



Collegedunia NCERT Notes

The Ultimate NCERT Revision Guide for Class 12 English – Vistas

The Enemy Class 12 Notes

Chapter 4 · Vistas · by Pearl S. Buck
NCERT 2026-27 Syllabus · 12th CBSE Board

Also see for this chapter: [NCERT Solutions](#)

Contents

1 Introduction and Chapter Snapshot	2
1.1 Author at a Glance	2
1.2 Story in One Breath	3
1.3 Setting at a Glance	3
2 Plot Summary – Four Acts	4
2.1 Act One: Discovery on the Beach	4
2.2 Act Two: The Operation	5
2.3 Act Three: The Servants Leave and the General Promises	5
2.4 Act Four: The Escape	6
3 Visual Story Map	7
3.1 Timeline of Recovery and Escape	7
4 Character Map	8
4.1 Sadao at a Glance – the Three Identities	8
4.2 Dr Sadao Hoki – the Moral Protagonist	8
4.3 Hana – the Moral Hinge	8
4.4 Tom – the Wounded American	9
4.5 The Old General – Self-Absorbed, Not Compassionate	9
4.6 The Three Servants	10
5 Sadao’s Inner Conflict – Doctor vs Patriot	10
5.1 The Two Trainings in Collision	11

5.2 Sadao's Conflict in Five Beats	11
6 Hana's Moral Hinge	12
6.1 Three Causes of Hana's Sympathy	12
6.2 The Two Hardest Acts	13
7 Themes – The Theme Stack	13
8 The Three Mechanisms that Override Wartime Prejudice	14
9 The Doctor's Final Solution	15
9.1 Sadao's Decision Tree	15
9.2 Was It the Best Possible Solution?	16
10 Comparison with A. J. Cronin's 'Birth'	16
11 Films and Novels with Similar Themes (Q8)	17
12 Glossary of Key Terms	18
13 Quote Bank	18
14 Reading with Insight – Model Answer Skeletons	19
15 Board Pointers – 2020–2025 Patterns	20
16 Common Mistakes – Errors that Lose Marks	20
17 Strategic Reading – Why Buck Wrote It This Way	21

Introduction and Chapter Snapshot

The Enemy by the American Nobel-laureate **Pearl S. Buck** is the fourth chapter of the Class 12 Vistas supplementary reader. The story is set on the Japanese coast during the Second World War. **Dr Sadao Hoki**, a Japanese surgeon trained in the United States, finds a wounded young American sailor washed up at the doorstep of his cliff-top house. The man is an escaped prisoner of war. Sadao must choose between his oath as a doctor (which demands that he save the wounded man) and his duty as a patriot in wartime Japan (which demands that he hand the man over to the police). The story follows the careful, hidden surgery, the servants' revolt, the General's tangled promise of assassins, and Sadao's final, quiet decision to row the recovered American to a small offshore island.

1.1 Author at a Glance

Pearl S. Buck (1892–1973) was an American novelist who spent most of her first forty years in China, the daughter of missionaries. She won the **Pulitzer Prize** in 1932 for *The Good Earth* and the **Nobel Prize in Literature** in 1938 – the first American woman to receive it. Her writing

is known for its sympathetic, ground-level portraits of ordinary people caught inside large historical pressures: peasants in famine, women under feudal marriage, soldiers and surgeons under war. *The Enemy* was first published in *Collier's* magazine in 1942, during the Pacific War, when the United States and Japan had been at war for less than a year. Buck's choice to write the story from a Japanese surgeon's point of view, in the middle of a war in which the two countries had declared each other the enemy, is itself part of the story's meaning.

Why this chapter matters in Class 12

- Vistas's central story on the conflict between professional ethics and national loyalty; almost certain source for the 6-mark Long Answer in Section C.
- One of the few Vistas chapters set outside India and outside the present day; tests the student's ability to read a translated cultural frame (wartime Japan, Bushido honour, American medical training).
- Pairs naturally with A. J. Cronin's *Birth* from the Class 11 Snapshots reader – both stories about a young doctor whose technical skill becomes a moral act.

1.2 Story in One Breath

A wounded young American washes ashore at a Japanese surgeon's doorstep during the war. The surgeon, recognising him as an escaped prisoner of the U.S. Navy, hides him, removes the bullet from his back, and nurses him back to health while his servants and his country expect him to hand the man over to die. The General, who relies on Sadao medically, promises assassins; the assassins never come. Sadao finally rows the recovered American to a small offshore island, gives him a torch, food and water, and tells him to wait for a Korean fishing boat. The American escapes. Sadao, alone on the veranda at the end, stares at the dark sea and wonders: "*Strange, I wonder why I could not kill him?*"

Five-Word Anchor

BEACH – BULLET – SERVANTS – GENERAL – ISLAND. If you remember these five words in order, you can reconstruct the entire story – the wounded American on the BEACH, the BULLET removed by Sadao, the SERVANTS who refuse and leave, the GENERAL who promises assassins and then forgets, and the ISLAND where Sadao rows Tom to escape.

1.3 Setting at a Glance

The story is set on a small stretch of the **Japanese coast**, in a low square stone house built on rocks above a narrow beach outlined with bent pines. The setting matters at three levels. *Geographically* – the house is isolated; fishing villages are a mile or two away on either side; the surf is spiked with rocks; a small offshore island lies within rowing distance, near enough that no one has bothered to fortify it. *Historically* – it is the middle of the Pacific War; Japan is in an "absolute state" (the General's phrase); harbouring an American means death. *Personally*

– the house was Sadao’s father’s, kept rigorously Japanese, and Sadao lives there as a Japanese surgeon who has also been deeply marked by his American training.

Why the cliff-top house matters

The geography of the house is not decoration. The isolation makes the secret nursing possible (no fisherman comes by, the mists screen the beach). The offshore island makes the final escape plausible (rowable in one night, water too deep to fortify, on the route Korean fishing boats already take). And the father’s insistence that the house remain Japanese – floor mats, sliding partitions, the bedroom kept exactly as the old man left it – is the inherited Japanese frame against which Sadao’s American medical training will collide. Buck builds the story’s central conflict into the setting before any character speaks.

Plot Summary – Four Acts

The story has no formal chapter divisions, but it falls cleanly into four acts. Reading them separately is the easiest way to remember the plot for any answer.

2.1 Act One: Discovery on the Beach

The story opens with Sadao and his wife **Hana** standing on the veranda of their cliff-top house. The mists are rising off the ocean. They see something black flung out of the breakers – a man, who staggers a few steps, falls on his face, and lies still. Sadao runs down to him, Hana following. They find a young man with long matted yellow hair and a rough yellow beard, in wet rags of clothing. Hana whispers: “A *white man!*”

Sadao examines him. There is an old, partly-healed gun wound in the right side of his lower back; the wound has been reopened by the rocks; the bullet is still inside. From the cap – “U.S. Navy” lettered in faint paint – they identify him as a sailor from an American warship. He is an **escaped prisoner of war**. Sadao’s first instinct, spoken aloud, is to put the man back into the sea. Hana agrees. But neither of them moves. The trained reflex to staunch a wound takes over: Sadao packs the wound with sea-moss to stop the bleeding. They decide that they cannot throw a wounded man back, and that they must carry him into the house and then, formally, turn him over to the police.

The discovery in four images

- **The mist.** Curled, hiding, then revealing – the visual register that the story has begun.
- **The black shape.** Flung out of the breakers; almost not a person yet.
- **The U.S. Navy cap.** The fact that converts the wounded man into the enemy.
- **The trained hands.** Sadao’s hands packing the wound while his mouth is still saying “put him back”.

2.2 Act Two: The Operation

Sadao and Hana carry the unconscious American to the empty bedroom that had been Sadao's father's. They explain to the three servants – the old gardener, the cook, and **Yumi** (the baby's nursemaid) – that they intend to give the man over to the police, but that he must first be washed and operated on. The servants are frightened and disapproving. The old gardener mutters that “the white man ought to die”; the cook says contemptuously that the young master is too proud of his surgical skill to let any life go; Yumi flatly refuses to wash the prisoner.

Hana, in distress and pride, washes the white man herself, although she has *never washed a man before except her own husband*. Sadao fetches his surgical bag, lays out a sterilised towel on the floor of the *tokonoma* alcove, and operates. The bullet is deep, dangerously near the kidney. Hana holds the ether cone, although she has never given an anaesthetic before. The smell of the ether overcomes her; she runs out and is sick in the garden, then comes back and continues. Sadao extracts the bullet “with the cleanest and most precise of incisions”. The man quivers but does not regain consciousness. He mutters a few English words: “*Guts. . . They got. . . my guts. . .*”

Exam shortcut – the operation scene

Three details are repeated across Board papers: (1) the wound was on the *right side of the lower back*; (2) the anaesthetic used was *ether*, given by Hana for the first time; (3) the bullet was lodged near the *kidney*. If you remember these three, you can answer any factual question on this scene.

2.3 Act Three: The Servants Leave and the General Promises

For seven days, the household “drags on”. The servants remain in their work but their eyes are cold. Hana overhears the cook and the gardener saying their master ought to give the man up. On the morning of the seventh day, the three servants leave together, their belongings tied in large square cotton kerchiefs. Hana, who has never done housework, pays them off, thanks them, and lets them go.

That same afternoon a **messenger in official uniform** comes to the door. Hana's hands go cold – she believes Sadao has been reported. But the messenger has only come to summon Sadao to the palace: the **old General** is in pain again. Relieved beyond measure, Hana laughs at her own fear. Sadao goes to the palace.

At the palace Sadao confesses to the General that an American prisoner is in his house. The General, who depends on Sadao medically (the General once took a degree at Princeton; “so few Japanese have”), is not angry. He proposes a private solution: he will send two of his **private assassins** to the house at night. They are skilled, silent, and “know the trick of inward bleeding”. They can even remove the body. Sadao should simply leave the outer partition of the white man's room open while he sleeps. Sadao agrees, thinking of Hana.

The assassins, the General promises, will come any night. The promise will not be kept.

A note on “private assassins”

The phrase is the General’s, not Buck’s. In the wartime Japan of the story, an official war machine and an informal personal one ran side by side: a high-ranking general had retainers who would carry out a quiet killing without the official record of a court martial. Buck names the practice without endorsing it. The reader is asked to register the moral cost of even agreeing to such a plan – the same hands that healed will, by silence, “leave the partition open”.

2.4 Act Four: The Escape

The next nights pass. Sadao listens for the rustle of footsteps in the garden. No one comes. The young American, meanwhile, is recovering visibly. On the third day after the operation he is sitting up; in a fortnight the stitches are out and he is nearly as well as ever. He introduces himself, with a flash of his *old self*: “Anyway, let me tell you that my name is **Tom**.” He thanks Sadao warmly – “Sure, I know that. . . If all the Japs were like you there wouldn’t have been a war.”

After three nights of waiting for the assassins who do not come, Sadao decides to act himself. He tells Tom that there is a small offshore island, uninhabited because it is submerged in storms; that this is not the season of storms; that Korean fishing boats pass close to the island because the water is deep there; and that Tom must row to the island, hide, and wait for a passing boat. Sadao spends a day quietly buying food, bottled water, two quilts at a pawnshop, and Japanese clothes. After dark he drags his own stout boat down to the shore, loads it, and ties it to a post. He gives Tom a flashlight – his own – with a strict signal: *two flashes* the instant the sun drops over the horizon means the food has run out; *one flash*, on the same signal, means Tom is all right but still there; *no signal in darkness*, ever, and *no fire*, ever (a fire would be seen from the coast).

Tom, dressed in Japanese clothes, with a black cloth wrapped over his blond head, shakes Sadao’s hand without a word and walks down to the boat. From the dark beach, Sadao sees the torch flash twice in the garden as Tom finds his way; later, from the dark sea, he sees one more flash from the island and knows Tom has landed safely. Then the partition closes; Sadao sleeps.

A week later Sadao is called back to the palace – the General has had an emergency gall-bladder attack and Sadao operates. After the General has recovered, Sadao formally reports that the prisoner escaped. The General, who had completely forgotten his promise to send assassins, admits: “*The truth is, I thought of nothing but myself.*” He insists this was not lack of patriotism or dereliction of duty, only personal preoccupation. He thanks Sadao for his silence and promises a reward.

That night, alone on the veranda, Sadao stares out at the dark sea where the island is. There is no flash from it. Tom has gone. Sadao remembers the white faces he had known in America – the silly talkative professor’s wife, the dirty old landlady who had nursed him through influenza, his old teacher of anatomy who had thundered about the surgeon’s duty. He remembers Tom’s

youthful, haggard face. The story’s last line is a question to himself:

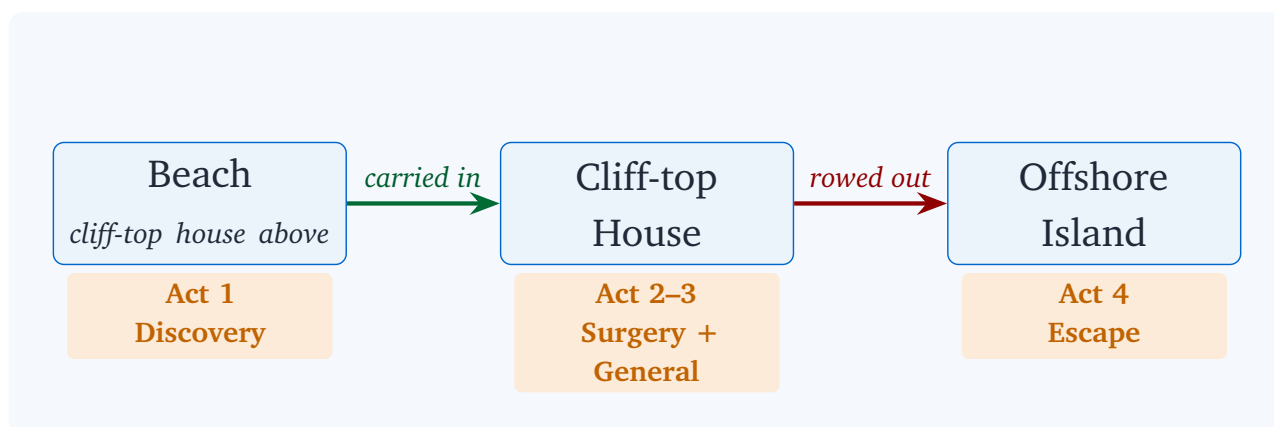
Closing line

“Strange,” he thought. “I wonder why I could not kill him?”
— Dr Sadao Hoki, final paragraph

Visual Story Map

The plot of *The Enemy* is built on a single sweep of the coast: **beach** → **house** → **island**. The diagram below maps the four acts onto that geography.

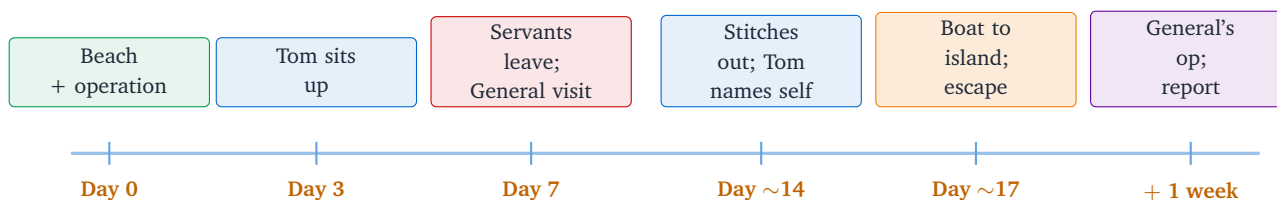
The Enemy – Geography of the Four Acts



3.1 Timeline of Recovery and Escape

The story does not flag its calendar overtly, but the dates and gaps are exact. The timeline below is the sequence the Board factual-MCQ questions test against.

Recovery and Escape – Timeline



Character Map

4.1 Sadao at a Glance – the Three Identities

Three Identities Inside One Man

Japanese Son

father's house; arranged marriage; the floor mats

American-trained Surgeon

anatomy professor; the doctor's oath; trained reflex

Husband and Father

Hana; two children; the cliff-top house

4.2 Dr Sadao Hoki – the Moral Protagonist

Sadao is a Japanese surgeon, sent at twenty-two to America for medical training and returned at thirty. He has become famous as a surgeon and as a scientist; he is perfecting a discovery that will render wounds entirely clean. He was kept back from being sent abroad with the troops for two reasons: the discovery, and the General's reliance on him for a continuing medical condition. He is married to Hana and is the father of two children – a small boy of nearly three months when the story opens, and another older child.

Sadao's central feature is the *collision* inside him between two trainings: the Japanese inheritance (his father's house, the Japanese floor mats, the marriage arranged in the Japanese way) and the American medical training (the doctor's oath, the anatomy professor's thunder about complete knowledge of the human body, the years of professional habit). The story is the test of which training wins.

Sadao – a four-line character note

- **Skilled.** "With the cleanest and most precise of incisions, the bullet was out."
- **Patriotic in his self-image.** "All Americans are my enemy."
- **Honest with himself.** "I do not know why I am doing it."
- **Reflective at the end.** "I wonder why I could not kill him?"

4.3 Hana – the Moral Hinge

Hana is Sadao's wife. She met him in America, at an American professor's house (the small rooms, the bad food, the voluble wife are remembered specifically by both of them). Sadao would not let himself fall in love with her until he was sure she was Japanese in race – his father would not have accepted any other daughter-in-law. She is the moral hinge of the story: when the servants refuse, she washes the prisoner herself; when the ether sickens her, she vomits in the garden and comes back; when the messenger arrives in uniform she is terrified, but she will not let her face show it.

♥ Why This Matters

Hana is not a passive figure. The exam question “what made Hana sympathetic to the wounded American?” is the second-most-asked Long Answer on this chapter. The correct answer is not “she was a kind woman” – it is the *chain of three causes*: (1) her American education, where she lived among Americans as people and not as a category; (2) her years as a doctor’s wife, in which the clinical frame has become internal; (3) her personal sense of honour, which will not let her show fear even when she feels it. Mark the three causes in any Hana answer.

4.4 Tom – the Wounded American

The American is a very young sailor (“barely seventeen” in Sadao’s own estimate – “not yet twenty-five” on the operating table), an escaped prisoner of war from the U.S. Navy. His name is given only once in the whole story – on the day he says, with a flash of his old impulsive self, “*Anyway, let me tell you that my name is Tom.*” He has been tortured by his captors: deep red scars on his neck, just under the ear, remain crimson when he is frightened, “like an animal’s”. He is brave (he will not thank Sadao prematurely), grateful (“*If all the Japs were like you there wouldn’t have been a war*”), and recovers fast.

Easy mistake on Tom

Many students write that the American sailor is *unnamed*. He is not – Buck gives him a name once, deliberately, the day Hana is arranging the flowers in the veranda. The name is **Tom**. Hana does not even acknowledge the name. Sadao never speaks it. The single naming carries the whole weight of the prisoner becoming, for one moment, a particular person rather than a category.

4.5 The Old General – Self-Absorbed, Not Compassionate

The General is the highest-ranking authority figure in the story. He is Sadao’s patient – a continuing condition, plus the emergency gall-bladder attack. He is politically powerful, personally frail, and (the story takes care to note) physically a coward about his own pain. He offers private assassins. He forgets to send them. When the matter comes back to him a week later he is amazed at his own forgetting: “*so I did! But you see, I was suffering a good deal. The truth is, I thought of nothing but myself.*” He insists this was not disloyalty, only self-preoccupation. The General is not a villain; he is a self-absorbed patient.

The most common mistake on the General

Do *not* write that the General spared the prisoner “out of compassion” or “because he secretly admired Sadao”. The text does not support either reading. Buck is careful: the General forgot because he was in pain and “thought of nothing but myself”. The

American's life is saved by the General's self-absorption, not by his mercy. The moral point is that the rescue is *accidental*, not heroic on the General's part.

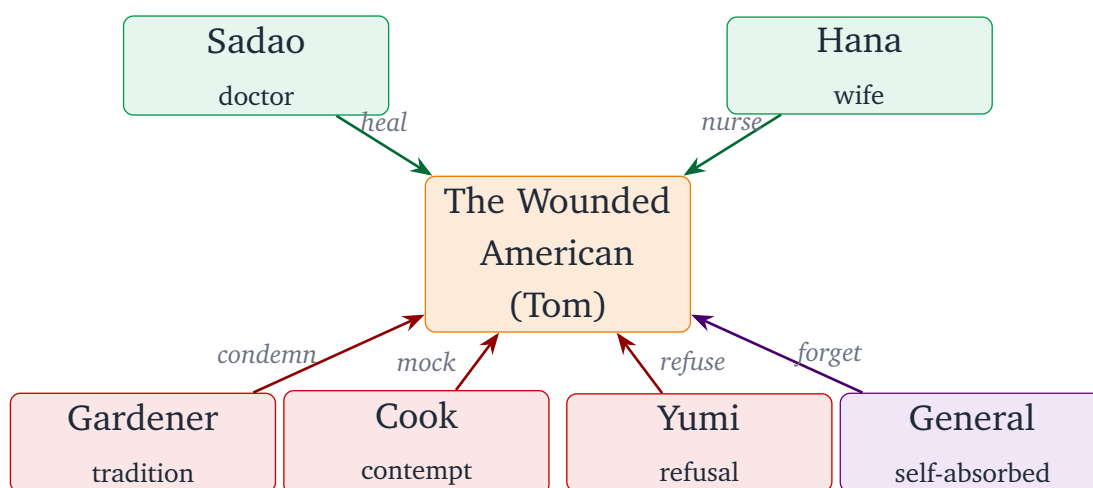
4.6 The Three Servants

The three servants speak the public morality of wartime Japan – the inherited certainty that an enemy is an enemy and the master ought to know that.

- **The old gardener** – has worked for the family since Sadao was a boy; a specialist in moss who made one of the finest moss gardens in Japan for Sadao's father. He says bluntly: “The master ought not to heal what the gun did and what the sea did, they will take revenge on us.”
- **The cook** – mocks Sadao's surgical pride: “That young master is so proud of his skill to save life that he saves any life.”
- **Yumi** – the baby's nursemaid, of whom the children are fond. Yumi refuses to wash the white man (“I have never washed a white man and I will not wash so dirty a one now”), but she will not say a word against the master or report him; she is a poor person and “it is not my business.”

On the seventh morning the three leave together, belongings tied in cotton kerchiefs. Hana pays them off and thanks them. They cry; Hana, out of pride, does not. They are not antagonists; they are the chorus of ordinary Japanese opinion the story is testing against.

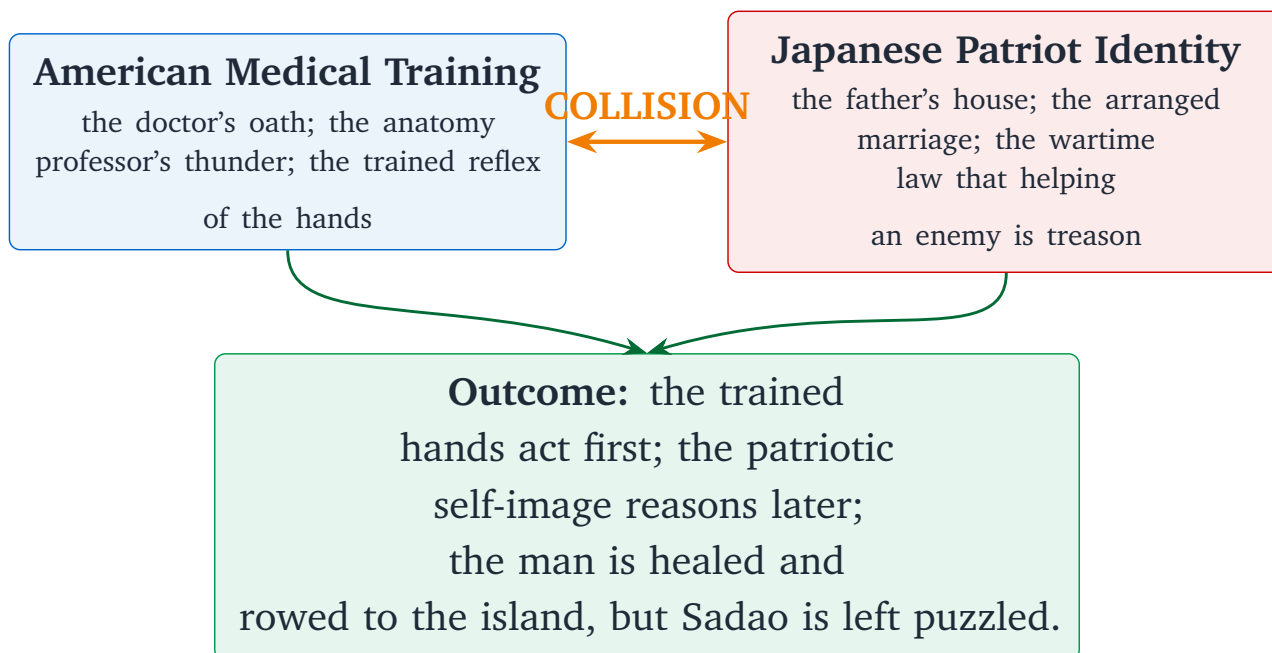
Character Map – Forces Around the Wounded Man



Sadao's Inner Conflict – Doctor vs Patriot

The central conflict of *The Enemy* is internal. It happens not between Sadao and the General, or between Sadao and the servants, but inside Sadao himself, between two trainings that the story has put inside the same man.

5.1 The Two Trainings in Collision



5.2 Sadao's Conflict in Five Beats

- **The first reflex is medical.** Sadao kneels by the man on the beach, his “trained hands seemed of their own will to be doing what they could to stanch the fearful bleeding.” The professional precedes the political.
- **The thought of returning the man to the sea.** “The best thing that we could do would be to put him back in the sea.” Sadao says it; Hana says it; neither moves.
- **The teacher's voice on the operating table.** The old American professor of anatomy who thundered: “Ignorance of the human body is the surgeon's cardinal sin. To operate without as complete knowledge of the body as if you had made it – anything less than that is murder.” This is the doctor's oath Sadao has carried out of America.
- **The face becomes a person.** “He was very young – perhaps not yet twenty-five.” Once Sadao has seen the face, the abstract enemy has become a concrete young man.
- **The final solution.** Sadao chooses escape, not delivery (which would mean Tom's death) and not murder (which the assassins were to perform). He chooses the third path, the one only he can take.

A one-line answer to “What is Sadao's conflict?”

“Sadao's surgical reflex outranks his political duty – he heals the enemy because his hands, trained in America, will not let him do otherwise; only afterwards does he ask himself why.”

Memory aid – five beats of Sadao’s conflict

R–T–V–F–E (“Read The Very First Escape”)

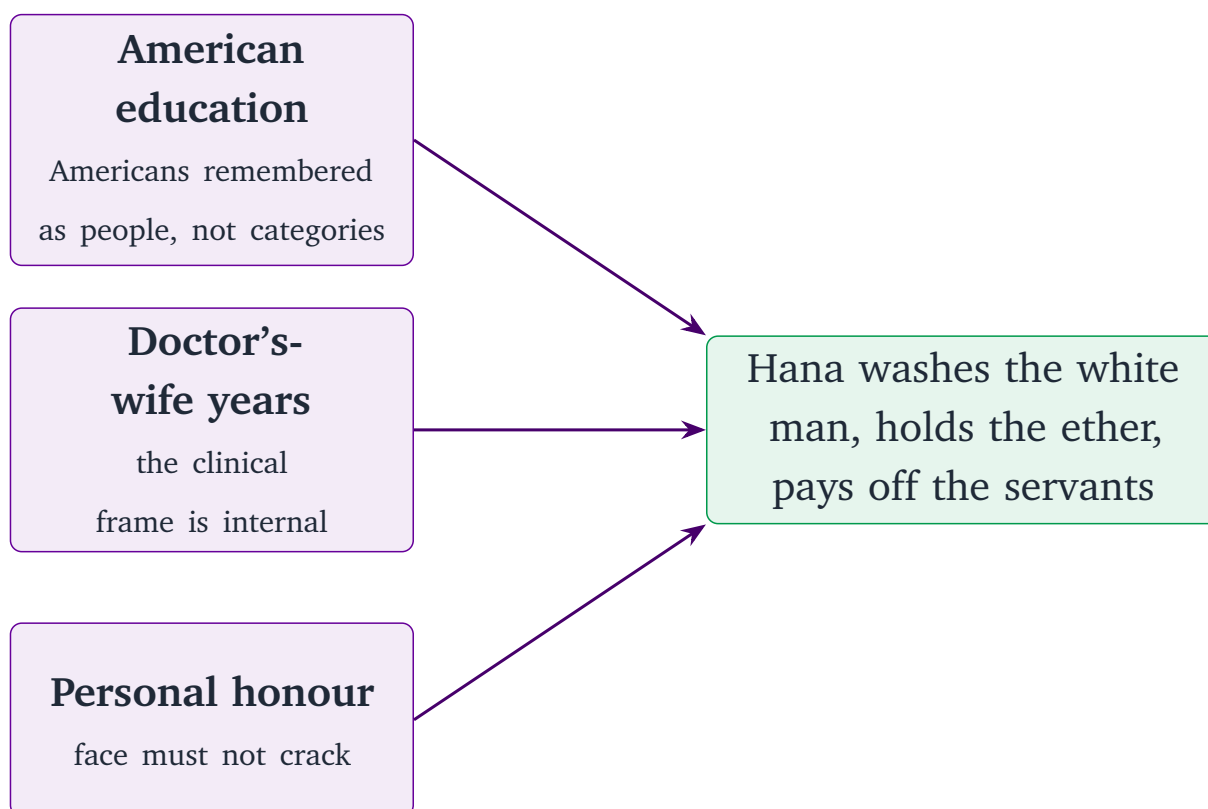
Reflex (the hands act) – **T**hought of throwing back (rejected) – **V**oice of the anatomy professor (the doctor’s oath) – **F**ace becomes a person (the concrete young man) – **E**scape via boat (Sadao’s third path).

Hana’s Moral Hinge

Hana’s arc inside the story is small in event and large in meaning. She does no surgery, gives no speeches, and is never alone in a scene that defines the plot. But she is the figure who decides, before Sadao does, that the white man will be carried into the house.

6.1 Three Causes of Hana’s Sympathy

Hana’s Three-Cause Chain



- **Lived American memory.** Hana has been a student in America. The professor’s house where she met Sadao, the small rooms, the bad food, the professor’s wife – she remembers Americans as silly, kind, particular human beings, not as a category. The memory disarms the wartime label.
- **Years as a doctor’s wife.** The clinical frame is internal to her. When Sadao says “something must be done with him,” she does not flinch. She fetches towels. She holds the ether. She

washes the man.

- **Personal honour.** When the servants leave, Hana pays them off, thanks them, and does not let her face crack. When the messenger arrives in official uniform, she is terrified but “her pride as a mistress would not allow her to show it.” She acts as if everything is normal. The Japanese sense of dignity is hers too.

6.2 The Two Hardest Acts

- **Washing the white man.** She has never washed any man except her own husband. Yumi refuses. Hana, “in the conviction of her own superiority,” bends and unties the knotted rags, dips the small clean towel into the steaming hot water, and washes his face carefully. The scene is the story’s first quiet defeat of the public prejudice.
- **Holding the ether cone.** She has never given an anaesthetic. The smell makes her sick. She runs out, retches in the garden, and comes back with the bottle and cotton in her hand. “Where is the anaesthetic?” she asks in a clear voice. The return is the story’s clearest single image of moral courage.

The doctor’s-wife motif in 20th-century fiction

Buck is one of several mid-century writers (Cronin in Britain, Sinclair Lewis with *Arrowsmith* in the U.S.) who used the doctor’s wife as a moral lens. The figure is neither professional nor passive; she is the witness, the assistant, and – when the professional code and the social code collide – the first to act. Hana is the *Vistas* instance of this larger figure. The Board examiner who asks “what made Hana sympathetic” is testing whether the student noticed the chain of three causes (American education, doctor’s-wife training, personal honour), not just the surface fact of sympathy.

Themes – The Theme Stack

The Enemy is built on a stack of overlapping themes, each one supported by specific scenes. The Board examiner expects the student to name a theme and immediately give scene-evidence.

- **Duty as doctor vs duty as patriot.** The story’s central conflict. Sadao’s hands save the man before his patriotic self-image catches up. Evidence: the trained hands packing the wound on the beach; the operation in the *tokonoma*; the closing question “why I could not kill him?”
- **The humanity beneath the wartime label.** The American becomes Tom on the day he is named; the Japanese soldier becomes a man with deep red scars on his neck; the Japanese surgeon remembers his American landlady. Evidence: the naming scene; the scars passage; the closing memory of white faces.
- **Personal honour vs public order.** The General has public order; Sadao and Hana have personal honour. Buck quietly endorses the second. Evidence: the General’s “thought of nothing but myself”; Hana’s silent paying-off of the servants.
- **Racism and the limits of nationalism.** The servants speak the public racism of wartime

Japan; the American sailors who tortured Tom enacted their own. Buck names both without sparing either. Evidence: the gardener's bluntness; the scars on Tom's neck.

- **The unheroic ending.** Sadao does not feel triumph. The General does not feel guilt. Tom escapes off-page. There is no music. Buck's chosen register is moral realism, not melodrama.

Common theme-question mistakes

- Writing that the story is "about the evils of war." It is more specific than that. It is about a particular kind of conflict inside a particular kind of professional.
- Writing that "humanity wins over patriotism." Buck does not say this so flatly. Sadao remains a Japanese patriot at the end of the story; the General remains in power; the war goes on. What wins is the doctor's oath, which is older than the war.
- Writing that "the General was kind." He was not. He was self-absorbed.

The Three Mechanisms that Override Wartime Prejudice

Buck identifies, with quiet precision, three things in Sadao and Hana that lift them above the prejudice the servants and the General assume as given.

- **A vocation older than the war.** The doctor's oath, dramatised in the anatomy professor's thunder: "Ignorance of the human body is the surgeon's cardinal sin." Medical ethics predates the modern nation-state. The hands obey the oath before the mouth obeys the slogan.
- **Lived cross-cultural memory.** Sadao and Hana have spent years in America. They remember Americans as people, not as a category. The professor's voluble wife, the bad food, the small rooms; the dirty old landlady who nursed Sadao through influenza. The specific memory disarms the abstract enemy.
- **Personal honour.** The inability to do harm with one's own hands. The closing line – "why I could not kill him?" – is the honest summary. Sadao is not sure his answer is patriotism, or kindness, or training. He is sure only that his hands would not do it.

Three Mechanisms that Override Wartime Prejudice

Vocation older than the war

the doctor's oath

"Ignorance of the human body is the surgeon's cardinal sin."

Lived cross-cultural memory

Americans as people

The professor's voluble wife; the dirty old landlady.

Personal honour

cannot kill with own hands

"I wonder why I could not kill him?"

Why this three-part list is exam gold

The 6-mark Long Answer “what makes a human being rise above narrow prejudices?” (Reading with Insight Q5) appears in four of the last six Board sittings. The expected answer is exactly the three-part list above. Each point should be opened with one line of the story-evidence. A clean three-point answer with three matched evidence-lines hits both content marks and “relevant illustration” marks.

Memory aid – three mechanisms

V–M–H (“Very Many Hands”)

Vocation older than the war (the oath) – **Memory** of Americans as people (the lived years) – **Honour**, personal (cannot kill with own hands). Three letters, three mechanisms; ready answer for Reading-with-Insight Q5.

The Doctor’s Final Solution

Sadao’s escape plan is the most concretely-worked passage in the story. Every detail in it matters because every detail represents a small constraint Sadao has thought through.

- **The boat.** Sadao’s own stout boat, dragged down to the shore after dark and tied to a post (the tide was high). Sadao uses no flashlight in loading it; the boat is darker than the sand.
- **The food and water.** Bought secretly during the day – food, bottled water, two quilts at a pawnshop. The pawnshop matters: a fresh purchase of two quilts at a regular shop would be remembered.
- **The clothes.** Sadao’s Japanese clothes for the journey, a black cloth over Tom’s blond head.
- **The island.** So near the coast that no one has bothered to fortify it; submerged in storms (so uninhabited); the water is deep, so Korean fishing boats pass close.
- **The flashlight signal.** Sadao gives Tom his own small flashlight, with one strict rule – the signal is at sunset, never in darkness. *Two flashes* = food gone; *one flash* = still here, all right; *no fire ever*, because a fire would be seen from the coast.

Three details the Board likes

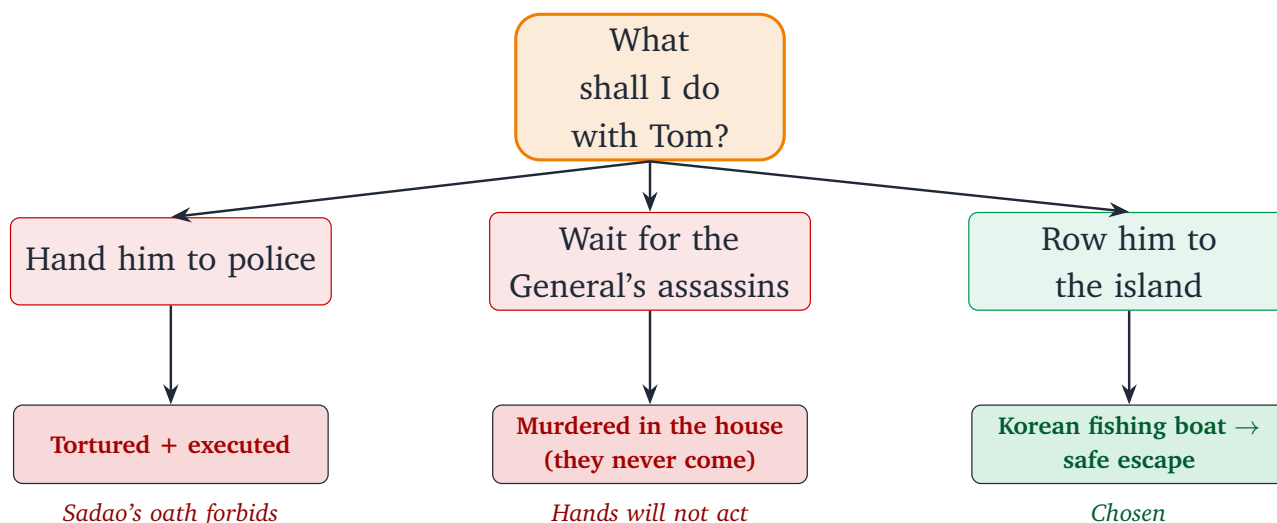
Two quilts, bought at a **pawnshop**; the **Korean fishing boat** as Tom’s onward transport; the **signal-flash at sunset only**, with two flashes for food and one for “still here”. These three details show the examiner you have read the escape passage carefully and not just memorised a summary.

9.1 Sadao’s Decision Tree

When the assassins do not come and Tom is fit to travel, Sadao has only three live options. The diagram below maps the three and shows why the escape is the only path that closes without a

death.

Sadao's Decision Tree



9.2 Was It the Best Possible Solution?

Reading with Insight Q6 asks whether Sadao's solution was the best one in the circumstances. The expected analysis runs in three steps:

- **The constraints.** (i) Tom cannot stay – the servants have already gossiped, the General might remember; (ii) Tom cannot be handed over – he will be tortured and killed; (iii) Sadao cannot have him killed – his own hands will not do it; (iv) the assassins did not come.
- **The remaining option.** Quiet escape to a place Tom can survive in until a non-Japanese boat reaches him. The offshore island plus Korean fishing route is the only such place within Sadao's reach.
- **The costs Sadao accepts.** (i) a permanent secret with the General; (ii) the danger of discovery for himself and Hana; (iii) the loss of his own boat; (iv) the moral question that the story's final line records.

Verdict for the exam: Yes, under the constraints, this was the best possible solution – and the marker rewards you for naming the constraints in your answer, not merely the solution.

Comparison with A. J. Cronin's 'Birth'

The Reading-with-Insight Q7 invites a comparison with A. J. Cronin's short story *Birth* from the Class 11 Snapshots reader. The two stories sit naturally side by side.

Axis	‘Birth’ (Cronin)	‘The Enemy’ (Buck)
Protagonist	Dr Andrew Manson, young Welsh-village doctor	Dr Sadao Hoki, Japanese surgeon, U.S.-trained
The hard case	a stillborn-looking newborn	a half-drowned American POW
The technical act	the revival routine for the baby	the operation to remove the bullet
The uncooperative environment	Welsh village fatalism; the patient’s exhausted mother	wartime Japanese nationalism; the servants’ revolt
The moral agent	technical competence – the routine of warming and breathing	technical competence – the surgical removal of the bullet
The ending	private, internal – Andrew walks home in the dawn	private, internal – Sadao stares at the dark sea
The difference	peacetime Welsh village	wartime Japanese coast; the political weight is much higher in Buck

The shared shape

Both stories ask the reader to watch a young doctor whose technical skill becomes a moral act. Both stories deliberately end small (no rewards, no medals, no public recognition); both stories make the inner reflection of the doctor the actual climax. The Board examiner who asks the comparison is testing whether the student noticed the *shape* – young doctor, hard case, hostile environment, technical victory, quiet ending – and not just the difference in setting.

Films and Novels with Similar Themes (Q8)

Reading-with-Insight Q8 asks for one film or novel with a similar theme. The honest answer is that the story sits inside a large 20th-century tradition of “private humanity overriding official prejudice in wartime”. Below are five strong candidates. Pick one, name two reasons it matches, and you have a complete answer.

- *The Pianist* (Roman Polanski, 2002) – a German officer cannot bring himself to kill the Polish-Jewish pianist he discovers hiding in a Warsaw attic; he feeds him for weeks instead. The professional category (German officer / Polish Jew) is broken by a particular human encounter.
- *Schindler’s List* (Steven Spielberg, 1993) – a German industrialist saves a thousand Jewish

workers during the Holocaust by hiring them into his factory.

- *Train to Pakistan* (Khushwant Singh, 1956) – a Sikh saves a trainload of Muslims during the Partition of 1947 by laying his own body across the tracks.
- *The English Patient* (Anthony Minghella, 1996) – a Canadian nurse cares for a burned “enemy” at the end of the Second World War in an Italian villa.
- *Bombay* (Mani Ratnam, 1995) – a Hindu man and a Muslim woman love and marry across the communal line during the 1992–93 Bombay riots.

Glossary of Key Terms

- *Haori* – a loose outer garment worn over the kimono. Hana wears a dark-blue woollen haori on the morning the prisoner washes ashore.
- *Tokonoma* – a niche or alcove in a Japanese home for displaying a flower arrangement, kakemono (hanging scroll), or other piece of art. Sadao lays out his surgical instruments on a sterilised towel on the floor of the tokonoma alcove for the operation.
- *Ether* – the liquid anaesthetic Sadao uses for the surgery; given by Hana, holding a cotton-saturated cone, for the first time in her life.
- *Prisoner of war (POW)* – a person captured by an enemy in war and held until the end of hostilities. Tom is an escaped POW from the U.S. Navy.
- *Private assassins* – the General’s own term for the secret killers he proposes to send to the house at night. The phrase is the General’s; Buck records it without endorsing it.
- *Korean fishing boat* – the non-Japanese vessel that Sadao expects to pass near the island and pick Tom up. Korea was at this time under Japanese occupation, but Korean fishing crews were not Japanese and would carry an American sailor away without reporting him.
- *Princeton* – the American Ivy-League university where the General once took a degree; the line “so few Japanese have” explains the General’s odd, almost confessional, tolerance of Sadao’s American training.
- *Manchuria* – the region of China that Japan had occupied since 1931; Hana remembers the newspapers’ triumphant reports of Japanese victories there, and the discrepancy between those reports and the rumoured cruelty of Japanese soldiers in occupied territory.

Quote Bank

- “A white man!”
– Hana, the recognition that turns the discovery into a crisis.
- “The best thing that we could do would be to put him back in the sea.”
– Sadao, on the beach (the thought, not the deed).
- “It would endanger all of us if we did not give this man over as a prisoner of war.”
– Hana, planning the cover story for the servants.
- “Ignorance of the human body is the surgeon’s cardinal sin.”
– Sadao’s old American teacher of anatomy, remembered on the operating table.

- “*I do not know why I am doing it.*”
– Sadao to himself during the operation.
- “*Anyway, let me tell you that my name is Tom.*”
– the wounded American, naming himself once.
- “*I will have nothing to do with it. I am a poor person and it is not my business.*”
– Yumi, refusing to wash the white man.
- “*The white man ought to die.*”
– the gardener, the voice of public morality.
- “*If all the Japs were like you there wouldn’t have been a war.*”
– Tom to Sadao, after the recovery.
- “*The truth is, I thought of nothing but myself.*”
– the General, explaining the forgotten assassins.
- “*Strange, I wonder why I could not kill him?*”
– Sadao, the closing line.

Reading with Insight – Model Answer Skeletons

The eight Reading-with-Insight questions at the end of the chapter are the Board’s single most reliable source for Long Answer questions on *The Enemy*. Below is a one-paragraph skeleton for each, the kind of plan you can carry into an exam and expand on the day.

- **Q1. Hard choices between private individual and citizen.** Open with a one-line thesis (“The story argues that the older the role, the stronger the claim – the doctor’s oath is older than the modern nation, and it wins.”). Then three illustrations: the trained hands on the beach; the operation in the *tokonoma*; the escape plan. Close with the unheroic ending.
- **Q2. What made Hana sympathetic to the wounded soldier?** The three-cause chain (American education, doctor’s-wife training, personal honour). Open each cause with a one-line story evidence.
- **Q3. The soldier’s reluctance to leave the doctor’s home.** Tom is wounded, very young (Sadao thinks “barely seventeen”), tortured before (the deep red scars on his neck), and has just found, after months, one safe house. The reluctance is not laziness; it is the small animal terror of a tortured boy at the prospect of being alone in the dark again.
- **Q4. The General’s attitude.** Self-absorption, not compassion, not disloyalty. Quote “the truth is, I thought of nothing but myself.” Refuse the easy reading.
- **Q5. What makes a human being rise above narrow prejudices?** The three mechanisms (a vocation older than the war; lived cross-cultural memory; personal honour).
- **Q6. Was Sadao’s final solution the best possible one?** Yes, under the constraints. Name the constraints, the remaining option, and the costs Sadao accepts.
- **Q7. Comparison with Cronin’s ‘Birth’.** The shape: young doctor, hard case, hostile environment, technical victory, quiet ending. The difference: peacetime vs wartime, low political weight vs high.

- **Q8. A film or novel with a similar theme.** Pick one of the five candidates above; give two reasons it matches.

Board Pointers – 2020–2025 Patterns

- **Most-asked LA clusters:** Q1 (duty as doctor vs duty as patriot) and Q5 (rising above prejudice). One or the other appears in *four of the last six* Board sittings.
- **Second LA cluster:** Q4 (the General’s attitude). Has appeared twice, with the expected answer being self-absorption rather than compassion.
- **Common SA cluster (3 marks):** Q2 (Hana’s role) and Q3 (the soldier’s reluctance to leave).
- **Common factual MCQ items (1 mark):** Pearl Buck’s nationality (American); year of her Nobel (1938); the wound location (right side of the lower back); the anaesthetic (ether); the General’s promise (private assassins); the name of the prisoner (Tom, given once); the rescue route (Korean fishing boat).

Five-mark scene-explanation question – a likely surprise

The Board has begun, since 2022, to add “Explain the significance of [a single scene]” as a short-answer question for Vistas chapters. For *The Enemy* the three likeliest scenes are: **(a)** the discovery on the beach (Hana’s “A white man!”); **(b)** Hana holding the ether cone for the first time; **(c)** the closing veranda scene with the dark sea and the question “why I could not kill him?”. Have a 5–6 line note ready on each.

Common Mistakes – Errors that Lose Marks

- Writing that the American sailor is *unnamed*. Buck names him once – **Tom**.
- Writing that the General *spared* the American out of compassion. He did not. He forgot.
- Writing that Sadao is *arrested*. He is not. The story ends with Sadao puzzled, not in custody.
- Writing that the American *dies*. He does not. He rows to the island and is later confirmed gone – “safe, doubtless” – on a Korean fishing boat.
- Calling Yumi a *nurse*. She is the *baby’s nursemaid*, not a medical nurse. The medical nursing on the operation is done by Hana.
- Writing that the wound was on Tom’s chest, shoulder, or arm. It was on the *right side of his lower back*; the bullet lodged near the kidney.
- Citing the teacher’s lesson as “mercy with the knife”. The phrase is not in the text. The teacher’s actual line is about complete knowledge of the human body: “Ignorance of the human body is the surgeon’s cardinal sin.”
- Writing that Hana *never* got over the smell of the ether. She did – she vomited, came back, and gave the anaesthetic.

A final caution – on the closing line

The closing line is a *question*, not a statement. “I wonder why I could not kill him?” is not a declaration that Sadao has chosen kindness over patriotism. It is genuine puzzlement. Buck does not let Sadao resolve his own conflict. Any answer that ends “and so Sadao chose humanity” or “and so love won” is the wrong register. The story’s deliberate ending is moral incompleteness.

Strategic Reading – Why Buck Wrote It This Way

Buck wrote *The Enemy* in 1942, during the Pacific War, when American and Japanese soldiers were killing each other in the Pacific and Japanese-Americans on the U.S. mainland were being interned in camps. To choose, in that moment, a Japanese surgeon as your protagonist – to ask American readers to inhabit a Japanese conscience, and to award that conscience the story’s moral victory – is itself the most political move in the story. The plot is the vehicle for that move.

The choice to make the rescue *accidental* (the General forgets the assassins) rather than *compassionate* (the General spares the man) is a refusal of cheap reconciliation. Buck does not let the Japanese state, in the person of the General, become quietly kind. The state remains what it was; one surgeon and his wife are different inside it.

The choice to end on a question rather than an answer is the refusal of melodrama. Sadao is not redeemed. He is left, on his veranda, staring at the dark sea. The reader is left with him.

The story’s afterlife in Indian classrooms

The Enemy has been on the CBSE Vistas reader since 2003. It is one of the most-discussed Vistas chapters in Indian classrooms because the central conflict – private conscience inside a public order – maps so cleanly onto the conversations Indian students have about communalism, the army, the police, and the doctor’s role in custodial deaths. The story is a foreign story that has become, for two decades, a deeply Indian one.

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Key Takeaways

- *The Enemy* is Pearl S. Buck's 1942 short story, set on the Japanese coast during the Pacific War, about Dr Sadao Hoki, a Japanese surgeon who must choose between his oath as a doctor and his duty as a patriot when a wounded American sailor washes up at his door.
- Sadao removes the bullet from Tom's lower back, hides him in the empty bedroom that had been his father's, and nurses him for about three weeks; Hana, his wife, washes the white man and gives the ether anaesthetic for the first time in her life.
- The three servants – the old gardener, the cook, and Yumi the baby's nursemaid – leave the household on the seventh day rather than serve in a house that shelters an enemy.
- The old General, who relies on Sadao medically, promises to send private assassins; he forgets, "thinking of nothing but myself." The American's life is saved by the General's self-absorption, not by his mercy.
- Sadao gives Tom a boat, food, water, two quilts bought at a pawnshop, Japanese clothes and a flashlight, and rows him to a small offshore island to wait for a Korean fishing boat. The escape succeeds.
- Buck argues that three things lift a person above wartime prejudice: a vocation older than the war (the doctor's oath), lived cross-cultural memory (Sadao's and Hana's American years), and personal honour (the inability to do harm with one's own hands).
- The story ends not in triumph but in a question – "*Strange, I wonder why I could not kill him?*" – and that deliberate moral incompleteness is itself the story's argument.

End of The Enemy Notes