



## The Falling Flowers written by Jennifer B. Reed illustrated by Dick Cole

### About the Book

**Genre:** Fiction

**Format:** Paperback, 32 pages

**ISBN:** 9781643794587

**Reading Level:** Grade PreK–5

**Interest Level:** Grades 2–5

**Guided Reading Level:** P

**Accelerated Reader® Level/Points:**  
3.3/0.5

**Lexile™ Measure:** N/A

\*Reading level based on the ATOS Readability Formula

**Themes:** Childhood Experiences and Memories, Cultural Diversity, Environment/Nature, Families, Five Senses / Body Parts, Grandparents, Nature/Science, Asian/Asian American Interest, Holidays/Traditions, Realistic Fiction

**Resources on the web:**

[leeandlow.com/books/the-falling-flowers](http://leeandlow.com/books/the-falling-flowers)

### SYNOPSIS

What is more fun than the zoo, more beautiful than the shrine, and prettier than the neon lights of Tokyo? Mayumie and her Grandmother are taking a train ride into the heart of the biggest city in Japan to see something special, but Grandmother won't say what it is.

Mayumie tries to guess what this special place might be, but the excitement of taking a train and seeing the lights of the big city are almost thrilling enough. Finally, they turn down a quiet street in the middle of the city and find what Grandmother has been looking for: a grove of Japanese cherry trees, all in blossom.

This touching story of a little girl's outing with her grandmother takes place in modern-day Japan, where cherry trees bloom for one week every spring. With text simple enough for the youngest readers, author Jennifer Reed captures the excitement and wonder of a little girl's day in the big city, while Illustrator Dick Cole's watercolors complement both the serenity and animation of Tokyo in the springtime.

All guided reading level placements may vary and are subject to revision. Teachers may adjust the assigned levels in accordance with their own evaluations.

## BACKGROUND

### Japan's Cherry Tree Festival (From the Author's Note)

Each spring, the Japanese people celebrate the arrival of spring with a "flower"-viewing party called Hanami. Hana means flower in Japanese. The Cherry Tree Festival is an annual event and many people enjoy the festivities. Young girls and women wear their favorite kimonos. A kimono is a long silk robe which wraps around your body like a bathrobe. Kimonos are worn only for special occasions, but in the past, they were worn all the time. Many kimonos today have cherry blossom prints on them.

The Japanese cherry tree is the symbol and national flower of Japan. The blooms last for only a week. Unlike other cherry trees, they do not yield fruit. They bloom in the spring, grow lush green leaves throughout the summer, and come fall, the leaves fall off, leaving a bare tree.

More Information: Hanami is an important celebration all over Japan. The travel website GoTokyo.Org publishes a guide to viewing the cherry blossoms each year with many photos. (See <https://www.gotokyo.org/en/story/guide/hanami-guide/index.html>)

### Cherry Trees in the United States (From the Author's Note)

Flowering Japanese cherry trees are grown in the United States. In 1912, the city of Tokyo gave the city of Washington DC three thousand and twenty cherry trees as a gift. The trees are located at the Tidal Basin and around the Jefferson Memorial. People come from all over to enjoy these trees and admire their beauty. The best time to see the trees is late March or early April. They bloom during this time and the flowers last for only two weeks. Residents of and visitors to Washington celebrate the blooming of the cherry trees by holding an annual Cherry Tree Festival, just as they do in Japan. There are many activities, food tasting exhibits, and a parade.

More Information: For photos and more about the history of Japan's donation of cherry trees to the United States, including a detailed timeline of the challenges involved in getting healthy trees all the way from Asia to North America, see The National Park Service's information page: <https://www.nps.gov/subjects/cherryblossom/history-of-the-cherry-trees.htm>.

## BEFORE READING

### Prereading Focus Questions

(Reading Standards, Craft & Structure, Strand 5 and Integration of Knowledge & Ideas, Strand 7)  
(Speaking & Listening Standards, Comprehension & Collaboration, Strands 1 and 2)

Before introducing this book to students, you may wish to develop background knowledge and promote anticipation by posing questions such as the following:

- When you spend the day with a special adult from your family, what do you do together?
- Has anyone ever taken you somewhere special as a surprise? What feelings might someone

have on a surprise adventure?

- Where is Japan? What do you know about it? What do you wonder about it?
- Do you like to be surprised or not? Why?

You may want to chart student responses questions so that you can refer back to them during or after reading. You could also have students journal their responses to these questions or pose the final question as a KWL discussion and chart so that you can refer back to it throughout and after the reading of the book to further their thinking on the topic(s).

### Exploring the Book

(Reading Standards, Key Ideas & Details, Strand 1; Craft & Structure, Strand 5; and Integration of Knowledge & Ideas, Strand 7)  
(Speaking & Listening Standards, Comprehension & Collaboration, Strands 1 and 2)

**Book Title Exploration:** Talk about the title of the book, *The Falling Flowers*. Ask students what they think this book will most likely be about and whom the book might be about. What do they think might happen? Do they think this will be a story or an informational book? What makes them think that?

**Book Walk:** Display the book and analyze the cover. What do students notice in the illustration? Take students on a book walk and draw attention to the following parts of the book: front and back covers (including blurb), title page, dedication, and illustrations.

**Read Author's and Illustrator's Biographies:** Read the author's and illustrator's biographies in the book or at the end of this guide. What do you think the process is like to write a book for young readers? How does the author's biography help you predict what might happen in the story? Why do you think these creators made this book for young readers?

### Setting a Purpose for Reading

(Reading Standards, Key Ideas & Details, Strands 1–3)

Have students read to find out:

- Why does this story have such an interesting title, "The Falling Flowers?"
- Where does this story happen? What do you imagine about the setting?
- What do the characters do in the story? How do they feel?
- What does Mayumie learn about patience and trust?

Encourage students to consider why the author would want to share this story with young people.

# VOCABULARY

(Reading Standards, Craft & Structure, Strand 4)

(Language Standards, Vocabulary Acquisition & Use, Strands 4–6)

(Speaking & Listening Standards, Comprehension & Collaboration, Strands 1 and 2)

The story contains several content-specific and academic words and phrases that may be unfamiliar to students. Based on students' prior knowledge, review some or all of the vocabulary below.

Encourage a variety of strategies to support students' vocabulary acquisition: look up and record word definitions from a dictionary, write the meaning of the word or phrase in their own words, draw a picture of the meaning of the word, create a specific action for each word, list synonyms and antonyms, and write a meaningful sentence that demonstrates the definition of the word.

## Content Specific

rice field, mountains, zoo, fruit market, train station, museum, passengers, city, moped, shrine, neon street signs, (cherry) blossoms, puffy clouds, breeze, snow, bark, petals, branches, futon

## Academic

patience, shoved, rumbled, glimpses, steamy, familiar, warned, sulked, stomped, refused, steadily, crowds, tilted, nestled, wide, gently, blanketed, outstretched

# AFTER READING

## Discussion Questions

After students have read the book, use these or similar questions to generate discussion, enhance comprehension, and develop appreciation for the content. Encourage students to refer to passages and/or illustrations in the book to support their responses. **To build skills in close reading of a text, students should cite textual evidence with their answers.**

## Literal Comprehension

(Reading Standards, Key Ideas & Details, Strands 1–3)

(Speaking & Listening Standards, Comprehension & Collaboration, Strands 1–3 and Presentation of Knowledge & Ideas, Strand 4)

1. Who is in this story?
2. Where does the story happen?
3. When Mayumie looks out her window, what does she see? What does she talk about with her grandmother?
4. What do Mayumie and Grandmother see as they walk? Where does Mayumie guess they're going?
5. What's it like for Mayumie to travel on the train? What words does the author use to help you imagine it?
6. What is the city like? What words does the author use to help you imagine it?
7. What does Mayumie see when they arrive in the city? Where does she guess they're going?
8. How does Mayumie react when all her guesses are wrong?

9. Where do Mayumie and her grandmother go once they turn down the quiet street? What does Grandmother stop and do?
10. What do they see in the park? What words does the author use to help you imagine it?
11. How does Mayumie react to seeing the cherry blossoms?
12. Where do Mayumie and Grandmother sit? What's special about that spot?
13. What do Mayumie and Grandmother talk about under the tree?
14. How does the story end?

### Extension/Higher Level Thinking

(Reading Standards, Key Ideas & Details, Strands 2 and 3 and Craft & Structure, Strands 4 and 6)

(Speaking & Listening Standards, Comprehension & Collaboration, Strands 1–3 and Presentation of Knowledge & Ideas, Strand 4)

1. How do you think Grandmother got the idea to take Mayumie to see the cherry blossoms? Why do you think she decided to make it a surprise?
2. How do you think Mayumie feels about not knowing where they were going? What makes you think that?
3. Based on Mayumie's reactions, do you think she's taken trips into the city before? Why or why not?
4. Why do you think Mayumie gets upset after they've been walking for a while? How would you have reacted in this situation?
5. Why do you think the cherry blossoms are such a special sight to people? Why are they special to Grandmother?
6. The cherry blossoms are only able to be enjoyed at a certain time each year. How does this make them more special?
7. What does Mayumie learn about patience and trust?
8. Why do you think Grandmother chooses not to tell Mayumie where they are going before they set out? Why might the Grandmother want to surprise Mayumie? Do you think Grandmother made the right choice not to tell Mayumie where they were going? Why or why not?
9. Which part of this book did you enjoy imagining most? What words did the author use that helped you?
10. Do you think Mayumie learned patience today? Why or why not? Do you think she will like surprises in the future? Why or why not?
11. Was this outing a good activity for practicing patience? Why or why not?
12. Was this outing a good activity for practicing trust? Why or why not?
13. This author wrote a book about a place she lived for a short time. What do you think would be important when writing about a place that isn't where you're from? What might the author have done while writing to make sure her story was realistic and respectful of this important

Japanese tradition?

14. Why do you think the author wanted to share this story with young people?

### Reader's Response

(Writing Standards, Text Types & Purposes, Strands 1–3 and Production & Distribution of Writing, Strands 4–6)

Use the following questions and writing activities to help students practice active reading and personalize their responses to the book. Suggest that students respond in reader's response journals, essays, or oral discussion. You may also want to set aside time for students to share and discuss their written work.

1. Why do you think the author chose to write this story? What do you think the author's message to the reader is?
2. Have students make a text-to-self connection. What kind of connections did you make from this book to your own life? How is the narrator similar or different to you and your role in your own family?
3. Have students make a text-to-text connection. Did you think of any other books while you read *The Falling Flowers*? Why did you make those connections?
4. Have students make a text-to-world connection. What kind of connections did you make from this book to what you have seen in the world or on the news? Why did *The Falling Flowers* make you think of that?
5. What is one big thought that you have after reading this book? Think about different character changes, the setting, and the relationships. What did you learn from reading *The Falling Flowers*?
6. Choose a page you enjoyed imagining. Make a list of things you imagined as you read this page and looked at the illustration. Then, make a list of specific words the author used and which sense (sight, sound, smell, touch) they made you think about.
7. How do the author and illustrator help readers imagine and learn more about what it's like to be in Japan? Make a list of details the text gives about the story's setting.
8. This author gets story ideas from her observations of where she lived (Japan) and the people there. Make a list of story ideas or topics related to where you live, or somewhere you've visited.
9. This story is about the beginning of a special tradition between a grandchild and grandparent. Write about a tradition you have with someone in your family, or one you'd like to start.

### Multilingual Learner Teaching Activities

(Speaking & Listening Standards, Comprehension & Collaboration, Strands 1–3 and Presentation of Knowledge & Ideas, Strands 4–6)

(Language Standards, Vocabulary Acquisition & Use, Strands 4–6)

These strategies might be helpful to use with students who are English Learners and multilingual learners.

1. Assign ML students to partner-read the story with strong English readers/speakers. Students can alternate reading between pages, repeat passages after one another, or listen to the more

fluent reader.

2. Have each student write three questions about the story. Then let students pair up and discuss the answers to the questions.
3. Depending on students' level of English proficiency, after the first reading:
  - Review the illustrations in order and have students summarize what is happening on each page, first orally, then in writing.
  - Have students work in pairs to retell either the plot of the story or key details. Then ask students to write a short summary, synopsis, or opinion about what they have read.
4. Have students give a short talk about something in nature they like to see.
5. The book contains several content-specific and academic words that may be unfamiliar to students. Based on students' prior knowledge, review some or all of the vocabulary. Expose English Learners to multiple vocabulary strategies. Have students make predictions about word meanings, look up and record word definitions from a dictionary, write the meaning of the word or phrase in their own words, draw a picture of the meaning of the word, list synonyms and antonyms, create an action for each word, and write a meaningful sentence that demonstrates the definition of the word.
6. Additional resources to support multilingual students is: <https://www.multilinguallearning-toolkit.org/>.
7. Have students act out the story to support comprehension. Have one student play Mayumie and one play Grandmother. Provide photos to use as scenery as the pair travels to see the cherry blossoms.

### Social and Emotional Learning

(Reading Standards, Key Ideas & Details, Strands 1-3 and Craft & Structure, Strands 4-6)

(Speaking & Listening Standards, Comprehension & Collaboration, Strands 1-3 and Presentation of Knowledge & Ideas, Strand 4)

(Writing Standards, Text Types & Purposes, Strands 1-2 and Production & Distribution of Writing, Strands 4-6)

(Language Standards, Vocabulary Acquisition & Use, Strands 6)

Social and emotional learning involves being aware of and regulating emotions for healthy development. In addition to understanding one's own feelings, strong socio-emotional development allows individuals to develop empathy for others and to establish and maintain relationships.

Use the following prompts to help students study the socio-emotional aspects of this book.

1. What Social and Emotional Learning (SEL) skills does Mayumie exhibit over the course of the book? Some examples of SEL skills include problem-solving, grit and perseverance, self-regulation, and perspective taking. How does Mayumie demonstrate some of these skills?
2. Have students go on a Social and Emotional Learning scavenger hunt in the text, looking for evidence in the details from the book. Assign students to relevant Social and Emotional Learning themes, such as: empathy, problem-solving, perspective taking, perseverance, and

recognizing and managing emotions. Discussing the arc of Mayumie's emotions (e.g., from excited, to confused, to frustrated, to surprised, to content) would be especially appropriate for this book.

3. Choose an emotion that interests you: excitement, happiness, frustration, hope, and so on. Illustrate or act out what that emotion looks like in *The Falling Flowers*.
4. Talk about Grandmother's expectation that Mayumie would be patient as they traveled to see the cherry blossoms. What's hard about being patient? What strategies can you use? Have students pretend they are a "coach" whispering in Mayumie's ear when she gets frustrated that she can't figure out the surprise.
5. Do you think the author wants Mayumie to be a role model for young people or an example of caution? Why or why not?
6. Host a classroom debate to practice perspective-taking: Would you take someone else on a surprise adventure? Why or why not? Focus especially on how surprises might make someone feel.

## INTERDISCIPLINARY ACTIVITIES

(Introduction to the Standards, page 7: Students who are college and career ready must be able to build strong content knowledge, value evidence, and use technology and digital media strategically and capably)

Use some of the following activities to help students integrate their reading experiences with other curriculum areas. These can also be used for extension activities, for advanced readers, and for building a home-school connection.

### English/Language Arts

(Reading Standards, Key Ideas and Details, Strands 1–3, Craft and Structure, Strands 4–6, Integration of Knowledge & Ideas, Strands 7–9, Range of Reading of Text Complexity, Strand 10)

(Writing Standards, Text Types & Purposes, Strands 1–3, Production & Distribution of Writing, Strands 4 and 6, Research to Build & Present Knowledge, Strands 7–9, Range of Writing, Strand 10)

(Speaking and Listening Standards, Comprehension and Collaboration, Strands 1–3, Presentation of Knowledge and Ideas, Strands 4–6)

- **Have students practice retelling this story across their fingers, with the prompts "First, next, then, then, finally."**
- **Read other stories about children enjoying time with a grandparent, such as *Sunday Shopping* (<https://www.leeandlow.com/books/sunday-shopping>) or *Birdie's Beauty Parlor* (<https://www.leeandlow.com/books/birdie-s-beauty-parlor>).** Make connections between texts.
- **Have students create scenery on murals to act out this story.** Talk about using the details in the text for small groups to draw or paint murals of Grandmother and Mayumie's neighborhood, a train and/or city scene, and the park with the cherry blossoms. Then have students act out the story by moving to different scenes and using some of the dialogue from the book.
- **Invite kids to build 3-D scenery and retell this book using figurines.** They might build a Japanese city out of blocks and train tracks and create cherry trees in bloom from recycled items and art materials.



- **Talk about the differences between stories and informational text.** (Also, perhaps, how realistic fiction, like this book, includes elements of both.) Use details from the book, the back matter, and additional research, if needed, to create a shared informational text about Japanese cherry blossoms.

### Social Studies

(Reading Standards, Key Ideas and Details, Strands 1–3, Craft and Structure, Strands 4–6, Integration of Knowledge & Ideas, Strands 7–9, Range of Reading of Text Complexity, Strand 10)

(Writing Standards, Text Types & Purposes, Strands 1–3, Production & Distribution of Writing, Strands 4 and 6, and Research to Build & Present Knowledge, Strands 7–9, Range of Writing, Strand 10)

(Speaking and Listening Standards, Comprehension and Collaboration, Strands 1–3, Presentation of Knowledge and Ideas, Strands 4–6)

- **Have students create a travel poster, brochure, or social media ad to convince people to come see the Japanese cherry blossoms.** Talk about helpful details from the book they could include.
- **Return to your conversation about Japan from before reading.** Discuss how reading this story, along with the author's note, can help build students' knowledge about Japan. Make a list of other questions they have about Japan and make a plan to research topics of interest.
- **Read other stories set in Japan that teach about aspects of Japanese life and culture, such as *The Wakame Gatherers*** (<https://www.leeandlow.com/books/the-wakame-gatherers>). Use details from the stories to add to students' knowledge of Japan

### Science/STEM

2-LS4-1 Biological Evolution: Unity and Diversity (Make observations of plants and animals to compare the diversity of life in different habitats.)

K-LS1-1 From Molecules to Organisms: Structures and Processes (Use observations to describe patterns of what plants and animals (including humans) need to survive.) (Writing Standards, Text Types & Purposes, Strands 1–3, Production & Distribution of Writing, Strands 4 and 6, and Research to Build & Present Knowledge, Strands 7–9, Range of Writing, Strand 10)

- **Learn more about the structure and seasonal cycles of trees, using the vocabulary and details from the book as a starting point.** Have students draw and/or label the parts of a diagram of a cherry tree. Alternatively, do additional research to learn about how cherry trees look in different seasons and create a series of diagrams.
- **Help students learn about whether cherry trees can grow in your area, and what kind of trees are native to where you live.**
- **Encourage students to go to the school or public library to learn about cherry trees and answer the question:** how is climate change affecting cherry trees and the cherry blossom festival if at all?

### Art

(Reading Standards, Integration of Knowledge and Ideas, Strands 7 and 9)

(Writing Standards, Text Types & Purposes, Strands 1-3, Production & Distribution of Writing, Strand 4, and Research to Build & Present Knowledge, Strands 7-9, Range of Writing, Strand 10)

(Speaking and Listening Standards, Comprehension and Collaboration, Strands 1-3, Presentation of Knowledge and Ideas, Strands 4-6)

- **Invite students to create cherry blossom artwork.** Some ideas include: permanent black pen outline with water color, draw or paint a branch and dip the ridged bottom of a

plastic bottle in pink paint to stamp blossoms, draw or paint a branch and bunch and glue pink tissue paper for blossoms.

- **If possible, provide students watercolors, brushes, watercolor paper, a cup of water, and paper towels to explore the medium.** How is watercolor painting different from colored pencils, markers, or other paints?

### School-Home Connection

(Reading Standards, Integration of Knowledge and Ideas, Strands 7 and 9)

(Writing Standards, Text Types & Purposes, Strands 1-3, Production & Distribution of Writing, Strand 4, and Research to Build & Present Knowledge, Strands 7-9, Range of Writing, Strand 10)

(Speaking and Listening Standards, Comprehension and Collaboration, Strands 1-3, Presentation of Knowledge and Ideas, Strands 4-6)

- **Have students draw or take a photo of a tree they see near their home (or school, or childcare location).** Have them try to identify it and write about how they know. (Optional: provide a cheat-sheet of common trees to your area.) How does the tree change (if at all) over the year? What animals or plants use the tree for shelter or food?
- **Have students share a summary of the *The Falling Flowers* with someone at home.** Have students ask where they'd take someone they wanted to surprise with a special adventure. Share and compare responses at school.



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## ABOUT THE AUTHOR

**Jennifer B. Reed** lived in Japan for three years and was inspired to write *The Falling Flowers* after her first spring there. She was in awe of the flowering cherry trees and the strong bonds so often found between Japanese grandmothers and their grandchildren, which reminded her of her own bond with her grandmothers. She now writes children's books, edits and is a professor of children's literature, teaching others how to take their inspiration and create lasting stories. She lives in Maryland with her husband and two children.

## ABOUT THE ILLUSTRATOR

**Dick Cole** was an illustrator and watercolorist for over 30 years. A graduate of UCLA and the Art Center College of Design, Dick worked as graphic designer, art director, and illustrator in New York, San Francisco, and Los Angeles. He garnered awards from the three cities' Art Director's Clubs as well as the San Francisco, Los Angeles and New York Societies of Illustrators. He died in 2016.

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