

Individual Learning Packet

Teaching Unit

Hiroshima

by John Hersey

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Hiroshima

Notes

Hiroshima chronicles the lives of six survivors of the atomic bomb, which was dropped on the morning of August 6, 1945. The history of the publication of this work is very interesting. It was first published in August, 1946, as an article for *The New Yorker Magazine*; later that year, it was published as a nonfiction book. The current edition of *Hiroshima* was published in 1985 and includes the final chapter, *Aftermath*, which follows the lives of the six survivors forty years after the dropping of the bomb. The information included in this book is true. Although Hersey writes the novel with an objective and journalistic style, some students may find the content disturbing because he accurately describes the terrible trauma and hardships the people of Hiroshima suffer after the attack.

All references come from the Vintage Edition of *Hiroshima*, Copyright 1946, 1985.

Hiroshima

Objectives

By the end of this Unit, the student will be able to:

1. define vocabulary words from the text.
2. point out instances of the following uses of language: metaphor, personification, and descriptive language.
3. discuss the extent to which the six survivors credit providence for their survival.
4. cite incidents from the story to illustrate the destructive power of the atomic bomb to destroy lives and property; relate significant statistics relating to the atomic bomb and the resulting destruction of property and lives.
5. discuss the extent to which a country can protect its citizens from a nuclear attack.
6. discuss the attitude of the Japanese people on the following political topics:
 - World War II
 - the power of the Emperor to influence the Japanese people.
7. discuss the implied irony in the following statement: “There, in the tin factory, in the first moment of the atomic age, a human being was crushed by books.”
8. discuss what Father Kleinsorge’s papier-mâché suitcase may represent to some readers.
9. cite incidents from the story that illustrate how the human spirit survives, despite the devastation caused by the atomic bomb.
10. cite significant details from the story that illustrate the following characteristics of Japanese culture:
 - why the uninjured survivors feel a sense of shame
 - why the survivors prefer to be called hibakusha
 - why the injured people do not complain or cry out in pain
 - the importance of the dead in Japanese culture
 - what significance “face” has to the Japanese
 - the willingness of Japanese civilians to die for their country.
11. identify the tone of the story and comment on why you think Hersey wrote the story in this way.

Hiroshima

Questions for Essay and Discussion

1. Some critics believe this novel illustrates the strength of the human spirit. Cite two instances from the story to support this idea.
2. Define the following Japanese terms. As part of the definition, discuss why each term is important to this story.
 - tonarigumi
 - gensbi bakudan
 - hibakusha
 - enryo
3. Search through the text to answer the following statistical questions about the atomic bomb.
 - How many people are living in Hiroshima on August 6, 1945?
 - How many people survive the attack uninjured?
 - Of those who are injured, what percentage dies immediately from the explosion? What percentage die from radiation exposure? What percentage die from other injuries?
 - How many buildings in Hiroshima survive the blast?
 - What is the heat of the blast at ground zero?
4. Discuss the steps the Japanese government takes to protect the citizens of Hiroshima from a bombing attack.
5. Discuss why Mr. Tanimoto feels anger toward Japanese doctors and the Japanese military.
6. Discuss how the Japanese people feel about their Emperor at this time.
7. Discuss the importance of “face” to the Japanese people. Cite several examples.
8. At the end of Chapter One, Hersey writes about Miss Sasaki, who is buried under a pile of books.

“There, in the tin factor, in the first moment of the atomic age, a human being was crushed by books.”

Discuss the irony in this statement.

Hiroshima

Chapter One: A Noiseless Flash

Vocabulary

abstinence – the act of voluntarily doing without

convivial – sociable; jovial

diathermy – medical treatment in which heat is produced beneath the skin by high-frequency electric current or radiation to warm or destroy tissue

estuarial – like an inlet

hedonistic – concerned with pleasure

incendiary – designed to cause fires, flammable

incessant – never ceasing

philanthropy – a desire to help mankind by giving gifts to charitable or humanitarian institutions

prefecture – any of the regional districts of Japan administered by a governor

repugnant – distasteful, disagreeable

sampan – small boats used in China and Japan

volition – exercise of the will; a conscious or deliberate decision

xenophobic – fear or hatred of strangers

1. What is the setting for this book?

2. The six main characters are real people who survive the atomic bomb. Hershey writes:

“A hundred thousand people were killed by the atomic bomb, and these six were among the survivors. They still wonder why they lived when so many others died. Each of them counts many small items of chance or volition—a step taken in time, a decision to go indoors, catching one streetcar instead of the next—that spared him.”

What does the above statement suggest to the reader about how the six survivors feel about being alive when so many others are killed?

10. In what way do the wounded and suffering Japanese people in Asano Park surprise Father Kleinsorge?

11. The tone of a novel is a term referring to the author's attitude toward the subject matter. For example, tone can be described as formal, intimate, pompous, ironic, light, solemn, or objective. Read the following excerpt from this chapter. How would you describe the tone of this passage? Why do you think Hershey writes this novel in this way?

12. Why does Mr. Tanimoto want to find a boat?

Father Wilhelm Kleinsorge

1. Hersey describes Father Kleinsorge in the following excerpt:

“Father Kleinsorge lived this life of misery with the most extraordinarily selfless spirit.”

In what ways is Father Kleinsorge’s life a “life of misery”? In what sense does Father Kleinsorge embrace the Japanese spirit of “enryo”?

2. Why does Father Kleinsorge change his name to Father Makoto Takakura?

3. How does Father Takakura die?
