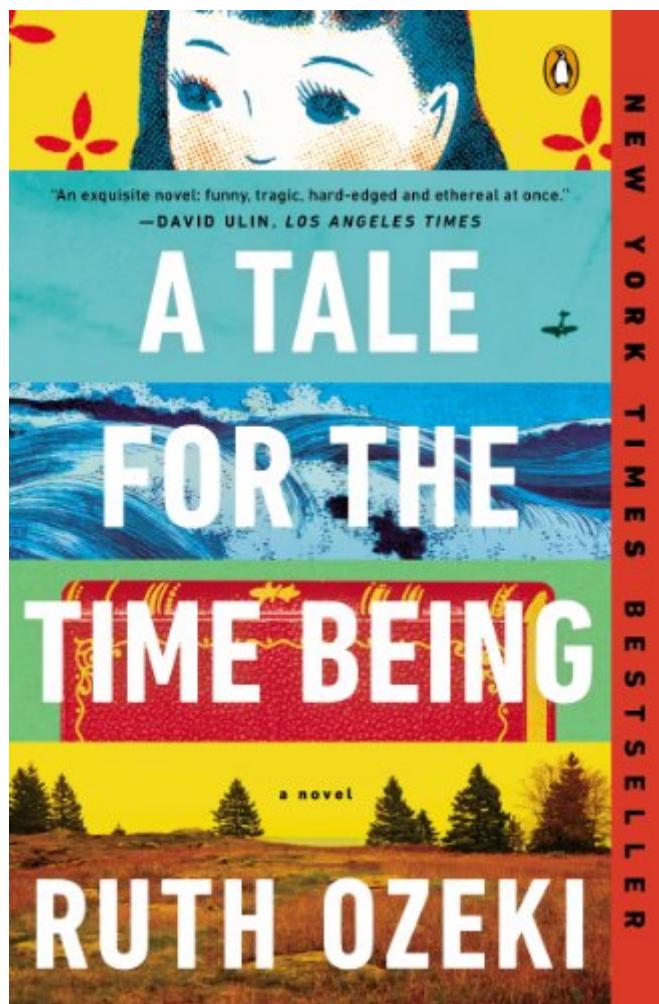


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# A Tale For The Time Being: A Novel



## Synopsis

A brilliant, unforgettable novel from bestselling author Ruth Ozeki "shortlisted for the Booker Prize and the National Book Critics Circle Award" A time being is someone who lives in time, and that means you, and me, and every one of us who is, or was, or ever will be. • In Tokyo, sixteen-year-old Nao has decided there's only one escape from her aching loneliness and her classmates' bullying. But before she ends it all, Nao first plans to document the life of her great grandmother, a Buddhist nun who's lived more than a century. A diary is Nao's only solace "and will touch lives in ways she can scarcely imagine. Across the Pacific, we meet Ruth, a novelist living on a remote island who discovers a collection of artifacts washed ashore in a Hello Kitty lunchbox" possibly debris from the devastating 2011 tsunami. As the mystery of its contents unfolds, Ruth is pulled into the past, into Nao's drama and her unknown fate, and forward into her own future. Full of Ozeki's signature humor and deeply engaged with the relationship between writer and reader, past and present, fact and fiction, quantum physics, history, and myth, *A Tale for the Time Being* is a brilliantly inventive, beguiling story of our shared humanity and the search for home. From the Trade Paperback edition.

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## Customer Reviews

It's not often a book gets me excited about reading it as soon as I open it, but that's what happened with *A Tale for the Time Being* by Ruth Ozeki. Right away, in the first few pages, readers are treated to a unique, young voice. Naoko is contemplative, wiser than she realizes, and speaks without tempering her words. She displays a very stark self-awareness which often caused me to catch my breath. This novel has so many intricate layers, I know I can't do it justice in this review. A colleague of mine once told me he always loves listening to, performing, and conducting Beethoven's 5th Symphony, even though he's done so countless times. For him, it never gets old or stale. He always hears something new, notices something that gives it even more depth and meaning. I can imagine reading *A Tale for the Time Being* again and again and having this same reaction. In a way, I think Naoko exemplifies the complexity and full freedom of religion in modern Japanese culture. She isn't overtly religious, but she is very open-minded, which allows her to pull the truths and strength she desperately needs. Naoko's time with her great-grandmother Jiko is profoundly beautiful, and the descriptions of Buddhist traditions and ceremonies are absolutely breathtaking. Ruth says she "wanted to read at the same rate [Naoko] had lived" and at times found it difficult to resist the temptation to quickly devour the entire story. I definitely shared that feeling! I found myself getting impatient during the scenes with Ruth and Oliver. I just wanted Ruth to get back to reading Naoko's diary. I had to know what happened next!

Shortlisted for the 2013 Booker, this tells two intertwined tales - of Nao, a Japanese schoolgirl, and of Ruth, a Canadian author of Japanese heritage. Ruth has found Nao's journal washed up on the shore and begins to obsess about finding out whether the people and events Nao discusses are true. Nao's story is of a young girl who has lived most of her life in California but has now returned to Japan and we see the society through her eyes. Nao's story is interesting, if bleak. Having been brought up in California, Nao is seen as an outsider by her classmates on her return to Japan. We learn of the extreme bullying she is both subjected to and participates in at school, leading her to drop out. Meantime, her suicidal father is making repeated failed attempts to end his own life, leading Nao to harbour suicidal thoughts of her own. In an effort to break this cycle, her parents send her to spend the summer with her old great-grandmother, a Zen nun, who rapidly becomes Nao's sole support and spiritual guide. While here, Nao learns the story of her great-uncle, a war-hero who died during WWII. Ruth's story is a dull distraction. Ruth is a writer, struggling with long-term writers block, giving Ozeki the opportunity to tell the reader, at length, how very, very tough life is for writers - even one who lives in fairly idyllic surroundings with no apparent real health

or money worries and with a partner who loves and supports her. She is also in a perpetual state of existential angst and this part of the novel merely serves to interrupt and slow to a crawl the telling of Nao's tale.

Meet Nao (pronounced "Now"):- A suicidal Japanese teenager who lives with her mom and suicidal father;-- The victim of pretty severe and grotesque bullying;-- Caught between two cultures (feels like an American, because she grew up in Sunnyvale, CA . . . but moved back to Tokyo with her family after the dot-com bubble burst and her dad lost his job);-- Loves her 104-year-old great-grandmother, Old Jiko, who is a Buddhist nun.Meet Ruth:- Japanese-American;-- Left NYC to live in a remote island town in British Columbia;-- Has a husband, Oliver, and a cat, Schrödinger (nicknamed "Pesto");-- An author (this book's author, in fact), working on her memoir.The book is about the intersection of Nao's and Ruth's lives. One day, Ruth is walking along the beach and finds a big Ziploc bag. In the Ziploc, she discovers a Hello Kitty lunchbox that contains:- A copy of Proust's *À la recherche du temps perdu*;-- A bundle of letters written in French;-- A diary written in old-fashioned Kanji; and-- An old watch.Upon further inspection, Ruth realizes that the copy of *À la recherche du temps perdu* is actually Nao's diary. The pages of the book were removed and replaced with blank pages that have been covered in girly, purple handwriting.As she reads, Ruth learns that Nao wrote the diary sitting in a French maid cafè in Tokyo. Nao has dropped out of school and is writing the diary because she wants to record the story of Old Jiko's life before she dies. But before she gets to Old Jiko's life, Nao delves into her own life and struggles.

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