

Sand as
representative of
community in woman
in the dunes



**ASSIGN
BUSTER**

Sand in *The Woman in the Dunes* is an omnipresent force that cannot be easily escaped. In the novel, sand is defined as an aggregate of rock fragments, sometimes including loadstone, tinstone, and more rarely gold dust, with a diameter of 2 to 1/16mm (13). This scientific approach of definition by the main character, Niki Jumpei, disconnects him from the importance that these rock fragments have in his life. Page 39 of the novel supports the evidence that although Niki does not yet see himself as a member of the community, the people of the village work clearing the sand in order to protect the livelihood of their neighbor, and ultimately themselves. It is only through shoveling the sand every night that they have a functioning community. The sand forces them to work together. In this sense, sand is the community. Each grain works together, and is a piece of a whole. A single grain can be ignored without hesitation (Niki), yet many grains cannot be disregarded easily. It is the collaborative work of the community that keeps everyone safe, and therefore the sand that keeps them safe. Safe from the city and safe from the outside world. This paper will prove that through an analysis of the setting (sand), ultimately arguing that the main character grapples with the need for community to establish a self-identity.

Throughout the beginning stages of the novel Niki has a very negative disposition toward the sand. He describes it as being barren, dry, and inhospitable to all living things. Going as far as to state that sand is not suitable for life (15), he believes that only the sand was his enemy (62). Due to the fact that Niki comes from the city, he is from a place where there is not a force that unites the people. It is his individualistic mindset that comes

from urban dwelling that causes him to not be able to understand the positives of the setting that he has been placed in. The unnamed woman in the novel has lost her identity because she has given up her individual self to be a part of the community. The woman is representative of the community and therefore Niki refers to the community as a whole when he speaks to her as an individual. In dialogue with The Woman Niki directly states that the sand is not a trifling matter and she is mistaken if she thinks she can sit herself up against the sand with simply shoveling it away every night (40). Without directly knowing it Niki has already admitted to the importance of the community. He contradicts himself every time that he attempts to escape. The community is not a trifling matter. Niki is mistaken if he believes that he can set himself up against it with the methods that he goes about trying to escape.

Although Niki sees the sand (and therefore community) as his enemy, it eventually becomes the catalyst to the relations between the Niki and the woman, and eventually to the creation of their child. Throughout the many times Niki and the woman copulate, their intimacy is preceded by Niki seeing the woman's body covered with sand, and/or his desire to clean the sand from her (46). It unites the woman to Niki physically, as well as a metaphysical and mental level. While the woman represents the community she is a part of the sand. She does not fight the sand like Niki, for it is an everyday part of her life. Niki having sex with the woman causes him to copulate with an essential part of the community (and therefore the being united with the community itself). This in turn causes him to be fine with the situation that he is in. A true testament of Niki's transition into the

community is his production of a child, which is something that he wouldn't have been previously able to do without the sand and community keeping him trapped with the woman.

Eventually it comes to the point where sand becomes the savior in Niki's life. Over the stages of the novel Niki has gone from abhorring the sand to seeing how vital it is in his life. Part three of the novel shows how much he has changed from the beginning. A key testimony of his change is with his creation of the device that he calls Hope. On the outside it would seem truly ironic that Niki would dub the name of this creation as Hope. His original intentions were for it to trap a bird where he would then be able to attach a note onto its foot and set it free in an attempt for someone to find it and free him from enslavement. Although this did not happen, he received something that could be seen as even better—water. Water is a source of life (and the sand/community that he discovers it from) and the fact that Niki previously believed that the sand was dry and barren shows true irony when sand proves to be the opposite.

Instead of escaping and failing as in the past, Niki can have extra water and save his life. In the beginning of the novel Niki argues with the woman when she states that the sand contains moisture. When Niki learns from the sand and stops fighting with the community, he is able to reap benefits for his situation. On page 236, the narrator states, "The change in the sand corresponded to a change in himself. Perhaps, along with the water in the sand, he had found a new self." This quote, which leans more to the side of Christian beliefs of baptism and re-birth (of which Niki would be exposed to living in the city), shows a change within Niki. A change of him seeing the <https://assignbuster.com/sand-as-representative-of-community-in-woman-in-the-dunes/>

community in all of its positive glory and not in the negative light that he believed it to be in the beginning.

The main point of Niki traveling to the sand dunes was to catch a beetle that had never been found in an attempt to create a name for himself. By the end of this novel Niki has done this and more. Because of the sand trapping him he has invented a device that could potentially save his and his newfound family's life. The creation of his child causes his name to live on forever. If his child ever decides to escape she/he will be able to say my father Niki Jumpei. If it is his grandchildren they will be able to call upon the name of their grandfather. Through his child his legacy will live on. Yet, if he or his seed decides to not leave the dunes, Niki will not be bothered. He has found peace within himself and the community/sand is what to thank: " You can't really judge a mosaic if you don't look at it from a distance. If you really get close to it you get lost in detail. You get away from one detail only to get caught in another. Perhaps what he had been seeing up until now was not sand but grains of sand" (235). When Niki takes a step back and takes a more holistic approach to the dunes and community, he is more readily able to see the beauty is the mosaic that is now his life.