

**BOOK CLUB KIT**

The background features a dense, repeating pattern of stylized yellow flowers and leaves on a purple field. In the center, a yellow dragon is depicted with its body coiled, its head raised, and its wings partially spread. The dragon's scales are finely detailed with a grid-like pattern.

**THE  
PUZZLE  
BOX**

**A NOVEL**

**DANIELLE  
TRUSSONI**

# A LETTER FROM AUTHOR DANIELLE TRUSSONI

I'm often asked how I came to write *The Puzzle Box*.

The story has many inspirations, but the seed of the novel took root in my twenties, when I lived in Japan for two years as a high school English teacher in a village in Kyushu, Japan. I was part of the JET program, which placed native English speakers in Japanese schools so that students would have a chance to hear English on a regular basis. I was assigned “teachers’ housing,” a small apartment in a building next to a rice paddy. My village had a grocery store, an onsen public bath (which I used all the time because my apartment had no hot running water), a small tea shop, a pachinko parlor, and a few small restaurants. It was 45 minutes by bus to the nearest medium-sized town.

I'd never been to Japan before, and I loved it the minute I arrived. Every day, I interacted with Japanese kids, and through them I learned an enormous amount about Japanese culture. I taught classes every morning, which left my afternoons free. I was an aspiring writer, and I spent these afternoons in the library, working to transform story ideas into a living, breathing novel. Over the course of my first year in Japan, I wrote the pages of what would eventually be my first book: *Falling Through the Earth*.

I spent a lot of time with the Japanese teachers at my school. One of the teachers heard that I was interested in learning a martial art, and soon I was studying wa-do in the school dojo. By the time I left Japan, I'd earned a brown belt. I took classes in Japanese calligraphy, Ikebana, Japanese language, but, more important, I was learning a way of seeing the world that revolved around community, routine, and education. These years were transformative not only because I developed a writing routine, and was adopted into a culture I loved, but because in my second year in Japan, my son Alexander was born. By the time I left Japan, I was a writer and a mother.

I've wanted to write about Japan for two decades but couldn't quite find the right story until *The Puzzle Box*. I felt that it was the perfect way to incorporate what I'd learned in Japan with a propulsive, panoramic story. It also allowed me to incorporate elements of Japanese culture and history that I'd discovered while living in Japan—Shinto religion, the Onna-Bugeisha female samurai, and the Imperial family's drama of succession.


All these elements, and many more, became part of *The Puzzle Box*. Thank you for reading my novel and I hope you'll reach out and let me know what you think!



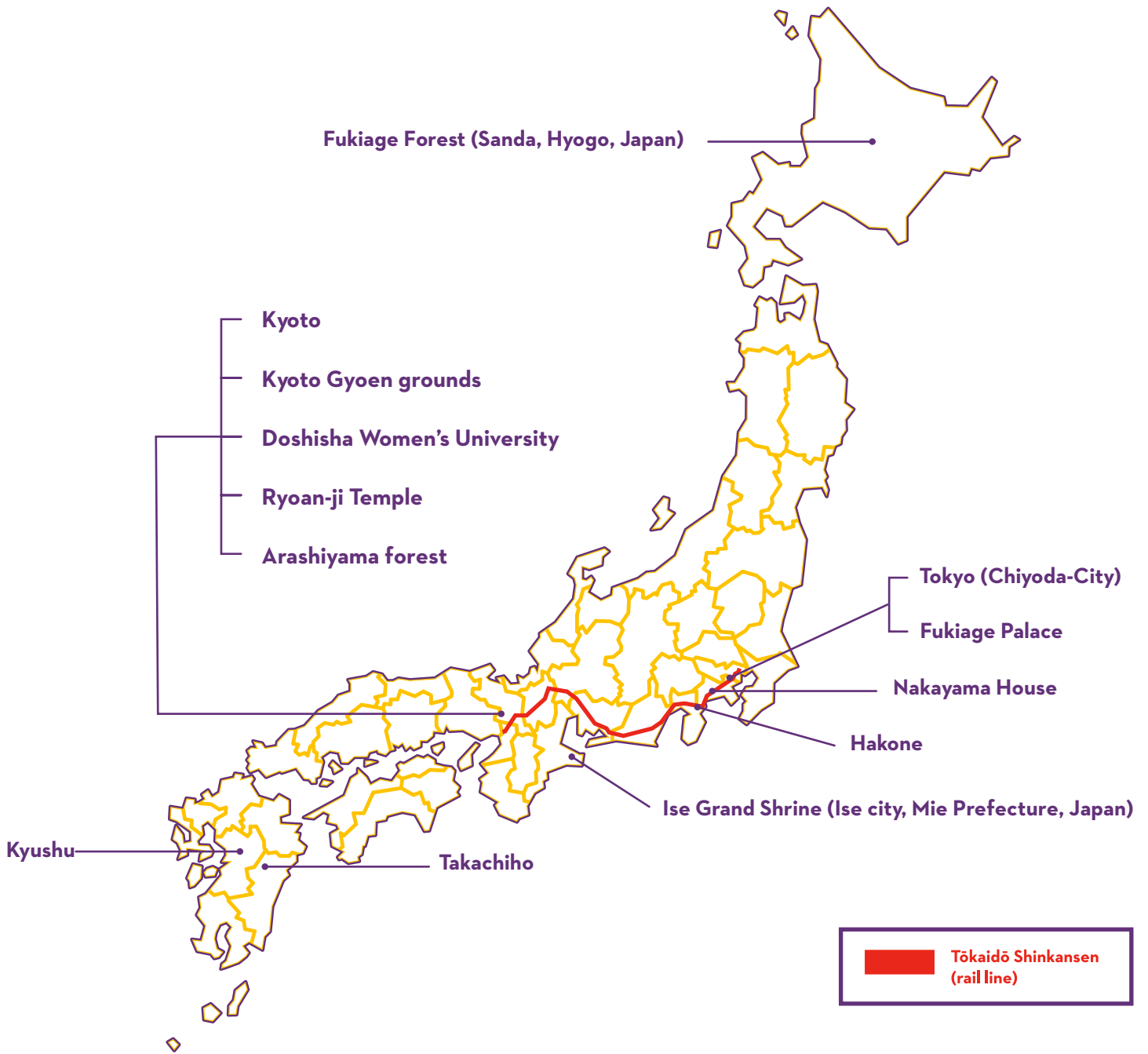
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# DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

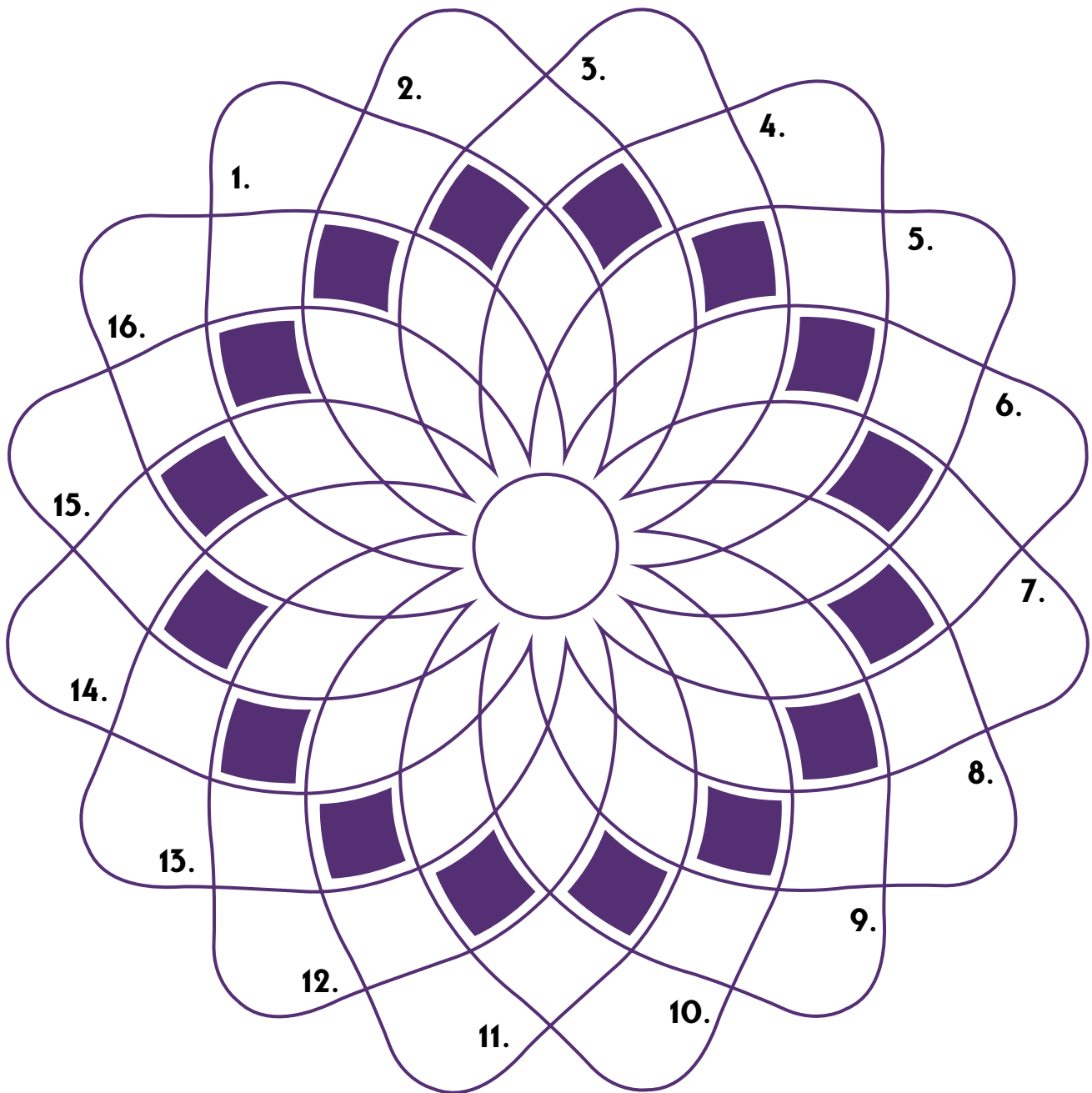
1. How does Mike Brink's unique ability with puzzles influence his character and decisions? What are some key moments that highlight his growth?
  2. How does the author build suspense and intrigue throughout the story? What techniques does she use to keep readers engaged?
  3. What did you think about the setting? What knowledge of Japan did you have before reading, and how did the book challenge or support it?
  4. What did you think of Ume and Sakura? How did their relationship evolve throughout the story? What impact does it have on the narrative?
  5. The novel weaves in elements of history and culture. How do these aspects enhance the story? Are there specific historical or cultural references that you found particularly interesting or relevant?
  6. What are the main conflicts in the novel, and how are they resolved? Were there any resolutions that surprised you or felt particularly satisfying?
  7. How do themes of female leadership, expertise, and power play out in the story? How do these themes affect the female characters and their actions?
  8. How do puzzles and games function within the narrative? Are they merely plot devices, or do they hold deeper significance for the characters and themes?
  9. What were some of your favorite moments or scenes in the book? Why did they stand out to you?
  10. Are there any recurring symbols or motifs in the novel? How do they contribute to the overall themes and messages of the story?
  11. Based on the novel's ending, what do you think might happen next for the characters? Are there any unresolved questions or potential future developments you would like to see explored?
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# THE PUZZLE BOX: MAP



# CHRYSANTHEMUM PUZZLE

It was a crossword puzzle, a puzzle within a puzzle,  
a delicious temptation custom-made for Mike Brink.



Designed by Brendan Emmett Quigley

# CHRYSANTHEMUM PUZZLE

It was a crossword puzzle, a puzzle within a puzzle,  
a delicious temptation custom-made for Mike Brink.

## Clockwise

1. Lower-leg areas
2. Window parts
3. For profit university of Naperville, Illinois
4. Big Houses?
5. Beginning of many website addresses
6. Sudden outpouring
7. Eager to get started
8. Miracle worker?
9. Sought the love of
10. Orthopedic surgeon's focus
11. It's a little over a yard in Scotland Yard
12. Leatherman collection
13. Dwarf's name
14. Island republic between Italy and Libya
15. \_\_\_-mouthed
16. In a clever, deceptive, or unscrupulous way

## Counter Clockwise

1. Gray-colored
2. Taxonomic ranks between kingdoms and classes
3. Every 24 hours
4. Female donkey
5. Those with plenty
6. Mixes things (up)
7. In an appropriate way
8. Photographs, briefly
9. Neighborhood of southern Los Angeles
10. Idaho's capital
11. Crescent-shape
12. You'd better believe it
13. Lavished love (on)
14. Rolling tracts of marshy land
15. \_\_\_ syrup
16. Tennis great Monica

