

A Choose to Read Ohio Toolkit

Use this toolkit to plan book discussions, library programs, or classroom activities.

Meet Harmony Becker, an author, artist, and illustrator born in Cincinnati and now living in Mexico City.

Select from a range of discussion questions and extension activities to deepen the experience of reading *Himawari House*.

Discover websites, music, videos, and readalikes to explore topics and themes in depth.

Himawari House

By Harmony Becker



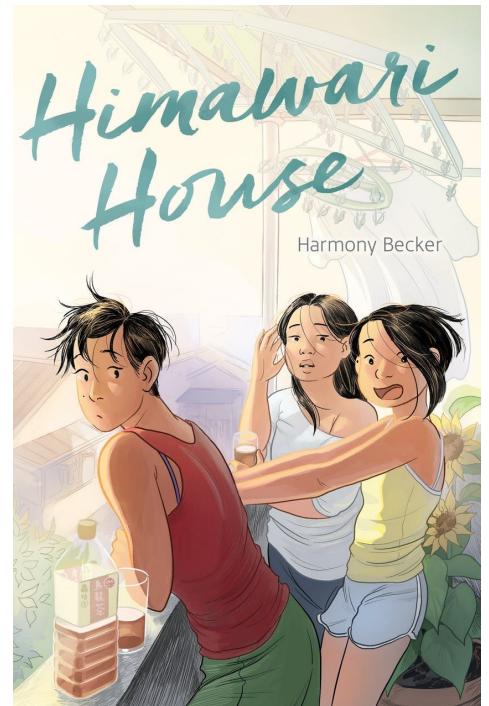
About the Book

A young adult novel about three foreign exchange students and the pleasures, and difficulties, of adjusting to living in Japan.

Living in a new country is no walk in the park—Nao, Hyejung, and Tina can all attest to that.

The three of them became fast friends through living together in the Himawari House in Tokyo and attending the same Japanese cram school. Nao came to Japan to reconnect with her Japanese heritage, while Hyejung and Tina came to find freedom and their own paths.

Though each of them has her own motivations and challenges, they all deal with language barriers, being a fish out of water, self-discovery, love, and family.

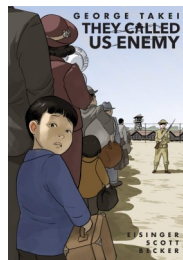


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Book Details

Himawari House by Harmony Becker.
First Second, 2021. ISBN 9781250235565. 380 pages. Ages 14+.
Leveled Reading: HL360L Lexile.

Available as an ebook through the Ohio Digital Library: ohiodigitallibrary.com



Harmony Becker is the illustrator of ***They Called Us Enemy***, a 2021 & 2022 Choose to Read Ohio selection.

All three of George Takei's co-creators of ***They Called Us Enemy***—writers Justin Eisinger and Steven Scott and illustrator Harmony Becker—were born in Ohio!



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**“What’s the point
in getting sad?
I did this
to myself.”**

**I ripped out
my own roots
in exchange for
my freedom.”**

About the Author

Cartoonist and illustrator Harmony Becker was born in Cincinnati and has also lived in Columbus. She is the creator of the comics *Himawari Share*, *Love Potion*, and *Anemone & Catharus*, and the illustrator of George Takai's graphic memoir ***They Called Us Enemy***, winner of the 2020 Asian/Pacific American Award for Young Adult Literature and a 2021 & 2022 Choose to Read Ohio selection. Her work often deals with the theme of language barriers and how they shape people and their relationships. Harmony Becker is a member of a multicultural family and has spent time living in South Korea and Japan. She currently resides in Mexico City.

Author Resources

Harmony Becker's official website

harmonybecker.com

An Award-Winning Artist Debuts Her Graphic Novel

www.kirkusreviews.com/news-and-features/articles/harmony-becker-himawari-house-interview

Laura Simeon interviews Harmony Becker for *Kirkus*.

Four Questions for Harmony Becker

www.publishersweekly.com/pw/by-topic/childrens/childrens-authors/article/87868-four-questions-for-harmony-becker.html

Gilcy Aquino interviews Harmony for *Publisher's Weekly*.

Q&A with Harmony Becker, *Himawari House*

diversebooks.org/qa-with-harmony-becker-himawari-house

Samantha Leong interviews Harmony for the We Need Diverse Books blog.

Q&A: Harmony Becker, Creator of *Himawari House*

www.slj.com/story/interview-harmony-becker-creator-of-himawari-house-graphic-novels

Brigid Alverson interviews Harmony for *School Library Journal*.

A Conversation with Harmony Becker (video, 46 minutes)

youtu.be/pr0X7WKYmh4

Recording of an online program hosted by the Goleta & Santa Ynez Valley Libraries. Harmony discusses ***They Called Us Enemy***, ***Himawari House***, and her creative process.

Himawari Share

tapas.io/episode/704712

Himawari House began as a webcomic called *Himawari Share*.

“Please Turn Off Your Cell Phone”

youtu.be/n3e6MuFZjmk

Enjoy this animation by Harmony Becker!

For publicity and speaking engagement inquiries:

Contact DongWon Song at dongwon@morhaimliterary.com.

Talk About It

Topics to share when discussing *Himawari House* with teens.

Educators: Every CTRO book may be used to support Ohio's English Language Arts reading, writing, and speaking and listening standards. Other Learning Standards, such as *Social and Emotional Learning: Relationship Skills (HS)* may also apply. Discussion questions and educational activities for *Himawari House* align with Learning Standards for Grades 9-12.

Librarians, parents, and others: These activities are also for library programs, family activities, and other projects. Learning Standards define what students should know and be able to do at each grade. For more information, see the Ohio Department of Education website, education.ohio.gov. From the Topics dropdown menu, click on "Learning in Ohio."

Spoiler warning! Some discussion questions refer to key elements in the book. Do not read if you do not want to find out what happens.

- How does Becker use language as a tool of both unity and alienation? How does the usage of "broken" language (Hyejung's English, Nao's Japanese) enhance this?
- Each of the three women in the Himawari House have fully developed backstories. How do these personal histories help the reader understand their motivations and character?
- Nao struggles with navigating her identity, attempting to bridge the divide between her Japanese and American heritages. How do her experiences in Japan affect her understanding of herself?
- What circumstances and events lead the tenants of Himawari House to transition from friendship to "chosen family"?
- All three women who live in the Himawari House are confronted by the concept of "stranger in a strange land," but each of them processes and contextualizes this feeling differently. How do their moments of confusion, isolation, misunderstanding, and culture shock shape them?
- Nao soaks in the sights and sounds of Japan: "The people here move through the perfumed air so lightly... they don't even hear the calling of crows in the morning. They couldn't imagine that I built my life clinging to these things, building a dream house out of things I wasn't sure I had the right to. Stupid, small things. Whatever I could remember. The smell of old wood. The depth of a bathtub. Muscat gummies. The sound of the train going by." (p. 217-218). Have you ever felt so immersed in a place, event, or situation that it feels intensely personal to you—that no one else could possibly feel the exact way you have? What did that experience mean to you?
- Harmony Becker has indicated that she doesn't plan to continue the stories of Nao, Tina, and Hyejung. If she did, where do you think their stories would go? What futures would you like to see for these women?

Go Further

Ideas for extending the experience of reading *Himawari House*.

Using online resources available to students through INFOhio (infohio.org) and to all Ohio residents through Ohio Web Library (ohioweblibrary.org), research the art of chanoyu, the traditional Japanese tea ceremony, and explore the cultural and aesthetic importance of this tradition.

Hyejung loses herself in karaoke. Develop a playlist of fifteen Japanese or Korean pop (J-pop, K-pop) songs that the residents of the Himawari House might enjoy belting out in a karaoke bar together. Start your research on INFOhio or Ohio Web Library. Check your local library for more resources!

Watch videos of Awa Odori (the Japanese dance festival the residents of Himawari House attend) on YouTube.

Explore More

Additional ideas and resources to use with **Himawari House**.

Go Abroad

www.goabroad.com

Thinking about studying abroad? Go Abroad has been providing tools and tips online for over 20 years. Find an advisor, gather important documents, and read up on the exciting locations and programs available for the adventurous learner.

Abroad in Japan

www.youtube.com/c/abroadinjapan

Chris Broad is a white British man living in Japan, but he's no fish out of water. Though he began his time in Tokyo as an assistant language teacher, he has since become a full-time vlogger, focusing on quintessential Japanese experiences from a *gaijin* perspective. Often accompanied by his friend Natsuki, Broad's videos are notable for their refusal to exoticize the people and cultural markers of Japan.

Japan National Tourism Organization

www.japan.travel

As the official website of the Japanese Tourism board, this is the authoritative source for prospective travelers to Japan. Explore the rich traditions and culture of Japan with in-depth tourist information for geographically specific regions. Want to know the prime time to see cherry blossoms bloom in Hyogo? Find out here!

Tofugu: Learn Japanese

www.tofugu.com/learn-japanese

A comprehensive and scaffolded step-by-step deep dive into learning the Japanese language. Learn how to read hiragana, grasp grammatical concepts, and build your vocabulary with fun, engaging lessons.

The Ultimate Guide to Bento Box Lunch

www.justonecookbook.com/how-to-make-bento

Tina works at a restaurant where she initially is tasked with making bento box lunches. These don't just have to be specialties in the restaurant world, though. You can make a bento box lunch at home! This guide breaks down the process, from selecting a bento box and finding containers for sauces to preparing the meals and arranging food in an aesthetically pleasing way.

Check It Out

Recommended for readers of **Himawari House**.

Satoko and Nada (4 vols.) by Yupechika, Seven Seas, 2017-2020.

Honey and Clover (10 vols.) by Chica Umino. VIZ Media, 2001-2006.

Home Home by Lisa Allen-Agostini. Delacorte, 2020.

Almost American Girl by Robin Ha. Balzer + Bray, 2020.

The American Dream? by Shing-Yin Khor. Zest Books, 2019.

I Love You So Mochi by Sarah Kuhn. Scholastic, 2019.

A Step from Heaven by An Na. Front Street, 2000.

The Astonishing Color of After by Emily X.R. Pan. Little, Brown & Co, 2018.

Goodbye Stranger by Rebecca Stead. Wendy Lamb, 2015.

Laura Dean Keeps Breaking Up with Me by Mariko Tamaki. First Second, 2019.

Choose to Read Ohio, a project of the State Library of Ohio, the Ohioana Library Association, and the Ohio Center for the Book, encourages public libraries, schools, families, and others to build a community of readers and an appreciation of Ohio authors, illustrators, and literature. CTRO is adaptable for use in classrooms, libraries, bookstores, by book discussion groups, families, and other community groups.

Explore Choose to Read Ohio resources & toolkits:
library.ohio.gov/ctro.

Toolkit created by J. Joseph Prince, Bowling Green State University, January 2023. Links and other information are accurate at the time of publication.