



# Walker Books Classroom Ideas



## A Bowl Full of Peace

Caren Stelson  
Akira Kusaka  
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\*Notes may be downloaded and printed for regular classroom use only.

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## Outline:

In this deeply moving nonfiction picture book, award-winning author Caren Stelson brings Sachiko Yasui's story of surviving the atomic bombing of Nagasaki and her message of peace to a young audience. Sachiko's family home was about half a mile from where the atomic bomb fell on August 9, 1945. Her family experienced devastating loss. When they returned to the rubble where their home once stood, her father miraculously found their serving bowl fully intact. This delicate, green, leaf-shaped bowl—which once held their daily meals—now holds memories of the past and serves as a vessel of hope, peace, and new traditions for Sachiko and the surviving members of her family.

## Author/Illustrator Information:

When author Caren Stelson first heard Sachiko Yasui speak, she knew she needed to share her story with young people. She eventually made five trips to Japan to interview Sachiko in Nagasaki and conduct additional research. Caren's book for middle grade readers, *Sachiko: A Nagasaki Atomic Bomb Survivor's Story*, was longlisted for a National Book Award and received a Sibert Honor Award, the Jane Addams Children's Book Award, and the Flora Stieglitz Straus Award. Caren and her husband Kim live in Minneapolis. They have two adult children and one grandson, Reid, who, like the readers of *A Bowl Full of Peace*, will be our next generation of peacemakers. See more about the author at: [www.carenstelson.com](http://www.carenstelson.com).

Akira Kusaka is an illustrator and graphic designer who has created advertisements, book covers, children's books, and more. He has not experienced war, and illustrating Sachiko's story for *A Bowl Full of Peace* prompted him to contemplate both war and peace. He hopes that this book will inspire the next generation of children to think deeply about peace as well. When Akira is not drawing, he plays trombone in a two-man band called Repair. He lives in Osaka, Japan. See more of his art at: [akirakusaka.com](http://akirakusaka.com).

## How to Use These Notes:

This story works on many levels. The suggested activities are therefore for a wide age and ability range. Please select accordingly.

### These notes are for:

- Primary 1-4
- Ages 5-10

### Key Learning Areas:

- English
- History

### Example of:

- Picture Book

### Themes/Ideas:

- Family
- Tradition
- War
- Hope



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## Discussion Questions and Activities:

### Before reading

Before reading *A Bowl Full of Peace* view the cover and title of the book. Identify the following:

- The title of the book
- The author
- The illustrator
- The publisher
- The blurb

Based on the cover, what do you think this story is about? How do you think it will begin/end? After reading, revisit your answer to this question. Were your predictions correct?

Consider the subtitle: '*A True Story*'. How does this affect your predictions? What do you expect from a story that's truth rather than fiction?

### Exploring the text

After reading the book, why do you think the author chose to call the story *A Bowl Full of Peace*? What role does Grandmother's bowl play in the story of Sachiko and her family?

As a class, identify some of the main themes of the text (e.g. family, war, change, hope, tradition). What messages about these themes do you think the text is communicating?

A major theme in this story is hope. How do we see hope in Sachiko's story? Why is hope important in everyday life? What are some ways to find hope in sad or difficult times?

Before eating, Sachiko and her family bow their heads, press their hands together and say "*itadakimasu*," meaning "we humbly receive this food." Does your religion, culture or family have any special mealtime traditions that are important to you? What does this tradition mean to you?

Grandmother's bowl is a precious family heirloom. Does your family have any objects that have been handed down from family member to family member? What makes that object special?

How does Sachiko keep the memories of her family close to her? Why is this so important?

Discuss why Sachiko decides to share her story with the world. What messages and lessons does she have to impart?

Read the note from author Caren Stelson at the end of *A Bowl Full of Peace*, with the facts about the bombing of Nagasaki. How does it make you feel? How can we learn from the past?



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## Exploring the illustrations

Examine several of the spreads and have a class discussion about the following:

- What is the composition (i.e. where are the key elements placed)? Are the characters large or small? In the foreground or background? Do they seem powerful or weak; happy or sad; scared or confident, etc?
- What are the characters on this page doing and where are they looking? Why are they doing this? What effect does this have?
- Is the illustration framed or does it take up the whole page? Why do you think Akira Kusaka illustrated it this way?
- Do the colours change from spread to spread? Make a list of the colours used in each area (this is called the colour palette). Why do you think he chose these colour palettes?

In some of the spreads, people are not drawn in colour, and look as if like shadows. Why do you think the illustrator made this choice? How does it affect you as a reader?

Consider the spreads when the bomb is dropped. How are they different to the rest of the book? How did they make you feel?

## Further Activities

What is the purpose of this text (tell a story, give information, persuade, etc.)? Does it have more than one purpose? How can you tell? Who is the intended audience for this book?

Sachiko goes through a range of emotions in the story. Look at each spread and discuss how she might be feeling, and how you can tell using clues from the text and illustrations. For each emotion, ask students to consider when they experienced a similar emotion and how it made them feel.

Origami cranes are a symbol of peace. Help the class to make their own origami cranes using an online tutorial (you could try <https://www.savingcranes.org/education/origami-cranes/> or <https://www.savingcranes.org/education/origami-cranes/>). This is an easy to intermediate origami craft, so it is best if the class have already tried origami before.

Have you or anyone in your class been to Japan? Ask them to share their stories and experiences with the class.

Write a journal entry/reflection after reading the book. Some questions to consider could be:

- What did you feel while reading the book? Which parts of the story made you feel most emotional?
- Have you had any experiences like those in the story?
- Do you know anyone who is like a character in the story?
- Does anything in the story remind you of a television program, film or other book? For example, a character, the setting or something that happened in the plot.
- If you were telling this story, what would you change?
- What do you think is the main message of the story?
- Are there any questions you have for the author or illustrator?
- If you could speak to the author or illustrator, what comments would you make?

Imagine your home was destroyed. How would you feel? What would you do? Where would you go? Make a list of the five things you would miss the most.