

One Thousand Paper Cranes: The Story of Sadako and the Children's Peace Statue Study Guide

One Thousand Paper Cranes: The Story of Sadako and the Children's Peace Statue by Ishii Takayuki

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Plot Summary

One Thousand Paper Cranes by Takayuki Ishii is the story of a young Japanese girl named Sadako Sasaki who became ill from radiation poisoning as a result of the dropping of the atomic bomb on Hiroshima, Japan, the young girl's hometown. World War II was coming to an end when on August 6, 1945, a US B-29 bomber named the Enola Gay dropped the atomic bomb, called Little Boy, on Hiroshima. A nuclear fission reaction set off the devastating explosion.

Sadako was just two years old when the atomic bomb was dropped on Hiroshima. The family home, along with those all around the neighborhood, were literally flattened. Sadako's mother, Fujiko, had to gather her two children and her elderly grandmother after the blast and run for cover. But, as she learned, there was no cover at least none anywhere near her home. Fujiko with her two children in tow headed to a park where a help center had been set up for victims of the firebombings that had been taking place during the war. As they moved through the chaos, they passed dead bodies, maimed people and people crying out for help. Eventually Fujiko was able to flee the city and stay with a relative some forty miles away where the bomb had no impact.

After a few days, Fujiko and her husband Shigeo decided to return to their flattened home to begin the process of starting over. Many people were very ill from the radiation poisoning and of course many were badly injured. Over one-hundred thousand died immediately from the blast. Even though their home had been destroyed and her grandmother died from burns and radiation, Fujiko and Shigeo felt fortunate that their two young children seemed to be unscathed.

However, once a person is exposed to radiation, even a small amount, it will eventually manifest in disease and will result in death. Sadako, a happy and popular student, became ill from the effects of radiation poisoning ten years after the bombing when she was twelve. At first her condition didn't seem serious, but the doctors spotted the conditions that were generally referred to as atomic bomb disease. After testing, the doctors told Sadako's father the horrific news that she had a rare form of leukemia and would live only for another three months to a year. Her condition deteriorated quite rapidly and soon she was confined to a hospital so that she could have constant treatment which consisted of blood transfusions and cortisone shots. A student sent dozens of paper cranes to the patients in the children's ward of the hospital. Sadako decided she would make a thousand paper cranes because she remembered a story her mother told her about a child whose wish came true after making a thousand paper cranes. Of course, Sadako's wish was to live. And although she make more than a thousand cranes, she did not get her wish.

After her death, her classmates began a movement to raise funds to build a memorial dedicated to Sadako and all the children who were victims of the atomic bomb. The school children were successful and enough money was raised to create the memorial which contained a sculpture of a young girl who was looking skyward and holding a crane.



Chapter One: Atomic Bomb and Radiation

Chapter One: Atomic Bomb and Radiation Summary and Analysis

Japan was engaged in the Second World War between 1941 and 1945. In the latter part of 1945, the war was coming to an end. The Axis Powers, Germany, Italy and Japan, were all facing defeat. Japan's major cities were being firebombed by B-29 bombers. The firebombs spread fire across large expanses of terrain destroying everything in its path. Most houses were made of wood and caught on fire like tinder boxes. But if that wasn't enough, scientists in the US were putting the final touches on the development of the first atomic bomb. The three cities chosen for the first bombing were Hiroshima, Nagasaki and Kokura. They were all manufacturing centers for military equipment. The atomic bomb that was dropped on Hiroshima caused widespread radiation. Sadako Sasaki was two years old when the atomic bomb was dropped. Sadako's death, ten years later, was from radiation exposure. Radiation is silent and invisible and only a small amount of it begins to deteriorate a living organism as soon as there is exposure. This was the case for Sadako Sasaki.



Chapter Two: An Unforgettable Morning

Chapter Two: An Unforgettable Morning Summary and Analysis

August 6, 1945, was a clear bright day in Hiroshima. Air raid alarms went off and thousands went into hiding. The aircraft that caused the alert was a US Air Force weather recon plane checking the conditions over the city. The pilot of the recon radioed back to command headquarters that the weather was good and the mission could be a "go." A US B-29 bomber called Enola Gay was warming up for take-off at a US base on Tinian Island near Guam. The sirens on Hiroshima stopped and an all-clear was sounded. There would be no raid that day.

Unaware that there would indeed be a raid that day, the most devastating one imaginable, the people of Hiroshima came out of hiding and went about their normal day's work. One of the tasks that the communities in heavily populated areas of Hiroshima had taken on was tearing down buildings to stop the spread of fire from firebombings. Ten-thousand people had resumed that work after the all-clear sounded. Of this work group, there were eight thousand boys and girls from junior and senior high schools who had pitched in.

Once the Enola Gay reached her target at some 28,000 feet, it released its deadly cargo. It took just seconds for the strike which immediately blanketed the entire city in a brilliant light. A violent wind rose up along with an intense heat and an ear-splitting sonic boom. The bomb exploded in the air above the building that became known as the Atomic Bomb Dome.

The heat produced was 7,232 degrees at ground level. The enormous heat destroyed everything within a half-mile radius. Glass and tile roofs literally melted. Every man, woman and child in this radius was either killed or seriously injured. Almost everyone who was not inside a structure died immediately. The immense force of the wind caused more damage and was recorded at a speed as high as 1,444 feet per second. The wind destroyed every house and structure within a two-mile radius. Four and one-half miles of the city were flattened. For those who survived, the fear of radiation poisoning spread like a cancer. Many frantic people rushed into the contaminated area to find loved ones and soon succumbed themselves.

Those who became contaminated soon became ill and showed symptoms such as bleeding from the mouth and ears. Massive internal bleeding caused purple splotches on their bodies. The death toll was estimated at between 120,000 and 150,000 people. The number dying from the aftermath of the bombing increased every year. The bomb was called Little Boy. Three days later a bomb called Fat Man was dropped on Nagasaki.



Chapter Three: A Desperate Escape

Chapter Three: A Desperate Escape Summary and Analysis

In 1945, the Sasaki family included two-year-old Sadako, her four-year-old brother, Masahiro, her father Shigeo, 28, her mother Fujiko, 26, and 66-year-old grandmother Matsu. They lived in Kusunoki-cho, a residential area a mile north of the hypercenter. Just before the bomb hit, the family was eating breakfast. Suddenly a neighbor was shouting for Fujiko to come outside and look at the beautiful things floating down from the sky. She ran outside and saw three shiny parachutes floating down. She didn't think much of what she saw and returned back inside. Moments later there was an all-encompassing and blinding white light and a violent and merciless wind.

The Sasaki house and those all around it were destroyed. The entire area was instantly rendered a wasteland. As Fujiko tried to dig out from the debris, she heard Sadako calling for her. She found her in the backyard, sitting on a box and crying. She embraced her daughter and immediately began to search for the others. She found her son under the kitchen table. Matsu was only slightly injured. They assumed they were the victims of a firebombing. Fujiko told the family to get ready for evacuation. When she looked up and saw a strange mushroom-shaped cloud forming over the area she wondered if a safe place existed anywhere.

Fujiko took her family to Ohshiba Park where emergency quarters had been set up to handle injuries from the firebombings. Trying not to let her children look at the destruction, they made their way through smoldering debris, mangled corpses and a chaotic and panicked populace. The injured people were more frightening than the dead people. Many had lost all their hair from the blast; others were burned beyond recognition. Some of the injured were bleeding from flying glass driven deeply into their bodies. Those who appeared not to be injured were frantically trying to help others. Grandma Matsu remembered that she had left a cache of cash at home and insisted on returning to the house to retrieve it. She would meet up with Fujiko and the children at the park.

The walk to the park was an excruciating one. The heat was unbearable and relentless and an opaque black smoke encompassed the air. The streets were packed with terrified people who were trying to escape to a safer place. As she neared the river bridge, an old family friend called to her to come aboard his boat. Even though the boat looked like it was already overloaded with people, Fujiko felt she had no choice. She and the children went aboard the boat. As they traveled downstream, they passed scores of dead bodies floating in the river. What became most terrifying was the black soot that continued to rain down. She didn't know what it was or where it came from. The thought struck her that the world was ending.



The black rain eventually began to abate and reveal patches of clear sky. Unknown to the people, what was falling down on them and their communities was contaminated nuclear radiation. Fujiko and the children went ashore where they encountered piles of dead bodies everywhere. The stench of death was beginning to permeate the air. Fujiko was devastated when finally reaching the once beautiful park to see that it had become a wasteland. The cries and wails of the injured were relentless. Exhausted, she and her children sat under a burned tree. Several hours later, rescue teams had been dispatched who distributed food and medical aid. The rescuers organized small groups of people to be taken to Miyoshi, a city forty miles from Hiroshima. Fujiko's parents lived there.

Fujiko and her children rode in one of the vans to Miyoshi and arrived there later that evening. After being left off, she and her children walked the rest of the way to her parents' house. Fujiko's husband, Shigeo, came a few days later. He had been uninjured and was helping with rescues. After a short time, the young family returned to their home to begin the task of rebuilding. Eventually, each member of the family would suffer in some degree from the radiation poisoning. A week after they returned, they learned that Grandma Matsu was dead. She had died on her way back to the house of burns and radiation.

In November, Fujiko became very ill. A short time later, Shigeo came down with symptoms of radiation poisoning. They were heartened because both children seemed to have escaped any serious health issues from the blast.



Chapter Four: Sadako's Illness

Chapter Four: Sadako's Illness Summary and Analysis

Nine years later the war was behind the Sasaki family. The family had two more children, Mitsue, a girl and Eiji, a boy. Shigeo opened a small barbershop. Sadako was in the sixth grade and Masahiro, in the seventh grade. Life seemed hopeful again. Sadako was a popular student who excelled at sports. She won almost every running contest. She was the star of her class' running team. The kids on the team practiced for months for the relay race to take place at Grand Field Day. The team won the competition and Sadako was the star of her team.

During winter recess, Sadako began to complain of feeling generally discomforted. Her mother noticed a swelling under both ears. She had no fever so mumps were ruled out. Shigeo took her to see Dr. Hatagawa, a physician and one of his barbershop customers. The doctor spotted the symptoms of radiation exposure and recommended she be examined at the ABCC (Atomic Bomb Casualty Commission), a research center established by the United States government to monitor the impact of the radiation from the bombings. Everyone exposed was required to have a checkup at the ABCC every two years. Sadako had had a regular exam just two months before. Still, the doctor insisted she be rechecked.

After being checked, tests revealed that Sadako's white blood count was 33,000. A normal healthy person has a white blood count of between 5,000 and 8,000. Her red blood count was much lower than normal. Not much was known at the time about the impact of radiation poisoning. Later, the full range of damage became known. It impacts every organ, bone and system of the body. It causes a wide-spread incurable cancer and a rare form of fatal leukemia. No part of the human body is immune to its ravishes.

The body normally has a balance between red and white blood cells. Red blood cells carry the blood and oxygen to the vital organs of the body. White cells fight off disease and infection. When a person has leukemia, red blood cells are progressively destroyed creating an imbalance between the two types of cells and the immune system no longer functions. In Sadako's case, her white cells were four times the normal amount and her red count was constantly decreasing. The doctor gave Shigeo the horrific news that Sadako had debilitating leukemia and that she had only perhaps three months to a year to live.

Shigeo told his wife the grave news and prepared to leave to get Sadako out of school. The doctor said she must be hospitalized immediately. Before he left, Fujiko gave him some money she had been saving. She told him to buy enough fabric to make Sadako a kimono. It was every young Japanese girl's dream to have a kimono. Sadako's teacher, Mr. Nomura, and her classmates were all shocked that Sadako's health was taking such a downturn. She had been so strong and fast just a few weeks before during the relay race. Shigeo did not tell Sadako how ill she was. She was sad leaving



her school and friends but her spirits were elated when he told her that he was going to buy material for a kimono for her.

They had two days before Sadako had to check in at the hospital so the family packed up and went to his sister's house in Mihara which was located near the hospital. His sister was an excellent seamstress and they asked her to make the kimono for Sadako out of the beautiful cherry blossom material she had picked out. Fujiko and Shigeo's sister worked through the night and completed Sadako's kimono. The next morning she slipped into the lovely kimono and looked beautiful.



Chapter Five: Sayonara, My Dear Friends

Chapter Five: Sayonara, My Dear Friends Summary and Analysis

Sadako, her mother and young sister went to Sadako's school on February 20, 1955, the day before she was to enter the hospital, to say goodbye to her friends. They promised to visit her. In just a few days, her condition had worsened. The main culprit was the incurable advanced state of malignant acute marrow leukemia which deteriorated Sadako's condition at a rapid rate. Her treatment included constant blood transfusions and cortisone injections to keep her white blood cell down. It was a costly treatment schedule and cost over \$4,000 in one month. The average Japanese worker earned only \$1,900 per month. A month after she entered the hospital, her teacher who was also a physician arranged for her to attend a class party. She looked forward to seeing her friends again. She smiled for the first time in weeks. For the occasion, Sadako chose to wear her new kimono. The girls in her class gathered around her and told her how beautiful she looked.

Sadako had to leave early because she grew very tired. The boys and girls all wished her the best and to get well soon. Sadako who had not wanted to cry in front of her classmates could not hold back the tears as she saw the children standing at the classroom windows watching her leave. It would be the last time she would see her school.

Even though she wasn't at school, she was promoted to junior high school level in April, 1955. The kids sent her a red notebook which they all signed as a graduation gift. The Sasaki's experienced some good news when Sadako began feeling better and showed some improvement. The treatments were effective in keeping her white cell count down. In May she was moved to a semi-private room with Kiyo Ohkura who was recovering from tuberculosis. Kiyo was two years older than Sadako. The two girls became very close, almost like sisters. Kiyo was shy and liked to read. Sadako liked to socialize and was friendly with the staff and other patients. Sadako was able to bring Kiyo out of her shell and helped her become more social.

The Sasaki's were facing great financial stress. Shigeo had to pay his own bills, the hospital bills and even a neighbor's loan which he had co-signed for. The Sasaki's were forced to sell their house and move. The day before they moved, Sadako was allowed to spend the night at home. It was important for Sadako to spend a night in the house where she had so many memories. She cried herself to sleep that night. The next day the family moved to a smaller house in the Moto-machi district of Hiroshima.



Chapter Six: My Friend Yukiko

Chapter Six: My Friend Yukiko Summary and Analysis

Sadako's improvements were short-lived and her condition worsened to its lowest level in June. Her spirit took a hit when her friend, Yukiko, who was also suffering from leukemia died. Yukiko was only six years old and was born after the bombing but both parents had been exposed to radiation. Kiyo comforted her and said she wouldn't die like the little girl had. But Sadako was bright and was becoming aware of her dire condition and that it was probably the atomic bomb disease. She began to ask when she would die. In July, Sadako's white blood count skyrocketed. Her appearance didn't belie how ill she was; however, her gums began to bleed quite often. In the hospital she overheard someone say that a white blood count over 100,000 was fatal. She wanted to learn what her count was. One evening she was able to sneak a look at her chart. She was relieved to see that at its highest it was recorded at 30,000. Sadako and her parents attended the August 6th Peace Ceremony to honor those killed in the bombing.



Chapter Seven: Folding Paper Cranes

Chapter Seven: Folding Paper Cranes Summary and Analysis

A nurse brought Sadako and Kiyoko hundreds of paper cranes that a school girl had sent to the hospital. Sadako remembered that her mother had told her a story about folding paper cranes - "if you fold a thousand paper cranes, your wish will come true." (58) Sadako decided that was exactly what she would do. She believed that if she folded a thousand paper cranes on her own that her wish would be granted. It took some doing to find enough paper, but she used every form of paper she could find including even candy wrappers. Even though her condition worsened, she would not give up her goal. Her father seeing that Sadako was getting worse, asked for permission to bring her home on weekends. Sadako was elated for the chance to spend two days at home. She attributed her visits home to her paper cranes. The family was overjoyed that they had Sadako back even for a limited time.

By the end of August, her body was covered with large purple marks and her gums bled constantly. Sadako had reached her goal and completed making the one thousand cranes. Kiyoko was pronounced as cured from tuberculosis and released in September. Sadako was happy for Kiyoko but sad because she would miss her.

By mid-September, Sadako was too ill and weak to go home for weekend visits. She believed that if she folded another thousand cranes that she would be able to return home. She had a more difficult time finding sufficient paper forcing her to make smaller and smaller cranes. And because she had little stamina, it took longer to make each crane. Her parents were concerned that she was overdoing it. Purple splotches now covered most of her body. Handfuls of hair would come out when her mother brushed her hair.

Chapter Eight: Can't Fold Any More

Chapter Eight: Can't Fold Any More Summary and Analysis

By October, Sadako had grown too weak to continue her folding. She had folded 1,500 cranes which hung about in her hospital room. Every night Fujiko would come right from work to the hospital. She stayed overnight most nights unless obligations at home prevented her from doing so. When she saw that leaving Sadako made her sad, Fujiko vowed to stay with her every night from then on and she kept that promise. One day at the hospital, Fujiko had a blinding headache and crawled in the bed with Sadako. When she woke, Sadako was standing next to the bed with a glass of water and a headache remedy. By mid-October, Sadako could not walk and was confined to bed. Even though she was in excruciating pain, she refused painkillers because she told the doctors that painkillers weren't good for one's body. It was obvious that, despite her condition, she hadn't given up.

Chapter Nine: Sadako's Last Moments

Chapter Nine: Sadako's Last Moments Summary and Analysis

Early in the morning on October 25, 1955, Fujiko called Shigeo at the barbershop to tell him to hurry to Sadako's bed. His daughter was dying. Shigeo put little Eiji in the basket of his bicycle and pedaled to the hospital as fast as he could. Sadako was so weak she could hardly open her eyes or speak. She was still clinging to life and expressed the hope that the doctor hadn't given up on her. Soon all of Sadako's siblings were there as well as her teacher and some of her classmates. Shigeo tried to encourage her to eat something. She asked for ochazuke which is a mixture of rice and hot tea. It is considered a treat. When the dish arrived from the kitchen, Shigeo spoon-fed the rice dish to his daughter. She took three spoonfuls and said that it tasted good. Those were Sadako's last words before she passed away.

The funeral was the next day and was attended by all her classmates. Her passing was difficult for her classmates. There was a bitterness that after Sadako folded all the cranes that she was still not granted her wish. Fujiko placed a favorite wooden doll that Sadako's classmates had given her into the casket. Shigeo also placed something special into Sadako's casket - hundreds of the paper cranes that his daughter had created. The remaining paper cranes were distributed to Sadako's classmates. Sadako was dressed in her beautiful kimono and looked like a porcelain doll.



Chapter Ten: The Children's Peace Statue

Chapter Ten: The Children's Peace Statue Summary and Analysis

The Hiroshima newspaper reported Sadako's death. Her passing was the fourteenth death in the junior high attributed to atomic bomb disease. Members of the Bamboo Class, which was the name of Sadako's class, gathered to share their grief and to think of some way to honor her. One student suggested that they put a marker in Peace Park where children who died from the bombing were honored. But it was an expensive proposition and they didn't know how they could raise the necessary funds. They decided to bring flowers to Sadako's grave every month. They could afford that.

The Sasaki's held a memorial for their daughter. Her relatives, classmates, teacher and a young man named Mr. Ichiro Kawamoto were invited. Ichiro was a dedicated young man who devoted much of his time to volunteer work. He helped those who were disabled by the bomb and were unable to work. He was sixteen when the bomb struck but was not impacted by the radiation. He did help with rescue work in the devastated area and would never forget the horror that he observed. Ichiro announced that he planned to build a memorial for Sadako and all the other children who died from atomic bomb disease. He asked for everyone's help. Ichiro suggested that they try to raise funds during a two day meeting of school principals that was going to take place in a few weeks.

The kids donated their allowance money, designed the flyer and wrote the announcement for their program. The school mimeographed copies of it for distribution at the meeting. The flyer described Sadako's suffering and their plans to build a memorial for all children who died from the atomic bomb blast. Flyers were distributed to all the principals who took them back to their schools. The kids felt that they were successful in getting their message out.



Chapter Eleven: The Circle of Unity Widens

Chapter Eleven: The Circle of Unity Widens Summary and Analysis

The principals took the information about Sadako and the proposed memorial for children who died from atomic bomb disease back to their schools. Northern cities such as Hokkaido and Tohoku became interested in the project. It was in 1955, the same year that Sadako died, that the Atomic Bomb Museum in Hiroshima Peace Memorial Park was opened to the public. The principals who toured the museum were reminded of the horrors of the bombing and became inspired with the idea of a memorial for the children who were victims of the disaster. Children who could closely relate to Sadako became engaged in helping and supporting the fund raising measures for the building of the memorial. Donations began to pour in.

Sadako's former classmates formed an official fund raising group called The Wooden Doll Association whose members went into Hiroshima and solicited contributions. Their efforts spawned the support of other schools as well as private individuals and businesses. The schools together formed another group called the Hiroshima Children and Students' Council for the Creation of Peace. Sadako's brother, Masahiro, and her friend from the hospital, Kiyoko, both became members of the council. On March 1, 1956, the council wrote an emotional appeal to all schools in the nation for their help. By the end of 1956, the efforts of the schools and students had raised nearly \$500,000. There would be enough money to build the memorial that the children dreamed of and at first thought was impossible.



Chapter Twelve: Prayer for Peace

Chapter Twelve: Prayer for Peace Summary and Analysis

With the combined support of over 3,000 schools the children's memorial became a reality. The statue was called The Statue for the Children of the Atomic Bomb and Sadako was used as its model. On Children's Day on May 5, 1958, a ceremony was held to unveil the memorial. Ten-thousand students were on hand for the ceremony including all of Sadako's classmates. The family sat with the original founders of the fund raising drive. Sadako's younger brother Eiji and young sister Mitsue pulled the cord that unveiled the memorial. On top of the memorial was the figure of a young girl holding a large crane as she looked skyward. The memorial was inscribed with the words: "This is our cry, this is our prayer: To create peace in the world." (91) Sadako and the children have never been forgotten. Even in modern times, the statue is decorated with paper cranes sent by children from all over the world.



Characters

Sadako Sasaki

Sadako Sasaki was just two-years old when her hometown, Hiroshima, Japan, was struck with the atomic bomb on August 6, 1945. Her mother, Fujiko gathered up Sadako and her brother and fled the city. Their house had been destroyed, there was no safe haven anywhere and the dead and dying were everywhere.

After a few days, Fujiko and her husband Shigeo decided to return to their home site. The house had been flattened but the couple felt fortunate that their children seemed to be happy and healthy. However, ten years later, Sadako became ill. At first, she experienced a sense of overall discomfort. Then her mother noticed that her glands were swollen under both ears. Her father took her to the doctor who spotted the unmistakable signs of atomic bomb disease. Once there is exposure to radiation, even a very small amount, it will eventually manifest into disease and even death.

Sadako had been a popular and happy student who loved her school, her teacher and her classmates. She was athletic and the fastest runner in her class. She could even beat the boys. But once she became ill, her condition rapidly deteriorated. She had to be hospitalized so that she could get constant treatment which consisted of blood transfusions and cortisone shots. Her parents had been told that she wouldn't survive the disease which was a rare and deadly form of leukemia. They did not tell Sadako that the disease would take her and she clung to the hope that she would be well one day.

A student sent the patients in the children's ward of the hospital dozens of paper cranes. It sparked an idea in Sadako. Her mother had told her a story about a girl who made paper cranes so that her wish would come true. She decided she would make a thousand paper cranes so that her wish would come true. Her wish, of course, was to live. She did not get her wish and tragically died less than a year after her condition was identified.

Her classmates joined with other schools and raised enough money to create a memorial to the children of Japan who died as a result of the atomic bomb. The memorial included the statue of a young girl who was looking skyward and was holding a crane.

Shigeo Sasaki

Shigeo Sasaki was Sadako's father. On the day the atomic bomb was dropped on Hiroshima, Shigeo helped with rescue efforts. He met up with his family at his in-laws' house where Fujiko and the kids had gone for safe haven. After staying a few days, Shigeo and Fujiko decided to return home although their home had been flattened and destroyed by the blast. But it was their home site and they had to start the process of



rebuilding. The couple was happy that their two children seemed to have escaped harm from the nuclear attack.

Ten years after the bombing, Shigeo owned a local barbershop and the family had rebuilt their house and had somewhat recovered from the tragic day. That was when Sadako began to show signs of illness. She just in general didn't feel good and the glands under her ears were swollen. He had a barbershop customer who was also a physician and decided to take his daughter to see him. Immediately, Dr. Hatagawa spotted the tell-tale symptoms of what was generally referred to as atomic bomb disease. He recommended that Shigeo take Sadako to the Atomic Bomb Casualty Commission for further testing. The prognosis was grim. Sadako had a deadly form of leukemia caused by radiation poisoning and she had only three months to a year to live.

Shigeo had to tell his wife the horrid news but he kept it from his daughter. Her condition escalated rapidly and Sadako soon had to be hospitalized which was quite a strain on the family's finances. But Shigeo didn't care about money. He would do everything possible to prolong her life and bring her some comfort. Shigeo not only had exorbitant hospital bills, he had his personal and business expenses and he was even paying a loan for a neighbor who had gone bankrupt. When Shigeo got the call from his wife that Sadako was dying, he rushed to the hospital. He talked her into taking a few bites of rice which he spoon fed to her. She told her father that it tasted good. Those were her last words just before she passed away.

Fujiko Sasaki

Fujiko Sasaki was Sadako's mother. On the day of the bomb struck, the family home was destroyed. She struck out with her two children to find a safe place but there were none in Hiroshima forcing her to travel to her parents' village to escape the danger and horror of the nuclear attack.

Masahiro Sasaki

Masahiro Sasaki was Sadako's older brother by two years. He was in the same location as his sister on the day of the bombing but he escaped from contracting the deadly disease that his sister developed.

Matsu

Matsu was Fujiko's 66-year-old grandmother who lived with the family. She became separated from Fujiko and the children on the day of the bombing. Matsu's body was found later. She had died of burns and injuries.



Dr. Hatagawa

Dr. Hatagawa was a physician and one of Shigeo's barbershop customers. Shigeo took Sadako to Dr. Hatagawa when she fell ill. He was the first physician to observe that Sadako had the tell-tale signs of atomic bomb disease.

Yukiko

Yukiko was a six-year-old patient at the hospital at the same time Sadako was there. She had the same condition as Sadako had. When she died Sadako was sad that she lost a little friend and feared that she would have the same fate.

Kiyo

Kiyo was Sadako's roommate at the hospital. Kiyo was two years older than Sadako and was suffering from tuberculosis. She eventually was pronounced cleared of TB and left the hospital while Sadako stayed behind. Sadako was happy that her friend recovered but she missed her.

Ichiro Kawamoto

Ichiro Kawamoto was a dedicated young man who devoted much of his time to volunteer work. He helped those who were disabled by the bomb and were unable to work. He was one of the leaders of the movement to erect a memorial in honor of the children who died from the atomic bomb.

Eiji and Mitsue

Sadako's younger brother Eiji and young sister Mitsue were born after the bombing. At her memorial, they pulled the cord that unveiled the statue of the little girl with the crane that represented all the children who perished from the atomic bomb.



Objects/Places

Japan

Japan was a member of the Axis Powers that opposed the Allied Forces in World War II. In August 1945, the war was winding down but the US and the Allied Forces were planning on bringing it to a swift and definitive conclusion.

Hiroshima

An atomic bomb that was dubbed "Little Boy" was dropped on the city of Hiroshima, Japan, on August 6, 1945. The city was selected for the attack because it was a large defense manufacturer.

Nagasaki

An atomic bomb that was dubbed "Fat Man" was dropped on Nagasaki, Japan, a few days after the attack on Hiroshima. Like Hiroshima, Nagasaki was a manufacturer of military arms and equipment.

Atomic Bomb

The atomic bomb that was dropped on Hiroshima, Japan, was developed by the US and its allies in a secret program called The Manhattan Project. The nuclear reaction that was set off in the blast resulted in never-before-seen annihilation.

Enola Gay

A US B-29 bomber dubbed the Enola Gay dropped the atomic bomb on Hiroshima, Japan, on August 6, 1945.

AABC

The Atomic Bomb Casualty Commission (AABC) was a research center that was established by the US government to monitor the impact of radiation on the people after the atomic bombs were dropped.



Paper Cranes

Sadako decided she would personally make one thousand paper cranes. She believed that if she met her goal, her wish would be granted and she would become healthy again.

Radiation Poisoning

Once a person is exposed to radiation, even a small amount, it does not disappear and eventually manifests into incurable diseases. These diseases were all grouped together under the moniker, "atomic bomb disease."

Bamboo Class

Sadako's class at school called themselves the "Bamboo Class." After Sadako died, her classmates began a movement to erect a memorial to honor Sadako and the other children who died from atomic bomb disease.

Memorial

A children's memorial was erected in the Atomic Bomb Museum in Hiroshima Peace Memorial Park to remember the children who died from the atomic bombs dropped on Hiroshima and Nagasaki at the end of World War II.



Themes

Survival

In *One Thousand Paper Cranes* the concept of fundamental survival is at the forefront. The story unfolds in August 1945 as the Axis Powers are facing defeat and World War II is coming to a conclusion. Germany and Italy are losing the war in Europe and Japan is failing on the Pacific front. The Japanese had bombed Pearl Harbor not quite four years before. It would, as it turned out, prove to be a huge tactical mistake. Even though the Allied Forces were emerging victorious, the US wanted to put a period on it. And, an element of revenge for the Hawaii assault cannot be discounted.

When the *Enola Gay*, a US B-29 bomber, released its deadly cargo over Hiroshima on that bright clear blue day in August, 1945, the world would never be the same for hundreds of thousands of Japanese people. Although their military was at war with the Allied Forces, led by the United States, conventional wisdom persuades that the majority of those killed that day and who suffered for years and eventually died from radiation were innocents, by-standers to the war.

Despite being hit by nuclear weaponry, the people had no choice but to go on, to try to live what was left of their lives. They had to rebound from total annihilation and rely heavily on a fundamental basic instinct to survive. Fujiko Sasaki scrambled to find her children after the blast had flattened their home. Her maternal instinct took over as she grabbed her two toddlers and sought safe haven.

Fujiko had to walk by twisted and mutilated people, destroyed neighborhoods and a river populated with floating bodies being washed downstream. She tried not to let her children see the devastation and tried not to look too closely herself. She had one goal and that was to get her children to safety. Where does a person in Fujiko's position find the strength to go through such horror? It can only be attributed to a mother's paternal instinct and another instinct even more basic - that of survival.

Fujiko and Shigeo decided to return to their home after a few days away. It wasn't really a home any longer. It was a home site where their house had been. They had to start the task of rebuilding. Their instincts drove them - they had to live and make a house for their small children. They survived the nuclear blast all intact... or so they thought. Ten years later, the radiation that Sadako had been exposed to had been eating at her body for all that time. It finally manifested itself in an incurable disease. They were told she would not survive. Although Sadako was not told, she was smart and knew that she was very ill. What kept her going was folding paper cranes. Her instinct for survival found something to hold on to. If she could just make enough of those paper cranes, her life would be saved. It didn't turn out that way for Sadako but the paper folding gave her something to focus on during an experience that no twelve-year-old child should have to undergo.



After she died, her family and classmates joined together to prove to the world that Sadako's spirit had indeed survived. They began a movement to raise enough funds to build a memorial dedicated to Sadako and the other children who perished from the nuclear attack. The statue that depicted a young girl looking skyward and holding a large crane was, to all who viewed it for years to come, the epitome of survival. The prayer inscribed on the memorial called for world peace - which is truly the only genuine pathway for the survival of mankind.

Martyrdom

One Thousand Paper Cranes by Takayuki Ishii is the story of a young girl who is the victim of radiation poison originating from the atomic bomb that was dropped on Hiroshima on August 5, 1945. There are always victims of wars but nothing is more heartbreaking than when those victims are innocent children. Martyrs are those who are sacrificed for a cause or for a movement. Although Sadako and the other children who perished after the US dropped atomic bombs on Hiroshima and Nagasaki in 1945, were not leaders of a movement or supporters of a cause, they came to symbolize the harsh realities of war and the consequences when the dangers of weaponry become a threat to humanity itself. These children had become unintentional martyrs for world peace.

Sadako was exposed at just two years of age. Fortunately, she had ten years of relative health and happiness after being in the wake of the heat and destruction of the atomic bomb. Her parents thought she was safe from the ravishes of radiation poisoning but all the while when she seemed fine, the radiation was inside her working on her cells and bones and organs. Radiation does not disappear; it only grows more powerful. Her parents didn't tell the twelve-year-old that she was doomed which made her dedication to folding a thousand paper cranes all the more poignant.

A child should not have to suffer as Sadako did. She worked at creating paper cranes hoping that she would magically be granted her wish to live if she only she could complete enough cranes. Juxtaposing the fragile paper cranes against a nuclear explosion and its residual radiation represents quite a tragic imbalance. But in a sense, Sadako has outlived the nuclear blasts. Fortunately, for mankind, there have been no atomic bombings since 1945 but the spirit of Sadako and the other children have survived. In a memorial for the children victims of the bombings, there is a statue of a young girl holding a crane. She looks skyward, offering the hopes of mankind that the earth will never again see such destruction and annihilation again.

Learning from History

Although the book, One Thousand Paper Cranes by Takayuki Ishii does not lecture its readers nor admonish any actions taken during World War II, specifically the dropping of atomic bombs on a civilian populace, there is an unspoken call to never let this happen again. This underlying theme, as stated before, emerges not from the pontification or pronouncements of the author, for that was not necessary. The story itself provides the



chastisements for the horrors, deaths, maiming and destruction brought about by the deployment of the atomic bomb that should never be allowed to happen again. The deaths and maiming were tragic enough in and of themselves; however; the true horror - as depicted in this story - is the silent killer, the radiation that lurked in bodies for decades that eventually manifested itself in a cruel and certain death. Once exposed to radiation, even a minute amount, it will ultimately result in death.

After reading about a happy and popular twelve-year-old girl who only wanted to go to school and be with her friends being struck with this nasty and cruel result of warfare, no one could be in favor of this tragic event in history ever being repeated. The sheer horror that the people experienced on the day that the Enola Gay dropped Little Boy down on Hiroshima is difficult to grasp. Statistics such as a wind that travels at 1,444 feet per second and heat that is 7,232 degrees at ground level sound like exaggerations or something out of a science fiction fantasy. But those statistics describe the reality of the citizens of Hiroshima on August 6, 1945.

People within the the radius of the hypercenter where the bomb actually fell were dead immediately or so burned and maimed that death would have been welcomed. The wind and heat resulting from nuclear fission which is the reaction that caused the explosion had to be terrifying and unbearable. The wind flattened everything within a four mile radius of the hypercenter. Since the heat literally melted roof tiles and glass, what did it do to living beings? What could that have felt like? Did internal organs burst inside the people's bodies? It is almost too horrific to even contemplate.

Hopefully, there is never another circumstance that leads to this kind of destruction ever again. After reading this account, the fear of nuclear weapons becomes more than just a headline that one glances at. The story behind the headline is this story - the story of what happens to people when warfare goes beyond the bounds of human decency especially for the innocents, the children.

Style

Perspective

One Thousand Paper Cranes by Takayuki Ishii is the story of Sadako Sasaki a Japanese girl who at two years of age was exposed to radiation when the atomic bomb was dropped on Hiroshima. Ten years later at twelve years of age she was diagnosed with incurable leukemia caused by radiation exposure. The story is written in the third person narrative.

In his introduction, Takayuki Ishii tells how he was reminded about the story of Sadako after his fifth grade son told him about learning the story from his teacher. Ishii didn't know the girl's name but he had heard about the little girl who "folded paper cranes." Other books had been written about Sadako but Ishii decided that a fact-based book was needed to tell the complete story of Sadako and her suffering and death.

Ishii was born in Tokyo and was converted to Christianity when he was sixteen. He moved to the United States and earned a Master of Divinity Degree from McCormick Theological Seminary in Chicago. He became the pastor of the Metropolitan-Duane United Methodist Church in New York City. Ishii was particularly inspired to write his book because of his interest in and advocacy for children. He agrees with the sentiment, "Let's not forget Pearl Harbor," but with this book he also hopes that no one forgets Hiroshima and Nagasaki and the horrors that were inflicted on hundreds of thousands of innocent Japanese people, many of them children.

Tone

One Thousand Paper Cranes by Takayuki Ishii is written in an informative and respectful manner. Although it is a very tragic tale, the author does not demagogue the story which, given the subject matter, really doesn't need it.

The author explains the circumstances that existed just prior to the dropping of the atomic bomb on Hiroshima. World War II was coming to a conclusion and Japan and the other Axis Powers - Germany and Italy - were facing defeat. So it was a weakened country and a defeated people that had one last powerful blow to encounter before the conflict was truly over.

Ishii does a credible job of portraying the destruction and misery and chaos that resulted from the atomic bomb. And just as bad was the horror of radiation poisoning that eventually caught up with those who had been exposed to it, even just a minute amount.

Although the young girl, Sadako Sasaki died of the leukemia caused by radiation poisoning, the book ends on an upbeat tone. The young classmates began a movement



to raise funds for the building of a memorial to honor Sadako and other children who were victims of the atomic bomb and radiation exposure.

Structure

One Thousand Paper Cranes by Takayuki Ishii is the story of a young Japanese girl who was two years old when the atomic bomb was dropped on Hiroshima. She became ill from the effects of radiation poisoning and died when she was twelve. The book is separated into twelve chapters. It begins with the circumstances under which the United States dropped atomic bombs on Hiroshima and Nagasaki which led to the end of World War II.

The first two chapters describe the debilitating impact that the bombings had on the people and lives of the Japanese. It also describes the diseases that developed in people exposed to radiation. In the case of Sadako Sasaki, she developed what many called the atomic bomb disease. This condition caused the number of white blood cells to increase dramatically while the red blood cells decreased. It was a form of leukemia that was incurable.

After the author describes the day of the bombing and the chaotic days just afterward, the book skips to ten years ahead when Sadako is a twelve-year-old student. She is a popular, happy girl who excels at sports, especially running. She is the fastest runner in her class and can even beat the boys. But she begins to become ill. Her mother sees that her glands are swollen under both ears. After testing, she is diagnosed with the fatal condition and her parents are told that she has at the most a year to live.

The last chapters are devoted to her final days which includes her hope that by folding a thousand paper cranes her wish to live with be granted. After her death, her classmates begin a movement to create a memorial for her and other children who were victims of radiation poisoning from the atomic bomb.

Throughout the book are photos and drawings that depict different aspects of the story. The story is preceded by an "Introduction" from the author about his motivation to write Sadako's story. There is also a "Preface" that briefly outlines Sadako's battle and the memorial that her death inspired. Following the story are instructions on how to fold a paper crane; a references section; and, the music and lyrics for "The Song" that the children sang about the tragedy.



Quotes

"Most of these cities became seas of fire as a result of these bombings. Upon impact, a typical firebomb spread an intensely hot, burning oil-like substance over large areas, destroying everything it touched." (Chapter One, page 11)

"Due to the severity of the radiation over Hiroshima and Nagasaki, it was believed by many scientists that no trees, grass, vegetation or human life would be able to live in these cities for a hundred years." (Chapter One, page 12)

"For the first time in history, humankind was to be threatened by the unpredictable wrath of the atomic bomb." (Chapter Two, page 14)

"They inched their way through smoldering debris, mangled corpses, and confused, injured masses." (Chapter Two, page 23)

"In addition to disfiguring surface burns (keloids), radiation from the atomic bomb also attacks vital organs, bones, and the circulatory and nervous systems. It produces a form of widespread incurable cancer, and it takes the form of fatal leukemia. In actuality, no part of the human body is immune from the tragic horror that results from radiation." (Chapter Four, page 37)

"Sadako attended the August 6th peace Ceremony with her family. They attended every year and participated in the ceremony of a thousand floating lanterns, each holding a lighted candle symbolizing that the spirit of the dead will live forever, to remember the victims of the atomic bomb." (Chapter Six, page 56)

"Sadako remembered a story which her mother had told her several years ago: if you fold a thousand paper cranes, your wish will come true." (Chapter Seven, page 58)

"There were periods when she found it difficult even to breathe or walk. Each day, she suffered numerous symptoms related to her disease, including high fevers, swelling of the glands, aching muscles and bleeding gums." (Chapter Eight, page 66)

"Mr. and Mrs. Sasaki... told the students that they hoped that Sadako's cranes, made with such passion and dedication, would now take their daughter to heaven, from where she could watch over Hiroshima and even the world." (Chapter Nine, page 73)

"Knowing that Sadako was aware of her fatal condition has made us very sad. But there is nothing we can do about it now. We do not want her death to have been in vain, so we hope to build a statue for all children who died of the Atomic Bomb Disease." (Chapter 10, page 79)

"Though our Sadako is no longer with us, her spirit lives on, a symbol of peace for all the children of the world!" (Chapter Twelve, page 91)



"These are the words, the prayers and the cries of the victims of the atomic bomb - past and present. They must be heard and remembered by all the people of the world!"
(Chapter Twelve, page 91)



Topics for Discussion

What are the functions of the red blood cells and the white blood cells? How does radiation poisoning impact their functionality?

What devastation was caused by the atomic bomb dropped on Hiroshima? How were heat and wind a factor in the destruction caused by the atomic bomb?

How debilitating was the dropping of the atomic bomb on Japan? How long-lasting was this impact?

What were some of Sadako's first symptoms that she was sick? What symptoms later emerged as her condition worsened?

How did Sadako's personality and positive outlook help her deal with her condition? How did she help others who were sick and suffering?

What good did Sadako get out of creating her one thousand cranes? What did the cranes symbolize for her? For others?

What reaction did Sadako's illness and death have on her classmates? How did they work to honor her and other children who suffered from atomic bomb disease?