



Curriculum Connections

Somewhere Among

by Annie Donwerth-Chikamatsu
illustrated by Sonia Chaghatzbanian

Atheneum Books for Young Readers, 2016
2016 Winner, Freeman Book Award for Young Adult/Middle School Literature

Fiction, set in Japan

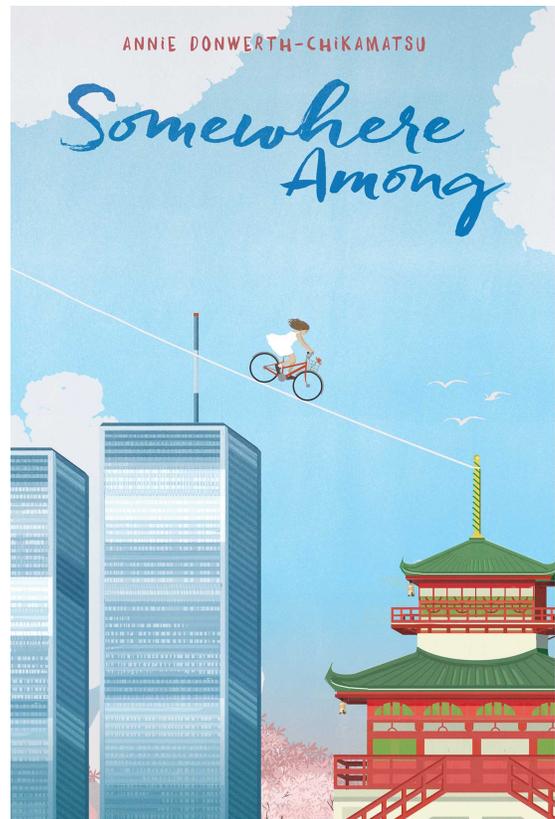
Grades 5–7

840 Lexile

The middle-grade novel *Somewhere Among* focuses on an eleven-year-old Japanese girl, Ema. The story takes place in Tokyo in 2001, in the months before, during, and after the September 11 terrorist attacks in New York and Washington, DC. Ema is “binational/bicultural/bilingual/biracial” or, as the Japanese call her, “hafu” (a romanized word for “half”): her mother is American and her father is Japanese. She looks and feels different from the other Japanese people around her, who often call her “foreigner” even though she was born and raised in Tokyo.

When the novel opens, Ema’s mother is pregnant and suffering from morning sickness. Since her mother has had a series of miscarriages in the past, to be extra cautious, Ema and Mom move in temporarily with her grandparents, Obaachan (pronounced: o BAH chan) and Jiichan (pronounced: JEE chan). For Ema, this presents problems: her strained relationship with her critical and cold grandmother, a new school and new friends, and her ever-growing feelings of isolation, anxiety, and loneliness.

The novel is written in verse and peppered with references to the current events of the time, including the sinking of the *Ehime Maru*, North Korean missiles shot into Tokyo Bay, typhoons, and more. The book also refers to past disasters and traumas in more recent Japanese history: the bombing of Tokyo during World War II, the nuclear bombing of Hiroshima and Nagasaki, and Pearl Harbor. And of course, the terrorist attacks of September 11 only add to the anxiety, fear, and dread everyone in the family experiences, especially Ema.





Curriculum Connections

Somewhere Among

by Annie Donwerth-Chikamatsu
illustrated by Sonia Chaghatzbanian

Atheneum Books for Young Readers, 2016
2016 Winner, Freeman Book Award for Young Adult/Middle School Literature

Fiction, set in Japan

The novel touches upon several themes:

- Identity
- The role of family
- Global vs. personal tragedy and trauma
- Conflict vs. peace
- Hope and resilience vs. despair

The following activities can be used to help students explore these themes while also meeting Common Core State Standards for Literacy.

Before reading:

- Ask students to research one aspect of Japanese daily life, such as public education, family structure, food, etc.
- Build students' knowledge of the events of 9/11. Students can engage in a gallery walk of primary source documents including photos, art, and interviews from the [Library of Congress September 11, 2001, Documentary Project](#).
- Ask students to journal about important people, places, and things in their lives. Ask them to name some things that give them hope for today and for the future.

During reading:

- As students read the book, have them analyze the structure of the novel and how Ema's perspective is developed through the short chapters in verse. How is this book told differently than other books that they may be familiar with?
- Students can create a character profile for Ema that allows them to track the different parts of the character's identity. Categories to consider might be relationships with family, important objects, hobbies and interests, thoughts, and feelings. Students can gather quotes from the book that represent these different facets of Ema. As an extension, students might want to create a character profile for themselves as well.

To learn more about the Freeman Book Awards, please visit:

www.nctasia.org/freeman-book-awards/



Curriculum Connections

Somewhere Among

by Annie Donwerth-Chikamatsu
illustrated by Sonia Chaghatzbanian

Atheneum Books for Young Readers, 2016
2016 Winner, Freeman Book Award for Young Adult/Middle School Literature

Fiction, set in Japan

- Students can create a timeline of global events mentioned in the novel as well as the characters' reactions to them. They can consider how each character reacts differently to these global events. Students can track how Ema's reactions change and evolve throughout the novel.
- Students can debate the role that family plays in Ema's life. How is her family a source of support for her? How is her family a source of anxiety for her?
- Throughout the novel, Ema's perspective on global and personal events fluctuates between hope and despair. Ultimately, what factors allow her to feel hope and optimism?
- The novel is rich with symbolism. Have students track and analyze the use of symbols in the novel. Some possibilities include Ema's NASA pen and Ema's unborn baby sister.

After reading:

- Students can experiment with writing their own stories in verse. They can take a section of the novel and write it from the perspective of Obaachan, Mom, Masa, or another character of their choosing.
- Another extension activity could involve students researching a real-life perspective on 9/11. They can find a primary source on the Library of Congress website or the [9/11 Memorial & Museum](#) website, or even interview an adult in their life about their memories of 9/11. Then, students can create a short story in verse told from that person's perspective.

Standards Addressed:

[CCSS.ELA-Literacy.CCRA.R.1](#) Read closely to determine what the text says explicitly and to make logical inferences from it; cite specific textual evidence when writing or speaking to support conclusions drawn from the text.

[CCSS.ELA-Literacy.CCRA.R.2](#) Determine central ideas or themes of a text and analyze their development; summarize the key supporting details and ideas.

To learn more about the Freeman Book Awards, please visit:

www.nctasia.org/freeman-book-awards/



Curriculum Connections

Somewhere Among

by Annie Donwerth-Chikamatsu
illustrated by Sonia Chaghatzbanian

Atheneum Books for Young Readers, 2016
2016 Winner, Freeman Book Award for Young Adult/Middle School Literature

Fiction, set in Japan

[CCSS.ELA-Literacy.CCRA.R.3](#) Analyze how and why individuals, events, or ideas develop and interact over the course of a text.

[CCSS.ELA-Literacy.CCRA.R.5](#) Analyze the structure of texts, including how specific sentences, paragraphs, and larger portions of the text (e.g., a section, chapter, scene, or stanza) relate to each other and the whole.

[CCSS.ELA-Literacy.CCRA.R.6](#) Assess how point of view or purpose shapes the content and style of a text.

[CCSS.ELA-Literacy.CCRA.R.7](#) Integrate and evaluate content presented in diverse media and formats, including visually and quantitatively, as well as in words.1

Author: Jessica Langbein, Library Facilitator, Adams 12 Five Star Schools
2025