

# **A Boy Called H Study Guide**

## **A Boy Called H by Kappa Senoh**

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# Introduction

*A Boy Called H: A Childhood in Wartime Japan* (Japanese, 1997; English, 1999), by Kappa Senoh, is an autobiographical novel. Senoh describes his life growing up in the port city of Kobe, Japan, from the 1930s until a few years after the end of World War II. In fifty short chapters, each focusing on a few incidents, some minor and amusing, others tragic and moving, the novel gives a remarkable picture, through the eyes of a young boy, of a society at war. H describes how life in Kobe gradually changes as the war with China, and later with the United States, drags on. There is an increasingly authoritarian atmosphere, marked by excessive nationalism that no one dares to question openly. H learns there is a difference between official versions of events, as reported in the newspapers, and what is really happening. He also goes through some harrowing experiences. In a massive air raid by American B-29 bombers, his home is destroyed. On another occasion he narrowly escapes being killed by machine gun fire from an American fighter plane. These experiences force H to grow up quickly, and the novel is really a coming-of-age story. As he reaches adolescence, H quarrels with his parents and moves out of the family home. The story ends during the post-war U.S. occupation of Japan, as H trains to be an artist.

## Author Biography

Kappa Senoh was born in Kobe, Japan, in 1930. His given name was Hajime, which he later changed to Kappa. His father was a tailor, and both his parents were Christians, a minority faith in Japan. As a boy, Senoh demonstrated a talent for drawing, and on leaving school a few years after the end of World War II, he worked as a graphic designer. When he was in his twenties, he became a stage designer. He has since been the set designer for numerous operas, theater productions, and musicals and is recognized as one of Japan's leading designers. He has won many awards for his work.

Senoh is also a best-selling essayist and illustrator in Japan. He is particularly well-known for his travel book series *Kappa Takes a Look at . . .* which describes various parts of the world and is notable for Senoh's detailed drawings.

In 1997, Senoh published his autobiographical novel *A Boy Called H: A Childhood in Wartime Japan*. This work was his first venture into full-length book form. The novel was a best-seller in Japan and other countries in Asia, selling over two million copies. It was adapted for the stage, and a television dramatization was made in 1999. The novel was translated into English in 1999.



# Plot Summary

*A Boy Called H* begins in 1937. H (short for Hajime) lives in Kobe with his father, mother, and younger sister. H is about seven years old. Japan is at war with China, and this conflict forms the background for the early part of the novel. It can be seen when H befriends a young man who works at the noodle shop and is shocked when his friend is arrested by the police as a communist and made to join the army. Another of H's friends, the projectionist at the movie theater, hangs himself rather than be drafted into the army.

In "Tambourine," H tells of his parents' backgrounds. His father, Morio, came to Kobe in 1918 to become a tailor's apprentice; his mother, Toshiko, came to Kobe to marry Morio. She also became a devoted Christian, but H hates the sound of the tambourine she plays as the Christians preach in the street. Toshiko likes to ape Western customs and insists that her family eat with knives and forks rather than chopsticks.

H's father takes him to a restaurant, and H is allowed into the adjoining movie theater for his first taste of a film. Not long after this experience, H gets a chance to make money of his own through an ingenious arrangement. He resells the paste that his father uses in his tailoring business to his school friends for use in their handicraft classes.

But H's life has its troubles. "Maps and Eggs" describes the futile efforts H and his parents make to curb his bed-wetting. And in "Love," H learns to his embarrassment that the word love can have many different connotations. In "A Boy and a Sea," he and his friends row a dinghy too far from the shore and endanger themselves. Then torrential rains drench Kobe for days and lead to a serious flood. In his borrowed book *The Three Treasures*, H secretly reads children's stories in a book he borrows from a friend, even though his mother disapproves of his reading fiction.

In "The Living God," H asks his schoolmasters awkward questions about the emperor, who is regarded as a god. He soon asks more awkward questions about the global political situation, which he learns about from his father. Japan allies itself with Germany and Italy, but Morio thinks this will damage Japanese relations with the United States. H decides that Germany is not to be trusted.

World War II begins. In Japan, the state controls more and more aspects of individuals' lives and decrees that everyone should wear a new national dress, unlike Western clothes. This edict badly affects Morio's business, since he makes Western-style suits.

In "Military Secrets," H learns about the restrictions on his hobby of drawing. Instead of sketching ships, he goes into business exchanging photos of sumo wrestlers. "The Founding of the Nation" describes the five-day celebration, in 1940, of the 2,600th anniversary of the founding of the Japanese nation. Studies at H's school become more patriotic. Japan signs a non-aggression pact with the Soviet Union, which displeases Morio since it will further irritate the United States.



War with the United States breaks out after the attack on Pearl Harbor in December, 1941. Morio is skeptical of the official versions that explain why Japan went to war, and he tells H he must form his own opinions and not accept everything he hears. Christianity in Japan comes under attack because it is also the religion of Great Britain and the United States. H is taunted at school for coming from a family of Christians.

Toshiko becomes head of the newly formed neighborhood association, and H learns air raid drills. The radio reports a continuing stream of Japanese military victories, but Morio remains skeptical because the Americans have far greater resources.

The first incendiary bombs fall on Kobe, and the residents are issued gas masks. In a spy scare, Morio is detained by the authorities because he has foreign clients for his tailoring business.

For their summer holidays, H and his sister visit their mother's relatives in the countryside near Hiroshima. When they return to Kobe, there are more changes: American and British films are banned, and people are urged to give up all their metal goods for use in the war. H passes his Second Middle exam by mouthing the patriotic slogans he has read in the newspaper, knowing his examiners want to hear them.

At his new school, H joins the riding club and learns how to ride a difficult horse called Kamikeru. But he runs foul of Inspector Tamori, who is in charge of military training. Tamori is furious when he discovers in H's notebook a drawing of a nude woman, copied from a painting by Manet. To escape Tamori, H joins the rifle club, where he learns military drills and target practice. This training culminates in an arduous night march.

The military exercises continue. H fires live ammunition for the first time and discovers that he is a good shot. Another military exercise involves students simulating leaping up from a hiding place in the ground and throwing a grenade at an enemy tank.

During 1944, after Paris has fallen, air raids on Kobe increase. A dead Japanese fighter pilot is laid out in the school reception area, and the first Middle school student is killed. The big raid comes in March 1945. H's family home is destroyed and fires rage throughout the city. H and his mother escape and obtain lodgings in a church. H and his father, who works at the fire station during the raid, retrieve his damaged sewing machine. Wandering around Kobe, H is astonished at the extent of the damage and is relieved to find that his friends are safe. But another adventure is soon upon him: he is strafed by machine gun fire from an enemy plane and narrowly escapes being hit.

H goes to stay with his Uncle Hadano, but he cannot settle there and returns to Kobe. At the Second Middle school he works in the school factory, assembling motors. In another adventure, he is summoned by a military policeman to assist in the capture of an American pilot who has been shot down over Kobe.

Germany surrenders, and H realizes that Japan will lose the war. Meanwhile, in the school factory, workers are urged to increase production. The government publishes a manual teaching people how to resist in hand-to-hand combat. Shortly after, H hears





that the United States has dropped the atom bomb on Hiroshima, although the authorities minimize the damage it causes.

The students gather at school to hear the emperor's radio broadcast, accepting the terms of the Potsdam Declaration. No one mentions directly that this event involves Japan's unconditional surrender.

After the war, H continues to resent the lies the government told. When occupation forces arrive in Kobe, he marvels at the superiority of their vehicles and weapons. An American serviceman allows him to sketch an M1 carbine, and H gets a favorable impression of U.S. soldiers. He also finds out the purpose of the occupation is to eradicate militarism and instill a democratic spirit. He is irritated by the fact that some of the teachers who were ardent militarists now become ardent democrats.

Living in a temporary dwelling with his family, H gets angry about everything he does not like. Under emotional strain, he quarrels with his parents and leaves home. He intends to commit suicide by lying under a train but pulls back at the last minute. For a while he lives in secret in a building at the school. Unsure of whether he will be allowed to graduate, he decides to study art. He seeks out a well-known artist, who allows him to work at his studio. The novel ends with H working as a sign painter during the day and studying at night with fellow artists at a studio.



# Chapter 1

## Chapter 1 Summary

The opening chapter introduces the reader to Hajime Senoh, his family and Noodles, a delivery boy for a local noodle house in Kobe, Japan. Hajime's mother, Toshiko, is a housewife who is easily influenced by any new ideas that come her way. Hajime's father, Morio, operates a tailoring shop in Kobe and often describes the shop as an upscale business.

As the story opens, Hajime meets a stranger on the street who calls him by name. Hajime asks the stranger how he knows his name. The stranger replies that his name is printed on his sweater. Having his name embroidered on his sweater is embarrassing to Hajime, and he asks his mother to remove it. Toshiko removes part of the name and leaves only the letter H where Hajime's name had once been sewn. From this time on, Hajime's name becomes "H."

H's free time is spent climbing in the hills and swimming in the sea near his home. Other days H plays baseball with his friends near the Takatori rail station. Freight trains carry oil to the Rising Sun Company's oil tanks and stop at the station.

On one occasion, H notices that only a few freight trains are coming to the station and that the tracks are getting rusty. H reports this information to the owner of the charcoal store and is told the rust is due to the war with China. The war is continuing on longer than expected, and China's oil supply is getting low. The owner cautions H not to repeat their conversation because it is a military secret.

One of the people in Kobe that H likes very much is Noodles, the delivery boy for the local noodle shop. H loves to hear Noodles sing as he makes his deliveries on his bike. When H hears Noodles, he jumps on his bike and follows Noodles on his route. People in the city think Noodles is too smart to be a delivery boy.

Noodles invites H to come to his room above the noodle shop to listen to some music. H's parents only listen to church hymns and school songs and expect H to do the same. H knows they will not let him go, so he tells his parents that he is going to the bathhouse and heads over to Noodles' home. Some of Noodles' records have a red label, which means that they are made in America. H enjoys listening to the different types of music and talking with Noodles about famous singers. Noodles tells H that he can come back as long as he does not tell anyone about their visits.

Hoping to please Noodles, H gives the nickname "Red Label" to Noodles. Noodles shouts at H and tells him never to call him by that nickname again. H agrees even though he is confused by Noodles' reaction.

A few days later, H asks Noodles if he can come for a visit that night. Noodles tells him that he is expecting a friend and that they will have some private things to discuss, so it



will not be a good idea for H to come for a visit. H tells him that he will not come over because Noodles and his friend probably have some private things to discuss. Noodles is startled by H's words. He tries to cover his reaction by telling H that he hasn't seen this friend for a very long time.

Later that night, H awakes to the sound of sharp whistle blasts. He asks his father what is happening. Morio tells him that the police are after someone and to stay inside. H runs to the upstairs window to get a better view of the action. As he looks out the window, H sees two men running across a nearby rooftop and sees that one of them is Noodles. The police catch up with the men and take them away.

All the people are talking about Noodles the next day. H hears the people saying that Noodles is a Red and that the secret police will be really hard on him because of his Dangerous Thoughts. H asks the people to explain about the secret police and dangerous thoughts, but his question is met with silence. The newspapers do not mention the incident at all. H asks his father how the police found out about Noodles. Morio tells him that someone must have informed on Noodles. H understands the meaning of "informing" and remembers things that were once confusing about Noodles but now make perfect sense. H realizes that Noodles was no ordinary delivery boy.

People in the city do not mention Noodles' name again. One day, H asks the owner of the noodle shop what became of Noodles. She is very upset by H's question and tells him that Noodles was put in the army and won't be back. She also tells H to stop asking about Noodles.

## Chapter 1 Analysis

*A Boy Called H* focuses on the life of Hajime Senoh, a young boy living in Kobe, Japan during the time of Japan's war with China. As the chapter begins, there is a semblance of normalcy in Japan, but it soon becomes apparent that an undercurrent of suspicion and fear exists not only in Kobe but also throughout Japan.

Like most boys H's age, being accepted by his friends is extremely important to Hajime, who is referred to as H in the rest of the book. He tries to avoid any situation that would cause embarrassment or draw attention to him. Hajime's mother, who is easily influenced by her friends, makes this a difficult task. Although Hajime is not aware of it, his mother's need for acceptance is reflected in his own personality.

Hajime has an inquisitive mind and very keen powers of observation. Taking notice of rusty railroad tracks leads him to question the reason for this condition. The answer to Hajime's question foreshadows the depletion of Japan's resources to continue its war with China and introduces the term "military secret" into Hajime's vocabulary. Hajime's observations provide subtle hints to the reader of the fear that permeates the lives of the Japanese people during this time.

Hajime's friendship with Noodles illustrates the power of suspicion and distrust that exists in Hajime's community. Although Hajime has never heard the words, "Dangerous



Thoughts," he soon learns their meaning and sees how these words can affect a person's life. When Noodles is arrested and it is revealed that he is more than just a delivery boy, Hajime sees, for the first time, just how devastating fear and suspicion can be.



## Chapter 2

### Chapter 2 Summary

When H hears tambourine music and drums, he runs away because the music signals the approach of Christian street preachers. H also dislikes tambourine music because his mother, Toshiko, plays the instrument with the street preachers. The route the preachers travel through the city goes right by H's school, and his friends tease him because of his mother's chanting and playing. Toshiko's actions embarrass H greatly. H tells his mother that her tambourine playing is embarrassing and asks her to stop. Toshiko tells him he shouldn't be embarrassed because she is bringing God to those who do not know him.

Toshiko's parents are Buddhists and are unhappy that she is a Christian. The parents urge Toshiko her to give up Christianity, but she is unmoved. Her parents feel that forcing her to marry Morio and move to Kobe is a contributing factor to her conversion. Toshiko knows that her arranged marriage has nothing to do with her decision to become a Christian.

Toshiko's home is very religious, and she is determined that her children grow up to be model Christians. H and his younger sister, Yoshiko, are christened, and Toshiko is convinced that her family is completely Christian. H's mother sends them to Sunday school each week. Producing "children of God" is Toshiko's main focus. Toshiko makes H read from the Bible in Japanese before leaving for school each day. Reading anything other than the Bible in H's house is strictly forbidden. Toshiko tells her children that reading anything but the Bible would teach them wicked ideas. H gets very angry when his mother tells him that he has been given up to God and that he must resist doing anything wicked. H knows for the time being that he has to play the "good boy" image, but that will change when he gets to be fifteen years old, which is the age when a boy stops being considered a child. For the time being, H plans on attending church, but his heart is definitely not in it.

### Chapter 2 Analysis

Toshiko, Hajime's mother, is a constant source of embarrassment to him with her chanting and her tambourine playing for the street preachers. As usual, Toshiko sees no reason for Hajime's embarrassment. Like Hajime, being accepted by her neighbors and friends is extremely important to Toshiko. This need for acceptance causes her to be easily swayed in her opinions.

Surprisingly, however, Toshiko shows a tremendous strength of character in matters of religion. Having converted from Buddhism to Christianity against her family's wishes proves to be a very courageous act. Her determination to raise her children in a home based on Christian principles is her highest priority. H, who does not share his mother's

religious interests, displays his ability to appease his mother while at the same time doing what he knows she would not want him to do.



# Chapter 3

## Chapter 3 Summary

The reader is introduced to Girly Boy, another of H's friends. Girly Boy's soft voice and effeminate build are the reasons for his nickname. Girly Boy lives with his mother and works in one of the movie theaters in a nearby entertainment district. The strong gangster element in the district makes it very dangerous. Toshiko warns H not to go there because he will become a delinquent. H's mother does not know that he has been going to this district since the first grade. H will not enter the theater because he never has any money. Instead, he lurks in the vicinity of the theater and looks at the movie posters hanging outside.

One day while H is looking at the posters, he is seen by the man who owns the tofu store. The owner tells H that the picture that is showing is not for children who are by themselves. H tells him that he is only looking at the posters. The tofu store owner tells H that if he really wants to see the movie, he will take him. H jumps at the chance to see the film and accepts the offer.

Inside the theater, H unknowingly starts to sit in a section reserved for the police. The shop owner directs him to a seat in the front row. H becomes bored with the film and decides to find the projection room. Just as H locates the room, a man carrying a canister of film opens the door and walks into the projection area. H hears the projectionist complaining in a loud voice that the film is late. H comes closer and sees that the projectionist is Girly Boy.

H likes Girly Boy, but when he is with his friends, H always teases him. H's friends are curious about Girly Boy's sexual endowment. To satisfy their curiosity, H and his friends devise a plan to be carried out at the bathhouse. As Girly Boy steps out of the shower, H pulls Girly Boy's towel off and reveals Girly Boy's more than adequate endowment. H's actions embarrass Girly Boy, who hastily covers himself. Iwao, a local storeowner, sees what is happening and without warning slaps H across his face. The force of the blow sends H sliding backwards into Girly Boy. Girly Boy helps H get up and asks if he is okay. This gesture makes H thoroughly ashamed of his actions, and he apologizes to Girly Boy. H and Girly Boy remain friends despite this incident.

H is in the fourth grade when Girly Boy receives his call up enlistment papers. H does not think that Girly Boy will make a very good soldier and goes to see him. Arriving there, H sees that Girly Boy's mother is crying, and Mr. Omari, chairman of the neighborhood association, is assuring Girly Boy that his mother will be cared for while he is away. The next day, Girly Boy leaves his home to enlist.

Three days later, Girly Boy's mother receives a visit from the members of the secret police. The police tell her that Girly Boy has joined the fighting forces but has not joined his unit, and they are looking for him. News of the visit spreads through the city, and the



secret police tell everyone that Girly Boy is a deserter. If anyone sees him it is to be reported immediately. In a little while, everyone stops talking about Girly Boy not because of disinterest but out of fear.

Two months later, H and his friends are picking up firewood in the hills around Kobe. H likes this task because it gives him an opportunity to play with his friends. While he picks up wood, H thinks about Girly Boy and what a good hiding place the hills would be for him. At this same moment, H's friend tells him that he has seen Girly Boy in the alleyway of his father's store. H wonders if Girly Boy has come back to check on his mother. H and his friend gather up the firewood and decide not to say anything about Girly Boy.

On the way home, H stops at the gas station to go to the restroom. The gas station is no longer used because cars are using charcoal instead of gas. The station is old, dilapidated and deserted. H grabs the handle of the restroom door and rushes inside. As he opens the door, H sees a pair of boots and legs dangling in front of him. H looks up to see that a human form is hanging before him. In horror, he sees that the human form is Girly Boy.

H runs home to tell his father what has happened. Morio goes to the police station to report H's discovery of the body. Meanwhile, H goes back to the gas station to wait for the police to arrive. H does not think that Girly Boy should be left alone. Soon, two policemen arrive, cut Girly Boy down and put his body into a cart. H asks the policemen where they will take Girly Boy's body, and they tell him that it is none of his business and that H is not to follow them. H cries as Girly Boy's body is being taken away.

Girly Boy's mother dies one week later. During the funeral, a policeman arrives and questions everyone there. The policeman asks if anyone is a relative of Girly Boy. H tells him that Girly Boy has an uncle living in another town, but he is not at the funeral. Except H, none of Girly Boy's friends or relatives is there.

## Chapter 3 Analysis

This chapter introduces the reader to H's love of film and his sense of adventure. The area in which the theaters are located is full of gangsters and is considered to be quite dangerous. This does not deter H at all, and he seizes every opportunity to go to the movies. Here, H meets Girly Boy, a projectionist at one of the movie theaters. Through their shared love of films, Girly Boy and H become friends. Peer pressure, however, causes H to join in the teasing and disrespect shown toward Girly Boy and his effeminate appearance.

H does not always treat Girly Boy with disrespect, as is seen when Girly Boy receives his enlistment papers. In a display of friendship, H pays a visit to Girly Boy the day before he leaves to join the army. While there, H sees the deep concern Girly Boy has for his elderly mother's well being. Although Girly Boy seems resigned to his enlistment,





H doubts that Girly Boy will be a good soldier. Out of respect for Girly Boy, H keeps his thoughts to himself.

Fear and suspicion once again grip the people of Kobe when Girly Boy is listed as a deserter. Fear of reprisal results in the entire community becoming silent about Girly Boy. Intimidation by the secret police causes everyone to act as if Girly Boy has never existed. Once again, H sees the power that fear and suspicion can have over people.

The continuing depletion of Japan's resources is apparent as Japan begins using charcoal instead of gas. The effect of the depletion is seen in the closings of the gas stations in the area. A deserted gas station provides the setting for H's first shocking glimpse of life's realities. Entering the gas station restroom, H sees the body of Girly Boy hanging from the ceiling. This is the first time H has seen a dead body, and it fills him with fear. After reporting the discovery of the body, H's compassion for his friend is seen when he returns to the gas station because he does not want Girly Boy to be left alone until the police arrive. The way in which the police remove the remains from the gas station show H just how much human life can be devalued. H's compassion is once again seen as he cries when Girly Boy's body is taken away and at the funeral where he is the only one of Girly Boy's friends in attendance.



# Chapter 4

## Chapter 4 Summary

Toshiko wants to teach H how to properly use silverware instead of chopsticks. She wants H and Yoshiko to learn the correct handling of knives and forks so that they will not be feel awkward in handling the cutlery. H practices but is having difficulty with the task. To avoid embarrassment, H tells his mother that he does not want his friends to see him using the silverware.

One day, H and Yoshiko are polishing the silverware when H sees that one fork has a slightly bent tine. Trying to push it back into place, H hits it with a hammer, and the tine breaks off. Toshiko tells him that he can use the fork as his own. Yoshiko tells her mother that she will take the fork because H shouldn't have to use a fork with a broken tine. Yoshiko's gesture touches H, and he is ashamed that he does not want his little sister hanging around him and his friends.

A few days later, H and his friends are playing hide and seek. Yoshiko asks to play, and H reluctantly agrees. When the next game begins, Yoshiko hides her face and begins counting to ten. Yoshiko opens her eyes and sees that everyone is gone. As she is looking for them, she gets lost herself. Darkness starts to fall, and H is frantic to find his sister. Just as he is about to give up hope, H sees Yoshiko with a middle-aged woman walking toward him. The woman tells H that she found Yoshiko walking all alone by the sea, and they have been walking all over the city to find Yoshiko's home. Yoshiko, the woman tells H, is not scared, just happy that H let her play with his friends. H is relieved to find his sister and takes her home.

## Chapter 4 Analysis

Toshiko's determination to prepare her children properly in all aspects of life is seen as she teaches them the proper use of cutlery. Once again, H's fear of embarrassment is shown when he refuses to allow his friends to see him using silverware. Through generous gestures, the reader sees the love Yoshiko has for her big brother. H learns a serious lesson about responsibility when H and his friends purposely leave Yoshiko alone during a game of hide and seek, and she becomes lost.



# Chapter 5

## Chapter 5 Summary

H's class goes to the amusement park every year. On this year's trip, H sees a boxlike structure that has never before been at the park. The rectangular black box is mounted on a stand and contains different types of pictures that can be seen for a fee. H is anxious to see inside the box but has no money. H devises a plan to see the pictures without paying. While people are looking at the pictures, H stands beside them and whispers that looking through the box can spread trachoma, which is a leading cause of blindness. H's plan is not working, but he keeps trying. H sees a man leaving the box and hurries over to see inside. The man is the owner of the booth where the boxes are located. Returning to the box, he hits H in the head with a bamboo stick, causing him to fall to the ground. H gets to his feet and runs away as the man tries to strike him again.

On another visit to the park, the owner sees H and invites him over to take a look inside the box. H hesitates for a moment but eventually takes a look. The man asks H what grade he is in and suggests that H become his apprentice. Something about the man scares H, and he slips away when the man isn't looking. As he leaves, he remembers hearing the local housewives saying people who operate this type of booth will sometimes run off with children.

H tells his father about the box and the pictures he has seen. His father explains that the pictures were a puppet peepshow and that the shows have been banned from Tokyo as inappropriate. H is surprised to learn that the show he saw is based on an actual event that occurred in Tokyo many years before. Morio tells H that peepshows are for adults, and the story he saw has an indecent meaning. He should not repeat it to anyone, especially Toshiko.

Oyatsu is an afternoon snack all children like. H is no exception. Toshiko will not give H money to buy the snack, so H finds a way to get the money himself. Toshiko sometimes gives a plate of candies to H. Instead of eating them, H takes the candies to school and trades them to his friends. He gets his friends to buy the things at the sweetshop that he wants to eat and trades his candies for theirs.

Toshiko does not allow H to go see the kambishi man. The kambishi man travels with a miniature "theater" and changes the scenes in the theater as he tells the story. H wants to go see the kambishi man but does not have any money to do so. He tries to take some of the grocery money, but his mother finds out and gives him a stern reprimand. H realizes that theft is out of the question. Morio saves the day by showing H how he can make money through the purchase of commercial starch or paste, as it is called in Japan. Before long, H has more than enough money to go see the kambishi man.



## Chapter 5 Analysis

H demonstrates his resourcefulness through finding ways to participate in various activities without paying the required fees. This resourcefulness results in H being offered an opportunity to be an apprentice at the local amusement park. H's instincts lead him to refuse the offer. Another example of H's resourcefulness centers on his favorite snack food, oyatsu. Without any money, H devises a plan to get his friends to purchase the snack for him.

On a separate occasion, H shows that he is not above stealing to get what he wants. However, his efforts are unsuccessful, and he must once again rely on his own resourcefulness to achieve his goal. Surprisingly, H receives the help he needs from an unlikely source. Morio, H's father, feels strongly that H should learn the value of money and how to earn it. He shows H how to start a very successful small business.



# Chapter 6

## Chapter 6 Summary

H has a bedwetting problem. Yoshiko does not have this problem, and this adds to the guilt H feels about wetting the bed. The bed he shares with his father is the one closest to the bathroom. H tries to wake up before he wets the bed, but most of the time it is too late. Wetting the bed causes H to fidget, which wakes his father. Instead of putting fresh futons on the bed, they put a map hider over the wet patch. The map hider is a pad made by folding a blanket into several layers and sewing them together. H's parents never complain or lecture him about his bedwetting. They do not ignore the problem but always refer to it as map-making, not bedwetting. When Yoshiko sees the wet patch, she tells H that it looks like a map. H tells her that he is map-making while he sleeps.

The bedwetting worries H, but he tries to make light of the situation. After bedwetting incidents, H washes the map part of the bedding and hangs it on the drying platform upstairs to dry. He watches carefully to make sure no one sees because he does not want anyone to discover his secret. Mitchan, a young woman that H likes, lives next door and can easily see the drying platform from her backyard. One day, the bedding slips out of H's hands and falls into Mitchan's backyard as she is washing her hands in the basin. Hearing the crash, she looks up to see H standing near the drying platform. H is convinced that Mitchan has seen the map and is completely ashamed.

Toshiko hears about a doctor who can cure bedwetting and takes H to see him. In the waiting area, H picks up a magazine to read and is surprised that his mother would allow him to read anything but the Bible. H is completely embarrassed when Toshiko begins praying aloud that H will be cured. After an hour and a half, Toshiko and H go in to see the doctor. The treatments are difficult and painful. To reward his bravery, Toshiko takes H to a noodle restaurant for a bowl of oyako-don. This becomes a ritual each time H goes to see the doctor.

On each visit, H eats heartily but complains that the egg in the oyako-don is overcooked. The owner overhears his remark and takes his advice to cook the eggs softer. This change brings many requests for the new version of oyako-don from the restaurant's customers. H makes a sign for the owner to put in the window which brings even more customers. To show her appreciation the owner tells Toshiko that their meal is free. Toshiko thanks her for her kindness but tells the owner she cannot accept her offer. Eventually, however, the owner wins out.

H decides that drawing pictures to sell to people is a better way to make money than selling the two-sen paste. H and his mother continue making weekly trips to the doctor for two months. In the end, the treatment for curing the bedwetting fails, and H goes on "making maps" on his bed.



## Chapter 6 Analysis

One major source of embarrassment for H is his frequent bedwetting. When Yoshiko tells H that the soaked area on his bed looks like a map, H, not wishing to be further embarrassed, tells her that he is map-making during his sleep. In a separate incident, H's embarrassment cannot be hidden when his soaked mattress accidentally falls into the backyard of a young lady that H likes. He is certain she has discovered his problem.

The supportive nature of H's parents is displayed in their efforts to find medical help for H. Having located a doctor, Toshiko and H make several trips to his office for treatment. Toshiko's deep religious faith is shown through the audible prayers for a cure that she offers up in the waiting room during each visit. H shows a great deal of bravery as he endures the extremely painful medical treatments.

Toshiko's motherly concern for her son is evident as she rewards his bravery with weekly trips to a nearby restaurant for oyako-don, another of H's favorite foods. H uses his resourcefulness to suggest a slightly different way to prepare the oyako-don to the restaurant's owner, which increases the number of orders for the dish. From this idea, H inadvertently discovers a new business that will bring in more money than his previous one.



# Chapter 7

## Chapter 7 Summary

Morio's apprentice, Jun, tells Morio he will be leaving to start his own tailoring business soon. A sign is put up in the window of the tailoring shop for a replacement. Two applicants apply for the job, and Morio and Toshiko have different opinions on which one will be selected. As they consider removing the sign from the window, another man comes into the shop and asks about the job. Toshiko sees that the man has a bad leg and his body tilts to one side when he walks. For this reason, Toshiko tells Morio that this man is not qualified for the job. Morio disagrees and hires the man to be his apprentice. Morio tells her that anyone can become a tailor if he wants to, even if he is not fit to be a soldier. Toshiko knows that Morio's decision is based on love and compassion even if Morio will not admit it. Shige-san, the new apprentice, begins work four days later.

At this time, China and Japan are at war with each other. Chinese people living in Japan are considered enemies and are called "chinks" by most everyone. In H's home, this phrase is strictly forbidden. Mr. Chin, a local restaurant owner, is a friend of H and his family. H tells Mr. Chin that he respects him and that he does not think of him as a "chink." Mr. Chin is surprised by H's statement and thanks him for it. Later, H talks to Morio about the visit with Mr. Chin. Morio tells H that saying what he feels is fine, but many people find it to be a little strange.

Toshiko is influenced by Mrs. Staples, an American missionary working in Kobe. Mrs. Staples believes that people should not discriminate against each other. She feels everyone should make the effort to eliminate discrimination, since this is the first step toward love that knows no boundaries or race.

At this time, Kaneda, a Korean who is renting a room from the Senohs, is facing discrimination daily by other people in Kobe. H asks Kaneda why he does not object to being called a "chosen," the name for Koreans living in Japan. Kaneda tells H that if he let himself become annoyed by everything they say, there would be no place for him to live in Japan. H tells Toshiko about his conversation with Kaneda, and his mother replies that Kaneda is a good Christian and will surely go to heaven. Toshiko tells H that she will talk with Kaneda about the love of Christ. It bothers H that his mother talks to anyone and everyone about Christianity.

Three months later, Kaneda leaves after an embarrassing incident with Toshiko. Kaneda has misunderstood Toshiko's intentions and has mixed up biblical love with the love between a man and woman. H and Toshiko decide not to tell Morio the real reason that Kaneda left so unexpectedly. Toshiko's eagerness to pass on the "love of Christ" is undiminished and continues to cause problems from time to time.



## Chapter 7 Analysis

Toshiko and Morio have a great deal of respect for each other. Even though they sometimes disagree on certain things, they always find a compromise. Their mutual respect for each other shows in the way Toshiko yields to her husband's way of thinking and in Morio's acceptance of Toshiko's religious beliefs. Although they possess striking differences in personality, both Morio and Toshiko have a quiet understanding of each other's wants and needs. Morio is a compassionate man who does not judge a person by outside appearances but by his or her character. Toshiko is compassionate as well, but her compassion is expressed in a more vocal manner.

Discrimination is very prevalent during the time of Japan's war with China. Japanese people use derogatory terms in reference to the Chinese people living in Japan. Tolerance of others is strictly practiced in H's home, and discrimination of any kind is forbidden. H has a great deal of empathy for the Chinese and their situation. H feels that it is very important to respect all people and to demonstrate that respect through words and deeds.

Toshiko strongly believes that discrimination should be eliminated through bringing the "love of Christ" to everyone. This method proves to be disastrous when her Christian motives are misunderstood by a Korean gentleman who is renting a room in the Senohs' home. Misreading Toshiko's intentions, his unwanted advances are rejected, and he leaves that afternoon. Undaunted, Toshiko's firm belief in sharing the love of Christ with people continues and causes some similar incidents.





# Chapter 8

## Chapter 8 Summary

H loves to go to the sea to swim and to be with his friends. Toshiko tells H that he must come directly home from school before going out to the sea or anywhere else. This is embarrassing to H because his friends do not have to obey such a rule. H decides to avoid embarrassment by going with his friends to the beach and making up an excuse to give to his mother when he returns home. Each time he meticulously shakes the sand from his clothing, hands, hair and feet and thinks that his mother will not find out. Unfortunately, Toshiko finds out each time and punishment follows.

Toshiko always tells H to be careful because the sea can be dangerous. H, Yasuo and some of their friends take the boat owned by Yasuo's father out on the sea. The boys plan to row to a nearby island, but the current is stronger than they expected and panic sets in when they are unable to change the boat's direction. Mr. Suzuki, Yasuo's father, sees the boys are in trouble and waves frantically and gestures to them to head the boat east. Meanwhile, he gets on his bike and pedals to the spot where he thinks the boat will come ashore. Mr. Suzuki swims out to the boat and saves the boys. All the boys expect Mr. Suzuki to be mad, but he is not. He is just happy that they are all safe.

Less than a month later, H tells Toshiko that Mr. Suzuki has received his call-up papers and will be leaving soon. H wonders if his father will receive his call-up papers as well. Toshiko tells H that his father will probably not receive his papers because he is too small and barely passed the physical exam.

H and his friends go over to Yasuo's house to tell him goodbye. Yasuo's mother is dead, and he will be living with his grandmother while his father is away. H wonders if he will ever see his friend again.

## Chapter 8 Analysis

Children often believe they can fool their parents, and H is no exception. His cleverly devised trickery always fails, and H is made to pay the price for his misbehavior. H never gives Toshiko credit for being smarter than he thinks. Like most parents, Toshiko is always one step ahead of H in his schemes and spoils his plans each time.

Poor judgment is another of H's traits that often leads him into dangerous situations. H's lack of respect for other people's property places him in a precarious predicament. His inability to think things through becomes quite apparent in a hazardous boating mishap. As a result of this mishap, H sees firsthand that a parent's love for his child can outweigh anger with the child's actions.

H loves his father and is concerned with the possibility that one day Morio will receive his call-up papers. Being a good father, Morio assures H that his chance of receiving

enlistment papers is slim to none due to his small stature and the fact that he barely passed the physical exam.



# Chapter 9

## Chapter 9 Summary

Morio invites H to go with him to deliver a suit to a customer in Sannomiya. Morio tells H that he will take him to see the Ikuta River while they are there. H is happy about the idea of seeing the river once again and that his dad is keeping a promise he made to him two years earlier when a flood descended on Kobe.

The flood causes people to be stranded everywhere. During the flood, a bus is stalled in front of H's home. Shortly afterwards, a woman and her child leave the bus and ask H's parents if she and the child can use her bathroom. Toshiko agrees, and before long many other bus passengers are asking to do the same thing. Toshiko prepares coffee for the passengers and lets them stay in her home until a new bus comes to take them to their destination. When the bus driver announces that the new bus is on its way, the passengers reboard the old bus until the new one gets there. Two hours later, they are on their way.

H's uncle, Hadano, arrives two days later, carrying his bicycle on his shoulders. He explains that he could not get home because the bridge has washed out and asks if he can stay with H's family for a few days. Hadano tells them about the flood damage in the city. He talks about the houses being washed away and about how he just got out before his office floated away. H thinks the flood is an act of God, but Morio corrects him. Morio says that human beings, not God, caused the flood. Three weeks later, Morio takes H to see the mudslides and other flood damage. His father promises H that he will bring him back to see these places again when they have been repaired.

Now, Morio is going to keep his promise to H. The effects of the flooding are nowhere to be seen. H tells his father that now the rivers will flow without getting angry. Morio agrees but tells him that disaster strikes when it is least expected, and if people forget that, they will probably suffer again.

## Chapter 9 Analysis

Toshiko and Morio show their generosity and charitable spirit when they allow stranded bus passengers to stay in their home until a new bus arrives to take them on their way. Toshiko sees this situation as an opportunity to display her Christianity to these people in need. After they leave, Toshiko has another chance to show her charity toward Uncle Hadano, a relative of Toshiko's, who is unable to get home due to the flooding.

Morio wants H to understand the true reason for the flooding. Morio makes sure that H understands that people caused the flooding, and it is not an act of God as Toshiko has claimed. After a few days, Morio takes H to see the flood damage and makes a promise to H to bring him back when the damage has been repaired. True to his word, Morio and H return two years later to see that all effects of the flood damage have disappeared. As

Morio teaches H that devastation can be healed, he also reminds his son that there will always be new troubles.



# Chapter 10

## Chapter 10 Summary

H has a friend whose nickname is "Blackpatch," which refers to the black birthmark on his head. Toshiko tells H to stop calling this boy by his nickname. H explains that everyone calls him by that name, and he does not seem to mind. Toshiko tells H that the boy probably does mind and just puts up with it. H understands what she is saying and agrees to stop using the nickname. Instead, H calls him Donchan, which is the boy's given name.

Donchan has many comic books in his library at home, and H takes every opportunity to read them when he gets the chance. He has to be careful, however, to make sure his mother does not find out that he is reading something else besides the Bible or his schoolbooks. Toshiko approves of Donchan and H's friendship because Donchan is so fond of reading and speaks politely.

On one visit, Donchan invites H to read some of the books from his father's library. H discovers a book entitled *Three Treasures*, with wonderful stories and adult illustrations. H asks Donchan to borrow the book, but Donchan refuses. After some pleading, Donchan relents and lets H borrow the book if he can do a double somersault. H tries and breaks his collarbone in the process.

On the advice of a neighbor, Toshiko takes H to a bonesetter to have his collarbone repaired. H wants to go to see the doctor immediately because he fears that he will lose the use of his arm otherwise. Hearing cries of pain from inside the bonesetter's office makes H very nervous. Toshiko glares at him and asks if he wants to have a useless arm for the rest of his life. H replies that he can stand the pain if she will take him to get a curry afterward. Toshiko remarks that H always has to be bribed with something.

Inside the office, the bonesetter angrily asks why H was not brought to him sooner. The collarbone has not set right, and it will need to be re-broken to be repaired properly. The bonesetter pulls H's arm and shoulder hard and causes H to pass out. The bonesetter tells Toshiko that she will need to bring H back several times for the bone to be set properly. When H returns home, Donchan brings him the book and tells him to keep it until he is recovered.

H comes home from school one day to find that Toshiko has found the book. His mother asks him if he knows that the author of the book committed suicide. Toshiko tells him that Christianity does not approve of anyone taking his or her own life. She asks if H's teacher allows him to read the book. H lies and says that his teacher is the one who recommended the book. H panics as Toshiko leaves to go talk to his teacher. Mom returns an hour later. H is surprised and relieved that she is not angry. Toshiko tells H that the teacher said that not allowing H to read anything but the Bible was not likely to keep H from going astray. Toshiko tells H that he can read other books, but he must get



her permission first. H is puzzled by his mother's acceptance of the book and that his teacher overlooked H's lie.

## Chapter 10 Analysis

Toshiko takes her responsibilities as a mother very seriously. She intends for her children to be raised with Christian principles and a sense of purpose. Toshiko only allows her children to read the Bible and their schoolbooks. Comic books and similar reading material is strictly forbidden. Of course, when parents withhold certain things from their children, the appeal of those items is hard to resist.

H's love of reading is apparent throughout the book. From comic books to newspapers, H never stops wanting to read and learn more. Having a chance to read comic books and other types of books from his friend's library is more than H can resist. H proves his sense of poor judgment is still intact when he accepts a dare to do a double somersault in exchange for the opportunity to read books from the friend's library. Although the somersault attempt ends with a broken collarbone, the situation turns out positively with H gaining access to the entire library of books.

Toshiko is influenced by a neighbor to take H to a bonesetter for treatment. Once again, H makes a deal with Toshiko to be brave during the treatments if she will take him to get curry after each visit. Toshiko is exasperated with H's use of bribery to get what he wants. Although she disapproves of H's methods, Toshiko condones this practice by agreeing to H's request. H's injury causes him to miss a lot of school, but it also gives him much time to enjoy reading all the books he knows Toshiko would disapprove of.

Like most children, H takes a great delight in getting away with something he knows his parents would not like. The longer H continues to read the books, the more confident he becomes that Toshiko will never find out what he is doing. This confidence proves to be his downfall. When Toshiko finds the book H is reading, she demands to know who gave it to him. In situations such as this one, most children feel that it is easier to lie than to tell the truth, and H is no exception. H lies to Toshiko and tells her that his teacher has recommended the book. H feels sure that his mother will accept this lie as the truth, but he is once again mistaken. Toshiko meets with H's teacher to confirm this information, which sends H into a panic. Prepared for the worst when Toshiko returns, H is shocked to find that Toshiko is not angry and now supports his desire to read other things than the Bible and his schoolbooks. What surprises H more is the fact that his teacher has backed up his lie.



# Chapter 11

## Chapter 11 Summary

The Hoanden, a concrete structure that houses the official royal portraits of the Emperor and Empress, is an object that sparks H's curiosity. He makes several attempts to get inside but is unsuccessful. On holidays, the portraits are taken from the Hoanden and put on display at the back of the school assembly hall. During an assembly, the students are standing with their heads bowed as the curtain covering the pictures is removed. H sneaks a peek as the curtain is raised and sees that the pictures are the same as the ones hanging in everyone's homes.

Later, H asks the vice-principal why students are not allowed to look at the photographs at school and why they pay their respects as if they are worshipping a god. The vice-principal explains that even though the Emperor looks like a person, he is really a living god. This answer puzzles H, and he decides to ask Toshiko about it when he returns home.

H asks Toshiko to explain the vice-principal's answers. His mother tells him that the Emperor is not a god and that the only god is the one in the Bible. Morio tells H that he supposes Jesus Christ is considered to be the only god for Christians, but other religions have other gods. His father tells H that there are many gods in Japan, and he supposes that the Emperor could be one of them. Toshiko overhears the conversation and is furious about Morio's explanation. She asks him if he recognizes the gods of the heathen. Morio replies that if she calls others heathen, then she should not be offended if they consider Christianity to be heathen.

H has a particular favorite among the Japanese gods. Susanowo, the younger brother of Omikami, is an unruly god that appears in the Kojiki, a book of ancient Japanese myths. H asks his homeroom teacher why Susanowo is not included in their textbooks. H is told that some things Susanowo did should not be included in textbooks. H wonders why everyone covers up anything that would be awkward for the Emperor. H does not care much for the Emperor, and finding out that he is a descendant of Susanowo, H suspects that the Emperor is not a living god after all.

## Chapter 11 Analysis

H is very curious about the Emperor of Japan and the references to his "deity." To satisfy this curiosity, H questions the vice-principal of the school about the reason students are not allowed to look at the royal portraits of the Emperor and are expected to worship him as if he is a god. The answer he receives is puzzling, and H goes to his father for more information. Morio tells H that Jesus Christ is the god of the Christians but that other religions have other gods. Over Toshiko's objections, Morio explains to H that the Japanese have many gods, and the Emperor could be one of them.

Susanowo, a god in Japanese mythology, is H's favorite. The most appealing feature of Susanowo to H is his unruliness. When H finds that the Emperor is a descendant of Susanowo, he wonders why Susanowo is not included in their schoolbooks. Finding out that Susanowo is not included because of his inappropriate behavior makes H even more suspicious that the Emperor is really not a living god.





# Chapter 12

## Chapter 12 Summary

Chapter 12 opens with the arrest of the director of the Takarazuka Girls' Opera for failing to participate in the Citizens' Anti-British Rally. The opera has recently returned from an exposition in the United States. Morio tells H that the opera members probably discovered all kinds of things about other countries that people in Japan will never know. H disapproves of anyone being anti-British because his father has so many British customers. One of these customers is returning to Britain because trade with Japan is becoming too difficult. Morio feels the issues of the day also because he is doing more alterations than making clothes. Morio tells H that if the Tripartite Alliance between Japan, Germany and Italy happens, things will get much worse. America will give Britain its military support and increase its aid to China.

H asks his father why others who feel the same way as Morio does do not speak out. Morio tells him that if they did so, they would be taken to jail by the military police. H knows that Germany has signed a non-aggression treaty with the Soviet Union at a time when Japanese forces are in danger of being defeated by the Soviet Union. Germany is betraying Japan just when Japan needs them the most. For this reason, H believes that Germany is a nation that cannot be trusted.

America's refusal to sell scrap iron to Japan and the impossibility of oil imports is causing Japan to run out of money to trade with other countries. Paper notes can no longer be exchanged for gold. A compulsory "National Census of Gold Holdings" form is being circulated to everyone in Kobe to determine how much gold each individual has in his home. H asks his father if Toshiko's gold watch is to be listed on the form. Morio replies that it will be.

Three months later, Germany invades France, and Japan signs the Tripartite Alliance. Following this, a National Dress Order, which requires all Japanese people to wear clothing made out of khaki material, is implemented. This order impacts Morio's tailoring business because of his inability to make and sell anything other than the "National Dress."

## Chapter 12 Analysis

This chapter opens with the continued efforts to ban any semblance of British/American culture from the Japanese people. These actions foreshadow the increased attempts to shape the national spirit through the banishment of any British and Western influence within Japan. People and organizations that refuse to participate in anti-British events are arrested and taken away immediately. As anti-British sentiment builds, many British people choose to leave the country. Their departure has a ripple effect on the economy,



causing many shop owners to lose their British customers and face the possible loss of their businesses altogether.

Politically, the anticipated signing of the Tripartite Agreement between Germany, Italy and Japan is looming. Morio believes that this will only make matters worse for Japan. America will give its military support to Britain and increase aid to China, making it more difficult for Japan to win its war with China. This, coupled with America's refusal to sell scrap iron to Japan and the lack of oil imports, makes it impossible for Japan to win the war. Germany, which has signed a non-aggression pact with the Soviet Union, will not intervene when Japan is in danger of being defeated by the Soviets. H sees this as a major betrayal by Germany and one that shows Germany cannot be trusted.

A National Dress Order is put into place in another attempt to build the national spirit of Japan. This order does not allow Morio to make or sell anything other than the national dress, which consists of clothing made from khaki material, in his tailoring shop. Morio's business is put in jeopardy with the passage of the National Dress Order, and Morio worries that he may not be able to keep his business open because of it. Morio is a man who plans ahead. To prepare for the possibility of having to close his shop, Morio begins to consider other areas of employment, though Toshiko and H do not realize this.



# Chapter 13

## Chapter 13 Summary

H and his friends are discussing the drive to ban English expression from the Japanese language and its repercussions among the Japanese. Names of people, cigarettes, food and pencils are being changed because they violate the spirit of the times. English is not the only thing being erased. The Japanese language is being affected as well. H hears talk about postcards being delivered with much of the writing being blacked out.

The purpose of this type of censorship is to prevent spying. Morio tells H not to go up on the roof anymore because the military secrets law prohibits any "bird's eye" photography or sketching from high places. The military secrets law also prohibits the sketching of any naval vessels and requires train passengers to lower their shades when passing by the countryside.

H is frustrated by the law and decides to give up sketching anything but sumo wrestlers. H sees a way to make some money by sketching the wrestlers on wax paper and selling them as "daylight photos," which are very popular. H decides to mass-produce the pictures using a mimeograph machine and makes lots of pocket money. Eventually, H loses interest in the business and stops the sketches. He acts as a middleman among his school friends, trading photos of the top sumo wrestlers. Once again, the business is good, but H eventually loses interest in this business also.

Everything that is made of bronze is being melted down and sent to the front in order to help the war effort. Even the bronze statue in the schoolyard is being melted down, and H thinks this is going too far. The vice-principal tells all the students to hunt out any iron or copper in their homes and bring it to the school so that it also can be used in the war effort. H and his friend, Hayashi, are walking along the beach as a trainload of soldiers passes by. Hayashi warns H not to count the number of railroad cars because he might get caught violating the military secrets law.

## Chapter 13 Analysis

The continuing effort to eliminate any hint of Western culture is seen when English is literally being erased from the Japanese language. Names and labels of items are being translated into Japanese to avoid the violation of the national spirit. The Japanese language is also being affected by the attempts to increase the national spirit.

Information on postcards is blacked out. The official reason for this, H discovers, is to prevent spying. H can no longer go up to his roof to sketch because to do so is a violation of the military secrets law. As an alternative, H decides how he can still sketch and make money at the same time. Selling his drawings of popular sumo wrestlers to other students does well in the beginning, but it soon becomes unchallenging, and H begins to search for other ways to earn money.



Running low on natural resources to continue fighting, the Japanese government is melting all bronze objects and using them to help the war effort. Wanting to do his part, H and his friends participate in the search for bronze objects. However, H thinks that melting the bronze statue in the schoolyard is unnecessary.

The fear that controls the people of Japan is seen as H is searching for bronze near the railroad. The warning H receives about violating the military secrets law by counting the number of railroad cars going by is one more indication of the powerful influence military secrets have on the lives of the Japanese people.



# Chapter 14

## Chapter 14 Summary

Bans continue on various items in Japan. Matches are rationed to five per person each day, which irritates H because he likes to play with them. Everywhere one looks, things are becoming more depressing. In spite of this situation, preparations for the 2,600th anniversary of the founding of the nation are ongoing. Warships are docked in the harbor, and their guns will be used to signal the beginning of the celebration. Phrases like "2,600th Anniversary" are seen everywhere. The celebration's theme song, "2,600 Years Since the Foundation" plays on radio stations and is a mandatory requirement in the schools.

The owner of the charcoal store tells H that the song has a story behind it, but H is not to tell anyone about it. If H does, the storeowner will be arrested. The story is that the continuing war with China is preventing Japan from scheduling the Olympics to coincide with the anniversary celebration. Since the war continues, the government is trying to build up the anniversary celebration as much as possible.

One day soon afterwards, H comes home to find Morio listening to a radio broadcast of the celebration in Tokyo. Ambassadors from America, France, Germany and Italy are in attendance. Morio tells H that ambassadors must attend to pay their respects on behalf of their countries. Failure to do this could result in a breakdown in relations and possibly lead to a war between the countries.

Five days after the celebration, signs of the festivities are still visible. Decorated streetcars called "flower cars" are strewn with lights and flowers. While H and his family are watching the lights of the flower cars as they pass by, H makes pictures of the cars. H decides to start a new business by exchanging the pictures for whatever he can get.

## Chapter 14 Analysis

Despite the ongoing war with China, Japan prepares to celebrate its 2,600th anniversary. Promotion of the event is widespread throughout the country. The celebration is being used as yet another instrument to build up the national spirit of patriotism within the Japanese people. Amid all the preparations, secrets are still being shared in spite of the fear of reprisals.

Implications of this event are far-reaching. Other countries such as France, Germany, Italy and America find it politically necessary to send ambassadors to the celebration. Tensions are high among these countries and the threat of war is looming in the background. A very intuitive individual, Morio senses the danger ahead and tries to prepare for the uncertain future.



# Chapter 15

## Chapter 15 Summary

Returning home from school one day, H finds Shige, Morio's apprentice, crying and Morio looking very uncomfortable. Morio tells H that he is letting Shige go because there is not enough work to keep him. Shige asks Morio to let him stay and learn how to do the alterations. Morio agrees to this as long as there are repairs to do. H suggests that Morio place a sign in the window advertising the alteration of suits into the national dress. H makes a sign for the window, and the idea brings quick results.

H sees a headline announcing the signing of the non-aggression pact between Russia and Japan. Morio tells H that the signing is one more way to irritate America. Morio feels that America is a powerful country that should not be tested by such things as the non-aggression pact. Morio and H both suspect that things will only get worse for Japan instead of better.

Permissible topics of conversation at school include Japanese and German victories. To talk about Britain or America is considered "un-Japanese." H never wants to be singled out by his friends as being "un-Japanese" and knows that he can only confide in his father.

Mr. Oppenheimer of the Jewish Association asks Morio to repair the clothing of a large group of Jewish people who are stopping in Kobe on their way to Egypt. America refuses to allow them entry into their country, and the group heads back to their home. When the repairs are made, the group is very happy with them, but they do not have any money to pay for Morio's work.

On H's eleventh birthday, Germany attacks the Soviet Union. The non-aggression pact is broken in less than two years. This confirms H's growing suspicion that Germany is a nation that cannot be trusted. H wonders how long it will be before the non-aggression pact between Japan and the Soviet Union will be broken.

## Chapter 15 Analysis

The economic situation in Kobe continues to deteriorate, and Morio's business is suffering. With the mandatory National Dress Order, Morio is no longer able to make and sell suits. Alterations are the main focus of his business at present, and this alone does not provide enough money to justify keeping his apprentice. Reluctantly, Morio makes the decision to let his apprentice go. H intervenes with a plan to regain some of his father's business by suggesting that people with suits could have their clothing converted into the National Dress by Morio and his apprentice. This idea brings successful results, and Morio's business improves, at least for the foreseeable future.



The signing of the non-aggression pact between Russia and Japan foreshadows the rapidly deteriorating relations between Japan and America. Morio's insightfulness is apparent, as he realizes that the pact will only irritate America and that Japan should not test a powerful country like the United States. Morio knows that things will only get worse for Japan instead of better.

H is distrustful of Germany, and his suspicions are borne out when Germany attacks the Soviet Union. As a result, the non-aggression pact between the two countries is broken in less than two years. H realizes that Germany is a deceitful country. H wonders how long it will take the pact between Japan and the Soviet Union to be broken.



# Chapter 16

## Chapter 16 Summary

Due to differences of opinion, the Japanese Konoe government changes its leadership. Hidei Tojo, war minister of the previous government, becomes prime minister in the new government. Tojo's tract, written on the rules of military personnel, is familiar to H. The main focus of the tract is that every soldier's duties are more important than personal survival.

C-grade men are now being called up for enlistment. H worries that his father will be one of them. Morio explains to H that the call up only applies to men who were examined in or after 1931. Since Morio was examined before 1931, there is no need for H to worry. Even though he knows he should feel relieved, H is still uneasy.

Newspapers report that C-grade men are anxious to receive their call up papers. H and Morio know that this is not true. The wood-form maker's son receives his papers and is not anxious to go to the front at all. Listening to his farewell remarks, H is very surprised to hear the boy say that he is more than ready to serve his country.

Newspapers also carry reports of talks between the United States and Japan. Some articles state that Japan should not be afraid of America and that Japan's military force is ready for any eventuality. H asks Morio if he thinks there will be a war between Japan and America, and Morio replies that he thinks it is very likely. Public opinion indicates that war with America is inevitable. H's friends feel that the Japanese national spirit is stronger than that of America's, and this will make Japan victorious. H does not think national spirit will be enough to win a war with the United States. This is an opinion H keeps to himself.

The next day, December 8th, the Japanese attack Pearl Harbor. All the newspapers carry headlines about the attack and the Japanese ultimatum to the United States. The way it is written makes the information hard for H to understand. H asks Morio about the situation. Morio explains that Japan has tried to keep the peace in the Pacific, but the U.S. will not do the same. Morio tells H that America is giving aid to China, which is forcing Japan to withdraw its troops from that country. His father continues to tell him that the Japanese government says that maintaining peace is the reason for the war with the U.S., but Morio believes differently. Morio feels that the main reason is the economic blockade. His father tells him to be careful what he says because all kinds of things will begin to happen. Morio tells H to form his own opinions on the things that will be happening in the future.

## Chapter 16 Analysis

H is a perceptive young man who realizes that the war is not going well, and that is the reason that more men are receiving their enlistment papers every day. He is concerned





that Morio may soon be called to serve. Morio explains that his chances of being called to the front are very slim and that H should not be worried. H remains unconvinced.

The belief of Prime Minister Tojo that soldiers should value service to their country more than personal survival is heavily promoted in the newspapers. Articles depicting the eagerness of soldiers to join the war effort appear throughout the newspapers. H knows that this cannot be true because he has seen too many men who have no desire to go to receive their enlistment papers.

Other articles promote the strength of Japan's military force to withstand any conflict with America. Propaganda stating that Japan is unafraid of America's power is carried daily in the newspapers. H believes this information is untrue and suspects that war between Japan and America will take place very soon. Morio feels the war is inevitable as well. Public opinion leads the Japanese people to believe that the national spirit of the country is much stronger than that of America, and it will carry Japan to victory. H, unlike his friends, does not believe the national spirit will be enough to win a war with America. For fear of being arrested for expressing this "un-Japanese" belief, H keeps his thoughts to himself.

The Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor is in all the newspapers in Kobe. H's curiosity as to the cause of the attack has to be satisfied, and H goes to Morio for the answers. H is told that the main reason for the attack is the economic blockade imposed on Japan by America. Morio tries to teach H to think for himself when he cautions H to be careful about what he says and to form his own opinions about things that will occur in the future. At the same time as Morio wants to encourage free and rational thought in his son, he realizes the dangers of voicing opinions that run contrary to the government's propaganda.



# Chapter 17

## Chapter 17 Summary

Religious institutions throughout Japan are feeling the effects of the war. All churches are amalgamated into one organization. The cross on one church is chopped off because of its height. The cross is higher than the Gokoku Shrine, which houses the spirit of the war dead. Crosses resembling those in America are taken out because they are considered symbols of the enemy.

Morio talks to his family about how they will prepare themselves for whatever is to come. If the reported Japanese victories are true and continue, Morio says, further pressure will be put on religion, and anyone who does not cooperate will be thought of as a traitor. His father cautions the family to be careful not to give the impression that anybody who believes in Christianity is an enemy. Morio tells Toshiko that if she continues to try to get others to believe, there could be trouble. He tells her that faith is in the heart, and direct resistance is not the only way to protect it.

The topic of conversation turns to Morio's employment. He is thinking of becoming a fireman as a way to avoid being called up to work in a factory. Morio tells them that he thinks the job would be the best for him, and the fire chief agrees. Another benefit would be that Morio could continue his alteration business on his day off from the fire station. H goes to the fire station to see what it is like and to take a tour of the station. The fire chief takes him up to the tower so that he can get a view of the city. When Morio finds out about H's visit, he is furious. H is told that going up into the tower without special permission is a violation of the anti-spying law. H promises his father that he won't ever do it again and that he will not tell anyone about it.

On H's birthday, a pastor of the Tokyo Church is arrested for violating the Peace Preservation Law. Morio explains to H that the law makes it possible to arrest anyone with ideas that might disrupt the state. Each day, more and more ministers are arrested all over the country.

## Chapter 17 Analysis

The amalgamation of all religious institutions in Japan is a result of the war. Religious symbols such as crosses on tops of church buildings are removed, as they are considered to be symbols of the enemy. Other areas of religion are affected as well. Christianity is in jeopardy of being thought of as the religion of the enemy. Morio foresees this as a problem for his family, given Toshiko's Christian beliefs. He warns her to be cautious in her Christian activities so as not to give the impression that she does not support Japan's war effort. As the war goes on, many ministers are arrested all over Japan for violation of Japan's Peace Preservation Law.



Morio possesses a strong concern for his family's economic well being. Morio realizes that his tailoring business will not sustain his family financially in the days ahead, so he makes the decision to become a fireman in Kobe. This job coupled with his alteration business should provide enough money for Morio's family. Without telling his father, H takes a tour of the fire station, and once again his curiosity gets him into trouble.

The Japanese government is becoming more controlling. Throughout the story, readers have witnessed more and more changes in the lives of the Japanese people. The government now censors communication, controls dress, restricts movement and prevents religious freedom. Morio sees more totalitarianism in the future. Throughout the story, H has shown himself to be a bright, curious, creative and artistic boy, interested in understanding and trying new things. H's personality conflicts with the atmosphere of oppression building in his country.



# Chapter 18

## Chapter 18 Summary

Toshiko is the head of the number four local association district. It is imperative that the association heads avoid suspicion of unfairness in their distribution of rationed items. Any complaints of unequal food distributions are not to be taken lightly. Toshiko takes her job quite seriously, and H feels that his mother is much better suited for this activity than beating a tambourine.

Frequency of air raid drills increases. The drills are actually practice for putting out fires caused by enemy bombings. One person in each household is required to participate in the drills. When Toshiko injures her back in a drill, other association members stop by to check on her and bring sweet buns and candies. H does not like the war, but he does like the goodies the association members provide.

The media reports that Japan is winning the war. This is hard for H to believe, since the next day American planes drop incendiary bombs all over Kobe. The newspapers do not report the one fatality in the bombing raid, which makes H angry. Morio tells him not to expect the newspapers to print anything awkward. H asks his father if the reports from the Imperial Headquarters about Japan winning the war are false. Shifting uncomfortably, Morio admits that they could be.

If more bombings continue, the number of fires will increase, Morio explains. H asks why they have bucket brigades if they don't do any good. Morio replies that if the Air Defense Department tells the truth, people will lose faith in the military. Air raid drills keep everyone working together, he tells H. Morio reminds H that this information is top secret and should not be repeated to anyone, especially Toshiko.

Notices are sent from the municipal authorities instructing local neighborhood associations to prepare air raid dugouts in the streets in front of the members' homes. At this time, H hears that a Japanese submarine has been shelling the American mainland. He decides to stop reading the papers to avoid becoming so frustrated with the misinformation.

## Chapter 18 Analysis

The intensity of the war increases with more frequent air raid drills and food rationing. Being assigned as the head of the local association district, Toshiko has the responsibility for distribution of rationed food and other items. This position of authority is very important to Toshiko and one she takes quite seriously.

False information is being reported in the newspaper of Japan's winning of the war. Incendiary bombing raids by the Americans disprove these reports daily. Fatalities resulting from the raids are never reported in the newspapers. H suspects that Japan is



losing the war, and this suspicion grows when Morio admits the possibility of Japan's defeat. The father, again, cannot lie to his son, but he understands the danger of opposing the government's version of the truth.

Bucket brigades to fight the fires started by the bombs are put into action but are not very effective. Being practical, H is curious as to the reason for having the bucket brigades if they do no good. H's father tells him the brigades are to keep everyone working together and to keep the national spirit strong. The people are being given something to do so that they don't become afraid and potentially rebellious. Local neighborhood associations begin preparations for air raid dugouts in the streets of Kobe.



# Chapter 19

## Chapter 19 Summary

Gas masks are delivered to H's home, and Toshiko delivers the masks to the neighbors. A document urging the purchase of the gas masks is sent to each household. Although not compulsory, the language of the document makes it clear that the masks should and will be purchased. H is disturbed by the language of the message and asks Toshiko if she thinks the masks will protect them from a poison gas attack. Toshiko answers that they probably will, but she does not think America will launch a poison gas attack on Japan. Toshiko decides not to purchase a mask, but Morio tells her that is not a good idea. Morio reminds her that if the head of the neighborhood association does not buy a mask, the other members will not have incentive to do so. Toshiko tells Morio that it would be better to tell the neighbors not to purchase the masks because they are so expensive. Morio replies that to do that would mean that she would be taken away immediately by the secret police.

Having so many British and American customers makes Morio nervous when the word "spy" is mentioned. The American and British people are now considered enemies of Japan. The secret police come to Morio's home one day to ask him some questions. After looking around, they take Morio in for further questioning. Morio returns late that night and asks H to give him the postcard of American skyscrapers which H received some time ago. H asks if the postcard is why the secret police came to see him. Morio tells him that he does not think so. H replies that a spy must have informed the police about the card, and he will find out who it was and make him pay. Angry, Morio tells him that would only make matters worse. Despite his father's warning, H decides to find the spy anyway.

News of H's father being taken in spreads quickly at school the following day. H tells his friend, Hayashi, that a rumor is going around about his family being spies. H tells Hayashi that the reason for the rumor is the postcard H received from America. H vows to find the person who informed on his family.

When H returns home, his father is there. Morio tells him that everything is okay. He gives the postcard back to H and tells him not to show it around anymore. Morio explains that his connection with American and British customers before the war was the reason for his being taken in by the secret police.

## Chapter 19 Analysis

Another preparation for the air raid attacks is the sale and distribution of gas masks to the people of Kobe. The messages that come with the gas masks imply that buying a gas mask is something mandatory, disguised as a choice. If the air raid preparations are ineffectual, the gas mask sales may serve no purpose but to provide more income to



the government. Toshiko is very budget-conscious and feels that the masks are too expensive for the families in her district. Toshiko has a tendency to act before thinking, and this is displayed by her decision not to purchase masks for her family and to discourage other families from purchasing the masks as well. Morio uses his common sense to point out that advising other families not to purchase the masks could easily result in Toshiko's arrest by the secret police. Toshiko seems to take the government messages at face value, while Morio reads between the lines, looking for real meanings beneath what is being said, an important theme in this work.

H gets a close-up view of just what the secret police can do when they come to his home and take Morio in for questioning. Jumping to conclusions, H mistakenly believes the reason for his father being taken by the secret police is because of a postcard of American skyscrapers H received. Believing someone has informed the police about the card, H is determined to find the informant. However, his father tells him that the card has nothing to do with the incident.



# Chapter 20

## Chapter 20 Summary

Before restrictions on long-distance travel begin, Morio and Toshiko send H and Yoshiko for a visit to their grandparents' home near Hiroshima. H is thrilled that he and Yoshiko are making the trip unaccompanied. H wants to take the express train, but Toshiko objects to the higher fare. With Morio's help, H is able to convince his mother that the express train would be best.

H and Yoshiko are allowed to go to the train station alone as well. When the train arrives, they board and find their seats as the train leaves the station. As they pass through the Takatori Station, H hears the loud clatter of blinds being drawn down by passengers, since it is forbidden to look at the scenery. H is impressed by the power of the military secrets law. At the next stop, H races outside to make some sketches of the train's engine. He is delighted when the engineer invites him to come inside the cabin to get a closer look at the controls. When H and Yoshiko arrive in Hiroshima, they see Uncle Yoshio, Toshiko's brother, waiting to take them to their grandparents' home.

## Chapter 20 Analysis

Toshiko and Morio want the best for their children and decide to send them, unaccompanied, to the country to visit their grandparents. The main reason for this decision is the approaching restriction on long-distance travel. This restriction is another indicator of the growing effects of the war on Japan. H's parents are unsure if or when they will ever be able to provide a trip like this again for their children.

H has a tremendous sense of adventure. Getting the opportunity to take the train, unaccompanied, to visit his grandparents is the ultimate in excitement for him. On board the train, H and his sister see the power of the military secrets law, which forbids train passengers to view the scenery from the train cars. As drawing down the shades hides the scenery from the passengers, the government in Japan is hiding reality from the view of the people. H takes advantage of this opportunity to use his artistic abilities to make sketches of the train's engine and the engineer's cabin so that he can have a memento of this adventure. H's interest in everything around him again contrasts with the world of secrets and suspicions that is evolving in wartime Japan.

Because readers view this story from a future time, they realize that Hiroshima will be demolished at the end of the war. This builds tension in the reader as the children travel toward their destination, even though the end of the war is still far away. The reader may recall the flooded area that H visited earlier. Mankind is certainly headed toward an even greater tragedy, as H's father implied.





# Chapter 21

## Chapter 21 Summary

As H and his sister arrive at their grandparents' home, H is disappointed to see how dilapidated the house has become. After having some watermelon, H goes off exploring and finds a boat in the remains of the house. H wonders how it got there and asks his grandfather about it. H's grandfather tells him that the boat is necessary when the floods come. His grandfather explains that the boat is useful when the paddy fields become swamped.

H and his cousin, Tatsuo, are very close. When H hears that Tatsuo is home for the summer, he quickly finishes his lunch and goes over to see him. Yoshiko wants to go along and tells H that if he does not take her, she will tell their parents when they return home. H and Yoshiko argue, and H runs off down the road, leaving Yoshiko behind. During the summer, H makes many friends and spends his time swimming, fishing and learning the Hiroshima dialect.

At the end of the visit, H and Yoshiko return to find uncle Hadano digging an air raid shelter under the floor of their house. H finds it odd that a shelter would be dug in that location. If the house collapses from a bomb, he thinks to himself, they will be trapped under it. The war seems so much closer to H in Kobe than it does in the country.

## Chapter 21 Analysis

Like most boys, H is an explorer. When H finds a boat in the remains of an old boat at a house on his grandparents' property, his curiosity is peaked. H wonders why a boat would be found at a house so far from the water. Remembering what a nice place his grandparents' home was once, H feels a little disappointed when he sees its present rundown condition.

H is a problem-solver also. When he meets some new friends during his summer vacation, he has difficulty communicating with them because he does not speak their dialect. To solve the problem, H asks his cousin, Tatsuo, to teach him the dialect, Tatsuo agrees. Tatsuo teaches H the dialect as the two boys spend their summer fishing and swimming. Language and meaning is an important theme in the book, and the reader begins to realize that Japan is divided linguistically and culturally.

When H and Yoshiko return to Kobe, the reality of the war surrounds them. Arriving at home, they see Uncle Hadano digging an air raid shelter under the floor of their house. As H and Yoshiko look at the shelter, they realize that war is coming to Kobe, and it may be coming to their home. It is ironic that near Hiroshima, which will be so thoroughly destroyed, the war seems further away.



# Chapter 22

## Chapter 22 Summary

The Japanese language is undergoing changes in its vocabulary and the way it is written. These changes are very confusing to everyone including H and his friends. Some of the newspapers continue to write their articles to be read from right to left while others write articles to be read from left to right. H asks his teacher who is responsible for these changes, and the teacher tells H that the Education Ministry gave the order. His teacher explains that the changes are being made in an attempt to make Japanese the language of all of Asia.

The Education Ministry issues another rule, which states that "words of enemy origin" are to be avoided. H and his friends make up substitute names to use for the forbidden words. They make a game of it by getting other classmates to guess which forbidden word the substitute word stands for. H feels that it is better to make a game of these rules than to become irritated about them.

Efforts to gather up all metal objects are increased. Circulars are sent asking people to turn in any metal object in their homes so that they can be used to make weapons for the war. Children collect nails and scrap metal to turn into the metal-collection point. H makes his contribution and receives payment, but he does not tell his mother about the money.

Skipping school is another secret H is keeping. H does not enjoy studying math and the other subjects that will prepare him for his middle school entrance exam. Instead, he would rather go to the movie theater. H's most successful excuse to get out of class is to fake a stomachache. This is the excuse he uses to go with his friend, Shingo, to see the latest film in the entertainment district.

H and Shingo take the train to the theater and talk about movies that are banned and the film companies that are being consolidated by the government. The film they watch reminds H of the stories he has heard about the treatment of Jews in Germany. H enjoys the swordplay in the film, but Shingo is not impressed.

The boys do not take the streetcar all the way home. They get off the streetcar one stop before their home so as not to be seen by their neighbors. One of H's neighbors riding on the streetcar sees H and Shingo and lets his mother know. H's mother confronts him when he walks through the door. H expects punishment and is surprised when there is none. H finds out that Toshiko talked with his teacher. He is even more surprised to find out that his teacher told Toshiko that it would be a good idea to let H have some free time and not put too much pressure on him.

To build up the nation's spirit and resolve, a slogan competition is put on by the school and won by a fifth grade student. Her winning slogan, "Nothing for Me till Victory" is



seen on posters and in newspapers all over Kobe. H and his friends decide to hold a slogan competition of their own. The slogan H writes, "Too much restraint/Will make you faint" is disliked by his friends and causes H to be considered un-Japanese.

## Chapter 22 Analysis

The Japanese language is undergoing government-imposed changes. H plays games with the language to make the rules tolerable. Control of language is a way to control thought and communication. This causes confusion, as printed materials are inconsistent. The purpose behind the changes is to make Japanese the language of all Asian countries. However, the goal is not accomplished. Curious as ever, H finds out that the Education Ministry has authorized these changes. Another ruling of the Education Ministry prohibits the use of "words of enemy origin." While most people are irritated by this ruling, H decides to make a game out of it.

Collection of all metal objects to be used in the war effort is ongoing. Children search for any metal objects that can be used in the making of weapons for the war. Once collected, the items are taken to a collection point for payment. H makes his contribution, takes it to the collection point and gets his payment. H does have a bit of a selfish streak because he does not tell Toshiko about the money he has received. In a world of hidden meanings, H also has his secrets.

School attendance is not a high priority for H. When it comes to a choice between studying for his middle school exams and going to the movies, the movies win out every time. Complaining of a stomachache always works to get him out of class and on his way to the movie theater. On one occasion, H and his friend, Shingo, skip school to go see the latest film in the theater district, which reminds H of the stories he has heard about the treatment of the Jews at the hands of the Germans.

Trying to keep Toshiko from finding out that he has skipped school, H gets off the streetcar one stop before his home so that he will not be seen by anyone who knows him. His plan fails, and Toshiko confronts him when he gets home. In the end, Toshiko outsmarts H when she does not react in anger as he expects.

Efforts to build up the nation's resolve continue through the implementation of a national slogan contest. The winning slogan is written by a fifth-grade student and appears in all the newspapers. H and his friends hold their own slogan competition. All of H's friends dislike his slogan and consider him to be "un-Japanese." H's natural tendencies are again seen to contrast with the atmosphere of the times.



# Chapter 23

## Chapter 23 Summary

Toshiko dreads going around the neighborhood trying to convince her neighbors to buy war bonds. The price of the bonds, around one-third of an average worker's monthly salary, is quite costly. H asks Toshiko why the families are expected to buy the bonds. Toshiko explains that wars are expensive, and since there is not enough money, the government is asking ordinary people to lend some through the purchase of the bonds. Toshiko continues to tell H that once the war is over, the money will be repaid. With this explanation, H understands that the purpose of the bonds is to finance the war.

Coverage of the war is scarce until a report of a Japanese victory in the Solomon Islands is given precedence in the newspapers. Radio and newspaper reports are vague regarding the actual outcome of the battle. Other reports of the fighting in Burma and Guadalcanal are also unclear. All the confusion causes H to believe that Japan is actually losing the war rather than winning it. H decides that the news reports are only used to build up the national morale.

Toshiko worries about H passing the middle school entrance exam because of his poor study skills. H spends much time reading the newspaper instead of studying, and this is another source of concern for Toshiko. H tells Toshiko that she does not need to worry because reading the newspaper will help him pass the exam. Toshiko is unconvinced.

The middle school entrance exam consists of three sections. Seven students are scheduled to take the oral tests, physical tests and complete the school report. The exam is administered by three teachers and a military officer. H passes all three tests successfully and is given information about the rules and requirements of the Second Middle School. H's father makes H's school uniform and saves the family forty clothing coupons.

According to Yoshiko, when H wears his school uniform, he looks like a soldier. H tells her that the school offers military training, so he might just be a soldier one day. Rumors are spreading that the senior students of the middle school beat up the younger ones, and this worries H. He is right to worry because on the day of the entrance ceremony, H is struck across the face with a gun by a senior student named Furuta, and H has no idea why this happens.

## Chapter 23 Analysis

The Japanese are expected to support the war effort through the purchase of war bonds. H wonders why Japanese families are expected to purchase the bonds. Toshiko explains to H that wars are expensive and that the sale of war bonds will help to finance the war. Toshiko tells H that once the war is over the money will be repaid, but H has his doubts.



Toshiko wants her children to be well educated, and she is worried about H's chances of passing the middle school exams because of his poor study habits. The fact that H spends more of his time reading the newspapers than studying his lessons is a constant concern for Toshiko. H explains that when he reads the newspapers he is actually studying. The news he learns will help him to do better on his exams. Although this sounds logical, Toshiko is not convinced. H passes all three of the middle school exams, much to her surprise.

Yoshiko tells H that he looks like a soldier in his school uniform. Knowing that the middle school offers military training, H tells Yoshiko that one day he might just become a soldier. Because of rumors he has heard concerning the older students at the middle school beating up the new students, H is a little worried about what will happen when the school year begins. The rumors prove to be true when H is struck in the face with a gun by one of the older students. The tone of H's environment is changing with his passage into middle school. In his old school, his teachers convinced his mother to allow H to read books and allowed him to go to the movies. The new environment is unfriendly and warlike, reflecting the oppressive atmosphere of Japan.



# Chapter 24

## Chapter 24 Summary

The Second Middle School offers many clubs for the students such as riding, rugby, judo, baseball and rifle. The riding club appeals to H, and he plans to join. Before he can do so, H receives a message from Furuta, the student who beat H. The message tells H that Furuta wants H to join the rifle club. H tells the student to go back and tell Furuta that he is not interested in the rifle club.

Furuta comes into H's classroom the following day to ask him why H wanted to see his gun the day before. H replies he wanted to see how the bullets in the gun were fired. Furuta tells him that he can learn about that and a lot more if he joins the rifle club. Furuta explains that if H decides to quit the riding club, he can join the rifle club at any time. H's opinion of Furuta begins to change.

New riding club members are assigned the duties of cleaning out the stables and washing down the horses. The older club members are allowed to do most of the riding. H makes many new friends in the riding club, but his first day does not go well when a horse bites him. Eventually, Mr. Sawamura, manager of the riding stables, gives riding lessons to H and his friend, Yokota. After some time, H learns to ride his favorite horse, Kamikera.

H learns of the death of Admiral Yamamoto, the admiral who led the attack on Pearl Harbor, from Mr. Sawamura while he and his friends are cleaning out the stables. When H gets home, Morio has already heard the news. Morio suspects that since a successor to Yamamoto is already selected, the admiral was probably killed long before the official announcement, and it has been kept a secret. American forces are steadily advancing, and Morio thinks it is very likely that there will be an attack on Japan by the United States. H feels that his father is exactly right.

H and his friends decide to take the horses out for a ride without anyone knowing. The boys give Mr. Sawamura a bottle of whiskey, and under its influence, he gives H and Yakoto riding boots and spurs. The boys ride the horses to the riverbed and stay too long. They ride the horses at full trot to get back to the stables before the senior students find out that H and his friends are gone.

News of the secret ride comes out two days later. H and his friends are summoned to the riding grounds and are given a beating by five of the senior students. H and his friends are expelled from the riding club and can never figure out who betrayed them. Three months later the riding club is disbanded.



## Chapter 24 Analysis

The Second Middle School offers many different clubs for its students to join. H has an interest in horseback riding and joins the riding club. A member of the rifle club strongly suggests that H join that club. H has a strong will and will not be bullied into joining the rifle club. H's refusal to be intimidated causes the rifle club member to suggest that H consider joining the rifle club if he ever leaves the riding club.

New members of the riding club are assigned the cleaning of the stables and caring for the horses. Riding is reserved for the older members of the club. H does not have a lot of patience and wants to take riding lessons as soon as possible. Before long, H is taught how to ride his favorite horse, Kamikera. Eventually, however, H gets thrown out of the club for taking a secret horseback ride. Shortly after, the club is disbanded. For the first time, H's adventurousness has truly negative consequences.

News of the death of Admiral Yamamoto, the admiral who led the attack on Pearl Harbor, spreads throughout Kobe. Since a successor has already been selected, Morio, using his keen sense of deduction, suspects that Yamamoto died long before the announcement was made in the newspapers and that his death has been kept a secret. American troops are advancing, and Morio and H both think that an attack on Japan will occur very soon.



# Chapter 25

## Chapter 25 Summary

Instructor Tamori is in charge of the military training and is one of the most feared men at the school. Although he gets along fine with the other instructors, H and Tamori are at odds with each other from the beginning. In one incident, Tamori is embarrassed in front of other military officers, and he blames H for losing face with his colleagues. Venting his anger, he hits H in the face and berates him in front of the other officers. H encounters Tamori later the same day, and Tamori continues his bullying tactics. He tells H that since his parents are Japanese, they should stop being Christians. H walks away silently, totally sure that Tamori is a fool.

A few days later, H is sketching when Tamori comes over to him. Tamori makes sarcastic remarks about the drawing, and H responds in kind. Tamori kicks him in the chest with his boot. H asks Tamori if hitting him makes Tamori feel better. Knowing a blow is coming, H closes his eyes and waits. To H's surprise, the blow does not come. When he opens his eyes, H sees Tamori walking away.

H goes to the infirmary to get medical attention for his wounds. While there, he begins to wonder how much more of Tamori's treatment he can endure. At this moment, Yakoto and Furuta enter and suggest that H not provoke Tamori any further. They tell H to join the rifle club, and they will protect him from Tamori. H decides to take their advice and joins the rifle club the next day.

## Chapter 25 Analysis

The conflict between H's personality and the military atmosphere escalates. Instructor Tamori, head of the military training at H's school, is a very insecure man. He uses bullying tactics to instill fear in his students, which results in his poor reputation among the students. Tamori is at odds with H over an incident that proved to be very embarrassing for Tamori. The instructor is not one to forget any situation in which he loses face, especially in front of his colleagues. In a separate incident, Tamori verbally and physically attacks H about his drawings. H does not retaliate, which shocks and confuses Tamori. However, H is not sure how much more of this abuse he can take from Tamori. Members of the rifle club rescue H from Tamori's wrath by offering H protection from Tamori if he joins the rifle club. Seeing that this is his best option, H joins the next day.





# Chapter 26

## Chapter 26 Summary

A rumor is circulating that English language classes will no longer be given in the schools. H and his friends ask their language teacher, Mr. Matsumoto, if the rumor is true. He admits the existence of the rumor but tells them that it is unofficial. Matsumoto tells them to continue studying because it is useful to know the English language. He explains that even though it is unclear how much longer the English lessons will be allowed, he intends to continue teaching until the lessons are no longer allowed.

H realizes that Japan is experiencing a shortage of rifles one day when he is called to the armory. When he arrives, he sees two units of soldiers returning their rifles to the school. H wonders why a school would lend the army its rifles. H is told that the rifles originally belonged to the army, and they loaned them to the school. The school is required to return the guns when the Army requests them. H still wonders why the guns were borrowed in the first place and decides the country is experiencing a shortage of rifles.

Rifle club training takes place almost daily. On Sundays, the rifle club cleans up the shrine districts. H thinks the work is hard but not as difficult as the "bellycrawl" drill. Mastering the drill can determine whether or not one would be killed in battle. The rifle club's marches are difficult also.

The rifle club begins its night marches in the autumn. Dressed in full battle gear, the rifle club members march for two and one-half hours. Mock "friendly fire" begins, and H and the others throw themselves face down into the paddy fields. The battle lasts for thirty minutes, and the "enemy" disappears. At dawn the "enemy troops" engage H, and the rifle club in battle once again. This final battle ends the battle training for the day. As H is removing his gear, everything goes black, and he falls to the ground.

## Chapter 26 Analysis

Japan's shortage of rifles becomes apparent to H and his classmates when they witness some soldiers returning their rifles to the school armory. H's continuing curiosity causes him to question why the rifles are being returned. The answer he receives is that the school originally borrowed the rifles from the army with the understanding that they would be returned upon request. Evidently, the soldiers requested the return of the rifles and now are bringing them back to the school. This indicates to H that Japan does not have enough rifles to use in the war. What still puzzles H is why the school borrowed the rifles in the first place.

Rifle club training takes place daily. Training consists of participating in battle drills and marching. H tolerates the drills but enjoys the marching more. On one march, H encounters mock "friendly fire" and must use the knowledge he has learned from the



battle drills to make his way to safety. The next morning, the battle continues throughout the day. When the battle training ends, H removes his gear when suddenly everything goes black, and he falls to the ground.



## Chapter 27

### Chapter 27 Summary

The fact that family members have different blood types is news to H. He also does not know that the compatibility of blood is critical in blood transfusions and can be the difference between life and death. Articles advising people to know their blood types in case of injury during air raids are common topics of conversation. The thought that a person, who would otherwise survive, could be killed by a blood transfusion is unimaginable to H.

Italy's surrender is announced at the school morning assembly in September. A few days later it is reported that Mussolini, who was taken into custody by the Badoglio faction, has been rescued by a German helicopter unit. H begins to wonder how Italy's surrender will affect the Italians living in Kobe. The answer comes a week later when Italians in the area are rounded up and put into concentration camps. Eventually, all Italians are checked out to see if they have any personal connections with the Badoglio faction. The Italians who are cleared of suspicion are released and kept under close surveillance.

H does not care much for Prime Minister Tojo because he reminds H of Instructor Tamori. Instructor Hisakado never hits the students, and everyone enjoys his sessions. Hisakado takes a genuine interest in the students and teaches them to think logically. He deals truthfully with his students, and they believe that Hisakado can be trusted.

Another teacher, Tan Wantanabe, who teaches English grammar, and Tamori are instinctive enemies. Wantanabe makes sarcastic remarks to Tamori whenever he sees him in the hallways. Tamori never physically attacks Wantanabe. This fact is very confusing to H, and he wonders what Wantanabe has on Tamori.

Wantanabe is not fond of H. He constantly picks on H in class. Although Wantanabe does not slap his students, he will twist a student's ear if the student gives an incorrect answer to his question. Trying to back away while Wantanabe is twisting one's ear is a mistake that only causes more pain. H is very familiar with this practice. H's friends tell him that his ears are much bigger since coming to the middle school. H believes this is true since he has been given the ear twist many times.

### Chapter 27 Analysis

During the war, H learns that members of a family can have different blood types. This fact is surprising to H, who previously had no interest in the subject. This information comes to H in articles advising that family members know their blood types in case of injury during air raids. These articles also explain the critical necessity of blood compatibility in transfusions. The fact that blood incompatibility in transfusions could prove fatal is unimaginable to H.



News of Italy's surrender is announced in September, followed by news of the arrest and subsequent rescue of Mussolini by the Germans a few days later. H wonders what will happen to the Italians living in Kobe. He does not have to wait long for the answer to his question. The Italians are gathered up and sent to concentration camps, giving H a superficial view of the treatment the Jews are receiving in Germany. Even though some Italians are cleared of any suspicious activity, they are still monitored closely.

H does not care for many of his instructors, but Mr. Hisakado is the exception. H respects the fact that Hisakado takes a genuine interest in his students and helps them to think through a problem logically. More importantly, H trusts Hisakado because he knows that Hisakado will always deal truthfully with him. The school as a microcosm shows the behaviors of adults throughout Japan. Hisakado, like H's father, is kind and honest, interested in teaching the children. Other figures in power, like Wantanabe, are more interested in control.

The only thing that H feels is worthwhile about Wantanabe is that he does not like Instructor Tamori. Instructor Wantanabe takes every opportunity to ridicule Mr. Tamori, who reminds H of Prime Minister Tojo. H is always surprised to see that Instructor Tamori never physically attacks Wantanabe, which is his usual response to confrontation. H is convinced that Instructor Wantanabe must have some type of secret information on Tamori.

As usual, H clashes with authority figures who demand power. Mutual dislike of Instructor Tamori is the only thing H and Instructor Wantanabe have in common. Wantanabe has no use for H and constantly picks on him during class. Instructor Wantanabe does not believe in slapping his students when a wrong answer is given in class. However, Wantanabe has no qualms about twisting a student's ear. H is very familiar with this practice, as he has had the ear twist many times. Many times H is the subject of teasing by his friends about his large ears.



# Chapter 28

## Chapter 28 Summary

H is excited about his first trip to the firing range for target practice. Some of the club members act as target markers, and some are shooters. Standing in a trench in front of the target, H begins the first practice round as a target marker. Many of the shooters' bullets miss the target, which makes H think the target must be difficult to hit. Sugita, in charge of the practice, tells H the shooters are taking too long to aim, and this is the cause for all the missed shots.

H, Yukawa and Yokota walk to the firing platform to take their turn as shooters. Yukawa leads H and Yokota on a shortcut that takes them to an area where they will have to pass under the line of fire. Yukawa assures them everything is fine because they will be in a sunken area. Before reaching the sunken area, gunfire erupts around them. H and the other boys fall to the ground and bellycrawl to safety. At the firing platform, H takes his turn as one of the shooters. To his surprise, his first shot hits the bulls-eye. H's combined score for the day is thirty-two points, which sets a record and causes H to be referred to as a "crack shot."

## Chapter 28 Analysis

As a member of the rifle club, H likes target practice. As a target marker, H is confused about the reason so many of the students are missing the target. Whatever the reason, H knows that the targets must be difficult to hit. H learns later that the cause of all the missed shots is that the shooters are taking too long to aim.

Being adventurous, H and his friends take a short cut to the firing platform, which leads them under the line of fire. Once again, H's poor judgment is apparent when they take a wrong turn and find themselves in the middle of gunfire. Falling to the ground, H uses his battle drill training to crawl to safety. This incident proves Tamori's words that knowing the battle training could mean the difference between life and death. The day ends well with H achieving the highest shooting score and being labeled a "crack shot."



# Chapter 29

## Chapter 29 Summary

During a troop training session, H and his classmates watch soldiers jumping in and out of octopus pots, better known as foxholes. H cannot understand the purpose of soldiers repeatedly jumping in and crawling out of the "pots." At lunch, some of the soldiers are eating their rations in the holes, while others are standing nearby. Straw sandals hanging from the soldiers' belts make it obvious to H that the army's equipment is getting steadily poorer. The training session ends, and the soldiers march off to clear away houses in the immediate vicinity of munitions factories and other important facilities.

Octopus pots are also being used in Instructor Tamori's anti-tank mine tactic training. This training is done so that Tamori can capture the attention of the unit officer who is watching the exercises. At the end of the training, Tamori announces that another training session will be held the next day. H and his friends arrange to be excluded from the training and are assigned to a march.

The next day's march takes H and his classmates to an area not far from the school. As they reach their destination, they do not do any drills. Instead, they sprawl out on the ground and go to sleep. Sounds of an air raid alert awake them from their sleep. Looking up, H sees a group of B29s passing overhead as they make their way to the sea. H watches as the planes drop bombs into the water. Instructor Hisakado explains that the objects being dropped are mines, not bombs. Soon after, the all-clear signal is heard, and everyone marches back to the school.

When H returns to school, he puts his gun and equipment in the armory and heads for his class. H's friends, Okubo and Fukushima, are engrossed in conversation. H approaches and Fukushima tells H that a soldier has been hurt during Tamori's anti-tank training drill. The next day the anti-tank training drill is suspended. Everyone is relieved that they will never have to undergo the training again. A rumor spreads that Tamori's unnatural desire for hurting people comes from his wife having an affair while he was away fighting in the war. The rumor is never proven, but Tamori becomes a very pitiful figure in light of the training accident.

## Chapter 29 Analysis

H's powers of observation reveal that the quality of Japanese soldiers' equipment is inadequate. He comes to this conclusion when, during a troop training session, he sees straw sandals hanging from the soldiers' belts. The training exercises the soldiers are performing are confusing to H. Jumping in and out of octopus pots, better known as foxholes, seems like a waste of time to H.



The octopus pots are used as a part of Instructor Tamori's anti-tank training drill. Making a favorable impression is very important to Tamori, and he uses the anti-tank drill to impress the officers who are watching. As with most situations when one is trying to impress others, the results are anything but impressive. A soldier is injured during the drill, which causes the drill to be suspended and Tamori's skill as a responsible instructor to be questioned.

Even during times of war, there can be times of peacefulness. On a march to a nearby area, H and the other students are allowed to rest and enjoy the surroundings. H looks into the skies, but the peacefulness he feels is short-lived. B-29s fly overhead and drop bombs into the sea. H is once again brought back to the reality of the present situation. While H watches the planes, Instructor Hisakado explains that what he thinks are bombs are actually mines being dropped. Once again, H learns more about the weapons of war.



# Chapter 30

## Chapter 30 Summary

Zosui, a kind of porridge of rice and vegetables, is a favorite dish served at many restaurants in Kobe. Because of its popularity, restaurants are not allowed to serve it to more than a few dozen people. In order to get a serving of zosui, people stand in a long line for hours. To eat out, people have to apply for special eating-out coupons to be used in place of the ordinary ration of rice. The coupons are presented at the restaurant to allow people to eat rice with their meal. People can either carry a bag of rice or their eating-out coupons with them to the restaurant.

During an air raid drill, some students in the bucket relay get soaked with water and are allowed to go home early. H decides he wants to leave also and goes to the restroom to deliberately splash water all over his trousers. This trick works, and he is allowed to return home. Outside the school gates, H meets up with his friends, and they run to the sushi shop to get some zosui. As usual, the line is long, and they stand there for quite a while. H's portion of zosui is not very appetizing and leaves him still feeling hungry when he finishes. Later that evening, H catches a cold from standing out in the cold with wet trousers.

Ishizuka, a friend of H's, lives with his family in an apartment above the bookstore his father owns. H often comes to the bookstore to browse through the books on the shelves. Ishizuka's father is a favorite of H's because he always shares things he has read in the newspapers with H. Also, Ishizuka's father shows H the same articles in several different newspapers and allows him to decide which article is printing the truth.

Much to the students' annoyance, baseball and tennis are banned because they are English sports. The school's tennis courts are dug up and used for growing vegetables. Vegetables such as sweet potatoes and onions are planted. Even more surprising, the school buildings are converted into factories to increase production of military supplies.

There is a growing feeling among the people in Kobe that air raids on the main islands are beginning in earnest. Kobe has many factories and important port facilities, which are of particular military importance. This causes great concern for the citizens of Kobe. Many people with relatives living in the country are leaving the city and taking their families with them.

In July, every household in Kobe receives official notice from the Education Ministry announcing the compulsory mass evacuation of children in the third to sixth grades to protect them from the air raids. Those children with no families or friends are to be evacuated by their individual schools. For her safety, Yoshiko is being sent to Toshiko's family near Hiroshima. The evening before she leaves, Toshiko prepares a special meal for the family. Before eating, Toshiko offers a very long prayer for the meal. The ritual of saying grace before a meal disgusts H. Toshiko decides to accompany Yoshiko on her





journey. Since Morio has to work at the fire station, H skips his first two classes to see Toshiko and Yoshiko off.

After the train leaves, H catches a train to take him to school. When he arrives, H sees machinery in boxes marked "Mitsubishi Electric" being unloaded. Seeing the boxes, H knows that it will not be long before his school is converted into a factory.

## Chapter 30 Analysis

Another of H's favorite foods is zosui. It is so popular with the Japanese people that they have to spend many food coupons and stand in long lines just to get a serving of the dish. H's devious nature comes up with a plan to skip school so that he can get some zosui. H's plan works, but the zosui tastes terrible and not worth the risk he has taken to get it. H's love of reading continues in this chapter when the father of one of H's friends allows H to come in his bookstore and browse through the books. On his visits, H is exposed to many different types of books on several topics. H appreciates his friend's father very much because he allows H to read many newspapers about a certain subject and form his own opinion about what he has read. Like H's father and his favorite teacher, the bookstore owner allows H access to information and encourages him to use his mind, something that is discouraged by the government in this wartime.

Many changes are continuing in Kobe. Favorite sports such as tennis and baseball are being banned because they are considered sports of the enemy. Tennis courts are dug up and vegetable gardens planted in their place. Even school buildings are converted into factories for production of military supplies. Once again, H sees the effect the war is having in all areas of his life.

People in Kobe are aware of the increase in air raids on the main islands. With the conversion of schools into factories, it is easy to see that Kobe will become one of the main targets of air raids. The value of family is seen as some people in Kobe begin to send their families out of the city for their safety. Shortly after this, the Education Ministry orders the compulsory mass evacuation of children from third to sixth grade to protect them from air raids.

Toshiko and Morio send Yoshiko to stay with her grandparents. Toshiko prepares a special meal for Yoshiko before she leaves the next day. The reader can see H's dislike of religion by his reaction during a prayer given by Toshiko before the meal. H has no use for religion in any way. The next morning at the train station, H sees boxes marked for Mitsubishi Electric being unloaded. The shipment foreshadows the conversion of H's school into a military factory. H wonders just how long it will be before the conversion of his school begins.



# Chapter 31

## Chapter 31 Summary

After staying at the family home near Hiroshima for a while, Toshiko returns to Kobe. She returns with rice, eggs and chicken, all of which would have been confiscated if she had been caught. Toshiko makes omelets for H and hides the rest of the eggs in the air raid shelter under the floor. H suggests that the food be eaten as soon as possible. H explains that with the increase in the air raids, they have no idea if they will be alive the next day. Toshiko is convinced and makes a lavish chicken and egg dish.

H finishes the meal quickly and races to catch the streetcar to school. When he arrives, H joins his friends in a discussion of the B29 that passed overhead the previous night. H says that everyone in Kobe will be hearing many more airplanes now that islands to the south are being attacked and wiped out.

Arriving at school, the boys learn the morning classes are cancelled. H and his friends are put to work carrying boxes of machine tools and machinery into the armory. With that task completed, the boys are assigned to digging up sweet potatoes on the school's roof. H and Yokota decide to throw some potatoes to the ground below to be picked up later. When they go to pick them up all they find is fragments of sweet potatoes strewn across the grounds. The boys pick up the fragments and divide the pieces between them.

The air raid drills are so frequent that H no longer takes them seriously. H feels they are a nuisance more than anything else. A few weeks later, H hears the drone of airplanes flying over his home. He goes outside to see the largest formation of B29s that he has ever seen. The siren sounds and Morio reports to the fire station while Toshiko goes around the neighborhood telling the neighbors to check their firefighting equipment. Planes are dropping bombs, and shots are being fired from the ground but are falling miserably short of their targets. Through the heavy black smoke, Japanese planes are taking off into the air. H watches as a Japanese plane spirals toward Mt. Takatori and crashes.

The raid does not completely destroy the Mitsubishi factories but does produce the first victim among the students of the Second Middle School. H hears that the bookstore has been heavily damaged and goes to check on his friend, Ishizuka. When H arrives, he finds that Ishizuka and his family are packing to go live in the country. Ishizuka's father gives H some slightly damaged paperback books to keep and an old bicycle. As H rides home with the books, he passes a cart with an oil-stained cloth spread across the top. H knows the cart contains a victim of the bombing.

Morio returns from the fire station and pulls out twelve misshapen cans of crab that he has picked up from burned out munitions factory warehouse. Toshiko keeps some for the family and plans to give the rest away to the neighbors. Morio tells Toshiko



absolutely not and explains that there is not enough to share with everyone and it will cause hard feelings among the neighbors.

## Chapter 31 Analysis

In this chapter, the war is escalating. Increased attacks on islands to the south make it clear that Kobe will soon be next, and yet people pay little attention to the frequent air raid sirens. The largest formation of B29s that H has ever seen passes over H's house. Bombs are dropped from the warplanes. Black smoke billows everywhere, and Toshiko runs to the neighbors and tells them to check their firefighting equipment. Morio runs to the fire station to help put out the fires. The raid produces the first victim among the students of the Second Middle School, escalating the effects of the war even further.

The bookstore has suffered much damage in the raid. When H goes to check on the bookstore owner and his son, the owner gives H some of the books that are undamaged. Riding home on his bike, H sees a cart with an oil cover over it, which indicates that the cart is carrying a victim of the raid. The value these books hold for H is seen when he rushes home and hides the books under the floor, which is the safest place in his home.



# Chapter 32

## Chapter 32 Summary

As the air raid siren sounds, Morio wakes up H and tells him the raid will be on Kobe. Morio tells H to look after Toshiko as he puts on his helmet and heads out to the fire station. H fills a bucket with water and takes it upstairs while Toshiko is filling up pots with water in the kitchen. The two barrels on the laundry platform are full of water, but he leaves the bucket also. H remembers that his father has told him that water is the best thing for a fire, but if the flames rise higher than his head, the best thing to do is get out.

H wants to protect the books he has been given by Ishizuka's father in case H's house is destroyed in the raid. He hears the sound of an approaching B29 as he is hiding the books. He puts the books underneath the floorboards, surrounds each bundle of books with bags of sand to put out incendiary bombs and places "lids," jars of fermented bean paste, on top of the books.

H goes outside to see the B29 dropping flares instead of bombs. Soon after, a second bombing raid is launched. Incendiary bombs drop from the sky like fireworks. One falls in H's backyard and is embedded in concrete. H runs upstairs to see that the walls are on fire. He grabs one of the water buckets and throws it on the flames. H soaks a blanket, throws it over the bomb and uses the remaining water in the bucket to douse the flames.

H decides it is too dangerous to stay in the house. He calls to Toshiko, who is putting out flames in the backyard, for help. H and his mother carry Morio's sewing machine downstairs and out of the house. H tells Toshiko that they have to try and make it to the sea. Using a soaked quilt for protection against falling debris, Toshiko and H, pushing Morio's sewing machine, try to make their way to the sea. As they go, the castors come off the sewing machine, and they are forced to leave it behind on the side of the road.

As H and Toshiko hurry toward the shore, they meet three people who tell them to find a different direction to the sea because the area ahead is on fire. H decides to reach the sea by cutting through the grounds of the Rising Sun Refinery. Reaching the refinery, they find the gates closed and the fire behind them getting closer. A soldier at the gate tells them that the refinery tanks can explode at any time and that they should escape by following the path by the fence. As they start to run, a third wave of incendiary bombs is falling all around them. They finally make it to the Nagara market area and to safety.

Later, the all clear siren is heard, and H and Toshiko make their way to the church. Arriving there, H is surprised to see that the church has escaped the flames and is in good condition. The pastor's wife comes to greet them, heats water for them to wash up, and serves them noodles to eat. Toshiko is grateful that she and H have survived in spite of losing their home to the fires.



## Chapter 32 Analysis

The full-fledged attack on Kobe that H has been expecting arrives a few days after the B29 air raid. H's family races around trying to protect their home from the attack. Morio leaves to make his way to the fire station while Toshiko and H fill up water buckets to fight the fires. Despite their efforts, the fire is overtaking their home, and they must leave. The love H has for his father is apparent as he runs upstairs to get Morio's sewing machine and carry it to safety.

Under a water-soaked blanket, Toshiko and H drag the sewing machine along as they make their way to the sea. Eventually, they must leave the sewing machine by the roadside. H's ability to think on his feet is displayed when the main road to the sea is blocked and he is forced to find another way. Toshiko and H show their bravery as they race to safety with incendiary bombs falling all around them. Toshiko and H take refuge in a church that has escaped damage during the raid and are invited by the pastor's wife to stay there as long as they would like. Not having a home to go back to, Toshiko and H feel that their stay will be very long.



# Chapter 33

## Chapter 33 Summary

The next morning H is eating steamed sweet potatoes at the church when Toshiko tells him that a friend of hers has reported that Toshiko and H's house has burned to the ground. H tells his mother that they should go back to their home site, but Toshiko refuses. The next morning, H leaves with a bucket and trowel to dig up and retrieve any crockery or pans that might have survived the fire. He is also anxious to check the ruins and see what has happened to the sewing machine. H wants to put a sign up at the site that will read, "Both safe."

On the way, H sees that Mampukuji Temple, where he has stolen persimmons many times in the past, is in ruins. The persimmon tree is burned black and sticks up into the air. The roof of the temple is gone, evidently collapsed in the fire. One wall of the temple is still standing, and H walks along it and out into the street.

H approaches his home and sees what he believes are white butterflies circling in the air where his house was. Coming closer, he realizes the fluttering white things are not butterflies but unburned pages from the books he has hidden. H races to his home site and finds that the books are badly burned and of no more value. He sets out in search of his father's sewing machine and finds it in the same place where he left it. While the iron legs are all right, the body of the machine is badly scorched and blistered. Looking at it, H wonders how Morio will feel when he finds out what has happened to his sewing machine.

As H leaves, the wife of the tobacco shop owner sees H and calls to him. She asks about Toshiko and tells H that everyone in the neighborhood is staying at the school. She tells H that he and his mother should stay there as well. H goes to the fire station to look for Morio. When he arrives, he is told that his dad is okay and has just left. H goes back to the home site and sees his father, standing and looking at the ruins. Morio asks H if Toshiko is all right, and H answers that she is fine. H tells his father about the sewing machine, and they go to get it. Morio inspects the machine and thinks that he can repair it.

Morio and H struggle to carry the sewing machine back to the church. Toshiko sees them and rushes out to meet them. H notices that Toshiko is more concerned about him than she is about Morio. It is obvious that she is deliberately controlling herself, but H does not understand why.

Morio works on the sewing machine for four days to repair it. He replaces the wood and uses an old bicycle tire for the belt. After a lot of polishing and oiling, it is back in running order. Morio sews up a tear in his pants as H applauds.



## Chapter 33 Analysis

The devastation left by the attack is widespread. People are inspecting the damage at their home sites. H finds the severely burned sewing machine on the road where it was left. Seeing the pitiful condition of the machine saddens H. Going to the fire station, he finds his father, and they return to the family home site.

Morio's positive attitude and perseverance is displayed when he is convinced that the sewing machine can be repaired. H does not agree, but out of respect for his father, he remains silent. H and his father take the sewing machine back to the church, and Morio begins to work on it. After four days of repairs, the machine is operational once again. The family is reunited, but the effects of the war continue to get more severe, as the family is left homeless.



# Chapter 34

## Chapter 34 Summary

Since the streetcars are not running, H sets off walking to school. Walking by the schoolyard of the primary school, H sees many charred bodies covered by straw mats since there is no time yet for their cremation. The sight of these bodies does not bother H as much as does the pain and suffering of those who have survived. The sight of the devastation around the train station and other areas is unimaginable to H, even as he views it.

As H tops the hill, he sees that the Second Middle School is virtually untouched. Entering the building, H is surrounded by an overflow of people who have very few personal belongings. People are waiting for food rations and medical treatment for their injuries.

Students whose homes were burned are not required to go to school for awhile. H does not want to go back to the church, since he feels uncomfortable there. He decides that he will stay at school and spend some time with his friends. H's friends are talking about the houses that have burned and the death of Yokota's father. H and his friends talk about the news reports of the Kobe air raid. H cannot believe that the news reports claim that everything is under control in Kobe.

Sumiyama, a sturdy and tall man, believes wholeheartedly in the Emperor and Japan. He feels that to give one's life in service to one's country is the profound wish of every Japanese man. Those who do not share his belief are often beaten up and learn quickly to avoid Sumiyama at all costs. While H and his friends continue to talk, Sumiyama approaches. A feeling of uneasiness comes over H and his friends as Sumiyama walks toward them. To their surprise, Sumiyama has brought clothing for H. Sumiyama explains that he will be joining the navy soon and has no more need for the clothes. H thanks Sumiyama for his kindness as the other students look on in amazement. Another student brings H watercolors and a sketchbook. As H returns to the church, he thinks he is very lucky to have so many friends.

H feels uneasy living at the church, but Toshiko and Morio are completely comfortable there. H thinks that people who have something to believe in are very strong. H no longer attends church and tries to escape the image of being a "child of God" that has been imposed on him by his mother.

H's family feels that all three of them cannot continue to stay at the church. Morio knows that he cannot make a living if he gives up his job at the fire station. So, during a family conference, it is decided that Morio will continue living at the church and working as a fireman to make a living for his family. Toshiko and H will go to live at Toshiko's old home near Hiroshima, where Yoshiko is.





## Chapter 34 Analysis

War evokes many different emotions in people. For some, like H, it is much harder to watch the struggles and pain of the survivors than it is to view the charred bodies of the victims. The events of one night have changed the lives of the people of Kobe forever.

Survivors without homes are taking refuge in H's school, which is virtually untouched by the attack. People, clutching the few belongings they have left, are filling the school to capacity. In need of food rations and medical attention, the survivors wait anxiously for help. Seeing these people, H realizes that the devastation is not restricted to the buildings in Kobe but touches the people as well.

School is suspended for the students who have lost their homes in the attack. Conversations among the students at school center on the air raid and the houses that were burned. To give hope to the survivors, the newspapers report that everything is under control in Kobe. H is amazed that the newspapers would actually think that the reports would be believed.

Compassion among the survivors of the attack is evident when H receives clothing from a student not known for his generosity. The student has great allegiance to the Emperor and plans to join the navy and fight for Japan. No longer needing the clothes, he gives them to H, who accepts this and other offerings with thanks and appreciation.

Another fact of war is the separation of families. With his increasing disbelief in religion, H sees no sense in living in a church. Additionally, the Senohs do not feel it is right to continue living at the church. The decision is made for Morio to continue living in the church so that he can continue working at the fire station. Toshiko and H will live in Toshiko's old home near Hiroshima.



# Chapter 35

## Chapter 35 Summary

H ignores an air raid alert and takes a streetcar to school. There are so many alerts now that people do not let an alert keep them from their daily activities. The people are still afraid of the raids, but now they feel they can decide what to do immediately upon seeing the airplanes in the sky. Tensions result from air raid warnings not alerts.

An air raid warning sounds, and the streetcar makes an unscheduled stop so that the passengers can find shelter. As the doors open, the passengers run out and take cover in the dugouts in the street. H jumps into a dugout but decides it is too close to the streetcar. H climbs out and starts running along the roadside. As he runs, H hears the buzz of an enemy fighter plane. The plane makes a half-turn and comes swooping down. H runs as fast as he can with the plane bearing down on him. Hearing a rat-tat-tat, H falls down where he stands and stays still as the plane, a Grumman F6F carrier, flies away.

Thinking the plane is gone, H gets up and starts walking once again. Suddenly, he hears the plane's engines overhead. H runs to take cover behind a large concrete water tank. The bullets from the machine gun are passing about five meters in front of H. H knows that the pilot can see that he is the only one running among the ruins and that H is not in the military. H hears the sound of the plane's engines once more and realizes the plane is returning. Seeing the plane bearing down on him directly ahead, H immediately ducks behind the tank and tries to make himself as small as possible. H quivers as the plane, firing its bullets, passes overhead. Making certain that the plane has left, H carefully moves to the other side of the tank, where he makes a surprising discovery. H sees a bullet partially buried in the tank. H knows that if the bullet had hit him, he would be dead. The all-clear signal sounds, and H makes his way once again to the school.

H is picking up his school transfer papers when he sees his friend, Hayashi. Hayashi tells H that he and his family are evacuating to a place called Toyooka and that he will be attending the Toyooka Middle School. H explains to Hayashi that his family will be moving to Hiroshima, and he will be attending the Seishikan Middle School. H tells Hayashi that he is not really interested in moving, but he feels he cannot stay at the church indefinitely. It seems a lot of people are leaving Kobe.

H and Toshiko take the train to Hiroshima while Morio stays behind to continue working as a fireman. Morio's decision to stay is not entirely his own idea. Morio receives a notice from his superiors requiring all able-bodied males to remain in Kobe. Arriving safely in Hiroshima, Toshiko and H find H's uncle Yosho and Yoshiko waiting for them.

The following day, H enrolls in the Seishikan Middle School. After spending a few days there, H decides the school is not for him, and he decides to return to Kobe. His uncle



Hadano agrees pay for H's ticket and to let him stay in his home. When H gets back to Kobe, he goes to the fire station to tell Morio of his plans to stay. Morio is surprised to see him and pleased with H's decision.

## Chapter 35 Analysis

Amid the devastation, the people of Kobe try to resume some sort of normalcy in their lives. Things are quiet for awhile in the city. Soon, however, H learns the true meaning of the quiet before the storm. Days later, a second attack is made on Kobe. During the raid, H is in extreme danger as he is being chased and fired upon by a single enemy plane. Using his wits, H is able to take cover behind a water tank. Extremely scared, H makes himself as small as possible to avoid being hit by the bullets from the machine gun. When the all-clear sounds, H makes sure the plane is gone and continues onto the school to pick up his transfer papers.

H does not possess a lot of patience with the move to Toshiko's home near Hiroshima. H's dislike of his new school makes him even more impatient to return home. Since H has no home to go to, Uncle Hadano agrees to let H stay with him in Kobe. Even though Morio is surprised by H's decision to return, he is happy to see him.



# Chapter 36

## Chapter 36 Summary

When H returns to the Second Middle School, he sees it has been transformed into a factory. The school factory is producing motors to be used in the raising of periscopes on special submarines. H is immediately told that the production of the motors is a military secret and not to be mentioned to outsiders. H is not convinced that it really is a military secret. Instead, he feels that the production of the motors is just a ploy to build morale. H is assigned to do engine lathe work, and his group excels at motor production.

Not long after this, the school announces that students who have lost their homes in the raids will be given special grants. The amount of the grant is ten yen, and H decides to keep it a secret from his father and Uncle Hadano. H plans to use this unexpected fortune for his enjoyment only. With some of the money, he buys books from a man on the roadside, and the rest he spends on the movies. H buries the books in the ground at a nearby shelter so that no one can find them and they will not be burned in the bombing raids.

Going to the movie theater is risky. Only three movie theaters in the entertainment district are operational. The rest of the entertainment district is completely destroyed. By the time H and his friend, George, get to the theater, the film is almost half over. The boys sit near the front of the theater to lessen their chances of being caught. H begins to daydream during the film when he senses that danger is near. Seeing two men standing at the back of the theater makes H uneasy, and he tells George they must leave. The boys keep low as they make their way into the restroom and out the window. They jump into a filthy alleyway and get their clothes extremely dirty.

The boys find a water tap so they can clean their clothes and themselves. H and George take off their pants to wash themselves just when the woman who owns the nearby fish shop steps into the alley and screams at the sight of the two naked boys. Shocked to see the woman, the boys immediately cover themselves.

## Chapter 36 Analysis

As planned by the Education Ministry, H's school is converted into a factory making military supplies. Everyone, including H, is expected to work in the factory making motors to be used in periscopes. Using his talents, H is assigned to operate the engine lathe. Once again, the importance of keeping the products manufactured in the factory a military secret is imperative.

The government tries to assist those families who have lost their homes in the air raids with special small money grants. Selfishness overtakes H when he decides to keep the grant and spend it on himself. To satisfy his love of reading, H spends part of the grant



money for books he buys from a roadside vendor. Remembering what happened to his other books, H buries the books in the ground where they cannot be found or burned up. Being a risk taker, H spends the rest of the money for the movies. The riskiness is not with the movies but with the Guidance League who patrols the theater district. Students who are caught by the Guidance League face immediate suspension from the school factory. This scene highlights the changes in the times from H's earlier escapades escaping schools to see the movies.



# Chapter 37

## Chapter 37 Summary

H is assigned by his instructor to deliver a letter to Mitsubishi Electric and accompany a group of students transporting food from there back to the school. H is instructed not to divulge the purpose of this assignment and to use his bayonet and rifle to intimidate any offenders and protect the students and the food at all costs. H wonders why he is being given this assignment and decides that an armed guard protecting a cart of food might be a way to discourage looting. Whatever the reason, H realizes that this is a responsibility he does not really want.

The next day as H is waiting at Mitsubishi Electric to deliver the letter, the air raid warning sounds. People are running in all directions, and H dives into a dugout. While in the dugout, H hears that an enemy plane has been shot down, and the pilot has bailed out. Finally, the all-clear signal sounds, and H makes his way back to Mr. Takita's office to deliver the letter.

While Mr. Takita reads the letter, a military policeman enters his office and announces that the downed pilot has been taken into custody. The officer orders H to assist him in taking the pilot into custody. At first, H objects, explaining to the officer that he is just a student. The officer ignores H's explanation and accuses H of disobeying an order. Seeing that he has no choice, H accompanies the officer to the area where the pilot is being held and helps the officer take the pilot into custody. After finding a gun tucked in the pilot's boot, the military policeman takes the pilot away.

H tries to feel proud of what he has done but cannot convince himself that this man is one of the "American fiends" he has read about. Another military policeman tells H to forget everything he has seen and done that day. He tells H that the capture of the pilot is a military secret, and he is forbidden to speak about it to anyone. This order makes H furious, and he begins to realize that the real enemy is not America or Britain but the Japanese army.

## Chapter 37 Analysis

Everyone at the school factory is expected to follow whatever assignments they are given. As usual, H wonders why he is given the assignment to deliver a letter to Mitsubishi Electric and provide security for a group of students bringing food back from there to the factory. Whatever the reason, H does not want the responsibility of guarding anyone.

Before H can complete this assignment, he is thrown into a totally unexpected situation. A military policeman at Mitsubishi Electric orders H to assist him with taking an American pilot into custody. H has no desire to be a hero and tries to explain to the MP that he is a student and not a soldier. Accused of disobeying an order and knowing the



consequences that can bring, H reluctantly agrees to go with the policeman. The incident is over quickly, and the pilot is led away. However, H sees that, insidiously, he is being drawn into the army.

H's conscience cannot be quieted as he watches the pilot being led away. H has a hard time reconciling this pilot with the American "fiends" he has read about in the newspapers. From his experience, H knows that the newspapers lie. Once again, H is told to that the capture of the pilot and H's part in it is a military secret and must never be repeated. H's natural curiosity and love of knowledge is in direct contrast with the secrecy that surrounds the military. This type of secrecy proves to H that the real enemy is the Japanese army and not America or Britain.



# Chapter 38

## Chapter 38 Summary

Germany announces its unconditional surrender, and H realizes that Japan will now have to fight the combined forces of the allies alone. To anyone living in Kobe, including H, it is obvious that there is no way for Japan to win the war. Although defeat is apparent, no one is allowed to speak of it for fear of reprisals from the secret police. Japanese people feel that to admit the possibility of defeat is to destroy the national spirit.

Several instructors at the school are being sent to the front. Instructor Hisakado, a favorite of H's, is one of the first to receive his notice. A few days later, H's physics instructor, Mr. Nakata, receives his notice also. H feels disappointment to see Hisakado leave, but he has no such feelings for Nakata. Nakata and H have a mutual dislike for each other. H provokes Nakata by submitting incomplete tests and attempting to leave Nakata's class without permission. Nakata aggravates the situation by hitting H on several occasions.

Calls for "increased production" at the school escalate daily. Days off are cancelled, and shift work at the factory begins. While working at the factory, one of the students tells H there will be an air raid on June 5th. H does not believe the student and asks how he knows about the raid. The student replies that he has heard about the raid on American radio. H is unconvinced, but the raid does occur on the scheduled date.

The air raid begins, and Uncle Hamano tells H to go to the cave shelter and stay there. H goes to the shelter and finds many people already there. Hearing the sound of B29s, H goes to the entrance and sees a formation of the B29s flying lower than he has ever seen. To get a better view, H climbs the hill behind the Zenshoji Temple. H sees a B29 get hit while other enemy planes drop bombs all over the area. Damage is particularly bad to the east, where many of H's friends' homes are located.

## Chapter 38 Analysis

With Germany's surrender, Japan is now left to fight the American forces alone. It is obvious to everyone that Japan cannot win a war with America. In wartime, what is obvious is not mentioned for fear of reprisals. This, as well as a desire to keep national spirit high, keeps people in Kobe silent on the matter of the war.

Since Japan is fighting the war alone, production quotas at the school factory are increased, and the enlistment of several of the school instructors follows. H is sorry to see some of the instructors leave and thrilled about others. Instructor Nakata is not a favorite of H's, and he is glad to see the teacher sent to the front lines of the war. Instructor Hisakado, always a favorite of H's, is another story. Air raids continue regularly, and all areas of Kobe are damaged.





# Chapter 39

## Chapter 39 Summary

H reads an article about the June 5th raid and is surprised to learn that 350 B29 bombers led the attack, and the Japanese destroyed 200 of them. The article barely mentions anything about the extent of the damage done in the raid. The article reports that three areas were set on fire during the raid. In reality, many areas are virtually wiped out. H wonders why the newspapers cannot report the situation accurately.

The practice of keeping everything secret is common in Japan now. The newspapers publish little of what the public wants to know. Weather reports are no longer found in the newspapers. The reason for this is the possibility that the enemy might use this information to its advantage. The newspapers are now full of messages from the government and the military.

One day while working in the school factory, H and his classmates hear the air raid alert sound. Because the alerts are so common, people are allowed to use their own judgment as to whether or not to take cover until the all-clear sounds. H and two of his friends, Yokota and George, decide to go to the farm to get some onions. Masuda, another friend, warns H and the others to be careful and not get caught taking the onions. H replies that at least one-half of the teachers are not even at school and the chance of H getting caught is slim.

Along the way to the farm, H and the boys meet Sumiyama and his friends. Sumiyama is carrying a book entitled *A Citizen's Resistance Handbook*. The purpose of the book is to instruct people on how they should fight in the event of a final battle on home soil. H has read the section on hand-to-hand fighting in this booklet and does not think the tactics listed could actually be effective. However, H keeps his thoughts to himself, fearing that Sumiyama would not be pleased. A few moments later the all-clear signal sounds, and the boys have to return to the school without the onions.

H has not seen his father for some time and goes to the fire station after school to see him. While there, another fireman speaks to H about his father's bravery in saving two peoples' lives in a fire earlier that day. H is very proud of his father's courage and begins to see him in a more heroic light. Another fireman suggests that Morio deserves a medal for his heroism. When H speaks with his father about this, Morio is very modest about his actions and does not want to talk about it. They make plans to have dinner together at Uncle Hadano's house later that evening.

Reports of a new kind of bomb that has been dropped on Hiroshima arrive the next morning. The type of bomb is unclear, but its devastation is horrific. At school, H reads a newspaper article about the bomb and realizes the situation must be awful because the newspaper has never printed so much information about damage and casualties. Radio reports identify the bomb as an atomic bomb, which has wiped out people and buildings



in Hiroshima instantly. The radio also reports that America has declared that other towns will be bombed if Japan does not surrender.

## Chapter 39 Analysis

Certain practices are becoming commonplace in Kobe at this time. The newspapers continue to report inaccurate information concerning the extent of the damage sustained in the air raids. Secrecy about everything has become ordinary. Newspapers do not publish anything the people want to know. The pages of the newspapers are full of military and government messages for the people of Kobe.

Even the response to the sounding of the air raid alerts is now optional. On one occasion, H and his friends hear the alarm sound and ignore it, choosing instead to go to the school farm and get some onions. The possibility of getting caught while doing this does not bother H at all. On his way to the farm, H is introduced to a booklet on the citizen resistance to enemy forces by another student, Sumiyama, who supports the Japanese war effort. Looking over the tactics in the booklet, H does not see the value in any of them. However, Sumiyama, who is much larger than H, does see the value, and H thinks it best to keep his opinions to himself.

Acts of heroism are not just found on the battlefield. When H goes to the fire station to see his father, he finds that Morio has made a heroic rescue of two people from a fire that occurred earlier in the day. Morio is a modest man who does not like to draw attention to him. His father tries to make light of the situation. H, however, knows Morio is pleased with the outcome, and he is quite proud of his father's actions.

The next day, news of the bombing of Hiroshima is carried in all the newspapers. The horrific devastation of the bomb is heard on radio reports as well. Knowing that the newspapers have never been so thorough in their reports of damage done by enemy attacks, H suspects the situation must be terrible. H is sure the situation is terrible when the radio reports that other towns will be bombed if Japan does not surrender immediately.



# Chapter 40

## Chapter 40 Summary

Everyone at school is talking about the bomb dropped on Hiroshima. H tells his friends that the Americans presented Japan with the Potsdam Declaration demanding Japan's surrender ten days before the attack. Since Japan did not respond, the U.S. bombed Hiroshima. To keep an eye on the situation, H buys a newspaper every day. Even though he knows he cannot believe everything he reads, it is his only source of information.

One of the newspapers H reads carries news about the Soviet Union declaring war on Japan. The article tells that the Soviet Union has crossed the border into Manchuria and is fighting both Japanese and Manchurian forces. Up to this time, the Soviet Union has been neutral where Japan is concerned. However, the U.S. attack on Hiroshima changes everything, and the Soviets declare war on Japan.

According to a news article that H reads, Japan issues a stern protest to America concerning the bombing of Hiroshima. Another article explains that President Truman has said that America will continue to drop similar bombs on Japanese cities if Japan does not agree to surrender. On August 12th, U.S. forces drop a second atomic bomb on Nagasaki. H is surprised that the U.S. would carry through on their threat and that the newspapers would carry so little information about this second attack.

H wonders why the newspapers never carry any photos of the war. A former customer of his father, Mr. Odagiri, works for the newspaper, and H decides to go ask him for an answer to his question. When H arrives at the newspaper office, Mr. Odagiri is not there, and another staff member attempts to help him. The staff member explains to H that publishing photos in the newspapers gives information to enemy agents and damages public morale. He also tells H that the newspapers cannot publish photos of the devastation because the bomb dissolved people and buildings in an instant. H is also surprised to learn that photos could be touched up and objects inserted in the photos that are not really there.

H is walking home when an air raid alert sounds, and he takes shelter in the school building. Running inside, H sees his friend George is already there. George tells H that there is an important announcement to be made the next day at school. H asks him what the announcement is about, and George tells him that the school will announce that Japan has lost the war and is accepting the Potsdam Declaration.

## Chapter 40 Analysis

As expected, the bombing of Hiroshima is being discussed all over Kobe. From reading the newspapers, H discovers that the Potsdam Declaration, which demanded Japan's surrender, was offered to Japan ten days before the bombing. H realizes that if Japan

accepted the Declaration, the bombing in Hiroshima could have been avoided. The articles also state that the U.S. will continue the bombing until Japan surrenders. Making good on their promise, Nagasaki is bombed on August 12th. No photographs are included with the reports.

H asks a member of the newspaper staff why pictures are not included with the reports. To include pictures would damage public morale, he is told, and possibly provide information to enemy agents. The main reason is that the attack dissolved buildings and people in an instant, so there is nothing left to photograph. Another surprising piece of information that H discovers is that pictures can be altered through the insertion of objects that were not originally there.



# Chapter 41

## Chapter 41 Summary

At noontime everyone assembles in the auditorium to hear the important announcement. The ceremony begins with the singing of the national anthem, which is playing through the audio speakers. As the anthem ends, the Emperor's voice carries through the speakers throughout the auditorium. The Emperor tells those assembled that the Japanese government has accepted and agreed to the provisions of the Potsdam Declaration. H knows that the war is finally over. Reaction to the Emperor's words is mixed. Some are crying, while some are silent, and some are in denial and want to continue fighting.

Groups of students and instructors are standing around talking about the Emperor's announcement. In one group, the instructor is saying that America is not a savage country, as the Japanese people believe. He goes on to say that the American forces might behave in a more civilized way than the Japanese forces. He suggests to the students that they remain calm and continue studying.

H receives a message to come to the armory. Yukawa, the student who delivered the message, knocks on the locked armory door, identifies himself and H and says that they are alone. Sugita, a student in H's group, opens the door, and H and Yukawa enter. Sugita tells H about the rifles being held there on the Emperor's behalf and asks what H thinks should be done with them. H replies that they should not be used to fight the American troops. Sugita agrees and tells H that two more locks will be put on the armory door to make it safe. Three keys will be made, and H, Yukawa and Sugita will each receive one. Yukawa stays overnight in the armory while H and Sugita go to get the new locks. On their way, H and Sugita get into an argument about the end of the war. In a few moments, the argument is resolved, and Sugita tells H to meet him at the armory the next day to pick up his key.

H goes to the beach to relax for awhile. Looking at the clouds, H realizes that the sky and sea are the only things that have remained unchanged before and during the war. As the sun begins to go down, H goes to Hadano's home. He is surprised to see how bright it is inside and realizes that the black cloth no longer covers the windows. This is H's first confirmation that the war is actually over.

## Chapter 41 Analysis

The announcement by the Emperor that Japan has surrendered is heard over the loudspeakers during the school's morning assembly the next day. Mixed reactions to the announcement are seen throughout the auditorium. The instructors tell the students that American forces may behave in a more civilized way than the Japanese forces. The school instructors urge the students to remain calm and continue studying.



With Japan's surrender, some of the rifle club members are worried about the rifles in the armory being used to fight the American forces. The members of the rifle club value H's opinion and ask what he thinks should be done with the guns. The decision is made to put an additional padlock on the armory door to insure the rifles are secure. H and two other members of the club are given keys to the locks. By taking the key, H accepts the responsibility for making certain the rifles are secure.

The removal of the black cloth that covered the windows at Hadano's house is H's first indication that the war is truly over. Earlier, H noticed the sky and the sea on his way to Uncle Hadano's. Suddenly, H realizes that the sky and the sea are the only constant, unchanging elements in Japan.



# Chapter 42

## Chapter 42 Summary

H is hanging out his laundry when a neighbor of Hadano's, Mrs. Tazaki, comes over with sweet potatoes to swap for some figs from Hadano's trees. H asks if she completely understands the meaning of the Emperor's message. The neighbor tells H that one of the leaflets dropped by the B29s makes it clear that Japan has accepted the Potsdam Declaration. Later, at H's request, Mrs. Tazaki brings the leaflet over for H to read. Mrs. Tazaki tells H that she is sure the Emperor never expected Japan to lose the war. H asks her if she thinks everyone thinks as she does. Mrs. Tazaki replies that she does not know because such things are not to be discussed.

The next morning, H leaves early so that he can arrive at the armory before Sugita and the other students. To his surprise, H sees Sugita standing in front of the armory. Sugita gives H his key and tells him to come to the rear of the armory that night. Sugita tells H not to tell anyone where he is going. H is becoming uneasy about all these actions being clothed in secrecy. H and the other students are told not to take part in any type of "rash or foolhardy" behavior. Although he is relieved that the war is over, H still distrusts "the state," the huge entity that consistently deceives innocent people.

At nine in the evening, H arrives at the armory and sees Sugita and Yukawa waiting for him with picks and shovels. H asks the purpose of the tools, and Sugita tells him they are going to bury twelve rifles, used by the rifle club and capable of firing live ammo, on Mount Ege. The rifles, borrowed from the army, are still officially in service and recorded in the army's files. Sugita tells H that the guns have not been officially entered into the school's inventory. The guns, rifles and ammunition will have to be turned over to the American forces. Sugita feels the rifles are a symbol of the rifle club, and he does not want to turn them over to the Americans. Sugita explains that they must keep this a secret so that they will not be charged with concealing weapons. The boys dig a trench and bury the rifles on Mt. Ege.

When the boys finish, they rest for a while, and Sugita lights a cigarette. Smoking is something H has always wanted to try. H asks Sugita for a cigarette. H takes the cigarette and puts it between his lips as Sugita lights it. As H takes his first puff, he begins coughing furiously.

## Chapter 42 Analysis

H gets his first visual confirmation of Japan's acceptance of the Potsdam Declaration from a leaflet that dropped by a B29 over Kobe. Hadano's neighbor, who brings the leaflet to H, repeats the propaganda that is circulating around Kobe. The neighbor tells H that she is certain the Emperor was convinced Japan would win the war. H is surprised that anyone could believe such nonsense. Showing her allegiance to the



Japanese government, she refuses to discuss the matter further when H presses her for more information.

Secrecy of one's actions continues in Japan. When H is summoned to the armory by one of the rifle club members and told to keep silent about it, H becomes frustrated with all the secrecy. Having been instructed not to exhibit any rash behavior, H becomes nervous about these private meetings. Even though the war is over, H is still very suspicious of the "state's" actions.

Arriving at the armory, H finds that Sugita and Yukawa, rifle club members, have decided to bury the rifle club's guns, rifles and ammunition. Feeling they symbolize the rifle club, the boys do not want to turn over the weapons and ammunition to the American forces. The boys understand that they must keep this secret so they will not be charged with the concealment of weapons. They boys bury the rifles on Mt. Ege.

H is the type of boy who is always willing to try new things. Smoking is something that H has always wanted to try. When the boys finish burying the rifles, H gets his chance to try his first cigarette. The experience ends badly, with H coughing furiously. This incident is one of normalcy, and it seems to signal the return to normal life after the war. H is not a soldier or a factory worker, but a teenage boy.





# Chapter 43

## Chapter 43 Summary

With the war over, everyone is unsettled about how their lives may change when the occupation forces arrive. Instructors in H's school are no different. Instructor Tamori, once an overbearing and abusive teacher, has transformed himself into a nice, middle-aged gentleman in a suit. Many of the student conversations at school focus on this remarkable change from "demon instructor" to an ordinary man. Although some teachers continue to treat their students in the same fashion as before the war, others, like Tamori, make a complete change in their behavior and attitude toward their students.

Other changes are taking place as well. The school factory is closed down, and the machinery installed in the classrooms is loaded onto trucks and taken away. The "octopus pot" dugouts are filled in before the occupation forces arrive. Students are assigned to clean up the city's bombsites.

At the school assembly, the principal instructs the students that they will come into contact with the American flag and anthem and that they are to show respect for both. Students are not supposed to consider America as the enemy any longer. The vice-principal tells the students to avoid any action that might be considered rude or defiant. All clubs, including the rifle club, are being disbanded to avoid any suspicion that Japan is still carrying on military training.

H wonders what he should do about his key to the armory. H goes to the armory to check on the padlocks and finds that they are still in place. As he is about to leave, Sugita walks up, and they discuss what should be done with the keys. They decide to turn in all the keys to the school authorities. H and the other boys are relieved that the responsibility for supervision of the armory is no longer theirs.

Occupation forces are scheduled to arrive in Kobe on September 24th. During this time, traffic is restricted and schools closed. H is curious about the type of weapons the American troops use. Standing near the roadside as the troops arrive, H sees just small arms carried by soldiers in jeeps. Seeing the steady procession of covered trucks, guns and jeeps, it is no wonder to H that Japan lost the war.

There are many directives posted by the occupation forces concerning the removal of small shrines that contain photographs of the Emperor, the abolishment of martial arts and military training, prohibition of worship at Shinto shrines and a ban on anything which would restrict an individual's freedom of thought. The two things the occupation forces are focusing on are the eradication of Shintoism as a state religion and latent militarism.



New changes are happening at H's school as well. The main change is the abolishment of saluting of instructors and other formal greetings. It is no longer necessary to formally acknowledge a teacher each time one meets him on the school grounds. Other measures to "democratize" education are being introduced daily. "Corrective punching," once used by instructors, is now prohibited. However, some instructors continued to slap students such as H, who is prone to making teachers irate.

## Chapter 43 Analysis

Before the arrival of the American occupation forces, many changes are taking place in Kobe. The school factory is transformed back into classrooms, and the factory equipment is taken away. The octopus pots are filled in, and the city's bombsites are cleaned up. These are not the only changes that are taking place on the school campus, as life begins to change from wartime to peacetime.

Students are no longer required to salute their instructors. Physical punishment by the instructors is not acceptable. Some of the teachers, irritated by students like H, continued to slap students in spite of the new ruling. Students are instructed to show respect for the American flag and anthem and are not to consider America the enemy any longer. All clubs are being disbanded to avoid suspicion that military training is still being conducted in Japan.

Curious about the type of military equipment the American forces have, H watches by the roadside as the occupation force arrives. Seeing all the guns, jeeps and covered trucks coming into Kobe, H clearly sees why Japan lost the war. By watching them, H realizes that there is a major difference between the American occupation troops and the Japanese army.

As is customary, the occupation forces post many new directives for Kobe. Abolishment of martial arts and military training, the removal of shrines carrying the picture of the Emperor and a ban on anything that would prohibit individual thought are just a few of the changes made. The occupation forces target the eradication of Shintoism as the state religion and latent militarism as the two main areas of change in Japan.



# Chapter 44

## Chapter 44 Summary

The Water Board assigns H and his classmates to work on the water supply system. The work mainly consists of locating leaks in the water mains among the ruins of the area and cutting off the water supply. Armed with picks and shovels, they work in groups of three, digging through tiles and plaster from walls that collapsed in the fires, looking for the main tap at each site. Work is to be suspended if it rains, so the students keep their eyes on the sky.

Soon, heavy rain begins to fall, causing H and the other two members of his group to run quickly to a nearby lean-to connected to the wall of a gutted building. As they dive into the darkness, they see two pairs of eyes staring back at them. An elderly man and his grandson are crouching in the corner. They are terrified to see the three boys with picks and shovels come running toward them. To ease their fears, the boys share some of their food with the old man and his grandson.

After a few moments, H and the other boys start talking about Instructor Tamori and comparing him to Prime Minister Tojo. Hearing Tojo's name, the elderly man shouts that Tojo is a disgrace to the Japanese military because he did not commit suicide on the day the war ended. With a raised voice, the elderly man tells the boys that Tojo has always told the military not to suffer the shame of being captured alive, and Tojo should have followed his own directive. Seeing the rising anger of the man, H panics and hastily returns to work. When H and the boys get back to the work site, everyone is gone, and the boys leave for home.

On the way home, H decides to visit his former instructor, Mr. Hisakado, at his watch shop. H asks Mr. Hisakado about the model of gun the occupation troops are carrying and is told it is the M16 Carbine. H wants a chance to see an M16 and has an idea about how to make this happen. H decides to draw sketches of the American troops for free. Once he becomes friendly with the soldiers, he will persuade one of them to show him the gun.

H's plan works before long. A soldier at the occupation forces hospital shows H his M16 Carbine. H sees that it is much lighter than the Japanese guns. Compared to the Japanese rifles, H realizes the M16 is far superior. H is allowed to make a sketch of the M16 in his sketchbook. When he finishes, H takes the sketch to show Mr. Hisakado. While they look at the picture, H says that Japan could not have won the war because of the superiority of America's weapons.

Morio is helping Hadano pack to go to Gifa when H arrives. Hadano's health is failing, and Morio will accompany him on the trip. Morio tells H that their family has been selected in the lottery that provides homes for air raid victims. His father explains to H that Toshiko and Yoshiko will be returning to Kobe very soon. Upon hearing this news, H



realizes that all four members of his family will finally be able to live under the same roof again.

## Chapter 44 Analysis

All the people of Kobe are expected to help in the rebuilding of the city, and the students are no exception. The Water Department assigns H and two of his friends to help repair the city's water supply system. The work consists mainly of locating leaks in the water mains in the ruined areas and shutting off the water supply.

The work is suspended one day when heavy rains begin to fall. Taking shelter in a nearby lean-to, H and his friends are shocked to find an elderly man and his grandson crouching in the corner. Eventually, the elderly man realizes he has nothing to fear from the boys. When the man hears the comparison H makes between Instructor Tamori and Prime Minister Tojo, he flies into a rage, condemning Tojo as a traitor. Afraid of his rage, the boys quickly run back to the work site and find that everyone has left.

H puts his resourcefulness to work once more and devises a plan to get a close-up look at the M-16, the gun the occupation forces use. Drawing sketches of the American soldiers for free, H eventually finds a soldier who will let him see his M-16 rifle. Seeing the superiority of the M-16 to Japanese rifles, H sees that there was no way for Japan to win the war. H is allowed to make a sketch of the rifle, which he shows to Instructor Hisakado. H's natural curiosity comes to the forefront, and the boy who was once disallowed from counting railroad cars can make sketches of the American occupation's rifles.

Arriving at Hadano's house, H is surprised to find that Morio is accompanying Hadano, who is in failing health, to Gifa, his former home. Still more surprising is the news that H's family has been selected to receive housing that has been provided for air raid victims. For the first time in a long while, H realizes, all of his family will be under one roof.



# Chapter 45

## Chapter 45 Summary

At the end of the war, H learns the horror of Hiroshima and Nagasaki and the full power of the atomic bomb, which is completely different from what is being reported in the newspapers. H thinks that now the newspapers will be able to print whatever they want, but he is mistaken. A new censorship replaces that of the military. A report, critical of the Allies, irritates General MacArthur because of its distortions. Soon the occupation forces replace the military as an authority figure not to be disobeyed.

H dislikes the display of "democracy" exhibited by teachers who were once the champions of militarism. Their hypocrisy disgusts H, and he decides to show his disgust in many ways. When a teacher enters a classroom, H bows and then walks out of the room. This action causes him to be marked absent quite often.

Another teacher, Mr. Kawano, harbors a grudge toward H. During a test, H tries to turn in a blank answer sheet and leave. Mr. Kawano becomes angry with H's lack of respect. He tells H that he is not to leave until the test is completed. H spends the rest of the period tracing his hand on the back of his test paper. This is the first of many similar incidents.

One day, H decides to take a look at the "homes for air raid victims." His family's assigned apartment is substandard and disappointing. H goes to the fire station to tell Morio about the poor condition of their new housing. When he arrives, H is surprised to learn that his father has quit his job at the fire station. H finds Morio sitting alone at Uncle Hadano's home. Morio tells H that he is going back to tailoring. H explains to Morio that the apartment housing to which they have been assigned is substandard. H suggests that the family move into Uncle Hadano's home, but Morio refuses, explaining that the family must live in the apartment to qualify for better municipal housing when it becomes available.

As Morio and H prepare the apartment for Toshiko and Yoshiko's arrival, H notices that his father is worried about something. Morio tells H that he does not think anyone will come to a tailor in the area they will be living. The apartment cannot be seen from the street, and no one, he feels, will expect to find a tailor in a burned-out school building. H tells Morio that he will make signs to show what Morio does and where he can be found. H will place the signs throughout the city the next day.

## Chapter 45 Analysis

With the war's end, H thinks everything will go back to normal. H believes the censorship in the newspapers and radio reports during the war will now end. Nothing could be further from the truth. The occupation forces replace the military as the ultimate authority figure that is not to be disobeyed.



H dislikes hypocrisy regardless of its source. Instructors, previous champions of militarism, attempting to be the model of democratic principles disgusts H. Frequent absence from class and submitting uncompleted tests to his instructors are only two of the ways H displays his disgust. This lack of respect causes many instructors to bear grudges against H, which foreshadows future events. Instructor Kawano, who disapproves of H's defiant attitude, is particularly antagonistic toward H.

H takes a look at his family's new apartment and finds it to be very disappointing. H goes to the fire station to find his father and is surprised to learn that Morio has quit his job there. When H does find Morio, he tells him of the substandard condition of their new apartment. H's suggestion to move into Hadano's house is turned down. Morio explains to H that they must occupy the apartment housing in order to be eligible for better municipal housing when it becomes available.

Always observant, H sees that something is bothering his father. Morio explains that he does not think anyone will come to a tailor shop that is in a bad area and difficult to find. Morio wonders how he will ever get any customers. Once again, using his resourcefulness, H comes up with the solution for his father. H will make signs to be posted all over Kobe to show where the shop is and how to get there.



# Chapter 46

## Chapter 46 Summary

Soon after the Senohs move, a noisy family moves in next door to them. Due to the thin walls, it is easy to hear every conversation that takes place in the apartment next door. Toshiko hears the children asking their mother for some rice, and she replies that she does not have any money. True to her Christian faith, Toshiko decides to take the family some rice balls. H tells his mother that she should not start something that she cannot continue. Ignoring H's remarks, Toshiko begins to pack the rice balls to make her delivery.

After Toshiko leaves, H notices that there are holes in the paper he used to cover the walls. More surprising, H sees two pairs of eyes peering at him through the holes. H throws a cushion at the wall, and the eyes disappear. When Toshiko returns, H complains that she should not give away rice when their supply is so low. H asks Morio, who has been sitting quietly, what he thinks about the situation. Morio looks flustered, and this frustrates H tremendously. H flings open the door and rushes outside.

H returns later to hear his parents discussing whether or not they should give up their subscription to the daily newspaper. H enters the room and demands that they not give it up because he wants to see it every day. Toshiko explains that they are no longer able to afford the newspaper. Trying to appease his son, Morio tells H that they will continue to take the paper as payment to H for saving Morio's old sewing machine. H decides to help out with his family's financial problems by continuing to do sketches for the soldiers, but not for free.

H comes home one night to see the pairs of eyes staring at him from the other side of the wall. Rushing to wall as the eyes disappear, H shouts that if any more holes are made in the paper, he will come to the intruders' apartment and smack them. Toshiko tells H to be patient with the family because the father was killed in the war, and the mother barely makes enough money to feed them. Toshiko remarks that it is no wonder the children are hungry. Toshiko urges H to be a little more understanding about the situation.

Kobe is preparing for its first general election since the end of the war. Sanzo Nosaka, a member of the Communist Party, is making a campaign speech at Minato Park, and H decides to attend. When Nosaka begins speaking, he blames all of Japan's devastation on the Emperor. This statement is met with loud applause. This reaction scares H a little and reminds him of a similar scene when these same people were cheering for the Emperor.



## Chapter 46 Analysis

A noisy family moves into the apartment next to the Senohs. Thin walls convey the conversations of the new family right into the Senoh's kitchen. Toshiko, displaying her Christian love and charity, decides to share one of H's favorite dishes, rice-balls, with the new neighbors. Being selfish, H is furious with Toshiko for sharing their limited rice supply. As usual, Toshiko is determined to express her Christian love for the family and continues on with her plan. When Toshiko returns, H once again berates her for sharing their supply of rice with the neighbors. Looking to Morio for support, H receives none, which makes him even more furious. H turns and storms out of the apartment.

While in the kitchen, H sees that pieces of the wallpaper have been torn away. Looking closer, H sees two pairs of eyes staring at him through the holes in the paper. Surprised and furious, H throws a cushion at the eyes, and they disappear. In a short while, the eyes return.

Coming home a few days after that, H once again sees the eyes peering through the holes in the wallpaper. Frustrated, H yells that he will come over and smack the eyes' owners if any more holes are made. Toshiko explains that the father of the family is dead and the mother is having a difficult time. Toshiko tells H that he should be more compassionate and understanding of the family's situation. Unfortunately, as is seen later, Toshiko's request is completely ignored.





# Chapter 47

## Chapter 47 Summary

H is worried that he is becoming more unstable emotionally. If the situation gets worse, H worries that he may do harm to someone. H thinks he will lose his mind if he does not do something about the children looking through the holes in the wallpaper at his home. Other things upset H as well. On the way home one day, H is infuriated to see a poster of the Japanese Progressive Party. H rips the poster off the wall and tears it into shreds while shouting abuse at the Party. The main reason for his outburst is that the poster of the Japanese Progressive Party was placed over the advertisement for the poster for Senoh Family Tailors. No matter the cause, H's act of viciousness scares him.

H feels the best way to improve his mood is to go to the hospital and make more sketches of the soldiers there. The soldiers' cheerfulness, in spite of their problems, makes H always feel much better. To his surprise, H is not allowed to enter the hospital when he arrives. An officer tells H that Japanese black-marketeers and American army patients in the hospital have begun trading goods, and no one is allowed in the hospital until the situation is resolved. H tries to persuade the officer to make an exception, but the officer tells him to leave or face arrest if he tries to enter. H leaves and returns home.

Entering the apartment, H smells the aroma of rice cooking. As he lifts the lid of the rice pot, H senses that he is being watched. Turning quickly, H once again sees the eyes peering at him through the holes in the wallpaper. H is enraged and races out of his apartment to the one next door. He bangs on the door, but there is no response. H opens the door and enters the apartment. With an angry glare, H surveys the room and sees an eleven-year-old girl clutching her younger brother and sister cowering in the corner. Looking at the frightened children, H's resolve weakens a little, but he tells them in a stern voice not to make any more holes in the wallpaper and to stop watching his family.

Later that day, an emaciated soldier collapses in front of the Senohs' door. Toshiko brings him in and, over H's objections, gives him some rice. H asks Morio why he does not stop Toshiko. Morio, looking at H in pity, says nothing. This reaction infuriates H, and he throws the lid of the rice pot at his father, hitting Morio in the face. H panics as he sees blood trickling down his father's face. Yoshiko, very upset, shouts at H and tells him she wishes he were dead. In his mind, H believes he would be better off dead.

Later, H walks in the direction of the "Hold On Bridge" with the intention of committing suicide. H leaves a suicide note by the post at the end of the bridge. H dangles himself between the railroad ties of the bridge, waiting for the train to come. As the train approaches, H loses his nerve and cannot go through with his suicide attempt. Picking up the suicide note, he shreds it and throws the pieces into the air.



## Chapter 47 Analysis

H is aware that his emotional state is deteriorating, and it scares him. H worries that he might do harm to someone if the problem with the family next door is not resolved. His anger is displayed when a political party poster is placed over the one H made for Morio's tailoring business. H rips the poster to shreds, shouting abusive language as he does so. One thing H knows for sure is that these spontaneous vicious outbursts scare him. H tries to improve his mood by going to the hospital to make more sketches of the soldiers there. Unfortunately, a black market racketeering ring has been discovered within the hospital, and no one is allowed to enter.

Returning home, H has another encounter with the eyes staring through the wallpaper. H throws the rice bowl lid at the eyes and rushes out of the apartment. Banging on the door brings no response, so H turns the doorknob and enters to see the older child clutching her siblings in the corner. The sight melts H's fury somewhat, but he tells them firmly to stop watching his family. Upon entering his family's apartment, Toshiko confronts him and tells him to be more understanding of their neighbors' circumstances.

Later in the day, an emaciated soldier collapses in front of the Senoh apartment. Toshiko brings the soldier in and gives him a serving of rice. His mother's generosity with the rice infuriates H. Screaming, H asks Morio why he does not stop Toshiko. Once again, his question is met with silence. Morio's failure to answer infuriates H, and he throws the lid of the rice pot at this father, hitting him in the face. Shocked by his actions, H realizes that he would be better off dead.

H does try to commit suicide at the Hold On Bridge later that day. Leaving a suicide note, H is prepared to follow through with the suicide. At the very last second, his will to live takes over, and H pulls himself out of danger. He retrieves the suicide note, tears it into pieces, throws the pieces into the air and returns home. The stress of the war has pushed this promising, precocious young man to the brink of suicide.



# Chapter 48

## Chapter 48 Summary

H returns home and apologizes to his father for his behavior. H tells his father that he is going to ask to stay at a friend's house for a while. Morio feels that H leaving home for a while is a good idea. Toshiko prepares some food for H to take with him. H packs his bags and starts to leave when Morio hands him some money. In actuality, H is going to stay in one of the deserted classrooms in the school, but he does not tell his family about his plan. Instead, H reassures Morio that he will be staying with a friend and asks his father not to worry about him.

The art classroom at the Second Middle School has been deserted since the art classes were suspended. H sneaks into the room and covers the windows so that no one will know H is living there. H's first night is difficult. Tossing and turning, H cannot stop thinking about his actions and realizes that he is spiritually sick.

A week later, H goes to visit his parents. Morio welcomes him, but Toshiko keeps her distance. Toshiko is afraid that H might become violent again. H explains that he feels it best if he continues to stay away for a while. H tells his parents that he is doing fine and not causing any trouble. Toshiko asks if H has enough to eat, and he replies that he does. Morio tells his son that he is welcome to come back whenever he is ready.

H has decided to become an artist and is concerned about how he can begin to study art. H goes to the home of Koiso, a well-known artist, to show Koiso some of his sketches and ask him for art lessons. H's sketches impress Koiso, but he tells H that he does not take pupils. Instead, Koiso invites H to come to his home and sketch while he is away teaching in Kyoto. This is an offer H quickly accepts.

On the way back, H meets a friend and tells him of his good fortune. H also suggests they form a Kobe Students' Art League, composed of art-loving middle school students. H's friend wonders about the League being co-educational. Up to this point, classes made up of boys and girls are unheard of. Since Americans are planning to make the schools co-educational, H thinks it should not be a problem. They both set about to make the Kobe Students' Art League a reality.

## Chapter 48 Analysis

Filled with guilt, H apologizes to Morio for his behavior earlier. H and Morio agree it would be best for H to live away from the family for a while. H's family gives him the freedom to find a way to heal his spiritual wounds. This is the hidden result of the war, and the damage runs deeper than the death and physical wounds. The art classes at the school have been suspended, so H has decided to live there. It is symbolic that H seeks out the art studio as his place to heal. Art seems to be his salvation as he comes back from the brink. Knowing his parents would never approve, H lies and tells his



parents he will be staying with a friend. Morio reminds H that he is welcome to come back home whenever he is ready, giving his son support as the same time as he provides freedom.

Using a copy of the art room key he made years earlier, H is able to gain entrance into the room. To keep his presence there a secret, H covers all the windows. H's first night there is difficult. Thoughts of his actions earlier in the day crowd his mind and rob him of sleep. Tossing and turning throughout the night, H realizes that he is spiritually sick.

H is convinced that he wants to be an artist, and he tries to think of some way to begin studying art. As usual, it does not take H long to come up with a plan. H pays a visit to Koiso, a famous artist in Kobe, and asks Koiso to look at his sketches and give him art lessons. Koiso is impressed with H's sketches but tells H that he does not teach private art students. Alternatively, Koiso tells H that he is often away teaching in Kyoto, and H is welcome to come to his home to do his sketches during those times.

Meeting a friend on his way back, H tells him about Koiso's offer. H suggests to his friend that they form an Art Students' League for art-loving middle school students. Concerns about the co-educational makeup of the league are discussed and quickly dispelled. The boys set about to make the Art Students' League a reality. At the end of this chapter, H seems to have found a healing path.



# Chapter 49

## Chapter 49 Summary

Although extremely popular in the Second Middle School and the community, rugby is a sport H does not like. The school's passion for the game is one reason for H's dislike of rugby. Instead of keeping his opinions to himself, H voices them aloud and often gets beaten up by other students.

At the beginning of the school year, Mr. Yoshiharu Naito is assigned as H's new teacher. Mr. Naito impresses H and causes H to want to get to know him better. One thing H likes about Mr. Naito is his ability to care for his students without probing into their private lives. H is completely surprised when he finds out that Mr. Naito is living in the annex to the geography room at school. H begins to visit Naito there but keeps quiet about his own residence at school.

Omura, a friend of H's, comes to the art room door and knocks. H hears the knock but recognizes that it is not the same knock as usual. Omura calls out to H, but something in Omura's voice keeps H on his guard. He waits in silence, not opening the door. After much shouting and door kicking, H hears footsteps walking away from the door. H finds out later that Mr. Kawano, H's math teacher, used Omura to prove that H was living in one of the abandoned classrooms. Mr. Kawano sends a message to H through Omura telling H that he will fail if he continues skipping class and turning in unfinished work.

Surprisingly, H does graduate. This is mainly due to the efforts of Mr. Naito and Mr. Matsumoto, who speak up for H. The instructors claim it would be unfair to fail a student with such a unique individuality that cannot be measured in terms of grades and attendance. Although H is not particularly concerned about failing, he is pleased to be graduating.

H's family receives notification that they have been chosen to move into the new municipal housing. Upon hearing this news, H goes over to see the new house. When he arrives, H's parents are there getting the house ready for move-in. Seeing glass window panes in the windows pleases H very much. Yoshiko asks her brother if he will be moving back now. H tells her that he will, which makes Yoshiko very happy.

## Chapter 49 Analysis

H soon finds out that he is not the only one living in one of the school classrooms. His new teacher, Mr. Naito, a bachelor, is living in the geography room. H is impressed with Naito and wants to get to know him better. H likes the way that Naito sincerely cares for his students without probing into their private lives. To satisfy his curiosity about Mr. Naito, H visits him often. Each time, however, H makes sure that Naito does not know where H really lives.



H's keen instincts are tested one day while he is living in the art room. The only one that H has told about his living in the art room is Omura. They have arranged a secret knock so that H will always know who it is when Omura comes to visit. On this particular day, Omura knocks on the door and calls out to H. Something in Omura's voice bothers H. Sensing a trap, he sits silently, waiting to see what will happen next. Before long, shouting and door-kicking begin. H gives no response, and he hears footsteps walking away. Omura later tells H that Mr. Kawano, H's math teacher and not one of H's favorites, was using Omura to prove that H was living on school property. Mr. Kawano sends a message to H through Omura telling him that if he continues to skip his classes, he will fail.

Again, H's lack of interest in formal education is displayed in his lack of concern about the possibility of failure. Mainly due to the efforts of Mr. Naito and Mr. Matsumoto, H does graduate. The instructors claim that H possesses a unique individuality that cannot be measured in terms of attendance and grades. Their argument is very convincing, and the school approves the decision, which allows H to graduate.

More good news comes H's way when he finds out that his family has been approved for the new municipal housing. H's curiosity is aroused, and he goes over to see the new housing for himself. Toshiko, Morio and Yoshiko are there preparing the house for move-in. The glass window panes and other pleasing features of the home convince H that it is time for him to move back in with his family.



# Chapter 50

## Chapter 50 Summary

Ryohei Koiso arranges for H to begin working in the Phoenix Studio, a sign-painting business by day and an art studio by night. The job gives H the opportunity to work and draw pictures at the same time. Another added benefit is the fact that many other artists spend time at the studio as well. The makeshift appearance of the building is a little disappointing to H, but not enough to keep him from working there.

When H begins working there, he finds himself among unconventional students who are quite different from the students at his school. Mr. Okumura, the owner, spends the money he is paid for paintings to buy alcohol. Koji Mitani, a repatriate from Siberia, paints dark and gloomy pictures. Masaru Sayema, a calligrapher, has an obsession with mahjongg and previously lost a job because of it. Another heavy drinker is Seiji Takagi, who describes himself as a novelist. H is shocked at the amount of alcohol they consume. At times, H is more or less forced to drink himself, but he never gets used to it. On one occasion after drinking with them, H finds himself out on the sidewalk with no idea how he got there.

After H learns how to apply the undercoat for the signs, Mr. Okamura tells him to begin studying lettering. Okamura tells H it will be helpful for him in the future to know how to write script. H teaches himself the skill by using the newspapers as an example. In a short time, H masters the skill quite effectively.

Painting the lampposts in the Motomachi shopping area is a tougher assignment. One day, a female student he knows sees H painting a lamppost. H immediately turns in the other direction, embarrassed for her to see him doing such a menial job. As he finishes painting, the owner of the fruit store comes over and asks H if he will help him nail down the tin on the roof so that his sign will not blow away.

When H gets up on the roof, he sees the newly built stores that show Kobe is coming back to life. H thinks that now orders for signboards will increase, and that will mean more money for him. The fruit store owner asks H what the word "Phoenix" means. H replies that it is the name of the bird of immortality. H explains that often the bird is burned to death, but it always comes to life again.

## Chapter 50 Analysis

H's first paying job is arranged by Koiso. H is hired by Phoenix Studios, which is a sign-painting business by day and an art studio by night. The makeshift appearance of the building is disappointing to H, but he's excited to have the chance to work and draw pictures at the same time. The fact that other artists come to the art studio at night is another added benefit.



H assumes that all artists are like the students he encounters at school. Soon, H finds out that his assumption is incorrect. One is an expatriate from Siberia. One has an obsession with mahjongg that cost him a previous job, and another considers himself to be a novelist. Most of the people H works with are heavy drinkers and consume large quantities of alcohol each day. On some occasions, his co-workers gently coerce H into drinking with them, but he never gets used to it.

H's sign painting skills are quite good, and H teaches himself how to do the lettering for the signs. Painting lampposts is a harder assignment. One day, while finishing the lampposts, the owner of a nearby fruit store asks H to help him nail down the tin on his roof so his sign will not blow away. As they work together, H looks out on all the new buildings in Kobe that are being constructed. H knows that the buildings will need signs and that will mean more money for him. The owner asks H the meaning of the word "Phoenix." H explains that the phoenix is a bird of immortality that when burned will rise from the ashes to live once again. The symbol of the phoenix resonates with the early scene when H's father takes him to see the damaged flood areas when they are rebuilt and healed. Healing is a major theme of the book, and Japan is just beginning to heal from its worst disaster. The healing is not only a national one, but a personal one as well. H has been spiritually burned in the war, and he is just now rising from the ashes.





# Characters

## Don-chan

See Haruo Ota

## Joji Fujita

Joji Fujita, whose nickname is George, is a year older than H, but the two boys become friends when they work together in the same school factory. They have a lot in common. They both come from a family of Christians, but both are atheists. George speaks excellent English and always knows a lot about the war because he listens to the American radio broadcasts.

## Fukushima

Fukushima is a friend of H in Second Middle School.

## Furuta

Furuta is one of the members of the Second Middle School rifle club, and he encourages H to join.

## George

See Joji Fujita

## H

See Hajime Senoh

## Uncle Hadano

Uncle Hadano is a civil engineer. He is a close friend of the Senoh family, and that is why H calls him uncle, although he is not a blood relative. H is fond of him and regards him as another father. The affection is mutual. H stays with Uncle Hadano for a while towards the end of the war. Uncle Hadano gets sick with cancer and dies shortly afterwards.



## Iwao Hayashi

Iwao Hayashi is a friend of H. They are in the same grade at primary school. Hayashi is a champion wrestler; he is also intelligent and like H is good at drawing.

## Instructor Hisakado

Instructor Hisakado, a teacher at Second Middle School, is in charge of the rifle club. He was formerly a watchmaker, and he is interested in art and music. He is a decent man and the students trust him. He teaches them that the true warrior is not one who does not fear death but one who has the skills necessary to protect himself.

## Itchan

Itchan is a close friend of H at primary (or national) school. H confides in him that he owns a postcard from New York and talks to Itchan about the United States. Itchan passes this information on to another boy, who writes "spy" on H's desk in chalk. However, H and Itchan are soon reconciled.

## Ryohei Koiso

Ryohei Koiso, a well-known artist, helps H in his studies after he graduates from Second Middle School.

## Mr. Matsumoto

Mr. Matsumoto is the teacher of English at Second Middle School. H likes him because he says he will continue to teach them English, even though it is the language of the enemy, as long as he is able.

## Mr. Nakata

Mr. Nakata is H's physics and chemistry teacher. He and H dislike each other.

## Nishioka

Nishioka is a friend of H in Second Middle School.

## Muneo Ogura

Muneo Ogura is a close friend of H toward the end of his time at Second Middle School.



## Okubo

Okubo is a friend of H in Second Middle School. Like H, Okubo does not believe the official versions of the war.

## Haruo Ota

Haruo Ota is one of H's classmates and the head boy. Haruo is known as "blackpatch" because of a birthmark on his head. H calls him "Donchan." Haruo lends H a book called *The Three Treasures* from his father's collection.

## Red Horse

See Instructor Tamiyama

## Hajime Senoh

Also called H, Hajime Senoh is the son of Morio and Toshika Senoh. As a young boy in primary school he is intelligent and mischievous. According to his father, Hajime has a habit of saying the first thing that comes into his head. Hajime learns ways of getting what he wants even if he has to be devious. When he has no money but wants to see a "puppet peepshow" at a fairground, he tries to scare off the adults who are watching it by telling them they can contract an eye disease by touching the lens. Significantly, his favorite god in Japanese myth is Susanowo, who has a reputation for behaving badly.

Others tend to see H as an odd boy, although he has plenty of friends at school. But he is always questioning authority and asking awkward questions about why things are as they are. He is puzzled by the adults who say that everything that happens in the war is the will of the emperor, since H cannot see how the emperor can possibly be aware of all the things being done in his name. H's instincts are pacifistic, and he does not want to join the rifle club because he feels it is too warlike. He makes up his own version of a patriotic jingle, neatly reversing its meaning. He becomes exasperated when he realizes that the newspapers are not telling the truth about the war.

H rebels against what is expected of him in many ways. He skips classes when he is supposed to be studying for examinations. In response to the drive to collect scrap metal, he refuses to give up his precious collection of metal buttons. Rather than hand them over as a contribution to the war effort, he digs a hole and buries them. H also has a habit of turning in an exam paper with nothing written on it except his name and sometimes a sketch of his own hand on the back. He reserves this treatment for teachers who have a reputation for hitting their pupils. H is also impatient with what he sees as hypocrisy. After the war, if a teacher he dislikes comes into the classroom, he simply bows and walks out.



H does not want to be a tailor like his father. Instead, his greatest talent is drawing, and at the age of sixteen he resolves to become an artist.

## Morio Senoh

Morio Senoh, H's father, is a kind, mild-mannered man, a tailor by profession. He moved to Kobe when he was fifteen years old to do his apprenticeship. After he married Toshika, he too became a Christian, although he is less enthusiastic about the religion than his wife is.

Morio's tailoring business suffers when all citizens are encouraged to wear national dress rather than the Western suits that he makes. Then when he joins the fire brigade during the war, he only has time to practice tailoring part-time. During his fire service, he distinguishes himself with his courage in saving lives.

Morio has a lot of common sense, and he is skeptical of the official claims that Japan is winning the war. He always suspects that the United States will eventually win. Since as a tailor he has many foreign clients, he is more cosmopolitan than the average resident of Kobe.

Morio is unfailingly kind and attentive to H, always ready to give him sound advice. Even when H throws a rice pot lid at him and walks out of the house, Morio does not blame him and welcomes him back with warmth.

## Toshika Senoh

Toshika Senoh, H's mother, came originally from Hiroshima but moved to Kobe when she was eighteen and her family arranged her marriage to Morio. Toshika enthusiastically embraces whatever new ideas come along, and in Kobe she converted to Christianity, even though her birth family were Buddhists. Toshika is zealous for her religion, playing the tambourine on the streets with a group of Christians. She also tries to bring up her children in the Christian faith and does not let them read anything other than the Bible. Her habit of trying to express Christian love for everyone and everything irritates H. He often reacts negatively to her emotional and impulsive nature. During the war, Toshika becomes head of the neighborhood association and performs her duties well.

## Yoshiko Senoh

Yoshiko Senoh, H's sister, is two years younger than H. She likes to cling to her older brother, and H finds this attachment a nuisance. But in one incident Yoshiko shows him kindness and he thinks better of her. This event occurs when she insists on eating with the fork that has one prong missing, even though it was H who broke the fork. Yoshiko is evacuated to the countryside when the air raids start.



## Sumiyama

Sumiyama, a friend of H in Second Middle School, is kind to H when H's house is burned down. Sumiyama also enthusiastically practices how to fight and kill enemy soldiers if they should land in Japan.

## Instructor Tamiyama

Instructor Tamiyama is a military instructor at the Second Middle School. He is nicknamed "Red Horse" because of his long face and red complexion. He is popular with the students. He volunteers to go to the battlefield.

## Lieutenant Tamori

Lieutenant Tamori is the teacher in charge of military training at H's Second Middle School. All the students fear him. He is known as "His Lechery" because not only does he cultivate an imperious manner, he also makes inappropriate inquiries about the boys' sisters. Tamori takes a dislike to H when he finds H's sketch of a female nude in his notebook. In another incident, Tamori hits H for what he regards as an insolent remark. H joins the rifle club to escape him. Later he hears a rumor that some years earlier, Tamori's wife ran off with another man. This information makes H believe that Tamori must be lonely, and he feels compassion for him.

## Mr. Tan Watanabe

Mr. Tan Watanabe is a teacher of English grammar at Second Middle who makes fun of Lieutenant Tamori.

## Yokota

Yokota is a friend of H, and H considers him to be worldly-wise. Yokota is one of the students who participates with H on the arduous night march and other military drills. He and H go on a secret riding excursion together and are consequently expelled from the riding club. Yokota's family home is burned down following the big air raid on Kobe in 1945. Not long after this event, his father is killed in action in the South Pacific.



# Themes

## Militarism

Lurking behind the day-to-day experiences of the growing boy is the specter of the imperialism and militarism that characterized Japanese society in the 1930s and continued until the Japanese defeat in 1945. Imperialism and militarism are apparent almost from the beginning, in the passing reference to the neighborhood celebrations that followed the fall of Nanking, China, to invading Japanese forces in 1937. H is affected by the war when he is only seven years old, when two of his friends are called up to the army. One of them commits suicide rather than enlist.

In the schools, boys are indoctrinated with the belief that their highest duty is to sacrifice themselves for the emperor, to die for the nation. No one except H seems to question this view, and as the years go by, militarization gets more pronounced. When H is about nine, the boys have a swimming class and are taught the "navy's way of swimming," which means to swim slowly and not splash much. "If your ship sinks, whether you survive or not will depend on this," the students are told.

In Japanese wartime society, everyone must be careful about what they say. No one dares to voice sentiments that might be considered un-Japanese.

Everything is secretive. Even the weather forecast is removed from the newspapers, on the grounds that it might give information to the enemy. A telling incident occurs when H is about eleven years old and takes a trip to the country by train. When the seacoast comes into view, the passengers automatically, without anyone saying anything, pull down their window blinds because the government has made it clear that no one is allowed to look out to sea. Warships may be visible, and that must be kept secret.

H always questions the need for such extreme secrecy, and at the end of the war he believes that the constant indoctrination of such ideas as dying for the emperor has made people unable to make mature judgments about how to behave and what to believe.

## Coming-of-age

The narrative begins when H is about seven years old and ends when he is seventeen. During the war years he is forced to mature quickly. He learns to think for himself, to take charge in moments of crisis, and to discover his own identity.

H's transition from childhood to early adulthood is apparent in several major episodes. Firing live ammunition with the school rifle club for the first time is a significant moment, for example. So are the many times when he questions the validity of reports he reads in the newspapers about the progress of war. But the most important episode is when the family home is set on fire following an American air raid with incendiary bombs.



Fifteen-year-old H immediately takes charge, giving his mother instructions about what to do and dousing a quilt in water so that they can put it over their heads as they flee. When his mother stops to pray, he tells her they must keep moving. In fact, she has fainted, and H's slaps get her conscious again. Then they come upon a woman whose son is badly injured. H almost faints at the sight of the blood, but he regains control of himself and offers the woman his flask of water, which she gives to the boy. But this is not enough to save him. For the first time H witnesses death, and H feels compassion for the dead boy—at least he is no longer in pain.

A short while later, he again takes the lead when he returns with his father to their ruined house. He is mature enough to ask his father whether he wishes to see the badly damaged sewing machine, since he knows that his father's livelihood depends on the machine and fears he may be upset by its ruined condition.

A few days after the bombing, H observes the area around Hyogo Station, which is completely leveled. Dead bodies yet to be cremated are visible in the area. It is a sobering moment for H, who as a result of the air raid has been forced to lose any childhood innocence he may have had left: "'So this is war,' he thought as he gazed over the seemingly endless sea of destruction."

In the coming-of-age process, it is common for a teenager to get into conflict with his parents, and H is no exception. He becomes impatient with what he sees as his father's apathy after the war, and his mother's brand of pious and missionary Christianity annoys him more and more. When he throws the heavy lid of a rice pot directly at his father, he knows it is time to move out. He then tries to commit suicide but thinks better of it at the last minute. This experience is all part of the maturing process. H has to find out who he is and what his vocation in life is, independently of his family. By the end of the novel it appears that he has succeeded, since he is set for a career as an artist.

## Style

Although *A Boy Called H* is an autobiographical novel, the story is told in the third rather than the first person. In this case, the point of view—the consciousness through which the story is told—is limited to H. Other characters, and all situations and events, are seen through his eyes. And since H is a young boy, the style employed to convey his point of view is for the most part quite simple. The sentence structure is simple, and the vocabulary is appropriate for a boy of H's age. Also, the story is told in a straightforward, chronological manner. There are no flashbacks (except in chapter 2, when H tells of his parents' backgrounds) or other more sophisticated literary devices.

The diction includes both informal and colloquial elements, as well as a fair amount of slang. (Of course, the translator has had to find English equivalents for the Japanese slang expressions.) The effect of this choice of diction is an unpretentious style. The narrative is not weighed down with deep thoughts or reflections, only such as arise in the immediate context of events, and even these are not dwelt upon excessively. The result is a somewhat detached, objective style, which gives the impression that H is a good, steady observer of life, rather than someone who gets too emotionally caught up in things, although that steadiness is sometimes belied by his rebellious behavior. It therefore comes as a surprise when late in the novel H comes close to mental breakdown and suicide. It suggests that the rather flat, even tone of the narration hides a depth of emotional turbulence which eventually finds its way to the surface.

Although the manner of narration is generally matter-of-fact and literal, occasionally the author uses poetic, figurative language to striking effect. A notable example is after the air raid on Kobe. When H sees the unburned pages of his books caught up in the wind and swirling in the air, he at first mistakes them for white butterflies: "The scene, with white cabbage butterflies dancing round and round over the overall black of the ruins, was dreamlike, fantastic." He feels that the white flakes are "the very souls . . . of the books."



## Historical Context

Like the rest of the world, Japan suffered from the great economic depression of 1929 to 1931. As other countries introduced import tariffs on Japanese exports, the Japanese economic situation rapidly deteriorated. Needing new markets and raw materials, Japan turned its attention to China, knowing that a military conquest of China would give it exclusive control of a large economic area, including markets and raw materials. In 1931, Japan occupied Manchuria and set up the puppet state of Manchukuo to the south. China was militarily weak and could not stem the Japanese advance. By 1933, the Japanese had reached the Great Wall of China.

Japanese expansion into China created friction with the United States and Britain, both of whom had interests in the Far East. The League of Nations condemned the Japanese invasion, and in 1933 Japan withdrew from the League. After this decision, Japan began to look to Germany for support.

In 1937, Japan, Germany, and Italy signed a tripartite pact against Russia. With the United States still neutral, Japan launched on a major war of conquest. In the first few years, Japan met with unbroken success. Most of Northern China was under its control. It had seized the chief ports, and it controlled the railroads and all lines of communication. The Japanese navy controlled the seas. Although out-fought, China continued to resist as well as it could.

In 1940, after the outbreak of World War II, the signatories of the tripartite pact mutually acknowledged German and Italian leadership of Europe, and Japanese leadership in East Asia. Britain, fighting in Europe against Nazi Germany, had few resources to spare for protecting its far eastern outposts or countering Japanese expansion.

Relations between Japan and the United States were tense. In the 1930s the isolationist United States took no steps to curb Japanese expansion other than to affirm the principle of Chinese integrity. But hostility to Japan was growing, particularly after 1937, when Japan stepped up its assault on China. The United States began to build up its Pacific navy, banned oil and other exports to Japan, impounded Japanese assets in the United States, and closed the Panama Canal to Japanese ships.

Negotiations between the two countries continued throughout 1941, but in December, without warning or a declaration of war, the Japanese attacked the U.S. fleet at Pearl Harbor. This event brought the United States into World War II, with Germany and Italy declaring war on the United States.

For the first six months following Pearl Harbor, Japanese forces put together a string of spectacular victories. Hong Kong, Sarawak, and the Malay Peninsula fell. In February 1942, the British naval fortress of Singapore, previously considered impregnable, surrendered. By March, Japanese gains were such that even Australia was threatened with invasion. By May 1942, the Japanese controlled Burma, and the whole of



southeast Asia and the Western Pacific were in Japanese hands. The British and the Americans had been expelled.

But Japan's resources were stretched too wide, and the tide began to turn. In June 1942, the United States defeated the Japanese navy at the battle of Midway. American air power also soon began to tell. In 1943, from new bases in the Pacific, U.S. forces were destroying Japanese positions in the empire and in Japan itself. The first raid on Tokyo was in the spring of 1942.

Little by little, the Japanese were pushed back, in spite of their dogged resistance. By the spring of 1945, it was clear that Japan had lost the war. Its navy had been completely destroyed, and American aerial bombardment was wiping out whole Japanese cities. H's home city of Kobe was not spared; it suffered devastating air raids in March and June 1945.

In July 1945, the three great powers, the United States, Britain and Russia, called on Japan to surrender or face utter destruction. On August 6, 1945, the United States dropped the first atomic bomb on the city of Hiroshima. About one hundred thousand people were killed in the first ten seconds. Three days later the United States dropped a second atomic bomb, this time on the city of Nagasaki. On August 14, Japan surrendered unconditionally.

By the end of the war, Japan had lost all the territories it had conquered, including Manchuria, and submitted to an American occupation. The Allies conducted trials of those it charged as war criminals, and Japan was given a new, democratic constitution.

## Critical Overview

When first published in Japan in 1997, *A Boy Called H* quickly became a best-seller. Over two million copies were sold, and critics hailed the book as an outstanding example of literature about World War II, although there was also a feeling that the book was not absolutely reliable in its historical details. Most of these details were minor. For example, in an incident that takes place in the book in the summer of 1942, H's sister sings a patriotic song that was not published until 1945.

When the book was translated into English and published in the United States in 1999, the critical response was enthusiastic. For Steven I. Levine, in *Library Journal*, the book provided "an accessible, unforgettable, and intimate introduction to the effects of the war upon Japanese family life, friendships, school, and society." Levine argued that the book belonged "with a handful of classics about children in wartime."

Hazel Rochman, in *Booklist*, commenting on how World War II becomes increasingly real for H, noted that "The writing is quiet, almost detached at times, until you come to realize that the young boy is fighting emotional breakdown."

The reviewer for *Publishers Weekly* described the book as "refreshing in the honesty with which it faces some ugly realities in Japan before and during WWII." The reviewer commented that one of the most shocking aspects of the novel was the way in which H, although he held many private doubts about the war, nonetheless in public was openly zealous about it and always supported the propaganda of the authorities.

# Criticism

- Critical Essay #1
- Critical Essay #2
- Critical Essay #3



# Critical Essay #1

*Aubrey holds a Ph.D. in English and has published many articles on twentieth century literature. In this essay, Aubrey discusses the issue of press censorship in wartime, from Japan in World War II to today's United States.*

A recurring theme in *A Boy Called H* is the extent to which the Japanese newspapers during wartime did not report the truth. H gets frustrated with what he reads about the war because he senses, as does his father, that they are not getting the whole story. When the first air raids are made on Kobe, the newspaper headlines read, "The Neighborhood Association Spirit Beats the Raiders." This puzzles H because he knows that, in fact, the air raid had taken the Neighborhood Association by surprise and that, in practice, the hazards of putting out fires were nothing like the smooth drills they had been regularly practicing. Also, someone is killed in that first raid, but the newspapers fail to report it. H decides that the newspapers "are just a pack of lies!" and he does not change his opinion from then on.

On the overseas battle front, the Japanese press enthusiastically reports Japanese victories but engages in subterfuge whenever there is a Japanese setback or defeat. One example in particular is quite amusing, illustrating as it does the extent to which language can be manipulated to disguise meaning. In 1943, Japanese forces were facing stiff opposition in the islands of the South Pacific. One morning the newspapers report the following:

Our forces operating on Buna Island in New Guinea and Guadalcanal Island in the Solomons, which had been smashing persistent enemy counterattacks despite a shortage of manpower, have now achieved their objects and in early February were withdrawn from the islands and ordered to advance in another direction.

Behind the welter of difficult words, H concludes that this means Japan is losing in that area of the war. He asks his father, "Does 'advancing in another direction' mean retreating?" His father does not give him a satisfactory answer.

As H and his father guess, the newspapers in Japan during World War II were indeed subject to government and military censorship. This pattern was a matter of some importance, since Japan was (and still is) a nation of newspaper readers. Before Japan went to war against the United States in 1941, daily circulation of newspapers was about nineteen million, which was more than one newspaper per household. Newspapers were not controlled by the government, and they were free to criticize politicians, although even before the war they tended to be supportive of the government's foreign policies.

After the war began with China, the government expected the press to be loyal to the Japanese cause, and restrictions were placed on it. Any news regarding the economy or foreign events was considered to be a state secret and could not be published without permission. (In *A Boy Called H*, H frequently expresses annoyance and frustration at the



number of things that are declared state secrets.) Further regulations made it a punishable offense to deviate from official guidelines or to reveal any information considered helpful to the enemy.

In *Politics and Culture in Wartime Japan*, Ben-Ami Shillony states that as long as Japan was successful, press reports of the progress of the war were largely accurate. But when the tide turned and Japan experienced defeat after defeat, official bulletins printed in the newspapers were glaringly false. Shillony uses the decisive battle of Midway in June 1942 as an example. In that battle, Japan lost more than twice as many ships and planes as the United States and nearly twelve times the number of men. But the Japanese press was obliged to present Midway as a victory for Japan, denouncing any other view as enemy propaganda.

The defeat on Guadalcanal was also initially reported as a success, until, as H found out, it was conceded that Japanese forces had made a "sideward advance" (which as Shillony shows is a translation of the Japanese word *tenshin* and is the equivalent of the phrase "advancing in another direction" that H reads about).

Although H frequently bemoans the fact, censorship of the press in wartime is a common phenomenon, not only in Japan but elsewhere. Governments usually assume that keeping up public morale in difficult times is more important than allowing the press to report the unvarnished truth. In the United States during World War II, the press censorship was voluntary. It was supervised by the Office of Censorship, which was a civilian, not a military, body. In January 1942, guidelines for news reporting were sent out to all U.S. newspapers, magazines, and radio stations. During the course of the war, not a single print journalist and only one radio journalist deliberately flouted the censorship guidelines. This compliance was in part because the war was generally supported by the American public, and journalists were no different. Along with most Americans, they felt that the war against Hitler's Germany and Imperial Japan was justified and were more than willing to support the government. Of course, had results on the battlefield not, after mid-1942, begun to favor the United States, the censorship guidelines might have come under strain, as they did in Japan. It is much easier to report the truth when one's own side is winning.

After the war, the U.S. occupation forces maintained extensive censorship of Japanese newspapers, as H finds out when the newspaper he reads, the *Asahi Shimbun*, has to suspend publication for two days at the order of the U.S. commander, General Douglas MacArthur. As William J. Coughlin explains in *Conquered Press*, the censorship code was designed to prevent the publication of false stories and any story that was likely to arouse illfeeling towards the Occupation forces. Nothing could be printed that put the United States in a bad light. Much international news was censored, including the deteriorating relations between the United States and the Soviet Union. Anything that encouraged the reemergence of militarism was also banned. Some Japanese complained that there was less freedom of thought and speech in U.S.-occupied Japan than there had been during the war.



H, however, prefers American censorship to the Japanese version, and he explains why in the chapter, "Homes for Air Raid Victims." In his experience, it was easier to find out the reason why a certain article had been banned or had displeased the censors than it had been under Japanese censorship, when no reasons were ever given.

Press censorship in Japan was eased in 1948, when it was made voluntary. It was assumed that the Japanese editors had absorbed the censorship code and would observe it voluntarily. In most cases this was true, but there were many instances of Japanese newspapers being fined or reprimanded for stepping out of line.

Since World War II, the subject of the freedom of the press in wartime has not come up again in Japan, since the nation's postwar constitution forbids it to engage in war. However, the same subject has been a thorny issue in the United States. Relations between the government and the press during the Korean War, which lasted from 1950 to 1953, were sometimes strained. U.S. war correspondents were critical of military strategy, and the U.S. Army command accused them of giving aid and comfort to the enemy.

The Vietnam war provides another example. As the war, which began in the early 1960s, dragged on into the late sixties, with no end in sight, the press became increasingly critical of U.S. war policies. In one devastating episode, in 1971, the *New York Times* published what became known as the Pentagon Papers. Drawn from seven thousand pages of secret documents, the Pentagon Papers exposed many of the shortcomings of U.S. policy in Vietnam. Such a bombshell dropped by the press would have been unthinkable in World War II. The difference was that World War II was a popular war, a "good" war, whereas the Vietnam war, certainly by its later stages, was an unpopular war that many Americans believed should not have been fought.

Press freedom in wartime continued to be an issue after Vietnam. In 1983, for example, journalists were banned from directly covering the U.S. invasion of Grenada. They were only allowed into the country after U.S. forces had the situation under control. The same rules were applied to the U.S. invasion of Panama in 1989. The U.S. military believed that it could not rely on journalistic discretion or self-censorship in reporting the military clashes. The U.S. actions in both Grenada and Panama were widely supported by the American public, but later investigations suggested that the operations had not gone as smoothly as was at first believed.

None of this should be surprising. In a democratic society, there is an inherent tension between the government, which likes to "manage" the news, and the press, whose job it is to seek it out and report it objectively. In wartime, this tension may increase, since the government usually feels the need to prevent public confidence in its policies from being undermined by an inquisitive or critical press. On the other hand, at times when the nation is united in war, tensions between government and press may abate. A case in point is the aftermath of the terrorist attacks in New York and Washington, D.C., on September 11, 2001. After President George W. Bush's declaration that the nation was at war with terrorism, the press rallied around the president. No one wanted to appear unpatriotic in a time of need. Only gradually over the course of the following year did

some muted criticism of government strategy in the "war on terror" begin to emerge in the mainstream press.

As young H found out in wartime Japan, the relationship between the government and the press is not always ideal. H relied on his common sense and his independence of mind in order to not be fooled by the official line of the Japanese government, especially when it contradicted his own experience. Although we may suspect that the author exaggerates the extent to which H was able, with his limited sources of information, to reach skeptical conclusions about the information he read in the newspapers, it is as well to be reminded of the fact that the words of those who claim to be defending the national interest should not always be taken at face value.

**Source:** Bryan Aubrey, Critical Essay on *A Boy Called H: A Childhood in Wartime Japan*, in *Nonfiction Classics for Students*, Gale, 2003.





## Critical Essay #2

*Holm is a freelance writer with speculative fiction and nonfiction publications. In this essay, Holm looks at how Senoh captures the insidious effects of war in a young boy's daily life.*

For those of us in a country that has never seen traditional warfare on its soil, it can be difficult to imagine the day-to-day realities of living in a nation under attack. Even news coverage cannot come close to capturing the insidious ways that war can affect individual lives. Kappa Senoh's fictionalized autobiography, *A Boy Called H: A Childhood in Wartime Japan*, does a fantastic job of capturing the process of war and its increasing presence in the life of H and others. The book's precocious protagonist does not flinch from making his views about war known to the reader, even though H feels he must keep his opinions to himself in many public situations.

Right away, we are given a hint of the public paranoia that will increase over time. So early in the book, this instance of subtle public fear is an almost unnoticed foreshadowing of events to come, since it is combined with other apparently pleasant details of everyday life. H becomes friendly with a man from the noodle shop. When Noodles (as H calls him) invites H up to his apartment to listen to records, H is so taken with the music that he calls Noodles "Red Label," after the labels on the record collection.

H found himself liking the delivery boy more and more and decided that as a mark of respect he'd give him the nickname "Red Label." The next time he went to visit, he told him about it. To his surprise, the smile was wiped off his face in a flash. "No, thank you!" he said in a loud voice, "You stick to 'Noodles' - I don't want any 'Red Label.'"

Later it turns out that Noodles is captured right in H's neighborhood; and that Noodles is thought to be a Communist informant. But when H hears the neighbors talking about the incident and tries to decipher their meaning, he is brushed aside. "'What're dangerous thoughts? Who're the secret police?' H asked them anxiously, but the grown-ups suddenly clammed up. 'Keep your voice down,' he was told with a look of fierce disapproval."

H notes that the paper never reports on the incident. Throughout the book, he'll continually notice discrepancies between reality and what the news reports, especially as the war accelerates. And possibly, for the first time in his life, the concept of being an informant is really understood by the boy. He begins to fear that Noodles will think H informed on him.

Even though Japan is not at war in the beginning of this book, the stage is being set as the author skillfully accents aspects of H's life that will later prove to have a direct relationship, in some way, to war. Early on, H's mother is described as an ardent Christian. The practice of Christianity is not the norm during this period in Japan. H's mother came from a family of Buddhists, and "no one had dreamed for a moment that



she might become Christian, and it caused quite a stir in the village." Later, H's family is suspect in a general way, as wartime propaganda paints a picture of Christianity as the religion of the "British and American fiends." H's family is considered unusual in the community of Kobe, since H's father is a tailor and has customers of all nationalities (Kobe has an international population). As the wartime situation becomes more tense, H's family needs to consider how openly they can practice their religion. H's father wonders if he'll still have international customers and how his business will fare.

In the fourth grade, H experiences another side to the war besides the patriotism that is touted by the government and, increasingly, by the press. Girly Boy, a young man in the community that H is friendly with, gets his call-up papers. Three days after Girly Boy leaves, the military police come to Kobe looking for him; apparently Girly Boy has deserted. When H and some friends are playing, H discovers Girly Boy in an old shack. Horrified, H realizes that Girly Boy hanged himself to avoid serving in the war.

H is indeed horrified, even if the tone of the narrative is relatively subdued. In fact, throughout the book, H seems to process many horrifying experiences in a subdued, almost clinical way. It is difficult to tell whether this is part of the author's style or whether the protagonist, as reviewer Hazel Rochman suggests in *Booklist*, sounds detached because "the young boy is fighting emotional breakdown."

It is immediately after the Girly Boy incident that H's true feelings about war begin to become clear. H begins to have the courage to process such thoughts internally, even though they run counter to what the government would have the public believe about the war. With surprising clarity for a young child, and an unusual lack of fear at the circumstances, H reflects on the situation. "His friend hadn't wanted to be a soldier, he thought to himself: suicide was the only alternative. He wondered if hanging himself had seemed better than being killed by a bullet on the battlefield."

Throughout *A Boy Called H: A Childhood in Wartime Japan*, H continues to have troubling thoughts that explore the ethics of war. His musings are mature for a person his age, probably in part because his parents are thoughtful and deviate from the norm. Keeping his thoughts to himself, or occasionally confiding to a few like-minded adults (including his father), H questions the official party line and finds discrepancies in news coverage of the war. In some cases, H realizes that his views differ from those of his friends or his teachers. In riskier instances, he is silent, as when he is interviewing for a slot in school and is asked about his opinion on the war. A reviewer in *Publishers Weekly* suggests that this discrepancy

. . . leaves a gaping hole in the center of the narrative. Senoh seems more comfortable hinting at, rather than directly confronting, big questions about personal responsibility and collective guilt. Maybe these questions remain too painful, both for himself and the entire Japanese nation.

While this reviewer might find that these "big questions" would have been dealt with more directly had H voiced them aloud, H does, on many occasions, struggle with the questions internally, giving the reader a good argument regarding the ethics of war.



It is understandable that H would be cautious, even paranoid, about voicing his true feelings during the tense social climate of wartime. Senoh makes it clear that Japanese felt the need to modify their behavior during these times, and hide or draw attention away from certain pursuits that used to be undertaken without a worry. Thus, H's Christian parents worry about practicing their religion too visibly, since Christianity is now associated with western nations and the "British and American fiends." Passengers riding a commuter train automatically draw the shades down when the train passes the ocean, so no one will see the ocean that the train is passing - and possibly witness a "military secret." Such paranoid and necessary behaviors become a part of everyday life for the Japanese, until the populace can barely remember living any differently. Senoh makes the experience ultimately knowable for the reader, since anyone can imagine being in these everyday, real yet surreal, situations.

But H has been struggling with his conscience even before the acceleration of war. These internal ethical struggles are ones that readers can identify with. How many people, for example, have experienced modifying what they truly wish to say, for fear of reprisal? H recalls how he was singled out as a first grader, because of his family's religious practice:

He'd been surrounded by other boys who said to him, "Your family are Amens, aren't they? You people are supposed to love your enemies, right? So you love Chinks, do you?" Frightened, H was so keen to get away that he blurted out tearfully, "I'm not a Chink-lover. I don't love them. I *hate* Chinks!" The incident continued to bother his conscience long after that.

H fights with his conscience through much of the book. In showing this, Senoh has made the book completely readable, since H is confronting aspects of the human condition others can relate to.

War continues to make its presence known in everyday life, often in surprising and detailed ways. H and his classmates are taught specific ways to swim and remain afloat in a survival situation. When air raids become common, schoolchildren are given detailed instructions on how to take shelter on the floor under desks, and to open their mouths and cover their ears and eyes so that their ears and eyes stay intact during an explosion. When food shortages increase, residents receive information on how to use parts of the rice plant (such as rice grass) that were previously considered inedible. In Senoh's unsurprised, detailed narrative, the already surreal events become even more surreal to the reader. These changes become commonplace and accepted as an everyday part of life, much like the words "terrorism" and "anthrax" became a more commonplace part of American reality and language after the terrorist attacks against the United States in September 2001.

With a true nonconformist's mentality, H makes it clear early on that he respects people who stand for their principles. Though his mother has forbidden him to read anything but the Bible and textbooks, she finds that he is secretly reading *The Three Treasures* (H loves books and movies). When she confronts an unsuspecting teacher about this, the teacher covers for H, saying that reading such books was good for H, and reading only



the Bible "wasn't likely to do [children] much good." H admires the pragmatism and forthright nature of the teacher. Given such glimpses at H's parents, it is easy to see how such a young protagonist developed such a questioning and intelligent nature. Although his mother is an evangelist, she is at least willing to change her stance regarding H's reading material after meeting with the teacher. H's father also has a number of interesting discussions with H on the subjects of war, tolerance for other religions and cultures, and ethics. At one point, H's father tells the boy, "If you're going to call religions that other people believe in 'heathen,' you can't complain if other people refer to Christianity as heathen."

From early on, H has been taught by his parents to consider both sides of any issue. But perhaps his reluctance to voice his opinion begins with friends at the beach in the winter of 1940.

"Say what you like, Japan's got a strong navy!" cried Shogo in a shrill voice. "If it was a real war, though," said H, even though he was just as excited, "the enemy wouldn't just sit still, they'd fire back." This prompted an immediate barrage of cries along the lines of "Whose side are you on anyway?" from the others, so H decided he better be careful about this habit of putting forward the other side of things.

This is an intensely real, human reaction - one that any reader who has taken a risk (or considered taking a risk) in voicing a dissenting opinion will recognize.

In an interesting scene toward the end of the book, H expresses sudden joy that the war is over. His friend is upset with H's reaction and joy, since the friend's family members are potentially dead or injured because of the war. The friend smacks H in anger, and H experiences a sudden catharsis. "Suddenly, the tear spilled from H's eyes too - not from regret at the defeat, but out of sheer, frustrated puzzlement as to what the war had been all about."

This is also a completely human reaction. Senoh seems to be asking us - Who can make sense of the insanity of war? - even though each person may hold a different opinion or have suffered different losses during wartime.

H is a nonconformist and a pragmatist. He is also a survivor. It's no surprise, therefore, when H begins to pursue a career as an artist toward the end of the book. Many artists, through their work, pursue an ideal of telling the truth, of speaking the truth and letting it be known. Although the character H may hesitate, out of necessity, to voice his opinions, the author has used effective honesty in giving us a look at the difficult ethics and the surrealistic everyday life in wartime Japan.

**Source:** Catherine Dybiec Holm, Critical Essay on *A Boy Called H: A Childhood in Wartime Japan*, in *Nonfiction Classics for Students*, Gale, 2003.



## Critical Essay #3

*In the following review, Noguchi praises A Boy Called H for its "gradual development of understanding on the part of the narrator" but questions the accuracy of the story.*

Senoh Kappa's *A Boy Called H*, the English translation of *Shonen H*, is the story of a bright, curious boy growing up in an unconventional family in Kobe during Japan's "15-year war." It is a tale of loss of innocence, as the boy's penchant for questioning everything is subject to the tightening constraints of the social, educational and political systems of a country increasingly entrenched in war and insistent that its entire population devote itself to ultimate victory.

The hero is dubbed "H" by his friends because his mother, inspired by a photograph she received from a foreign missionary friend, has knit the first letter of the boy's name, Hajime, into a sweater that he often wears. Both of his parents are devout Christians with many contacts in the foreign community of Kobe, and both strive to live according to their principles, especially by showing brotherly love to all people.

The book begins when H is an elementary school student in the late 1930s and follows him through World War II, the fire bombings of Kobe and destruction of his family home, and on through Japan's surrender, when all the contradictions in the society around him drive H to attempt suicide. It ends in 1948 when the youth has finally been able to pick up the pieces of his shattered life and find a useful outlet for his artistic talents. Working for the Phoenix Studio, a sign-maker's shop, he sees his country rising from the ashes of war like the immortal bird in the company name.

*A Boy Called H* is carefully constructed to recreate the boy's development. The first chapters artfully illustrate his early innocence, curiosity and exuberance with a series of anecdotes reminiscent of the adventures of Tom Sawyer and Huckleberry Finn. Like Mark Twain, Senoh Kappa narrates the story from the perspective of the youth, so that we see all his questions and confusion about the complex social issues in the world around him, but in a way that allows the more informed adult reader to laugh gently at his foibles.

Although the dark side of Japanese pre-war society is apparent from the start, when a local noodle delivery boy is arrested by the Secret Police because of his "dangerous ideas," H's life during the first quarter of the book seems almost idyllic. He pours his energies into sneaking into movies and peepshows, earning pocket money by selling paste and trading pictures of sumo wrestlers, and spending long days at the seaside learning to row and trying to make salt from seawater.

However, as the military increasingly controls every facet of daily life, H has to come to grips with emperor worship, deprivation, war slogans, fear of the Secret Police, and worst of all, the transformation of schools into factories and military training institutes. With his rationality and Christian principles, H has great difficulty accepting the changes in the society around him. He asks many of the same questions a Westerner or a



Japanese youth today might ask: Why does everyone put up with the shortages? Why do they go along with all of the propaganda and the unreasonable demands of the military? Why don't the adults say that the country is on the wrong course? Why don't the newspapers print the truth?

With great compassion, Senoh shows us why. In many cases, H himself is drawn in by goodies distributed to quell the people's anxieties and doubts. When special rations of sake, sweets and rubber balls are to be handed out to mark the fall of Singapore, for example, we find, "For all H's avowed dislike of war, the enticement of such special rations convinced him that victory in war wasn't a bad thing after all."

H's father Morio also helps the boy understand other people's reactions. When H asks Morio why the usually soft-spoken young man at a local shop bellowed out a speech welcoming his draft notice, Morio points out that "he probably has this basic idea that it's a man's duty to give up his life for his country," and even though his "mother and the others in his family don't want to lose him," he "may well have wanted to declare to himself and everyone else that [he] . . . was a real man now." H also sees Morio himself slowly becoming more circumspect, even in his conversations with his son, since the child's bragging that his father has a picture postcard of a tall building in America is enough to get Morio dragged into the police station for questioning.

Gradually, H comes to be more accepting of those around him who seem to be blindly devoted to the war effort. Although he initially rebels against a fanatical military instructor at his middle school, he eventually finds that "the strong resentment he'd once felt had given way to a feeling that the man was a lonely, pitiful figure. Possibly, as the war situation grew increasingly critical, he was desperately feeling feeling that he should do something, without knowing what that something was."

This gradual development of understanding on the part of the narrator makes this a valuable work. Not only does the original *Shonen H* explain to young Japanese today why the nation was led so badly astray a half-century ago, but the English translation also helps make the Japanese of that period appear far more human to Westerners, with their cultural tendency to stick to principles and strive for consistency in their own lives. For this reason, *Shonen H* was highly acclaimed in Japan by a number of critics and authors who had lived through the war. The pocketbook (*bunkobon*) edition of the work includes a short essay by renowned author Inoue Hisashi praising Senoh for explaining a period in the nation's history which, to anyone who did not live through it, can only be viewed as a time of sheer craziness.

Published in January 1997, *Shonen H* became an instant bestseller. The story was adapted for the stage, and a TV dramatization was broadcast in the fall of 1999. Moreover, because Senoh wrote the work in a style that would be accessible to children and insisted that the readings of most Chinese characters be provided, many junior high school teachers have added it to their recommended reading list or used excerpts in history classes.





The English translation masterfully captures the spirit of the original. Veteran translator John Bester conveys just the right combination of naivete and humor in the early chapters and then gradually darkens the tone to set the mood for the hero's descent into the hell of war. He has taken great pains to accurately render the many place names and dated technical terms that fill the work's 528 pages.

Nonetheless, a fair number of awkward sentences, dangling modifiers and small mistakes give the impression that the translation was rushed into publication without the benefit of a careful rereading by translator and editor. However, these are minor quibbles with a basically solid translation.

A more serious problem arises when we try to classify this work in order to understand how to read it. Only at the end of the original *Shonen H* do we find the label *shosetsu* to suggest, that it is fiction. The author has claimed on TV talk shows that the work is an accurate account of his childhood (Hajime being his given name and Kappa his pen name. He has since had his name legally changed to Kappa on his family register). Senoh says he consulted chronological tables and other historical sources to make the work as accurate as possible. He also sent chapters to several people his age to check on the historical veracity of his work and confirmed other facts and figures with people who appear in the story. The personal names in the book are the real names of people in his life, and the Japanese edition includes photographs of Senoh's teachers and classmates as well as those of friends who feature prominently in the story. Maps of his neighborhood in Kobe are also provided to help the reader visualize the locations in the narrative.

Yet one has to wonder about the accuracy of this "autobiographical novel" (as the translator calls it). Do we read it as "The Truth" or as historical fiction? Differing answers to this question have led to controversy over the book in Japan. Early media accounts praised the remarkable accuracy and detail of Senoh's memory. However, by late 1997, the selection committees for two awards for juvenile literature were embroiled in debate over historical inaccuracies in the work. In the end, *Shonen H* received neither the Shogakukan Jido Shuppan Bunka-Sho nor the Noma Jido Bungei-Sho, even though it had been the front-running nominee for both prizes.

The most vociferous critic of the work has been Yamanaka Hisashi, an author of historical books for children and a member of that year's selection committee for both awards. Yamanaka was so incensed by the uncritical acclaim Senoh's book received that he and his wife, Yamanaka Noriko, wrote an 845-page critique titled *Machigai Darake no Shônen H* (*Shonen H: A Book Full of Mistakes*). Yamanaka's tome points out three major flaws in Senoh's book. First, he claims the work is riddled with mistakes in historical fact. For example, in a chapter that takes place during the summer of 1942, Senoh's sister sings a patriotic song that was published and performed for the first time in 1945. In another chapter, a postman delivers a draft notice, even though these papers were actually delivered by special military personnel.

Second, Yamanaka feels that characters in the book, especially Morio, know things and make predictions of the course of the war in a way that was not possible at the time



because of media censorship. Yamanaka, who is only a year younger than Senoh, asserts that people in Japan at the time were completely fooled by the government and that there is no way that anyone could have entertained the kind of doubts that a number of the characters in *Shonen H* expressed. Finally, Yamanaka doubts whether H (Senoh) himself really questioned the war at the time as much as he does in the book.

Senoh apparently recognized the validity of a number of Yamanaka's claims about historical inaccuracies and revised later editions of *Shonen H*, although the latter two concerns were not addressed by the author. *A Boy Called H*, based on the 18th printing published in September 1997, reflects only some of the changes. As of February this year, the 29th printing was issued.

I also wondered whether Senoh had added many of the questions H asks and his attacks on the government after the fact. Other historical accounts of this period indicate that most Japanese supported the war. For years, it was impossible in Japan to bring up the question of the emperor's responsibility for the war. As recently as 1990, the mayor of Nagasaki, Motoshima Hitoshi, was shot by a rightist for daring to publicly state that the emperor bore at least some responsibility. Thus it is hard not to conclude that Senoh's recollection of his youth must be tinged by insights gained as an adult.

Yet any astute reader should see *A Boy Called H* as a literary work. Each chapter is neatly constructed to make a single point and could stand alone as a short story, complete with beginning, middle and end. Senoh said on a TV talk show that the chapters were written so that they would not have to be read in any particular order. Indeed, the author often explains characters and H's current situation in a way that appears redundant to someone who is reading the book straight through.

If taken as an artistic attempt to explain why Japan continued along the path to what in retrospect can only be seen as its inevitable self-destruction, then *A Boy Called H* serves as a valuable aid for those who did not live through that process to be more compassionate with those who did. As such, it is well worth reading.

**Source:** Mary Goebel Noguchi, "Compassionate Look at a Nation Co-opted," in *Japan Quarterly*, Vol. 47, No. 2, April-June 2000, pp. 98-101.





## Topics for Further Study

Based on your reading of the novel, why were so many ordinary Japanese people caught up in militarism and war fever during the 1930s and 1940s?

Is there ever a justification for press censorship during times of war, or should the press always be free?

Research the U.S. dropping of the first atomic bomb on Hiroshima in 1945. Why did the United States drop the bomb? Was the decision to use the bomb justified?

Research the American Occupation of Japan after World War II. How did the American authorities go about eradicating militarism and instilling a democratic spirit?

In what ways has the novel given you a better understanding of World War II?

By the end of the novel, does H still seem like a boy from a foreign culture, or does he seem more like teenagers in other places? Is he very different from an American or not?

# Compare and Contrast

**1930s-1945:** Increasing tensions between Japan and the United States lead to war. The United States is victorious after nearly four years of conflict.

**Today:** The United States and Japan are allies, and their alliance ensures political stability in East Asia.

**1930s-1945:** Japan is an authoritarian society in the grip of an imperialistic, militaristic way of thinking that glorifies war.

**Today:** Japan is a democracy based on Western-style political institutions.

**1930s-1945:** The Japanese emperor is considered divine. Emperor Hirohito reigns over his people as a distant, god-like figure, often pictured on a white horse.

**Today:** Japan retains its imperial family. But like surviving European monarchies, Prince Akihito, the son of Hirohito, is a figurehead and does not wield real political power.

## What Do I Read Next?

Peter Wuden's *Day One: Before Hiroshima and After* (1984) tells the story of the making of the atomic bomb, the decision by President Harry Truman to use it in 1945, and the effects the bomb had on Hiroshima. The book includes maps and photographs.

*Rising Sun: The Decline and Fall of the Japanese Empire, 1936-1945* (1970), by John Toland, is a history of Japan and its wars during the years covered by *A Boy Called H*. Toland views the events largely from the Japanese perspective.

*Diary of Darkness: The Wartime Diary of Kiyosawa Kiyoshi*, translated by Eugene Soviak and Kamiyama Tamie (1998), is a diary kept by a liberal journalist in Japan from 1942 to 1945. He records his opposition, which he could not express openly, to the rampant Japanese nationalism and bureaucratic control of every aspect of life. He also notes Japan's descent into poverty and crime as the inevitability of defeat loomed.

Anne Ipsen's *A Child's Tapestry of War* (1998) is a memoir about Ipsen's Danish childhood, which included the Nazi occupation of Denmark during World War II. Although born into a privileged family, Ipsen is touched by the horrors of war, as when her elderly half-Jewish cousin is sent to a concentration camp; a school is accidentally destroyed by bombs; and she hears her father's account of a mission to help concentration camp survivors.



## Further Study

Cook, Haruko Taya, and Theodore F. Cook, *Japan at War: An Oral History*, New Press, 1993.

This work of oral history captures in the words of ordinary people exactly what it was like to live in Japan during the time of Japan's war with China and the United States. As in *A Boy Called H*, many Japanese express a view of the war that is very different from the official versions.

Nimura, Janice P., Review of *A Boy Called H*, in *Washington Post*, August 6, 2000.

Nimura comments admiringly on Senoh's prose that seems so artless but manages to convey an entire social world.

Siegenthaler, Peter, Review of *A Boy Called H*, in *Persimmon: Asian Literature, Arts, and Culture*, Vol. 1, No. 2, Summer 2000. Available on the Internet at [http://www.persimmon-mag.com/summer2000/bre\\_sum2000\\_3.htm](http://www.persimmon-mag.com/summer2000/bre_sum2000_3.htm) (last accessed December 23, 2002).

Siegenthaler regards one of the strengths of the book to be how it shows many ordinary Japanese doubting the official versions of how the war was progressing but lacking the ability to give voice to their doubts in any public forum.

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## **Introduction**

### **Purpose of the Book**

The purpose of Nonfiction Classics for Students (NCfS) is to provide readers with a guide to understanding, enjoying, and studying novels by giving them easy access to information about the work. Part of Gale's □For Students□ Literature line, NCfS is specifically designed to meet the curricular needs of high school and undergraduate college students and their teachers, as well as the interests of general readers and researchers considering specific novels. While each volume contains entries on



□classic□ novels frequently studied in classrooms, there are also entries containing hard-to-find information on contemporary novels, including works by multicultural, international, and women novelists.

The information covered in each entry includes an introduction to the novel and the novel's author; a plot summary, to help readers unravel and understand the events in a novel; descriptions of important characters, including explanation of a given character's role in the novel as well as discussion about that character's relationship to other characters in the novel; analysis of important themes in the novel; and an explanation of important literary techniques and movements as they are demonstrated in the novel.

In addition to this material, which helps the readers analyze the novel itself, students are also provided with important information on the literary and historical background informing each work. This includes a historical context essay, a box comparing the time or place the novel was written to modern Western culture, a critical overview essay, and excerpts from critical essays on the novel. A unique feature of NCfS is a specially commissioned critical essay on each novel, targeted toward the student reader.

To further aid the student in studying and enjoying each novel, information on media adaptations is provided, as well as reading suggestions for works of fiction and nonfiction on similar themes and topics. Classroom aids include ideas for research papers and lists of critical sources that provide additional material on the novel.

### Selection Criteria

The titles for each volume of NCfS were selected by surveying numerous sources on teaching literature and analyzing course curricula for various school districts. Some of the sources surveyed included: literature anthologies; Reading Lists for College-Bound Students: The Books Most Recommended by America's Top Colleges; textbooks on teaching the novel; a College Board survey of novels commonly studied in high schools; a National Council of Teachers of English (NCTE) survey of novels commonly studied in high schools; the NCTE's Teaching Literature in High School: The Novel; and the Young Adult Library Services Association (YALSA) list of best books for young adults of the past twenty-five years. Input was also solicited from our advisory board, as well as educators from various areas. From these discussions, it was determined that each volume should have a mix of □classic□ novels (those works commonly taught in literature classes) and contemporary novels for which information is often hard to find. Because of the interest in expanding the canon of literature, an emphasis was also placed on including works by international, multicultural, and women authors. Our advisory board members□educational professionals□ helped pare down the list for each volume. If a work was not selected for the present volume, it was often noted as a possibility for a future volume. As always, the editor welcomes suggestions for titles to be included in future volumes.

### How Each Entry Is Organized





Each entry, or chapter, in NCfS focuses on one novel. Each entry heading lists the full name of the novel, the author's name, and the date of the novel's publication. The following elements are contained in each entry:

- **Introduction:** a brief overview of the novel which provides information about its first appearance, its literary standing, any controversies surrounding the work, and major conflicts or themes within the work.
- **Author Biography:** this section includes basic facts about the author's life, and focuses on events and times in the author's life that inspired the novel in question.
- **Plot Summary:** a factual description of the major events in the novel. Lengthy summaries are broken down with subheads.
- **Characters:** an alphabetical listing of major characters in the novel. Each character name is followed by a brief to an extensive description of the character's role in the novel, as well as discussion of the character's actions, relationships, and possible motivation. Characters are listed alphabetically by last name. If a character is unnamed—for instance, the narrator in *Invisible Man*—the character is listed as "The Narrator" and alphabetized as "Narrator." If a character's first name is the only one given, the name will appear alphabetically by that name. Variant names are also included for each character. Thus, the full name "Jean Louise Finch" would head the listing for the narrator of *To Kill a Mockingbird*, but listed in a separate cross-reference would be the nickname "Scout Finch."
- **Themes:** a thorough overview of how the major topics, themes, and issues are addressed within the novel. Each theme discussed appears in a separate subhead, and is easily accessed through the boldface entries in the Subject/Theme Index.
- **Style:** this section addresses important style elements of the novel, such as setting, point of view, and narration; important literary devices used, such as imagery, foreshadowing, symbolism; and, if applicable, genres to which the work might have belonged, such as Gothicism or Romanticism. Literary terms are explained within the entry, but can also be found in the Glossary.
- **Historical Context:** This section outlines the social, political, and cultural climate in which the author lived and the novel was created. This section may include descriptions of related historical events, pertinent aspects of daily life in the culture, and the artistic and literary sensibilities of the time in which the work was written. If the novel is a historical work, information regarding the time in which the novel is set is also included. Each section is broken down with helpful subheads.
- **Critical Overview:** this section provides background on the critical reputation of the novel, including bannings or any other public controversies surrounding the work. For older works, this section includes a history of how the novel was first received and how perceptions of it may have changed over the years; for more recent novels, direct quotes from early reviews may also be included.
- **Criticism:** an essay commissioned by NCfS which specifically deals with the novel and is written specifically for the student audience, as well as excerpts from previously published criticism on the work (if available).



- Sources: an alphabetical list of critical material quoted in the entry, with full bibliographical information.
- Further Reading: an alphabetical list of other critical sources which may prove useful for the student. Includes full bibliographical information and a brief annotation.

In addition, each entry contains the following highlighted sections, set apart from the main text as sidebars:

- Media Adaptations: a list of important film and television adaptations of the novel, including source information. The list also includes stage adaptations, audio recordings, musical adaptations, etc.
- Topics for Further Study: a list of potential study questions or research topics dealing with the novel. This section includes questions related to other disciplines the student may be studying, such as American history, world history, science, math, government, business, geography, economics, psychology, etc.
- Compare and Contrast Box: an "at-a-glance" comparison of the cultural and historical differences between the author's time and culture and late twentieth century/early twenty-first century Western culture. This box includes pertinent parallels between the major scientific, political, and cultural movements of the time or place the novel was written, the time or place the novel was set (if a historical work), and modern Western culture. Works written after 1990 may not have this box.
- What Do I Read Next?: a list of works that might complement the featured novel or serve as a contrast to it. This includes works by the same author and others, works of fiction and nonfiction, and works from various genres, cultures, and eras.

### Other Features

NCfS includes "The Informed Dialogue: Interacting with Literature," a foreword by Anne Devereaux Jordan, Senior Editor for Teaching and Learning Literature (TALL), and a founder of the Children's Literature Association. This essay provides an enlightening look at how readers interact with literature and how Nonfiction Classics for Students can help teachers show students how to enrich their own reading experiences.

A Cumulative Author/Title Index lists the authors and titles covered in each volume of the NCfS series.

A Cumulative Nationality/Ethnicity Index breaks down the authors and titles covered in each volume of the NCfS series by nationality and ethnicity.

A Subject/Theme Index, specific to each volume, provides easy reference for users who may be studying a particular subject or theme rather than a single work. Significant subjects from events to broad themes are included, and the entries pointing to the specific theme discussions in each entry are indicated in boldface.



Each entry has several illustrations, including photos of the author, stills from film adaptations (if available), maps, and/or photos of key historical events.

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The editor of Nonfiction Classics for Students welcomes your comments and ideas. Readers who wish to suggest novels to appear in future volumes, or who have other suggestions, are cordially invited to contact the editor. You may contact the editor via email at: [ForStudentsEditors@gale.com](mailto:ForStudentsEditors@gale.com). Or write to the editor at:

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