



Curriculum Connections

No Steps Behind:

Beate Sirota Gordon's Battle for Women's Rights in Japan

by Jeff Gottesfeld

Illustrated by Shiella Witano

Creston Books, 2020

Non-fiction, set in Japan

2020 Winner, Freeman Book Award for Children's Literature

Reading Level: 5.0

Lexile: 840

Dewey: 320.082

Accelerated Reader: 4.9

Summary: This story is about a young Jewish girl named Beate whose family fled Russia to escape antisemitism. As she grew up in Japan, Beate became aware of the lack of women's rights. The title *No Steps Behind* refers to the sexism she encountered, reflected in traditional sayings such as "Women walk three steps behind." After college in the United States, Beate is hired by the U.S. military during the postwar Occupation of Japan. She is able to use her talents as a translator to help write a new constitution for Japan that ensures equal rights for women.



Vocabulary: (definitions from dictionary.com)

dōmo arigatō: Japanese for "thank you" [pronounced: DOUGH-mow ah-REE-gah-toe]

internment camp: a [prison camp](#) for the confinement of prisoners of war, enemy aliens, political prisoners, and more.

Universal Theme: The universal theme of this story is determination.

Literary Themes:

- Coming of age
- Empowerment
- Facing reality
- Power of tradition
- Heroism—real and perceived
- Knowledge versus ignorance

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

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



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- Injustice
- Individual versus society

Higher Level Questioning

REMEMBER (Level 1): Recognizing and recalling

1. List the main events in the story from beginning to end.
2. Why did the family immigrate to Austria and then Japan?
3. How would you define the ways women were treated in Japan when Beate first moved there?

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

1. How did hearing the president's speech change Beate's life?
2. How did seeing her classmates' opportunities in college make Beate feel about the opportunities her friends had in Japan?
3. What can you infer about the picture of Beate on the plane with the soldiers when she first saw Japan after the bombing? What do you think the soldiers thought of her? Did she seem to care?

APPLY (Level 3): Executing and implementing

1. What examples show the importance of Beate's job in the military?
2. How would you solve the issue of women being treated as inferior to men?
3. What if Beate had not had the opportunity to work with the military?

ANALYZE (Level 4): Differentiating, organizing, attributing

1. What is the significance of Beate's conversation with Colonel Kades?
2. Why is it important that Beate looks directly at the delegates and not at the floor?
3. Why do you think Beate's hard work in changing the nation's future was considered a security secret?



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EVALUATE (Level 5): Checking and critiquing

1. Compare the ways the illustrator portrayed the difficult times and the good times.
2. Predict what would have happened if Beate had not stood up for women's rights.
3. What facts can you gather about Beate's position on women's rights in Japan and America?

CREATE (Level 6): Generating, planning, producing

1. What is your opinion of what Beate did? Should she be considered a hero?
2. What choice would you have made in Beate's position? How would you stand up for women's rights?
3. What is the most important lesson in this story? Why?

Research Websites:

<https://jwa.org/encyclopedia/article/gordon-beate>

<https://www.nytimes.com/2013/01/02/world/asia/beate-gordon-feminist-heroine-in-japan-dies-at-89.html>

<https://www.encyclopedia.com/women/encyclopedias-almanacs-transcripts-and-maps/sirota-beate-1923>

Standards

Elementary

- LA Standards: <http://www.corestandards.org/ELA-Literacy>
- Math Standards: <http://www.corestandards.org/Math/>
- Social Studies Standards: <https://aos98.files.wordpress.com/2015/06/ncss-standards.pdf>

Middle Grades

- LA Standards: <http://www.corestandards.org/ELA-Literacy>
- Math Standards: <http://www.corestandards.org/Math/>
- SS Standards: <https://aos98.files.wordpress.com/2015/06/ncss-standards.pdf>



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High School

- LA Standards: <http://www.corestandards.org/ELA-Literacy>
- Math Standards: <http://www.corestandards.org/Math/>
- SS Standards: <https://aos98.files.wordpress.com/2015/06/ncss-standards.pdf>

Activities:

1. Have students illustrate a story about something they stood up for or something they are passionate about.
2. Have students research Beate's life and create a visual timeline.
3. Have students calculate the distance between Japan, Austria, and the U.S.
4. Have students write a diary entry sharing Beate's feelings when she was not in contact with her family.
5. Have students create a poster or short PSA video in support of women's rights.

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