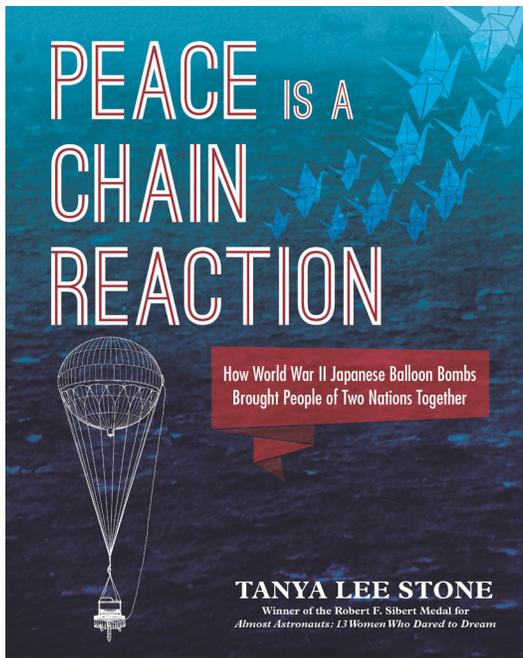


# PEACE IS A CHAIN REACTION

How World War II Japanese Balloon Bombs Brought People of Two Nations Together

**TANYA LEE STONE**



HC: 978-0-7636-7686-5 • Also available as an e-book

## ABOUT THE BOOK

When American citizen Yuzuru Takeshita was a teenager during World War II, the US government forcibly moved him and 120,000 others of Japanese descent from their homes and incarcerated them. Yuzuru ended up in California's Tule Lake Relocation Center. While there, he heard rumors that Japanese military balloons were dropping incendiary bombs on the US. In fact, one such balloon had killed five children and an adult just fifty miles away. In 1985, Takeshita, then a professor, met several women in Japan who had worked in the military balloon factories when they were teenagers during World War II. After discussing the Oregon incident with Takeshita, they became distressed about the children's deaths. Through letters, and eventually memorial ceremonies, Takeshita connected the Japanese women with the Oregon families of those killed by the balloon. It proved to be a profoundly healing experience for all, which lasted for decades. From Pearl Harbor to Tule Lake, from small-town Oregon to Japanese wartime facilities, this dramatic story pays tribute to the power that one person can have to further peace.

## ABOUT TANYA LEE STONE

Tanya Lee Stone is a highly respected author of nonfiction for young people, including *Almost Astronauts: 13 Women Who Dared to Dream*, winner of a Robert F. Sibert Medal, and *Courage Has No Color: The True Story of the Triple Nickles, America's First Black Paratroopers*, winner of an NAACP Image Award. She studied English and voice at Oberlin College, has a master's degree in science education, and holds a PhD in creative writing. After working as an editor for more than a dozen years, she is now on the faculty at Champlain College and serves as the program director of its Professional Writing Program.



CANDLEWICK PRESS  
www.candlewick.com

## Common Core Connections

This discussion guide, which can be used with large or small groups, will help students meet several of the Common Core State Standards (CCSS) for English Language Arts. These include the reading literature standards for key ideas and details, craft and structure, and integration of knowledge and ideas (CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RI), as well as the speaking and listening standards for comprehension and collaboration and for presentation of knowledge and ideas (CCSS.ELA-Literacy.SL). Questions can also be used in writing prompts for independent work.

## DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. What are some ways that the US government mistreated and violated the rights of those of Japanese descent during World War II? How did the government justify it? Discuss Milton Eisenhower's claim that the government was "determined to do the job as a democracy should, with real consideration of the people involved" (page 19). Why do you think Eisenhower downplayed the harsh financial impact on those detained, who lost businesses, homes, and possessions?
2. Describe the conditions at Tanforan, Topaz, and Tule Lake. How did life in those places contrast with the life that Yuzuru Takeshita's family had before? Why do you think the government provided such poor housing and surroundings?
3. Explain your understanding of the concept of *Shikata ga nai*, translated as "It can't be helped" (page 31). What are some examples of how those in Tanforan and the incarceration camps tried to make the best of a bad situation?
4. Who were the "No-Nos"? Why did the War Department make those incarcerated in the relocation centers fill out a "loyalty questionnaire" (page 40)? Discuss questions 27 and 28 and how they were tricky to answer. Explain why the Takeshitas answered no to those questions. What were the consequences for them and the others who answered in the same way?
5. Why did Margaret Gunderson and her husband decide to teach at Tule Lake's Tri-State High School? What was the negative impact on them? How was Margaret Gunderson important to Yuzuru and his fellow students? Why do you think Yuzuru asked her to give him an "American" name?
6. Discuss Margaret Gunderson's belief that "democracy is a difficult journey, not a destination already reached" (page 48). What did she mean? How did Yuzuru react to her statement? How does *Peace Is a Chain Reaction* demonstrate that democracy is a "difficult journey"?
7. Think about the psychological difference between living in a country far from the battlefield during a war versus living in a country where a war is being fought. How did the American bombing of Japanese cities in 1942 affect the Japanese psychologically? Do you think the balloons that landed in the US similarly affected Americans? Discuss Diane Shoemaker's statement "The thought of war coming right to our front door never entered any of our minds" (page 102).
8. The citizens of Bly who knew about the balloon, such as telephone operator Cora Mae Jenkins, were told not to discuss it. Why did the government want it kept a secret? Why were local people angry about the lack of information? What effect did the enforced silence have, especially on Cora Mae, at the time and over the years?
9. The War Department forbade newspapers from publishing information about the Japanese balloons in Bly and elsewhere. Why do you think a local editor in Oregon "argued against the censorship" (page 99)? Discuss the tension during wartime between military concerns and the freedom of the press to inform the public.
10. The government deliberately misled the public about the relocation centers. Discuss why Dorothea Lange's photographs were impounded until after the war and why people in the relocation centers were initially not allowed to have cameras. What is propaganda? Why did the government create propaganda such as upbeat films and photos? What was the point of deceiving the public? Is there an argument for governments to be more transparent during wartime?
11. Takeshita once said, "Pearl Harbor not only sank the Arizona, but it really capsized our Bill of Rights" (page 127). Discuss this statement, referring to the Bill of Rights in your discussion. How did the incarceration of Japanese Americans and the censorship of the press violate the Bill of Rights?
12. Who was Okazaki? How did Yuzuru meet him? Discuss Yuzuru's poem (page 114), its message, and what inspired it. Why was Okazaki's remorse about his role in the Fall of Nanjing important to Yuzuru? How was Okazaki's emotional response at odds with the village-wide celebration of the Japanese soldiers who fought in China?

13. Why was Takeshita disturbed by Japanese teacher Yoshiko Hisaga's remark that it was fortunate only six people were killed by the balloons (page 109)? How did he happen to meet her and how did she feel in retrospect about using the word "only"? Discuss Takeshita's words to students in Ann Arbor: "A life is a life, precious in its own right" (page 130).
  14. What is the symbolism of paper cranes? Recount the story of Sadako Sasaki and the paper cranes. How did paper cranes become part of the exchange between people that Takeshita met in Japan and those they reached out to in Oregon? How did cherry trees figure in that connection?
  15. Talk about the power of monuments and memorials, those in the book and those you may have encountered yourself. Why are they important? How can they have an emotional impact? Describe the role of ceremonies in the book and how they brought people together.
  16. Why is the book titled *Peace Is a Chain Reaction*? What does the phrase mean? Why did the phrase become one that Takeshita repeated often in his letters to families in Oregon?
- 

This guide was prepared by Kathleen Odean, a school librarian for more than fifteen years who now gives professional development workshops for educators about new books for children and teens. She chaired the 2002 Newbery Award Committee and served on earlier Caldecott and Newbery Award committees.



CANDLEWICK PRESS  
www.candlewick.com