



**Waka T Brown** was the first American born in her family and was raised in Topeka, Kansas. She grew up speaking both Japanese and English, although her English is decidedly better than her Japanese. Her parents made sure did not lose her Japanese, though, by sending her to Japan to live with her grandmother when she was 12 years old. *While I Was Away* is her memoir of this experience. Her second novel, *Dream, Annie, Dream*, came out in 2022. She also enjoys writing screenplays (Brown, Waka T).

Waka is currently an online instructor with the Stanford Program on International and Cross-Cultural Education (SPICE). She teaches about U.S.-Japan relations to high school students in Japan, and has also authored curriculum on several international topics. Recently, she was honored to receive the U.S.-Japan Foundation and EngageAsia’s national 2019 Elgin Heinz Outstanding Teacher award (Brown, Waka T).

Waka lives in the Portland, Oregon with her family, and a mischievous shiba Niko. She enjoys running, art, baking, and playing guitar (Brown, Waka T). Brown’s advice for aspiring writers is to not get discouraged. “Remember that you like writing,” she said. “Whether or not it sells or it’s published or not published, just the act of writing is wonderful. You’re creating something” (Marksbury, Owen).

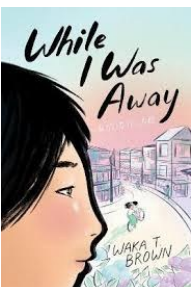
Waka described writing is a creative escape, especially after having kids, as it lets her “go places” when unable to physically travel. She uses storytelling to process thoughts and events, believing a well-told story can change how people think and live, which deeply intrigue her (Vincent, John Clark).

“Brown, Waka T. *About Me*, wakatbrown.com wakatbrown.com/about-me/. Accessed 18 Dec. 2025.

Marksbury, Owen. “Waka T. Brown Talks About Writing for Children.” *Kid Reporter’s Notebook*, kpcnotebook.scholastic.com/post/waka-t-brown-talks-about-writing-children. Accessed 18 Dec. 2025.

Vincent, John Clark. Interview: Waka T Brown. *John Clark Vincent*, johnclarkvincent.com/interview-waka-t-brown/. Accessed 18 Dec. 2025.

### Library Collection (Secondary)



#### [While I Was Away](#)

Call number: 928.1 BRO

Twelve-year-old Waka is sent from Kansas to Tokyo to live with her strict grandmother and improve her Japanese. Struggling with kanji, bullying, and a distant grandmother, she feels like an outsider in her parents’ homeland.



#### [Rick Kotani's 400 Million Dollar Summer](#)

Call number: JF BRO

Rick Kotani dreams of a major-league baseball career, but his summer plans are derailed when his mom sends him to Oregon. Instead of playing ball, he must help care for his grandfather, who is moving to a retirement home.