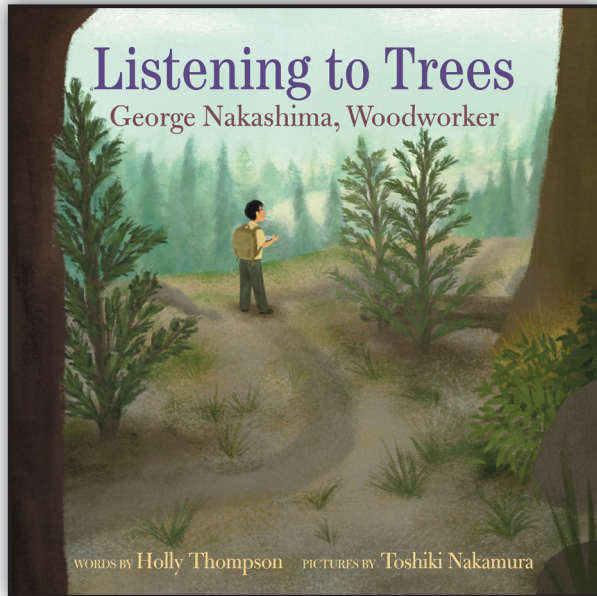


# HOLIDAY HOUSE EDUCATOR'S GUIDE



Neal Porter Books  
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## *Listening to Trees* *George Nakashima, Woodworker*

by Holly Thompson  
illustrated by Toshiki Nakamura

**An Orbis Pictus Recommended Title**

**A Eureka! Nonfiction Children's  
Book Gold Award Winner**

### ABOUT THE BOOK

**A poetic and moving picture book biography celebrating the life and work of the visionary Japanese-American woodworker George Nakashima.**

Growing up in the Pacific Northwest, George Nakashima began a love story with trees that grew throughout his

remarkable life as an architect, designer, and woodworker. During World War II, George, with his wife, Marion, and their baby daughter, endured incarceration in Minidoka prison camp, where he drew comfort from the discipline of woodworking. Once free, George dedicated the rest of his life to crafting furniture from fallen or discarded trees, giving fresh purpose and dignity to each tree, and promoting a more peaceful world.

Author Holly Thompson narrates Nakashima's life using haibun, a combination of haiku and prose, which twines smoothly through Toshiki Nakamura's earthy illustrations. A foreword by Nakashima's daughter Mira and robust back matter will deepen young readers' understanding of woodworking and poetry and offer added insights to the work of a master artisan.

### DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

- Study the first three double-page spreads. Why do you think George Nakashima feels at home in the woods? What is forestry? What is architecture? How do you think George might use his studies of forestry and architecture in his furniture making?
- George Nakashima goes to Japan to work with an American architect in Tokyo. Note the photographs of his furniture at the end of the book. How might George's Japan work and travel experience have influenced his furniture designs?



- Describe the simple life that George Nakashima lives while in India. Why do you think the simple life suits him? Explain why he must return to the United States.
- How do George and his family experience racism during World War II? Describe Minidoka, the prison camp where the Nakashimas were sent. How does George's love for woodworking help him endure the camp? Discuss the skills he develops while in the camp. Explain how the Nakashima family winds up in Bucks County, Pennsylvania.
- Point out the home the Nakashima family built for themselves. What materials do they use? What features do you notice?
- How is George Nakashima's love of wood revealed in the book? What do you think "listening to trees" means? Explain his belief in "giving noble trees new life." How have his children carried on his love of wood and furniture making?

Guide created by Pat Scales, retired school librarian and independent consultant, Greenville, South Carolina.

Learn more about author Holly Thompson's research for *Listening to Trees* and practice writing your own haibun with Holly's blog post on *DiverseVerse* at <https://bit.ly/DiverseVerse>.



Illustration © 2024 by Toshiki Nakamura from *Listening to Trees* by Holly Thompson

## ABOUT THE CREATORS



**Holly Thompson** is the author of two picture books in verse: *Twilight Chant*, an NCTE Notable Poetry Book, and *One Wave at a Time*, a story about grief and healing. Her picture book *The Wakame Gatherers* was an NCSS Notable Social Studies Trade Book for Young People and featured in NCT Asia programs. *Listening to Trees: George Nakashima, Woodworker* is her first picture book with Holiday House. A graduate of the NYU Creative Writing Program, she writes poetry, fiction, and nonfiction for children, teens, and adults, and teaches creative writing in Japan, the U.S., and places in between. Learn more at [HatBooks.com](https://www.hatbooks.com).



**Toshiki Nakamura** is an animator and children's book illustrator. Born and raised in Japan, he moved to San Francisco right after earning a B.A. in politics. He graduated from Academy of Art University, where he studied concept art and visual development. He is the illustrator of *Listening to Trees: George Nakashima, Woodworker* by Holly Thompson. He lives in Kanagawa, Japan. Learn more at [ArtofToshi.com](https://www.artoftoshi.com).



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