



Curriculum Connections

Beyond Me

by Annie Donwerth-Chikamatsu

Simon & Schuster, 2020

Fiction, set in Japan

2020 Honorable Mention, Freeman Book Award for Young Adult/Middle School Literature

Reading Level: 4.6
Grade Level 3–7

Dewey: F Don

Other Awards:

- New York Public Library Best Books of 2020
- Sakura Medal Chapter Book 2022 nominee
- Skipping Stones Honor Book 2021
- Young People's Poet Laureate December Pick 2020, Poetry Foundation

Summary: *Beyond Me* is written in verse. The story is told through the eyes of Maya an eleven-year-old Japanese girl who lives in Tokyo at the time of the March 2011 earthquake, tsunami, and nuclear meltdown that devastated Japan.

Vocabulary: (All vocabulary definitions are from dictionary.com)



1. Radiation: the process in which energy is emitted as particles or waves; the complete process in which energy is emitted by one body, transmitted through an intervening medium or space, and absorbed by another body.
2. Aftershock: a small earthquake or tremor that follows a major earthquake.
3. Scenario: an outline of the plot of a dramatic work, giving particulars as to the scenes, characters, situations, and so on.
4. Tsunami: an unusually large ocean wave produced by a seaquake or undersea volcanic eruption.
5. Epicenter (*Geology*): a point directly above the true center of disturbance from which the shock waves of an earthquake radiate.



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6. Origami: the Japanese art of folding paper into decorative or representational forms, such as animals and flowers.
7. Spring equinox (also known as the vernal equinox): occurring around March 21, when the sun crosses the plane of the earth's equator, making night and day approximately equal.

Universal Message: Even in bad times, there is hope and kindness.

Literary Themes represented in *Beyond Me*:

- Good and evil
- Facing darkness
- Power of tradition
- Darkness and light
- Displacement
- Destruction of beauty
- Isolation
- Humanity vs. nature
- Technology in society
- Family blessing

Higher Level Questioning:

REMEMBER (Level 1): Recognizing and recalling

1. How did Maya and her family deal with the earthquake and aftershocks?
2. Who are the central characters in the story?
3. Describe what happened when the earthquake hit Japan.
4. Why did Maya make origami cranes for people displaced by the disaster?



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UNDERSTAND (Level 2): Interpreting, exemplifying, classifying, summarizing, inferring, comparing, explaining

1. How does Maya feel every time there is an aftershock?
2. What does “The Big One” mean?
3. Compare and contrast Maya’s life before and after the earthquake.
4. What would happen if the earthquake had hit closer to Tokyo, where Maya lived?
5. How does the book design—both the cover and the interior (the font and the layout of text on the page)—affect your experience reading the story?

APPLY (Level 3): Executing and implementing

1. What examples can you find in the book that show the importance of cranes to Maya?
2. How would you decide what to take with you if you had to evacuate because of an earthquake? Make a plan.
3. How did the March 2011 earthquake affect people in Japan? Describe a few specific examples.
4. How would you modify your life after living through a big earthquake?

ANALYZE (Level 4): Differentiating, organizing, attributing

1. What is the significance of the whistles Maya’s father gave to her and her family?
2. How would you explain why Maya wrote letters to people in the northern part of the main island, where the earthquake did the most damage?
3. Why do you think the aftershocks are more concerning to Maya than the initial earthquake?
4. How is the cat connected to the story? What does the cat stand for?

EVALUATE (Level 5): Checking and critiquing

1. What would have happened if Maya had not taken in the cat?
2. Devise a plan to get food to people in the North without going too close because of the radiation.
3. What facts can you gather about the people who lived closer to the earthquake epicenter?
4. What other activities could Maya do to keep busy when she can’t attend school?



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CREATE (Level 6): Generating, planning, producing

1. What choice would you have made if you were Maya's father? Would you have gone back to work?
2. What is your favorite thing about Maya's life?
3. What is the most important lesson in this story? Why?
4. What would you suggest Maya do to keep up her schooling?

Activities:

1. Have students illustrate a story about a tradition in their own family.
2. Have students research the effects of radiation on the human body.
3. Have students calculate the distance between Tokyo and their hometown.
4. Have students research the distance from Tokyo to the area around the nuclear plant in Fukushima, where the worst effects of radiation were felt and what some of those effects were.
5. Have students create a family plan in case they were ever faced with an earthquake or other natural disaster.
6. Have students write about how they might feel if their family went through this type of earthquake, using textual evidence in their reasoning.

Research websites:

- <https://www.nationalgeographic.org/thisday/mar11/tohoku-earthquake-and-tsunami/>
- <https://www.britannica.com/event/Japan-earthquake-and-tsunami-of-2011>
- <https://www.unep.org/explore-topics/disasters-conflicts/where-we-work/japan/great-east-japan-earthquake-and-tsunami>
- <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/books/NBK253933/>

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2020