



**Delacorte Press, 2021**

**2021 Of Note, Freeman Book Award for Young Adult/Middle School Literature**

# **Culture Notes**

## ***Soul Lanterns***

**by Shaw Kuzki**

**translated by Emily Balistrieri**

**Fiction, set in Japan**

### **Atomic Bomb dropped on Hiroshima, 1945**

In the final phase of the Pacific War (the theater of war fought in Asia during World War II), the U.S. and Allied forces prepared to invade Japan. American forces assaulted the island of Okinawa on April 1, 1945. The Battle of Okinawa was one of the bloodiest of the war: 50,000 U.S. soldiers and well over 120,000 Japanese soldiers and civilians died during three months of intense fighting, ending in victory by the American forces. This gave them control of a strategic location relatively close to the main islands of Japan, from which they could launch an invasion. During the same period, Americans continued bombing major cities in Japan. The bombing of Tokyo on March 9 and 10 killed at least 100,000 and left one million homeless.



On August 6, 1945, the United States dropped an atomic bomb on Hiroshima, and three days later on Nagasaki. The bombings hastened the unconditional surrender of Japan. After the emperor announced the surrender on August 15, the papers were signed on September 2, 1945, on the *USS Missouri* in Tokyo Bay.

The atomic bomb dropped on Hiroshima detonated 600 meters above the city center. Intense heat instantly vaporized any living things around ground zero. Those who did not die instantly suffered from severe burns and radiation poisoning, and most died within a few days. The effects of radiation (leukemia, for example) lingered on, claiming the lives of thousands more. Today, more than 20,000 survivors are believed to be still alive. Any remaining radiation from the A-bomb now is undetectable; it is at the same level as the normal background radiation measured anywhere. There is no residual radioactivity in Hiroshima or Nagasaki.



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### ***Tōrōnagashi***

*Tōrōnagashi*, "setting lanterns afloat," is a tradition in some parts of Japan practiced on special occasions or during the August *bon* festival. In the case of Hiroshima, *tōrōnagashi* is a new tradition created a few years after the atomic bombing to commemorate the souls of the deceased. Small lanterns are floated down the Motoyasu River that runs by the Genbaku Dome. Many of these carry a message to the deceased or a message of peace.



Lanterns float for miles along the Motoyasu River, as Hiroshima remembers those who lost their lives in the atomic bombing.

(Photo by CTBTO. Hiroshima-Nagasaki 2012 (7746128740), Wikipedia./no URL listed, but the image is found on this page: [https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Hiroshima-Nagasaki\\_2012\\_\(7746128740\).jpg](https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Hiroshima-Nagasaki_2012_(7746128740).jpg))



Photo by Brenda Jordan, 2009

### **The Genbaku Dome**

The Genbaku Dome is the former Hiroshima Prefecture Industrial Promotion Hall. The large domed structure has been preserved to show how it appeared days after the bombing. It is the main symbol of the bombing, located in Hiroshima Peace Memorial Park.

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