



**Classroom Guide for  
TWO MRS. GIBSONS**  
Written by **Toyomi Igus**  
Illustrated by **Daryl Wells**

### Reading Level

\*Reading Level: Grades 2–3

Interest Level: Grades K–2

Guided Reading Level: L

Accelerated Reader® Level/Points: 3.4/0.5

Lexile™ Measure: AD530L

\*Reading level based on the Spache Readability Formula

### Themes

Memoirs and Personal Narratives, Growing Up, Community, Family & Intergenerational Relationships, Mothers, Grandmothers, African American Interest, Asian/Asian American Interest, Biracial & Multiracial Interest, Similarities & Differences, Identity & Self Esteem, Confidence & Pride

### Synopsis

Viola Gibson and Kazumi Gibson are as different as two women can be. While one is loud, the other is quiet; one takes hours to cook a pot of greens, the other can whip up dinner in a jiffy. Despite the differences, they love their family.

*Two Mrs. Gibsons* is author Toyomi Igus's tender and touching tribute to the two most important women in her life—her Japanese mother and her African American grandmother.

From memories of her grandmother's big bear hugs to her mother's light down-filled comforter hugs, from listening to her grandmother's lively spirituals to her mother's soft lullabies, from playing with her grandmother's fancy going-to-a-Sunday-meetin' hats to trying on her mother's kimono, Toyomi celebrates the joys and rich diversity of growing up biracial.

## BACKGROUND

*From the Author:* When I was a little girl—long before I ever thought of becoming a writer—my family lived for a time at my grandmother's house in Cedar Rapids, Iowa. While my father went to law school, my mother, Kazumi Tamori Gibson, and my grandmother, Viola Alice Willis Gibson, took care of us. This is a story about that time and about the two most important women in my life—one who was Japanese and another who was African American. Whenever I start to think that the many problems people have with one another will never be resolved, I remember my two Mrs. Gibsons, who showed me that love can overcome all differences and transcend all boundaries.  
—*Toyomi Igus*

*Multiracial in the United States:* The Census Bureau began allowing people to select more than one racial category to describe themselves in 2000. The U.S. Census Bureau in 2013 shows about 9 million Americans chose two or more racial categories when asked about their race ([Pew Research Center](#)).<sup>1</sup> According to the [U.S. Census Bureau](#), the top three states with the most people self-identifying as multiracial are California, New York, and Texas.<sup>2</sup> One famous person who identifies as multiracial who students should recognize is President Barack Obama.

## BEFORE READING

### Prereading Focus Questions

(Reading Standards, Craft & Structure, Strand 5 and Integration of Knowledge & Ideas, Strand 7)

Before introducing this book to students, you may wish to develop background knowledge and promote anticipation by posing questions such as the following:

1. Take a look at the front and back covers. Take a picture walk. Ask students to make a prediction. Do you think this book will be fiction or nonfiction? What makes you think so? What clues do the author and illustrator give to help you know whether this book will be fiction or nonfiction?
2. What do you know about memoirs or personal narratives? Why are memoirs of interest to readers? What memoirs or personal narratives have you read?
3. What do you know about someone who identifies as biracial or multiracial?
4. What kinds of activities can a child do with their mother or grandmother? What kinds of activities do you do with your mother, grandmother, or a mother figure? What interests do you share? What do you do when you visit your grandparents or other older adults?
5. What do you know about Japan? Where is it located? What languages do the people speak there?
6. Why do you think I chose this book for us to read today?

### Exploring the Book

(Reading Standards, Craft & Structure, Strand 5, Key Ideas & Details, Strand 1, and Integration of Knowledge & Ideas, Strand 7)

Talk about the title of the book. Ask students what they think the title, *Two Mrs. Gibsons*, means. Then ask them what they think this book will most likely be about and who the book might be about. What do they think might happen? What information do they think they might learn? What makes them think that?

Take students on a book walk and draw attention to the following parts of the book: front and back covers, title page, copyright page, dedications, illustrations, and author's note. Introduce the memoir to students with the author's note.

<sup>1</sup> <http://www.pewsocialtrends.org/2015/06/11/multiracial-in-america/>

<sup>2</sup> <https://www.census.gov/newsroom/releases/archives/race/cb12-182.html>

## Setting a Purpose for Reading

(Reading Standards, Key Ideas & Details, Strands 1–3)

Have students read to find out who the two Mrs. Gibsons are in the author's life, how they can both be named "Mrs. Gibson," and what makes them unique and similar to each other. Tell students to read about what the author does while she spends time with her mother and grandmother. Encourage students to consider why the author, Toyomi Igus, would want to share this story with young people.

## VOCABULARY

(Language Standards, Vocabulary Acquisition & Use, Strands 4–6)

The story contains several content-specific and academic words and phrases that may be unfamiliar to students. Based on students' prior knowledge, review some or all of the vocabulary below. Encourage a variety of strategies to support students' vocabulary acquisition: look up and record word definitions from a dictionary, write the meaning of the word or phrase in their own words, draw a picture of the meaning of the word, create a specific action for each word, list synonyms and antonyms, and write a meaningful sentence that demonstrates the definition of the word.

### CONTENT SPECIFIC

chocolate	Tennessee	vanilla	Gifu, Japan
bearskin rug	Japanese	piano	spirituals
kimonos	trunk	hat pin	fireflies
napkins	cranes	chopsticks	American
blink of an eye	braid	forehead	turnip greens
dandelion greens	mustard greens	down-filled comforter	

### ACADEMIC

once	wrapped up	stroke	quiet	angry	prettiest
covered	shine	dress up	special	waist	fancy
pointy	garden	magical	glow	flock	flutter
curly	straight	pronounce	minister	common	listened

## AFTER READING

### Discussion Questions

After students have read the book, use these or similar questions to generate discussion, enhance comprehension, and develop appreciation for the content. Encourage students to refer to passages and/or illustrations in the book to support their responses. **To build skills in close reading of a text, students should cite evidence with their answers.**

Literal Comprehension
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(Reading Standards, Key Ideas & Details, Strands 1 and 3)

1. Who is the narrator of the story?
2. What do the author's mother and grandmother have in common?
3. How does the author, Toyomi Igus, share and have fun with her mother? With her grandmother?
4. How does the author feel when she spends time with her mother? How does she feel when she spends time with her grandmother?
5. How does the author, Toyomi Igus, know when her grandmother is angry? How does she know when her mother is angry?
6. Which Mrs. Gibson should the author, Toyomi Igus, go to for a fast meal when she is very hungry?
7. How does the author feel when her grandmother makes a big braid that hangs down over her forehead?

8. What special names does the author, Toyomi Igus, have for the two Mrs. Gibsons in her life?
9. What lesson(s) do the mother and grandmother impart on the author, Toyomi Igus?

### Extension/Higher Level Thinking

(Reading Standards, Key Ideas & Details, Strands 2 and 3 and Craft & Structure, Strands 4 and 6)

1. How would you describe the author's relationship with her mother? With her grandmother? How is this relationship similar to and different from your relationship with your mother or grandmother?
2. In addition to loving the author and her father, what else do the mother and grandmother have in common?
3. What does the author, Toyomi Igus, mean when she says her grandmother's hugs are "like being wrapped up in a great big fat bearskin rug?" What does she mean when she says her mother's hugs are "like being wrapped up in a light, down-filled comforter"?
4. How does each family member in the book show they care for another?
5. Why might the author's mother feel sad when she lets her daughter try on the kimonos?
6. What does the word "family" mean to the author, Toyomi Igus?
7. Challenge students to retell the story (or an event in the story) from the mother's or grandmother's point of view.
8. How would you describe the relationship between the mother and grandmother?
9. Why is it significant that the author realizes her mother and grandmother both love her and her father at the end of the story?
10. How do you think the author, Toyomi Igus, feels about being biracial?
11. Have students create a Venn diagram of the author's mother and grandmother comparing their similarities and differences.
12. Why does the author, Toyomi Igus, enjoy spending time with both her grandmother and mother?
13. Have students discuss the role grandparents play in children's lives. How does this story connect to your experiences with your own grandmother or grandfather?
14. Compare the author's family to your own family. How are the two families similar and different?
15. Have students brainstorm what might happen after the end of the story.
16. How does this story celebrate mothers, grandmothers, and other special women in our lives?

### Reader's Response

(Writing Standards, Text Types & Purposes, Strands 1 and 2 and Production & Distribution of Writing, Strands 4–6)

Use the following questions and writing activities to help students practice active reading and personalize their responses to the book. Suggest that students respond in reader's response journals, essays, or oral discussion. You may also want to set aside time for students to share and discuss their written work.

1. Imagine this weekend, you are spending the day at the author's home. Which Mrs. Gibson would you rather spend time with? What do you want to learn more about or how to do?
2. Write a letter to your own mother, grandmother, or mother figure asking if you could spend time with her and suggesting some activities you might share.
3. Describe your mother, grandmother, or mother figure in as much detail as possible. What does she like to do? What kind of music or games does she like? What is her favorite food?
4. Which parts of Toyomi Igus's life story do you connect with the most? Why?

5. What can you learn about family diversity and family structures from this book?
6. The author, Toyomi Igus, gains a greater understanding of her mother and grandmother and cultural heritage while living in the same house. Describe an experience that helped you better understand something about yourself or your family.

### ELL Teaching Activities

(Speaking & Listening Standards, Comprehension & Collaboration, Strands 1–3 and Presentation of Knowledge & Ideas, Strands 4–6)

(Language Standards, Vocabulary Acquisition & Use, Strands 4–6)

These strategies might be helpful to use with students who are English Language Learners.

1. Assign ELL students to partner-read the story with strong English readers/speakers. Students can alternate reading between pages, repeat passages after one another, or listen to the more fluent reader.
2. Have each student write three questions about the story. Then let students pair up and discuss the answers to the questions.
3. Depending on students' level of English proficiency, after the first reading:
  - Review the illustrations in order and have students summarize what is happening on each page, first orally, then in writing.
  - Have students work in pairs to retell either the plot of the story or key details. Then ask students to write a short summary, synopsis, or opinion about what they have read.
4. Have students give a short talk about what they admire about the author's grandmother or mother in the story. Alternatively, students can describe what they admire about their mother, grandmother, or relative in their families.
5. The book contains several content-specific and academic words that may be unfamiliar to students. Based on students' prior knowledge, review some or all of the vocabulary. Expose English Language Learners to multiple vocabulary strategies. Have students make predictions about word meanings, look up and record word definitions from a dictionary, write the meaning of the word or phrase in their own words, draw a picture of the meaning of the word, list synonyms and antonyms, create an action for each word, and write a meaningful sentence that demonstrates the definition of the word.

### INTERDISCIPLINARY ACTIVITIES

(Introduction to the Standards, page 7: Student who are college and career ready must be able to build strong content knowledge, value evidence, and use technology and digital media strategically and capably)

Use some of the following activities to help students integrate their reading experiences with other curriculum areas. These can also be used for extension activities, for advanced readers, and for building a home-school connection.

### Writing

(Reading Standards, Integration of Knowledge & Ideas, Strands 7 and 9)

(Writing Standards, Text Types & Purposes, Strands 1 and 2 and Production & Distribution of Writing, Strands 5 and 6)

1. In a paragraph, describe what it means to be biracial or multiracial. What might be some challenges for a family with biracial or multiracial family members? What are the benefits for a family with biracial or multiracial family members?
2. What makes your family unique? What activities do you do or interests do you share with one member in your family? Describe a time you spent with a family member in your life and why that memory is special to you.
3. Have students create a Venn diagram of the author's and their own family. Then in two paragraphs, ask students to compare how the author's family is similar to and different from their own family.

4. Encourage students to think about the themes in the book and the future relationship between the author and her mother and grandmother. In a letter, students should persuade you about why you should use this book to celebrate or commemorate a specific holiday that they think best fits with one or more themes or topics in this book. For example, why would this book be great for Mother's Day?
5. Have students imagine they are the author, Toyomi Igus, as a child. Write a thank you letter to her mother or grandmother for her help, actions, or advice.
6. Ask students to write a letter to their mother, grandmother, or mother figure in their life. Review the structure and tone of a friendly letter. Students should describe what they admire about this person and include questions to learn more about them.
7. Ask students to reflect on ways their school involves and celebrates families. What could their school do to recognize the diversity of families and family structures? In a letter to their principal or in a letter to the editor to their school newspaper, encourage students to present ways that foster family and community pride at school.

### Social Studies

(Reading Standards, Integration of Knowledge & Ideas, Strands 7 and 9)

(Writing Standards, Text Types & Purposes, Strand 2 and Production & Distribution of Writing, Strands 5 and 6)

(Speaking & Listening Standards, Comprehension & Collaboration, Strands 1–3 and Presentation of Knowledge & Ideas, Strand 4)

1. The author, Toyomi Igus, is biracial and her mother is from Japan. Learn more about the country where her mother was born. Help students locate Japan on a world map or globe. On which continent is Japan located? Which bodies of water border Japan? Which countries are nearest to Japan? What is the capital of the country? What languages are spoken there? How many people live in Japan? Who are some famous people from Japan?
2. If any student in the class is biracial or multiracial or has family members who are and would be comfortable talking about their families, ask them to tell their classmates about their particular experiences.

### English Language Arts

(Reading Standards, Key Ideas & Details, Strands 2 and 3 and Integration of Knowledge & Ideas, Strand 9)

(Writing Standards, Text Types & Purposes, Strands 2 and 3 and Production & Distribution of Writing, Strands 5 and 6)

(Language Standards, Conventions of Standard English, Strand 1)

(Speaking & Listening Standards, Comprehension & Collaboration, Strands 1–3 and Presentation of Knowledge & Ideas, Strand 4)

1. Read another book about multiracial families, including *Bringing Asha Home*,<sup>3</sup> *Marisol McDonald Doesn't Match*,<sup>4</sup> *Pop Pop and Grandpa*,<sup>5</sup> *The Wakame Gatherers*,<sup>6</sup> and *The Story I'll Tell*.<sup>7</sup> These are other stories about biracial or multiracial children and families. As students reflect on these stories, ask them to compare how each family feels about what makes their families unique and special. What does each story reveal about the bonds of family?
2. As the author, Toyomi Igus, compares her mother and grandmother, she uses adjectives and their antonyms. Review or teach students that antonyms are two words that have the opposite meaning from each other. Have students make a T-chart of all the adjectives the author uses to describe her grandmother in one column and the antonym the author uses to describe her mother in the other column. With this list of adjectives, encourage students to use them in a short paragraph on a topic

<sup>3</sup> <https://www.leeandlow.com/books/2367>

<sup>4</sup> <https://www.leeandlow.com/books/2769>

<sup>5</sup> <https://www.leeandlow.com/books/2617>

<sup>6</sup> <https://www.leeandlow.com/books/2901>

<sup>7</sup> <https://www.leeandlow.com/books/2909>

of their choice. Remind students that adjectives can help writers add more detail to their writing and make their writing more interesting.

### School-Home Connection

(Writing Standards, Text Types & Purposes, Strands 2 and Production & Distribution of Writing, Strands 5 and 6)

(Speaking & Listening Standards, Comprehension & Collaboration, Strands 1–3 and Presentation of Knowledge & Ideas, Strand 4)

1. Encourage students to draw a family portrait of their own families. Ask for volunteers to share their pictures with the group and name the people shown. Alternatively, have your students bring in a copy of a family photograph to share with the class. Students can write about these photographs and post them in the classroom.
2. The author, Toyomi Igus, and her mother make paper cranes together. Have students create their own paper cranes. For construction instructions, try the basic crane from the [Origami Resource Center](#).<sup>8</sup> Challenge students to make cranes of different sizes and using different types of paper.
3. In the story we learn how two women can both be named “Mrs. Gibson.” Ask students to interview their parents, grandparents, or guardians about their own first or last name. What does the name mean? Is there a special reason why their names were chosen for them? Encourage students to write down any family story, personal connection, or history behind their own names. Students may ask their families and write about their first, middle, last names, or nicknames. If guardians do not know the origins, meanings of, or story behind the child’s name, they can look online to learn about the name at sites such as [Behind the Name](#),<sup>9</sup> [Ancestry](#),<sup>10</sup> or the [Surname Database](#).<sup>11</sup>
4. Have students research and select a recipe from Japan. Encourage students to try to make this recipe at home (with adult supervision) and bring it to class to share with classmates at a classroom food festival. Have students write down their recipes to include in a class recipe book. For easy snack ideas, start with [PBS Kids](#).<sup>12</sup>
5. Have students bring and share a recipe that is special to their families. For what occasion do they make this dish? What is the story or history behind the dish? Does the dish have any special cultural, religious, or holiday significance? Have students write and illustrate their recipes’ ingredients and steps. Include each student’s recipe in a class cookbook and make copies of the book for students to take home.  
If time allows, have a classroom potluck. Encourage students to bring in their dishes to present to and enjoy with classmates.
6. Ask students to interview family members to determine their own heritage, and encourage students to think about how their heritage is reflected in their daily lives. How does it influence the language(s) you speak? The foods you eat? The holidays you celebrate? and so on. Have students write a short essay about what they found out and how their family background makes them special and unique.
7. Encourage students to create a family tree of their own families including extended family members and anyone they identify as being a part of their family.

### ABOUT THE AUTHOR

**Toyomi Igus** is the author and editor of several books for children, including the award-winning *Going Back Home* and *i see the rhythm*. She is the former Editor and

<sup>8</sup> <http://www.origami-resource-center.com/paper-crane.html>

<sup>9</sup> <http://www.behindthename.com/>

<sup>10</sup> <http://www.ancestry.com/learn/facts>

<sup>11</sup> <http://www.surnamedb.com/>

<sup>12</sup> <http://www.pbs.org/food/cuisine/japanese/>

Publications Director for UCLA's Center for African American Studies. Toyomi lives in Los Angeles, California with her family.

### **ABOUT THE ILLUSTRATOR**

**Daryl Wells** is a painter and former art teacher of the Los Angeles Unified School District. She has worked with young people to create many public murals. A graduate of the Rhode Island School of Design, she is a native of Los Angeles, California.

### **Book Information**

\$9.95, PAPERBACK

978-0-89239-170-7

32 pages, 8 x 9-3/4

\*Reading Level: Grades 2–3

\*Reading level based on the Spache Readability Formula

Interest Level: Grades K–2

Guided Reading Level: L

Accelerated Reader® Level/Points: 3.4/0.5

Themes: Memoirs and Personal Narratives, Growing Up, Community, Family & Intergenerational Relationships, Mothers, Grandmothers, African American Interest, Asian/Asian American Interest, Biracial & Multiracial Interest, Similarities & Differences, Identity & Self Esteem, Confidence & Pride

### **RESOURCES ON THE WEB:**

Learn more about *Two Mrs. Gibsons* at: <https://www.leeandlow.com/books/2828>

### **ORDER INFORMATION**

#### **On the Web:**

<https://www.leeandlow.com/contact/ordering> (general order information)

<https://www.leeandlow.com/books/2828> (secure online ordering)

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