

How do you Live - recommended by Sam Becker

How do you Live? Genzaburo Yoshino

Yoshino (1899 - 1981) was a writer, editor and journalist. In 1935 he was appointed editor in chief of the 16 book series *A Library for Young Japanese Nationals*. This is the final book in the series and has gone on to become one of Japan's best loved classics.

The english edition was only published in 2021.

The book is about a school boy called Copper, his experiences and thoughts, and letters written to him in a notebook by his uncle, reflecting on philosophical and ethical matters.

The book explores his growing awareness of himself and the world, mostly through relationships with his school friends. The letters from his uncle explore deeper theme - although some sections do seem slightly of their time and place (eg. discussion of great men of history focuses on Napoleon) and have a certain earnestness which I like but isn't always popular nowadays.

The book is a gentle read - nothing of great importance or drama happens other than in Copper's small world - but it shares a similar luminosity with other classic books like *The Little Prince*. There is something about these simple books that force you to look at simple but profound questions - how to live a good life? how to be kind? - and review them anew.

I also read Gaiman's foreword (below) and the short introductory chapter, to give everyone a feel for the tone of the book.

shing,

group of companies
randomhouse.com

ce

U KA

tarō Yoshino

ten, Publishers, Tokyo.

er Books, an imprint of
gement with the copyright
gh Japan UNI Agency, Inc.,
l, NY.

tified as the author of this
ns and Patents Act 1988

ng Readers, an imprint of
f Workman Publishing

Navasky
aiman

e from the British Library

ys Ltd, Elcograf S.p.A.

quin Random House Ireland,
Dublin D02YH68.

is committed to a sustainable
eaders and our planet. This book
ship Council® certified paper.

Foreword

This is such a strange book, and such a wise book. I wish I had been given it as a small boy, but I suspect I would have found it puzzling or even dull: a book-length essay about how we live our lives, interrupted by the story of a pre-war schoolboy in Japan dealing with friendship and bullying; or a story about growing up, bravery, cowardice, social class and finding out who you are, interrupted by essays about scientific thought and personal ethics. Sometimes the joy of books that seem to contain opposing elements is realising that without both things, you would have a lesser book. (There's a book called *Moby-Dick* by Herman Melville that contains a story about a doomed hunt for a white whale and also contains essays about whales and

whale hunting. Some people like one part of the story, and some like the other. For me, the joy is that the book contains both parts, pulling at each other, each informing the other side, and that if you removed either part you would have a less interesting book.)

I read *How Do You Live?* now, in this sparkling new translation, because Hayao Miyazaki is basing his next film on it. It's a film he has said that he is making for his grandson, as a gift to the future.

The finest time I spent with Mr Miyazaki was in the building he was making for the children of the neighborhood around Studio Ghibli, where he makes his cartoons. It was built of wood, and there was a bridge across it, inside, too small for adults to cross, but the perfect size for children to go exploring. It was a space for the whole person.

Miyazaki makes films for whole people and makes films about consequences. When I worked on the English-language script of his film *Princess Mononoke*, I was astonished when I finally realised that everything in the film was about consequences of acts and actions: seemingly unrelated events are actually the consequences of other events or actions, and everyone in the film is acting according to what they believe to be their best interests without realising that what they do affects everyone else.

In *How Do You Live?*, Copper, our hero, and his uncle are our guides in science, in ethics, in thinking. And on

the way they take us,
in 1937, to the heart
selves about the way
betrayal and learn abo
me fear, and how we
think we are, and we
with it. We will learn
most of all, we will le
writer Theodore Stur

Books like this are
is making his film, no
four years after it was
can be read in Engl
winning translation.

f the story, and
the book con-
informing the
part you would

sparkling new
asing his next
making for his

zaki was in the
f the neighbor-
es his cartoons.
across it, inside,
ct size for chil-
whole person.

ple and makes
on the English-
monoke, I was
everything in the
actions: seem-
consequences of
e film is acting
ir best interests
everyone else.

o, and his uncle
inking. And on

the way they take us, through a school story set in Japan in 1937, to the heart of the questions we need to ask ourselves about the way we live our lives. We will experience betrayal and learn about how to make tofu. We will examine fear, and how we cannot always live up to who we think we are, and we learn about shame, and how to deal with it. We will learn about gravity and about cities, and most of all, we will learn to think about things—to, as the writer Theodore Sturgeon put it, *ask the next question*.

Books like this are important. I'm so glad Mr Miyazaki is making his film, not least because it means that, eighty-four years after it was written, Genzaburō Yoshino's novel can be read in English, in Bruno Navasky's gentle and winning translation, and that I got to read it.

Neil Gaiman