



# Curriculum Connections

## *A Place to Belong*

by Cynthia Kadohata  
Illustrated by Julia Kuo

Simon & Schuster, 2019

Fiction, set in Japan

2019 Winner, Freeman Book Award for Young Adult/Middle School Literature

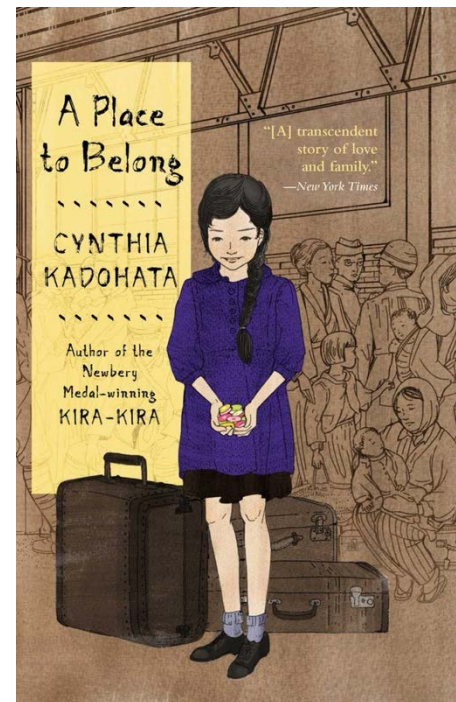
### Appropriate Age/Grade Level

*A Place to Belong* is most appropriate for middle grades but could also be used with some upper elementary or younger high school students, depending on their reading level and interest (overall grades 6+).

### Context

A number of young adult and middle-grade books about Japanese internment camps have been written from the perspective of Japanese Americans who endured and survived the experience during World War II. Two outstanding examples are *Weedflower* by Cynthia Kadohata and *They Called Us Enemy* by George Takei. A lesser-known piece of this story involves the 1944 Congressional passage of the Renunciation Act (Public Law 78-405), which encouraged people who had been interned during the war to renounce their American citizenship so that the U.S. government could deport them to Japan. *A Place to Belong* steps out of the United States to look at the 5,589 Japanese Americans who, following internment and the passage of the 1944 Renunciation Act, renounced their U.S. citizenship. Reasons for Japanese American renunciation varied from anger with the United States government over internment to hopelessness about their future in a country that had stripped them of their livelihood and limited their opportunities.

*A Place to Belong* begins with the deportation of twelve-year-old Hanako (pronounced: HA-nah-koh) and her family to Japan, where her father and mother grew up but where she and her brother, Akira (AH-key-rah), have never been. In the case of Hanako's father, he does not see a future for his family in the United States, after the loss of their property and business and the humiliation of internment. Ultimately, they decide to join Hanako's grandparents on a farm outside Hiroshima. There, the family set out to build a new life for themselves in a postwar world.





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### **Common Core Standards**

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RH.6-8.1: Cite specific textual evidence to support analysis of primary and secondary sources.

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RH.9-10.1: Cite specific textual evidence to support analysis of primary and secondary sources, attending to such features as the date and origin of the information.

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RH.6-8.2: Determine the central ideas or information of a primary or secondary source; provide an accurate summary of the source distinct from prior knowledge or opinions.

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RH.9-10.2: Determine the central ideas or information of a primary or secondary source; provide an accurate summary of how key events or ideas develop over the course of the text.

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.WHST.6-8.7: Conduct short research projects to answer a question (including a self-generated question), drawing on several sources and generating additional related, focused questions that allow for multiple avenues of exploration.

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.WHST.6-10.9: Draw evidence from informational texts to support analysis reflection, and research.

### **Literary Themes**

Family, wartime (economics, laws), opportunity, displacement, citizenship, identity

### **Concepts and Entry Points**

Each of the concepts that follow can be used to reinforce understanding, open discussion, or serve as a jumping-off point into a portion of the book or research connected to the novel.

#### **1944 Renunciation Act (Public Law 78-405)**

This congressional law leads to the deportation of Hanako and her family. Hanako's family loses their American citizenship and moving to Japan to live with Hanako's grandparents outside Hiroshima.



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### **Hiroshima**

With Hanako's grandparents living outside of Hiroshima, the dark shadow of the nuclear bomb lingers at the edge of their world; her grandparents have been spared, but the book reveals that many who survived still have to fight for their lives.

### **Opportunity Cost**

The novel provides many chances to talk about opportunity cost or the loss of potential gain when a different choice is made.

### ***Hibakusha*** (pronounced: he-BAH-KU-shah)

This term refers to people who survived the atomic bombing. *Hibakusha* is not used in the text but could be used for additional research.

### **Postwar Japan**

The novel gives a glimpse into the grim circumstances that the people of Japan faced after World War II ended.

### **Rice Farming**

Rice is highly valued in Japanese culture. The war and the nuclear bombings led to a decrease in rice production.

### **U.S. Attorney Wayne Collins**

This U.S. Attorney unsuccessfully filed a class-action lawsuit on behalf of Japanese Americans who renounced their citizenship; later, he filed individually for each person, winning cases between 1951 and 1968.

### **Guiding Questions**

1. What specific reasons do you think Hanako's father had for renouncing his family's citizenship? Provide specific examples from the text.
2. What did Hanako learn about Hiroshima from her time in Japan? Give specific examples.



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3. What factors allowed Hanako's grandparents to be better off than other people in Japan after World War II?

4. What factors prevented Hanako's family from achieving the success that they'd had in the United States?

5. What circumstances led Hanako to return to the United States? Do you think that this was the right decision? Why or why not?

### **Suggested Learning Activity/Evaluation/Assessment**

1. Have students agree or disagree about the tradeoffs of **opportunity costs**; use the examples below or ask students to fill in the statements with their own words. They could also create their own opportunity-cost statements.

- Renouncing American citizenship in exchange for [*being part of the ethnic majority in Japan*]
- Hanako sharing crackers with the boy from Hiroshima at the risk of [*not having food for Akira*]
- Hanako's grandmother selling her wedding kimono in exchange for [*the skirt that Hanako wanted*]
- Hanako returning to the United States at the risk of [*growing apart from her family*]

2. Have students research specific Wayne Collins cases, in which he advocated for famous Japanese Americans: *Abo v. Clark (1946)*, *Koramatsu v. United States*, and *Iva Ikuko Toguri D'Aquino [aka "Tokyo Rose"] v. United States*

3. Have students work in groups of two to three and analyze the images in this photo essay from *The Atlantic*, "[Japan in the 1950's](https://www.theatlantic.com/photo/2014/03/japan-in-the-1950s/100697/)."<sup>1</sup> Students should respond to the following three As, followed by a turn-and-talk, then large class discussion:

<sup>1</sup> Alan Taylor, "Japan in the 1950s," *The Atlantic*, March 12, 2014.  
<https://www.theatlantic.com/photo/2014/03/japan-in-the-1950s/100697/>.

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

[www.nctasia.org/freeman-book-awards/](http://www.nctasia.org/freeman-book-awards/)



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- Affirm: What does this affirm that you read/learned about in *A Place to Belong*?
- Ask: What questions would help you make better sense of this image?
- Argue: What information makes you question what is being presented in this image?

### Possible Resources

- "Documents, Court Documents for Tadayasu Abo et. Al vs. William P. Rogers, San Francisco in California, 03/10/1958." | National Museum of American History. Accessed December 31, 2023.  
[https://americanhistory.si.edu/collections/nmah\\_1800502](https://americanhistory.si.edu/collections/nmah_1800502).
- Dower, John W. "Ground Zero 1945: Pictures by Atomic Bomb Survivors." MIT Visualizing Cultures, 2008.  
[https://visualizingcultures.mit.edu/groundzero1945/gz\\_essay04.html](https://visualizingcultures.mit.edu/groundzero1945/gz_essay04.html).
- Kadohata, Cynthia. *Weedflower*. New York: Aladdin Paperbacks, 2009.
- Takei, George, Justin Eisinger, Steven D. Scott, and Harmony Becker. *They Called Us Enemy*. San Diego, CA: Top Shelf Productions, 2020.
- Takei, George. "Wayne Collins." Remembrance Project - Wayne Collins, 2012.  
<http://remembrance-project.janm.org/tributes/wayne-collins.html>.
- Taylor, Alan. "Japan in the 1950s." *The Atlantic*, March 12, 2014.  
<https://www.theatlantic.com/photo/2014/03/japan-in-the-1950s/100697/>.
- Wojtan, Linda S. "Rice: It's More Than Food in Japan." FSI, 1993.  
[https://spice.fsi.stanford.edu/docs/rice\\_its\\_more\\_than\\_food\\_in\\_japan](https://spice.fsi.stanford.edu/docs/rice_its_more_than_food_in_japan).

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