Chapters 1-4-The Sign of the Chrysanthemum

1. Explain the simile on the first page.

2. Muna daydreamed about finding his samurai warrior father. When do people daydream? What about? How is a daydream similar to a sleeping dream?

3. Why didn’t Muna cry at his mother’s death?

4. Has something tragic ever happened to you, and you just couldn’t cry? Explain. Why is it good to be able to cry when something terrible happens?

5. How did the author introduce the differences between Takanobu and Muna? What other differences were pointed out later? What similarities?

6. Why did the captain call Takanobu a pirate?

7. What was more dreadful to Muna than hunger?

8. How did the author suggest that Takanobu is clever?

9. Muna felt that he owed Takanobu loyalty. Why did he feel that way? Who would you say you are loyal to? How do you show loyalty?

10. Why did the author include the spectacle of the ox-drawn carriage in Chapter Three?

11. How have Muna’s feelings about pride and poverty developed? Give examples.

12. How did the author suggest that names are assigned to people in this culture? Give examples.

13. Explain: “Morality in the capital seemed to be written in a language the boy did not yet understand.”

14. What distracted Muna from looking for his father?

15. Kawaki, the sandal maker, and his daughter, Akiko, befriended Muna. Would you have done so? Under what circumstances would a stranger be invited to dinner in your home? Why?

16. What do you think the note to Plum Face said?

17. How might the fire have started? How was the fire at the Red Dog similar and different from the communal fires?

18. Who were the Genji and the Heike like? Why were there jealousies between these groups? Which group was Muna aligned with? Why?
19. Do you know of any gangs or groups in our country that display jealousies or dislikes for one another? Explain.
Chapters 5-8-The Sign of the Chrysanthemum

1. Explain: “A man who has known many years and many lives that began in brightness only to fall and disappear.”

2. Why did the author include the dialogue between Tada and General Kiyomori?

3. When Muna regained consciousness, why did he first remember Awa and the gnarled tree?

4. How did Muna explain “Takanobu’s death”?

5. Why did the sword smith rescue and nurture Muna back to health?

6. Why did Muna stay with the sword smith instead of returning to his stable job?

7. Explain “Pride, pride, pride. It will slay us all in the end.”

8. Muna said he would rather be hit for his errors than told kindly that he could try harder the next day. How do you feel about this? Why?

9. How did Muna use Fukuji’s song to lighten the sorrow he felt in a sorrow-filled world?

10. Can you remember a song or a story that helps you feel better when you are having a hurtful day? How can you help others when they are feeling bad?

11. Why did the author use poetry interspersed in the story? Did it add most to the setting, plot, or character? Why do you think so?

12. Why did the closed door to the forge seem hateful to Muna?

13. List the characteristics that you think Fukuji would expect in the warriors who carry his swords. Who else do you know in literature with similar traits?

14. How did the author use setting to reflect the characters’ moods? Be specific about Chapters 7-8.

15. Why did Takanobu say, “My life is once again in your hands,” to Muna?

16. Takanobu implied that he was Muna’s father. Up to this point in the story, what evidence supports or challenges that possibility? What do you predict will happen in the remainder of the story? Why?
Chapters 9-13-The Sign of the Chrysanthemum

1. Why did Fukuji send Muna to see the chigo?
2. Why was Muna beginning to believe that the ronin could have been his father?
3. Why did Fukuji say, “The proper question must be, what do you think of yourself?” Why did Muna respond the way he did?
4. Do you think Muna’s lie to Muratani was justified? Why or why not? Is not telling the truth ever justified? Give examples to describe under what circumstances not telling the truth is justified.
5. How was the beating compared to Fukuji’s trade and skill? Why did the author choose to make the comparison at this time?
6. Why did Muna want the pledge from the ronin? Why did Muna just give the sword to Takanobu out of friendship and gratitude?
7. Why did the woodcutter call Muna a ronin? Why did this meeting cause him to be more uneasy?
8. What was Muna concerned about at the end of Chapter 13?
9. Why didn’t Muna just use the sword to dig the trench?
10. Why title Chapter 13 “The Forgotten God”?
11. How would you have approached a relationship with Takanobu? Would you have wanted to stay with him rather than the sword smith? Why or why not?
1. When did Fukuji first suspect that Muna had stolen the sword?

2. Who was the “creature” inside the forge?

3. Why did Fukuji deny that the sword had been taken when Takanobu offered to get it back?

4. What is the contradiction in “an ordinary Fukuji sword”?

5. Why did Takanobu say, “An ancestry of rogues, but not a fool in the lot”?

6. Why did Takanobu offer to give Muna to Fukuji?

7. What name would you have given Muna to signify his move into adulthood? Why?

8. Why did Muratani offer to help Fukuji? What was his plan?

9. What was the history behind the chrysanthemum tattoo? Why did Lord Kiyomori tell Fukuji?

10. Fukuji was called a hypocrite by Kiyomori. What do you think a hypocrite is, and have you ever known one?

11. Why wouldn’t Fukuji make a sword for Lord Kiyomori? What favor was Kiyomori willing to do to get a sword make by Fukuji?

12. Explain “Muna was not some metal the sword smith could pound into his own design.”

13. Chapter 15 was titled “Death of Dreams”? Why?

14. Why did Muna decide to return the stolen sword? Explain “through fire the spirit is forged.” Why did Fukuji choose these words to inscribe on the sword?

15. Will Muna seek his father again? Why or why not? Will Fukuji ask Lord Kiyomori to help them find the true identification of Muna’s father?

16. How did Fukuji see Muna as Mt. Fuji?

17. Fukuji’s trade is one of perfection. What other occupations are so exacting? What skills does a sword smith need?