husk—guarantees fruitful rereadings for readers of all ages."—*Kirkus Reviews*

"The poems themselves will appeal to children, while the book as a whole will speak to readers who are interested in Japanese literature and culture, in poetry and translation, and anyone who finds inspiration in poetry's immortal nature."—Kerry Clare, *Quill & Quire*

"Not since Hana's Suitcase has such an exciting contribution to children's literature emerged. Are You an Echo? has something for every reader: a compelling story and beautiful poems for children, factual accuracy and rich content for teachers and librarians, a respectful look at one woman poet's experiences for feminists, and a glimpse into another time and place for parents and educators committed to multiculturalism, a

fascinating genre mash-up for scholars, and a just-plain-gorgeous-in-the-hand book for everybody. Are You an Echo? will enrich the lives of every reader."—Michelle Superle, *CM Magazine: Canadian Review of Materials*

"Astonishingly beautiful and soulful, it hit the mark in every way. It was a reminder that softness and sensitivity have enormous value despite (and actually because of) all the harshness in the world."—Eve Kushner, *Joy o'Kanji*

"Are You an Echo? is a wonderful little book, both for the story and the poems (not to mention the illustrations), bringing a talented voice to the Anglophone world, one that reflects on matters most people gloss over."—Tony Malone, *Tony's Reading List*

"Beautifully translated, written, and drawn, this graphic book—for children and adults alike—links two stories: that of a people faced with natural disaster, and that of the life of Misuzu Kaneko, revered Japanese poet of the early 20th century, whose works for children evince a cosmology of kindness we can all embrace. It's almost a companion book to St. Exupery's *Little Prince*! Here stars, snow, echoes, silkworms, tomatoes, dewdrops and fish, among others, cohabit our world and give us hope together. Children will love Misuzu's inquiring mind and her questions of the world, and will learn very gently as well about tragedy and difficulty, about the lives of women before feminism gave them a legal voice, and about the life-force of poetry."

—Erín Moure, poet and translator

"*Are You An Echo?* transcends the genre of picture book biography. Beyond tracing the outline of the poet's life, it tells a larger story about the search for Misuzu Kaneko's personal history and the collaborative nature of biography, translation, and bookmaking. David Jacobson artfully blends Kaneko's poems into his narrative, which is at once gentle and unflinching. The sweetness of Hajiri's illustrations soften the harsher details of Kaneko's short life, and just when you think the story is coming to a close, a generous selection of poetry follows."

—Matthew Burgess, poet and author of *Enormous Smallness: a Story of e e cummings*

"*Are You An Echo?* is brimming with compassion, empathy and love for all things on this planet ... and beyond. The translations are truly superb – the illustrations, truly lovely. This is a book presented with all the beauty of an exquisite Japanese meal!"

—Roger Pulvers, winner of the Noma Award for the Translation of Japanese Literature

"A true miracle can be found in this book of wonders: amid exquisite artwork and lovely and compelling poems, Kaneko's magnificent spirit — the spirit of poetry — lives on despite her heartbreakingly real-life story. An utterly original book of immense beauty and importance."

—Brenda Shaughnessy, poet

"A mystery, a quest, a mother and a child, an earthquake and a discovery: *Are You An Echo?* folds poetry and history into recent events, resurrecting the work of Misuzu Kaneko and bringing the gentle grace of her poems to a new generation."

—Lauren Redniss, author of *Radioactive*, finalist for the National Book Award

"David Jacobson weaves poetry and tragic history into the poignant biography of an iconic Japanese children's author. Leavened by gentle, expressive illustrations and a generous selection of translated poems ranging from observational to inspirational, *Are You an Echo?* confronts unlikely subjects for a picture book and will leave parents and children with much to discuss."

—Bruno Navasky, poet, translator and former editor of American Poet, the journal of The Academy of American Poets

About the Author

Misuzu Kaneko was born in 1903 in Senzaki, Japan. She rose to fame as a celebrated author of children's poems. After her death, her poems fell into obscurity for decades, until the 1970s when Setsuo Yazaki discovered and published her full body of work in Japanese. This is the first English-language biography and collection of her poetry to be distributed in English.

David Jacobson has a BA in East Asian Studies from Yale University and an MBA from NYU. In 1984-5 he attended the Inter-University Center for the Study of the Japanese Language (the "Stanford Center"). From 1987-9 he received a Mombusho scholarship to study at Hitotsubashi University. His news articles and TV scripts have been published widely in print, online, and broadcast media in the US and Japan, appearing in the Associated Press, *The Washington Post*, *The Seattle Times*, *The Japan Times*, and on NHK and CNN. He lives in Seattle, Washington.

Sally Ito holds a BFA in Creative Writing from the University of British Columbia and an MA in English from the University of Alberta. She received a Mombusho scholarship to study at Waseda University, where she worked on literary translations of modern and contemporary Japanese poetry. She has taught writing at several universities and has reviewed children's books for the Paper Tigers blog. She is the author of several volumes of poetry, including *Alert to Glory*, and her 1998 story collection *Floating Shore* won the Writers Guild of AB Book Award. She lives in Winnipeg, Canada.

Toshikado Hajiri is a graphic artist and illustrator in Tokushima, Japan. After graduating from Ritsumeikan University in international relations and working at a trading company, in 2009 he decided to pursue his love for painting full-time by becoming an illustrator. His work has appeared in school textbooks, advertisements, calendars, and in several children's picture books. He was awarded 2nd prize in the 2006 International Illustration Competition sponsored by the Japan Illustrators' Association. His illustrations for *Are You an Echo?* will be his first for international publication.

Michiko Tsuboi is a graduate of Doshisha Women's College where she majored in English literature. She also attended the University of Alberta in Edmonton where she studied and read Canadian literature in English. She has worked professionally as a translator and English teacher in Shiga, Japan for many years.

Users Review

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