

Curriculum Connections

Grenade

by Alan Gratz

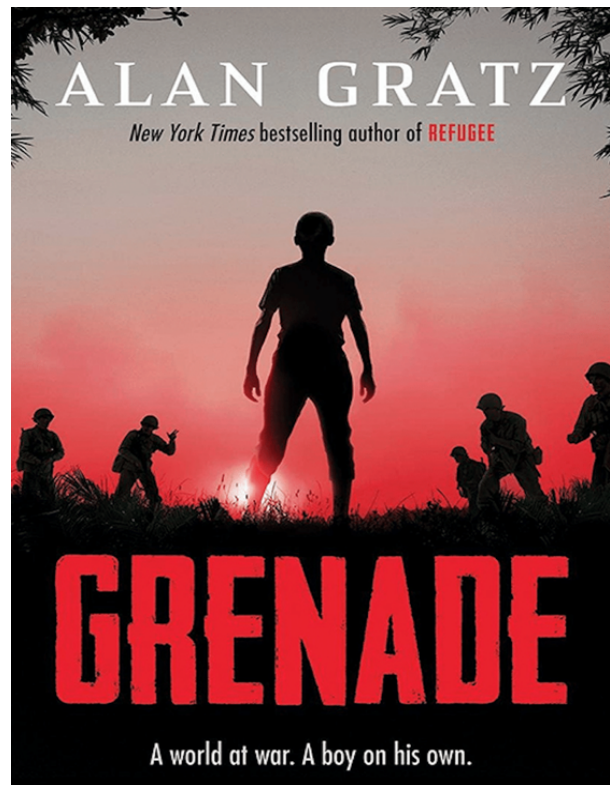
Scholastic Press, 2018

Fiction, set in Japan

2018 Winner, Freeman Book Award for Young Adult / Middle School Literature

1) Summary

The novel *Grenade* starts on April 1, 1945, the same day that the Battle of Okinawa began in the Pacific Theater toward the end of World War II (1941–1945). In the first two chapters, we are introduced to Hideki Kaneshiro, a teenage boy living on the Japanese island of Okinawa, and Ray Majors, an American soldier. The chapters alternate between the viewpoints of these two characters, offering us the Okinawan and American perspectives from opposite sides of the battlefield. The loyalties of both Hideki and Ray are tested as the narrative plays out.



2) Analysis

Grenade works well as a middle school novel with any grade 6–8 curriculum that includes material about World War II in the Pacific Theater, including the atomic bombings of Hiroshima and Nagasaki. The chapters are accessible, written in a manner that helps students to understand the motivations that propel the main characters. *Grenade* also provides broader context, offering perspectives on cultural mores, geopolitical fractures, and the rise of militarism.

Hideki and Ray are described as typical soldiers: they are putting their lives on the line in response to ideologies and political circumstances. These powerful themes—the brutality and amoral nature of warfare, the propaganda and nationalism at the heart of wartime tensions, and the search for humanity at the



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core of both main characters—challenge the reader to think deeply about the Battle of Okinawa, a historical event that is increasingly abstract to students today.

3) Cultural & Historical Themes

Any educator using this text in their class has an opportunity to delve deeper into the history of World War II in the Pacific Theater. Teachers who use this book could talk about Hideki as an Okinawan and discuss the values instilled in him by the Empire of Japan, which towards the end of the war used the warrior code of bushido (*bushidō*) to propel young men into battle without adequate training.

4) Historical Relevance & Reflection: Current Event Connections

Although *Grenade* is a middle grade text, it can be used in tandem with current events lessons, specifically within a social studies or history classroom. Its subject matter is tied to historical moments associated with World War II: trade disputes, diplomatic conflicts, the rise of totalitarian and fascist regimes, and wars against neighboring countries. If a teacher is inclined to connect *Grenade* to current events, then students could discuss real-world corollaries in the twenty-first century, such as the rise of totalitarian regimes in Hungary and Turkey, the Russo-Ukrainian War, and the growth of extreme right-wing politics around the world. The personal trials and tribulations suffered by the characters Hideki and Ray could be seen in historical perspective, and students might come to understand how the same forces may be at play for soldiers facing similar circumstances today.

5) Appropriate Grade Levels

The appropriate grade levels for *Grenade* is middle school readers in grade 6–8. Given the issues with reading levels among middle and high schoolers, it may also be appropriate for readers in grade 9 as well. However, if teachers plan for



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enough in-class reading days, chunk the text appropriately, use reading group strategies alongside audio versions of the text for students who need accommodations, and budget time to check for understanding, then the text should work for a majority of middle school learners.

6) Activities

- a. **Reading & Discussion:** If enough in-class reading time is scheduled, the teacher(s) can have meaningful Socratic roundtable discussions with students, as a class or by creating groups of students. These can serve as reflective pauses in the allotted reading time or can be used to assess how students have grasped concepts and events within the text, to determine if they have used the necessary critical reading and thinking skills they are being encouraged to develop.
- b. **Group Project Presentations & Reports:** Students can be divided into pairs and assigned a particular concept or idea associated with *Grenade*. This could be the Battle of Okinawa itself, or other historical aspects of the text that students can learn more about through research and writing. Topics can range from the Japanese warrior code (*bushidō*) that influenced Hideki, to the history of the Okinawan Islands, to the American regiments that were ordered to invade Japan. Students could write brief research papers, create slide deck presentations, or do these activities in tandem.
- c. **Primary Source Reading with Flowcharts:** Students can be given a flowchart to use in tandem with primary sources while reading *Grenade*. Sources might include documentary footage, testimonials from people in Okinawa who were directly affected by the war, or testimonials from American soldiers who took part in the invasion. Primary sources can be used to paint a fuller picture of the Battle of Okinawa. The Pacific Theater can be explored from both sides of the



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conflict, drawing on civilian and military sources to paint a full picture. The flowchart will help students to group information from primary sources with textual evidence and analysis.

- d. Cultural Immersion Activities:** Consider cultural immersion activities to help students better understand the humanity and personal motivations of characters such as Hideki. Because Hideki is steeped in Okinawan and Japanese culture, teachers can find photos to show students, or even cultural artifacts that Hideki might have used on a daily basis in early twentieth-century Japan. These could range from Japanese chopsticks and rice bowl to a koi fish flag, a samurai sword, or an example of a Japanese school uniform worn during World War II. Providing a kinesthetic class activity where students can learn how Hideki would have lived his day-to-day life will help to reinforce overarching themes at the heart of *Grenade*.

7) 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.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.6-8.4

Determine the meaning of words and phrases as they are used in a text, including vocabulary specific to domains related to history/social studies.

CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RH.6-8.5

Describe how a text presents information (e.g., sequentially, comparatively, causally).

CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RH.6-8.8

Distinguish among fact, opinion, and reasoned judgment in a text.



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CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RH.6-8.9

Analyze the relationship between a primary and secondary source on the same topic.

CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RH.6-8.10

By the end of grade 8, read and comprehend history/social studies texts in the grades 6–8 text complexity band independently and proficiently.

CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RL.8.1

Cite the textual evidence that most strongly supports an analysis of what the text says explicitly as well as inferences drawn from the text.

CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RL.8.2

Determine a theme or central idea of a text and analyze its development over the course of the text, including its relationship to the characters, setting, and plot; provide an objective summary of the text.

CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RL.8.3

Analyze how particular lines of dialogue or incidents in a story or drama propel the action, reveal aspects of a character, or provoke a decision.

CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RL.8.10

By the end of the year, read and comprehend literature, including stories, dramas, and poems, at the high end of grades 6–8 text complexity band independently and proficiently.

8) Literature & Media Connections

- a. **Middle School Text:** *Sadako and the Thousand Paper Cranes* by Eleanor Coerr

A text that mainly deals with the aftereffects of the atomic bombing of Hiroshima, Coerr's novel about Sadako and her ordeal can serve as a final reading for a whole unit or semester about the Pacific Theater of World War II and the impact of defeat on the Japanese people, who paid the price for the political and military mistakes of their leaders.

- b. **High School Text:** *Onward Towards Our Noble Deaths* by Shigeru Mizuki



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If *Grenade* is read in the grade 9 classroom, Mizuki's manga novel would provide a nice supplement. Ray Majors shows us the perspective of the American forces but Hideki Kaneshiro offers a civilian perspective. By reading *Onward Towards Our Noble Deaths*, students could learn what it was like in the Japanese military and what the Japanese thought of the efforts of their military leaders.

- c. **Film Connection:** *Flags of Our Fathers* and *Letters from Iwo Jima*, both directed by Clint Eastwood

While these films would be more suited to a high school classroom, they provide valuable visual addendums and even more historical realism to the types of conflicts that *Grenade* introduces. Showing these films is up to the discretion of the teacher—it may be wise to use only specific scenes to make points about the larger conflict or specific passages of the text.

For further historical and cultural information, please refer to the [Culture Notes for *Grenade* by Prof. Hiroshi Nara](#) on the National Consortium for Teaching about Asia website.

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