



## The Sky We Shared

written by Shirley Reva Vernick

### About the Book

**Genre:** Upper Middle Grade & Young Adult Fiction

**Format:** Hardcover  
256 pages, 5-1/2 x 8-1/4

**ISBN:** 9781947627529

**Reading Level:** Grades 6–11

**Interest Level:** Grades 6–11

**Guided Reading Level:** Z+

**Accelerated Reader® Level/Points:**  
N/A

**Lexile™ Measure:** N/A

\*Reading level based on the ATOS Readability Formula

**Themes:** Asian/Asian American Interest, Coping with Death, Cultural Diversity, Discrimination, Empathy/Compassion, Families, Fiction, History, Neighbors, Realistic Fiction, Respect/Citizenship, Responsibility, Similarities and Differences, Teen Interest, Tolerance/Acceptance, United States History, War, World War II, YA interest

**Resources on the web:**

[leeandlow.com/books/the-sky-we-shared](http://leeandlow.com/books/the-sky-we-shared)

All guided reading level placements may vary and are subject to revision. Teachers may adjust the assigned levels in accordance with their own evaluations.

### SYNOPSIS

In southern Japan, Tamiko spends her time writing in her diary, dreaming of making theatrical costumes, and praying her brother Kyo makes it back from the war. She wishes she could be brave like him and help the war effort.

In rural Oregon, Nellie spends her time lying in the grass, studying the stars, and wishing for her pa to return from the war and that the boy next-door neighbor, Joey, would talk to her again like he used to. Soon the girls' lives become inextricably linked.

Tamiko and her classmates are brought to a damp, repurposed theater to make large paper balloons to help the military.

No one knows what they are for.

Nellie and her classmates ration food, work in salvage drives, and support their community.

No one knows what's coming.

Based on Japan's Project Fu-Go during the last stretch of World War II, *The Sky We Shared* uses the alternating perspectives of Nellie and Tamiko to depict the shared tragedies of two countries at war.

## BACKGROUND

### “Exploring the History Within the Book” by Shirley Reva Vernick

#### Based on True Historical Events

*The Sky We Shared* is based on real events in the United States and Japan during World War II. Most of the novel's activity takes place in early 1945, a few months before the end of the largest and bloodiest war in global history. In Europe during this period, the Allies completed their victory in Europe, including the liberation of the Nazi concentration camps Auschwitz, Bergen-Belsen, Buchenwald, and Dachau. On April 30, Hitler died by suicide in his Berlin bunker, and, a few days later, Germany surrendered, ending the war in Europe. In the United States, meanwhile, more than 120,000 people of Japanese descent who'd been sequestered in internment camps since 1942 were returning home to rebuild their lives.

During this time, Japan fought on against the Allies, despite mounting losses of life and property. In a final attempt to reverse the tide of the war and avenge US air raids, the Japanese Imperial Forces launched a top-secret offensive in late 1944 and early 1945. That offensive, dubbed Project Fu-Go (“wind-ship weapons”) in Japan, is the inspiration for this novel, which tells the Fu-Go story through the eyes of the young people who were caught up in it.

#### Project Fu-Go

The Japanese military built and launched about 9,000 air bombs, or Fu-Go, between November 1944 and April 1945. Each Fu-Go consisted of a large handmade balloon, to which a firebomb was attached. The balloons were partially built by teenage girls, who were an available, nimble-fingered labor source. Seventy feet tall, thirty-three feet in diameter, and made of paper, the balloons were designed to travel above the Pacific Ocean on the high-altitude air current known as the jet stream and then release their payload when they reached the United States. The contraptions would burst into flames upon detonation and were intended to start forest fires, destroy buildings, and kill.

Each hydrogen-filled balloon had to carry 1,000 pounds of gear—including the bomb, ballast, and control devices—across the Pacific Ocean. Thanks to errors in the Japanese wind charts, which underestimated the average time required for the balloons to carry their heavy loads (sixty-five hours versus ninety-six hours), most of the balloons fell harmlessly into the sea before reaching the American mainland. Still, as many as a thousand balloons completed the 5,000-mile trip to the Americas. Most of these firebombs caused little or no damage, due in part to a wet 1944–45 winter that doused the flames. However, there was one fatal firebomb explosion, which took six lives in the small town of Bly, Oregon.

On May 5, 1945, the Bly pastor Archie Mitchell and his pregnant wife took five youngsters to nearby Gearhart Mountain for a picnic and fishing. While the reverend looked for a place to park his car, the others took a hike through the woods. There they discovered what looked like a large, deflated balloon. They didn't know a bomb was attached to it, so they ventured closer. As soon as they touched the contraption, the bomb exploded, instantly killing the five children and Mrs. Mitchell. In this way, the victims became the only World War II fatalities in the continental United States. They were twenty-six-year-old Elsie Mitchell; eleven-year-old Sherman Shoemaker; thirteen-year-olds

Edward Engen, Jay Gifford, and Joan Patzke; and fourteen-year-old Dick Patzke.

The US government knew about the firebombs before the Oregon catastrophe happened but had placed a gag order on the media to keep Japan from learning what, if any, effect their offensive was having. That was why the young picnickers weren't suspicious about the curious balloon they found in the woods. Thankfully, wartime rationing prevented Reverend Mitchell from using a bus for his outing, or else more children would have come along on that fateful day. The government lifted the press blackout in the wake of the Bly explosion.

### **Fu-Go's Aftermath**

While US officials learned about the firebombs as soon as they started to land, they didn't immediately know what country had sent them. To answer that question, the government had to turn to geologists. By examining the sand inside the balloons' ballast bags for minerals and organisms, the scientists were able to trace the contents to northeastern coastal Japan. Using that information, the American military located two of the three Japanese factories that were producing the hydrogen needed to fill the balloons. The US Air Force then destroyed the factories, putting an end to the balloon bomb program.

In 1950, a stone memorial was erected at the site of the Oregon explosion. Since then, a number of Japanese nationals have visited the site, either in person or in spirit, to offer their apologies to the community. For instance, in 1976, Sakyo Adachi, one of the Japanese scientists involved in the firebomb project, visited the memorial and laid a wreath on the monument. In 1987, a group of former Japanese schoolgirls who had been taken from their homes and forced to make the balloons sent personal letters of apology to the people of Bly. They also sent a thousand hand-folded paper cranes—the Japanese symbol of peace and healing—as well as six cherry trees. In 1991, Japanese schoolchildren at the Fukuga Elementary School sent another thousand paper cranes to their sister school in Bly.

To date, there have been 285 confirmed landings/sightings over the years, mostly on the western seaboard from Alaska to Mexico, but some as far inland as Texas, Wyoming, and Michigan. The latest discovery was in 2014, when a balloon bomb was found in British Columbia and detonated by the Royal Canadian Navy. No one knows if more bombs will be identified or whether they will still be live.

### **Names of the Characters**

To honor the memory of the Bly victims and the pastor, this book uses their real names, even though their conversations and some of their backstories have been fictionalized.

### “More WWII History” by Shirley Reva Vernick

#### Time Frame for *The Sky We Shared*

One might wonder why a story that takes place in the western United States during World War II doesn't have more about the Japanese American internment camps . . . or why a story that takes place in Japan during the war doesn't include the atomic bombing of Hiroshima and Nagasaki. The answer is that *The Sky We Shared* takes place in between these major chapters of the war. When *The Sky We Shared* opens, the internment camps are already closing, and the internees are beginning to return home. When *The Sky We Shared* closes, the Hiroshima and Nagasaki bombings are still three months away. Permit me, then, to include a brief note here on these two momentous subjects:

#### The Japanese Internment Camps

From 1942 to 1945, the US government forced people of Japanese descent to live in isolated camps. That was more than 120,000 Japanese Americans—more than half of them children—living behind barbed wire. There were a total of ten camps in California, Arizona, Wyoming, Colorado, Utah, and Arkansas.

Established in response to Pearl Harbor and the war, the Japanese internment camps are remembered as a grave violation of American civil rights. As one internee said, “There's not a more lonely feeling than to be banished by my own country. There's no place to go.”

#### The Atomic Bombs

To hasten the end of the war, President Harry Truman ordered the bombs to be dropped on the cities of Hiroshima and Nagasaki in August 1945. The incredible devastation did lead to Japan's unconditional surrender. Casualty figures are hard to estimate, but even a conservative estimate puts the death toll at well over 100,000—mostly civilians.

Do you think the United States was justified in dropping the bombs? In case you're wondering what other people think, a survey conducted by the Pew Research Center in 2015 showed that 56 percent of Americans at that time approved of Truman's decision, compared to 85 percent in a 1945 Gallup poll. The 2015 survey found that 14 percent of Japanese felt the bombing was justified.

#### WWII Propaganda

You probably noticed the slogans, posters, murals, and other war-related messages that the characters in both countries encountered. In fact, both the United States and Japan ran active propaganda campaigns to ramp up public support for the war effort. Governments and the media in each country worked to whip up patriotism, engender hate for the enemy, and encourage citizens to cooperate with conservation/rationing, war production, and other activities. Movies, radio programs, books, advertisements, even cartoons carried propaganda messages.

Sadly, many of those messages were racist in nature. The home nation was always portrayed as civilized and moral, while the enemy nation was depicted as subhuman or barbaric. It was often difficult for people to distinguish fact from fiction (or exaggeration) in these campaigns.

Some questions for readers to think about: Was there anything the characters in *The Sky We Shared*

could have done differently in response to the racist propaganda? How do you think you would have reacted in a similar situation? Can you identify any propaganda-like messages that you are exposed to in your own environment? How might you verify the “facts” in these messages?

### “Writing Cross-Culturally and Historically” by Shirley Reva Vernick

Readers may wonder about my process for determining how the characters in Japan would have lived—what information they would have received, and how they may have felt about various messages they heard or saw. Indeed, research was a large part of this project. For example, I studied firsthand accounts of the Japanese war experience, read books and articles (lots), and immersed myself in (translations of) the popular Japanese media of the day. During my historical and cultural research, I worked especially close with the following people:

#### **Mikio Tajima**

Mikio grew up in Japan during World War II. He was born in 1934 in Nishinomiya (outside of Osaka) and was raised there except for his evacuation to the Japanese countryside during the second half of the war. His mother died during a bombing raid. Mikio moved to the United States in 1953 to go to UCLA. From there, he went to Columbia University, where he earned a master's degree in international affairs. Mikio spent his whole career working for the United Nations, advancing his way up to Undersecretary General for Trade and Development.

#### **Michele and Tomohiro Fuji**

At the time she assisted my research, Michele was a graduate student in the East Asian Languages and Cultures Department at the University of Massachusetts-Amherst. She had been the Japanese editor for two years at Cheng & Tsui Co. in Boston, where she worked on the revised Adventures in Japanese high school textbook series. She now works in the Division of International Affairs at Kansai University in Osaka, Japan. Michele's husband, Tomohiro, was born and raised in Japan and graduated from Kansai University.

#### **Paula Long**

A school librarian, Paula lived in Japan as a high school student, a university student, and a working adult and parent. In reviewing my manuscript, she consulted with her former Japanese host parents, who were growing up in Japan in the 1940s.

## BEFORE READING

### Prereading Focus Questions

(Reading Standards, Craft & Structure, Strand 5 and Integration of Knowledge & Ideas, Strand 7)

(Speaking & Listening Standards, Comprehension & Collaboration, Strands 1 and 2)

Before introducing this book to students, you may wish to develop background knowledge and promote anticipation by posing questions such as the following:

- **Class Discussion:** Prejudice and discrimination are scary realities for people from a variety of backgrounds and orientations. Who would like to share an experience they (or their family) may have had and how you overcame this experience?
- What do you know about World War II (1939–1945)? What caused this global war? What have you been taught about this time period? What happened to Japanese Americans during World War II and immediately afterwards? Where did you learn about World War II (in school, at home, in the media, etc.)? Why did World War II end? What is the legacy of World War II and how does it impact your life in the present day?
- What strategies do you use when you're sad or upset? Some of the history and stories told in this book are difficult to read because they describe painful events. What can we do to take care of ourselves while reading or hearing things that are important to know but also sad or painful?
- What does it mean to be brave? Think about a time when you had to be brave. What did you do? How did you feel?
- What does it mean to be resilient? How do you demonstrate resilience even though something may be challenging? Why is it important to be resilient? Do you think it can be learned? How so? Who is someone from history that you consider to be resilient? Why?
- **Journaling exercise.** Ask students to write a journal entry about something significant that they have witnessed in their lifetime that they would want future generations to know about.
- What does it mean to stand up for what you believe is right? What are some instances in history where people stood up for what they believed in even though they encountered adversity and opposition?

You may want to have students journal their responses to these questions so that you can refer back to it throughout and after the reading of the book to further their thinking on the topic(s).

### Exploring the Book

(Reading Standards, Key Ideas & Details, Strand 1; Craft & Structure, Strand 5; and Integration of Knowledge & Ideas, Strand 7)

(Speaking & Listening Standards, Comprehension & Collaboration, Strands 1 and 2)

- Take students on a book walk and draw attention to the following parts of the book: front and back covers, title page, and dedications.
- What is the significance of the title, cover illustration, and dedication? What do you think you will be reading about?

- Read the book jacket—what will you be reading about? How does it match with the book cover?
- Encourage students to stop and jot in their reading notebooks during the read-aloud when they: learn new information, visualize, or see a powerful image, have an emotional reaction or an idea, have a question, or hear new words.
- Have students quickly write a feeling in their notebooks during reading. After reading, ask students why they wrote down that feeling and have them write a journal entry about it.

### Setting a Purpose for Reading

(Reading Standards, Key Ideas & Details, Strands 1–3)

Have students read to find out:

- how war impacts families and communities
- about the long-range effects of discrimination, as it relates to Japanese Americans
- the lives of Japanese schoolchildren during World War II
- what happened to the community of Bly, Oregon
- how history of the past manifests itself in contemporary times
- about the blurred lines that can exist between loyalty to a nation and empathizing with others
- why certain narratives are omitted from traditional school texts and the impact of these omissions

Encourage students to consider why the author, Shirley Reva Vernick, would want to share this story with young people.

## VOCABULARY

(Reading Standards, Craft & Structure, Strand 4)

(Language Standards, Vocabulary Acquisition & Use, Strands 4–6)

(Speaking & Listening Standards, Comprehension & Collaboration, Strands 1 and 2)

The story contains several content-specific and academic words and phrases that may be unfamiliar to students. Based on students' prior knowledge, review some or all of the vocabulary below.

Encourage a variety of strategies to support students' vocabulary acquisition: look up and record word definitions from a dictionary, write the meaning of the word or phrase in their own words, draw a picture of the meaning of the word, create a specific action for each word, list synonyms and antonyms, and write a meaningful sentence that demonstrates the definition of the word.

Many words can be found in the glossary at the end of the book, but there are also some that are not included. Students could be encouraged to create a log of these words—they will not be listed here.

### Content Specific

gibbous moon, sapling, Amaterasu, urn, foxhole, grisly, obasan, okaasan, otoosan, spigot, douses, kumquat, tranquil, daruma doll, haiku, kami, rucksack, kamidana, tawny, ballast, maneki-neko cat, steeple, sake, comrades, cypress, samurai, tamagoyaki, Bruma, careening, internment camps, nimble, aviary, calligraphy, tourniquet, toiling, tatami mat, tsutsumi drum, waning, infamy, tuberculosis, gorge, persimmons, lectern, hymn, pallbearer, shrapnel, cicadas

\*For specific words and their definitions, refer to the Glossary in the back of the book.

### Academic

constellations, kindred, rationing, condolences, embroidering, typhoon, polio, atrocities, solemn, haggle, bartering, accomplice, sabotages, adorned, ration, salvage, arson, agile, ambition, wanderlust, origami, intricate, abundance, translucent, ravenous, reminisce, vengeful, loiter, dread, tormented, meager, morsel, calamity, prudent, mayhem, ponder, solemn



## AFTER READING

### Discussion Questions

After students have read the book, use these or similar questions to generate discussion, enhance comprehension, and develop appreciation for the content. Encourage students to refer to passages and/or illustrations in the book to support their responses. **To build skills in close reading of a text, students should cite textual evidence with their answers.**

### Literal Comprehension

(Reading Standards, Key Ideas & Details, Strands 1–3)

(Speaking & Listening Standards, Comprehension & Collaboration, Strands 1–3 and Presentation of Knowledge & Ideas, Strand 4)

1. Where and when do the first two chapters take place? Who are the two narrators? Compare and contrast.
2. Why is Nellie's dad not in Bly?
3. Who is Joey Copper and what happened to his brother?
4. How old is Tamiko and what are her interests?
5. What is an honorable death?
6. Why does Joey set fire to Mr. Kava's shed?
7. What role does Nellie's mother play in the story?
8. Who is Kyo? Why does he leave home?
9. What role do Ruby and Suki play in Nellie and Tamiko's lives, respectively?
10. What career does Nellie want when she grows up?
11. What feelings come up for Nellie during the air raid drill?
12. What will Tamiko be doing in Kure City and how does she feel about this role when she initially finds out?
13. How does Tamiko's aunt feel about Tamiko leaving?
14. What almost prevents Tamiko from going to Kure City and how is she able to find a solution?
15. What changes occur during Tamiko's experience working in Kure City? How does she feel after a month?
16. What is the significance of Adolf Hitler's death?
17. Why does Tamiko eat the potato glue?
18. What happens to Suki in Kure?
19. How do Tamiko and her comrades feel after finding out they are making bombs?
20. Who is hiding in Ruby's aviary and why?

21. Why does Tamiko bring Pāru home?
22. What tragedy befalls Nellie and her community during the picnic near Gearhart Mountain?
23. How does Suki feel about the balloon bombs?
24. Why do Nellie and Joey feel responsible for what happened near Gearhart Mountain?
25. Why is May 5, 1945, significant for both Nellie and Tamiko?
26. What does Nellie learn at the assembly after the bombing?
27. What is a “gag order” and why was it used in regard to the balloon bombs?
28. What happens to Suki and her family at the end of the story?
29. Why does Tamiko vow to make ten thousand paper cranes?
30. Why do the people of Bly throw rocks? At whom? How does Nellie and her best friend intervene?
31. Where do Tamiko and Kyo meet at the end of the story and why do they meet there?
32. Why does Kyo feel as though he failed?
33. What brings Tamiko peace?
34. Where is Joey going at the end of the book and how does Nellie feel about it?
35. Why does Nellie revisit Leonard creek?

### Extension/Higher Level Thinking

(Reading Standards, Key Ideas & Details, Strands 2 and 3 and Craft & Structure, Strands 4 and 6)

(Speaking & Listening Standards, Comprehension & Collaboration, Strands 1–3 and Presentation of Knowledge & Ideas, Strand 4)

1. What does the title *The Sky We Shared* mean to you after reading the book? Why do you think the author chose this particular title?
2. Throughout the book Tamiko writes letters to process the events that she sees and experiences. What role can letter writing/journaling/etc. play in helping process traumatic events and situations? How has writing been used as a tool throughout history?
3. Describe the relationship between Nellie and her dad. How would the story change if Nellie's dad came back from the war?
4. How does Nellie's relationship with Joey change over the course of the book?
5. What role do ancestors play in Tamiko's life?
6. What is the role food scarcity plays in the story? In what ways do Nellie and Tamiko experience rationing differently? What accounts for these differences?
7. What role do girls and women play during the war, when most of the boys and men are sent off to fight?
8. How does Tamiko's polio impact her during the story? Cite evidence from the text to support your answer.

9. How do Tamiko's feelings regarding the balloons she made change over the course of the story?
10. How do Tamiko and Nellie's lives intersect? How do bombings impact both characters?
11. Survivor's guilt refers to a particular kind of guilt that develops in people who have survived a life-threatening situation. It can manifest in many different ways. Some survivors feel guilty that they survived when others died. Other survivors feel that they could have done more to save the lives of others. Sometimes people feel guilty that another person died saving them. How does survivor's guilt show up in the story? Cite evidence from the text to support your answer.
12. What does Nellie mean on page 189 when she says, "The war in Europe is over, and we're all overjoyed. We just can't feel it."?
13. Return to the book cover. What does the illustration mean to you after reading the book?
14. What is the significance of paper cranes in the story?
15. Analyze the structure in which the author, Shirley Reva Vernick, writes the book. What literary devices are used? How does she use the passing of time? How do these choices impact the reading experience?
16. How do Nellie, Tamiko, Joey, and Pastor Mitchell handle their grief? Do they handle it differently or similarly? What are the different ways grief shows up in the text?
17. What do you learn about war from this book?

### Reader's Response

(Writing Standards, Text Types & Purposes, Strands 1–3 and Production & Distribution of Writing, Strands 4–6)

Use the following questions and writing activities to help students practice active reading and personalize their responses to the book. **Suggest that students respond in reader's response journals, essays, or oral discussion.** You may also want to set aside time for students to share and discuss their written work.

1. What is one big thought that you have after reading this book? Think about how Nellie and Tamiko navigate and experience the circumstances of war as well as their trauma and grief throughout *The Sky We Shared*. How do they process trauma and change during the story?
2. What do you think the author's message to the reader is? Think about Shirley Reva Vernick's historical framework at the end of the book and her note on writing cross-culturally and historically. What do you think she wanted to tell young readers through this book?
3. Have students make a text-to-self connection. What do Nellie and Tamiko's experiences, thoughts, and feelings mean to you? Did reading *The Sky We Shared* make you think differently about war? How so?
4. Have students make a text-to-text connection. Did you think of any other books while you read *The Sky We Shared*? Why did you make those connections?
5. Have students make a text-to-current events connection. What kind of connections did you make between this book and what you have seen in current news events, including online, on

television, or in a newspaper? Why did this book make you think of that?

6. Have students make a text-to-world connection. What is the value in considering historical events from different perspectives?
7. Have students write a book review after reading *The Sky We Shared*. Consult ReadWriteThink's lesson plan on how to teach students how to write book reviews (<https://www.readwritethink.org/classroom-resources/printouts/book-review-template>). Students can also refer to other book reviews for references. What did they enjoy about *The Sky We Shared*? What would they tell a friend or another person who wants to read the book? Students can share their book reviews with small groups or the whole class.
8. If you could interview the author, Shirley Reva Vernick, what questions would you ask her? Why?

### ELL Teaching Activities

(Speaking & Listening Standards, Comprehension & Collaboration, Strands 1–3 and Presentation of Knowledge & Ideas, Strands 4–6)  
(Language Standards, Vocabulary Acquisition & Use, Strands 4–6)

These strategies might be helpful to use with students who are English Language Learners.

1. Assign ELL students to partner-read the story with strong English readers/speakers. Students can alternate reading between pages, repeat passages after one another, or listen to the more fluent reader.
2. Have each student write three questions about the story. Then let students pair up and discuss the answers to the questions.
3. Have students give a short talk about one of the characters in the book. Have them discuss what characteristics they admire about the person they chose.
4. Have students illustrate or discuss a loss and/or major challenge they have experienced and had to deal with.
5. Depending on students' level of English proficiency, after the first reading:
  - Review several chapters and have students summarize what happened, first orally, and then in writing.
  - Have students work in pairs to retell either the plot of the story or key details. Then ask students to write a short summary, or opinion about what they have read.
6. Have students give a short talk about what they learned about World War II through reading *The Sky We Shared*. What is something new they learned about World War II after reading the book?
7. The book contains several content-specific and academic words that may be unfamiliar to students. Based on students' prior knowledge, review some or all the vocabulary. Expose English Language Learners to multiple vocabulary strategies. Have students make predictions about word meanings, look up and record word definitions from a dictionary, write the meaning of the word or phrase in their own words, draw a picture of the meaning of the word, list synonyms and antonyms, create an action for each word, and write a meaningful sentence that demonstrates the definition of the word.

### Social and Emotional Learning

(Reading Standards, Key Ideas & Details, Strands 1-3 and Craft & Structure, Strands 4-6)

(Speaking & Listening Standards, Comprehension & Collaboration, Strands 1-3 and Presentation of Knowledge & Ideas, Strand 4)

(Writing Standards, Text Types & Purposes, Strands 1-2 and Production & Distribution of Writing, Strands 4-6)

(Language Standards, Vocabulary Acquisition & Use, Strands 6)

Social and emotional learning involves being aware of and regulating emotions for healthy development. In addition to understanding one's own feelings, strong socio-emotional development allows individuals to develop empathy for others and to establish and maintain relationships.

Use the following prompts to help students study the socio-emotional aspects of this book.

1. Nellie and Tamiko experienced a wide range of emotions throughout the story, especially when they each gained more perspective on the war. What kinds of emotions do they express over time as they gain more information? How do they turn their emotions into action?
2. This book covers an important part of world history. Part of that history includes racial violence, traumatic events, and grave injustice. What are the different ways that the characters in the book took care of themselves when confronted with traumatic events? How did they support each other? How do you take care of yourself when faced with traumatic situations or difficult truths?
3. Loss is a theme in this story. Have you ever dealt with a loss of someone you love? Why do some people become angry during times of sadness or trauma? What are some other grieving processes people usually go through when dealing with the loss of someone they love?
4. How do the desolate and poor living conditions during the war impact Tamiko and Nellie? How does the constant need to survive affect them mentally and physically?
5. What is the author's message about war's human cost? What do you think Shirley Reva Vernick wanted to impart to the reader about the impacts of World War II?
6. Why is it important to have empathy for those we don't know, who may live across the planet or down the street? Discuss how empathy is beneficial to social and emotional wellbeing.
7. What is your relationship to your country? How does your relationship to your country inform your sense of self and the choices you make?
8. Encourage students to identify passages where characters manage and resolve interpersonal conflicts in constructive ways. In a chart with five columns, write: What was the cause of the conflict? What was the consequence of the conflict? How does the character(s) resolve the problem? What are additional ways the character(s) could have solved the problem? What advice would you give?

## INTERDISCIPLINARY ACTIVITIES

(Introduction to the Standards, page 7: Students who are college and career ready must be able to build strong content knowledge, value evidence, and use technology and digital media strategically and capably)

Use some of the following activities to help students integrate their reading experiences with other curriculum areas. These can also be used for extension activities, for advanced readers, and for building a home-school connection.

### English/Language Arts

(Reading Standards, Key Ideas and Details, Strands 1–3, Craft and Structure, Strands 4–6, Integration of Knowledge & Ideas, Strands 7–9, Range of Reading of Text Complexity, Strand 10)

(Writing Standards, Text Types & Purposes, Strands 1–3, Production & Distribution of Writing, Strands 4 and 6, Research to Build & Present Knowledge, Strands 7–9, Range of Writing, Strand 10)

(Speaking and Listening Standards, Comprehension and Collaboration, Strands 1–3, Presentation of Knowledge and Ideas, Strands 4–6)

- **Examine the different literary elements used throughout *The Sky We Shared*.** Have students come up with a list and select portions of the text that showcase a specific literary device (i.e. foreshadowing, flashback, metaphor, etc.). Afterward, students can select one literary device and write about how that was impactful when reading *The Sky We Shared*. How do literary devices make the story engaging, and how do they contribute to the story overall? See PBS's Literary Elements and Techniques video for more information about how to teach about literary devices (<https://ny.pbslearningmedia.org/resource/litel18-fig/literary-elements-and-techniques-figurative-language/>).
- **Prepare a defensive essay that explains your views on which character changed the most throughout the course of the novel.** Defend your views by citing specific examples.
- **Select a scene in which you disagreed with how a character handled a situation, person, or event.** In the voice of that character, rewrite the scene as you think it should have happened.
- **Compare Tamiko and Nellie as characters.** How are they similar? How are they different? What are their perspectives on the war? Despite the geographic distance between Tamiko and Nellie, how are their experiences similar? Why do you think the author chose to include the perspectives from both Nellie and Tamiko in *The Sky We Shared*?
- **Assign students different characters from *The Sky We Shared* and have them brainstorm about a guiding question: What and how can this character teach us?** Students can think about different characters to examine as a whole class and then break into smaller, specific character groups. Encourage students to think about how characters have made mistakes and have done good things in the book, and ultimately what they learned from that character. Have students share their findings: How is this character important to the book, and what lessons did they teach us over the course of the story? How did their actions develop the narrative, and why are they crucial to understanding the meaning of the book?
- **What other pivotal era in world history can this novel be likened to?** Present your findings in a mock television news report.

- **How do Tamiko and Nellie support the war effort?** Compare the ways that Tamiko and Nellie get involved with the war effort, and what drives them to help. Why do you think it was important to include both Tamiko's and Nellie's motivations in supporting the war efforts? What do they learn about the war when they begin to help with the war effort?
- **Why do you think *The Sky We Shared* is different from other historical fiction novels about World War II?** Why do you think Shirley Reva Vernick wanted to write about civilians experiencing the devastation of enemy weapons? What did you learn from World War II after *The Sky We Shared*? How does it make you think about historical events that are traditionally taught, and the facts that are often omitted?
- **What do Tamiko and Nellie both come to understand at the conclusion of the book?** How does their realization demonstrate their characters' journeys? Write an essay detailing their character's development over the course of the novel.
- **What is the role of "enemy" in *The Sky We Shared*? What is an "enemy" to Tamiko? To Nellie?** How does the concept of "enemy" evolve? Have students prepare graphic organizers detailing the concept of "enemy," and write a descriptive essay about their findings.

### Social Studies/Geography

(Reading Standards, Key Ideas and Details, Strands 1–3, Craft and Structure, Strands 4–6, Integration of Knowledge & Ideas, Strands 7–9, Range of Reading of Text Complexity, Strand 10)

(Writing Standards, Text Types & Purposes, Strands 1–3, Production & Distribution of Writing, Strands 4 and 6, Research to Build & Present Knowledge, Strands 7–9, and Range of Writing, Strand 10)

(Speaking and Listening Standards, Comprehension and Collaboration, Strands 1–3, Presentation of Knowledge and Ideas, Strands 4–6)

- **Conduct a research study on the history of World War II.** Refer to the Background section of this guide for additional context. Guiding questions to ask include: What was World War II? When caused it? What were some major legislative accomplishments during this time period? What are some of the major differences between World War I and World War II? What were some of the tactics used during this war? Who were the Allied Powers and the Axis Powers? How did World War II end? Encourage students to find primary sources to supplement their research.
- **Conduct a research study on the oppression of Japanese Americans by the United States government.** Refer to the Background section of this guide for additional context and consult the PBS Learning Media's "Children of the Camps" (<https://www.pbs.org/childofcamp/>). Afterward, have students reflect on what they learned and display the resources and information they collected in a visual presentation.
- **Have students create a timeline of the historical events mentioned in the book.** As a class you can go through the book and make a list of all the historical events, people, legislation that is mentioned in the book (and/or consult the vocabulary section of this teacher's guide and/or the end of the book). Then, split students into small groups and assign groups vocabulary words and events to research. Pass out sentence strips or large notecards to each group and task them with writing a summary of their person, place, or historical event. Have students locate and print off a primary source to attach to their vocabulary note card. Then, assemble a large timeline in the classroom. This activity can be completed while reading the book. That way, you can continue to come back to the timeline to remember the historical

events and place them in relation to other events. Alternatively, have students make a timeline of the events in the novel or events that led to World War II.

- **Have students identify themes in *The Sky We Shared* and connect them to present-day issues.** Provide students with a graphic organizer that has “Themes in *The Sky We Shared*” in the left-hand column and “Present-day Issue” in the right-hand column. Explain to students that they need to list themes from *The Sky We Shared* and present-day issues that relate to that theme. Once the graphic organizer is complete, have students select one theme and one present-day issue and write an essay explaining the connection between the two in more detail. Why did they pick this theme to focus on, and what are the implications in our society today? Consider modeling the theme of “gender” in *The Sky We Shared* and connecting it to the inclusion of cisgender women and transgender individuals in the military. Brainstorm with students how and why these two themes connect, and then have students write an essay about a different theme from their organizer.
- **Compare the messaging of WWII by governments and communities to how we take in information about our “enemies” online and act upon it.** What did government messaging look like? For example, people were willing to throw rocks at the Japanese Americans on the bus, and how their opinion of those Japanese Americans people was built on what people were saying about them and not the reality of who they were as people. Discuss students’ findings.
- **Have students research the rationing and food shortages that are mentioned in *The Sky We Shared*.** Students can refer to Oregon’s state website (<https://sos.oregon.gov/archives/exhibits/ww2/Pages/services-rationing.aspx#:~:text=Even%20though%20thousands%20of%20items,includin%20fresh%20fruit%20and%20vegetables>) and the national World War II Museum website (<https://www.nationalww2museum.org/war/articles/american-strategic-options-against-japan-1945>).
- **Have students research World War II propaganda.** Students can start with the National archives at <https://www.archives.gov/exhibits/powers-of-persuasion>. Can you identify any propaganda-like messages that you are exposed to in your own environment? How might you verify the “facts” in these messages?

### Arts/Performing Arts

(Reading Standards, Key Ideas and Details, Strands 1–3, Craft and Structure, Strands 4–6, Integration of Knowledge & Ideas, Strands 7–9, Range of Reading of Text Complexity, Strand 10)

(Writing Standards, Text Types & Purposes, Strands 1–3, Production & Distribution of Writing, Strands 4 and 6, Research to Build & Present Knowledge, Strands 7–9, and Range of Writing, Strand 10)

(Speaking and Listening Standards, Comprehension and Collaboration, Strands 1–3, Presentation of Knowledge and Ideas, Strands 4–6)

- **Analyze the cover art for *The Sky We Shared*.** Have students think about the different symbols that are present on the cover and create a graphic organizer with columns according to each of the symbols (i.e. the balloons, the girls, the trees, etc.). Underneath each symbol, have students explain what they think it means and why it’s important to the story.
- **Have students draw their own cover image for the book *The Sky We Shared*.** What kind of materials do they want to use for the cover? Encourage students to think about what happened in this book, and how that reflects the artwork for the cover. How can they use the



current cover to inspire their work?

- **Cut thin colored paper into squares or purchase origami paper.** Have students follow directions or your modeling to create a piece of origami. Find student-friendly directions at <https://www.activityvillage.co.uk/origami>.

### School-Home Connection

(Reading Standards, Integration of Knowledge and Ideas, Strands 7 and 9)

(Writing Standards, Text Types & Purposes, Strands 1-3, Production & Distribution of Writing, Strand 4, and Research to Build & Present Knowledge, Strands 7-9, Range of Writing, Strand 10)

(Speaking and Listening Standards, Comprehension and Collaboration, Strands 1-3, Presentation of Knowledge and Ideas, Strands 4-6)

- **Have students interview a family member about a war they lived through.** Have students ask family members how they felt about the war and what impact it had on their lives.
- **Encourage students to share what they learned from reading *The Sky We Shared* with their families.** What was it like to read a book that told two perspectives of World War II? Have students start a discussion with their families about what it was like to read about the horrors and atrocities that people faced during that time period.
- **Explore the World War II memorial on** <https://www.nps.gov/wwii/index.htm> and <https://www.nps.gov/places/japanese-american-memorial-to-patriotism-during-world-war-ii.htm>.



## Ordering Information

### 🌐 General Order Information:

[leeandlow.com/contact/ordering](https://leeandlow.com/contact/ordering)

### 🔒 Secure Online Ordering:

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☎ **By Phone:** 212-779-4400 ext. 25

📠 **By Fax:** 212-683-1894

### ✉ **By Mail:**

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New York, NY 10016

## ABOUT THE AUTHOR

**Shirley Reva Vernick** is an award-winning author and journalist. Her previous works include *The Blood Lie*, *Remember Dippy*, and *The Black Butterfly*. Her interviews and feature articles have appeared in numerous magazines, national newspapers, and university publications. She also runs a popular storytelling website, [storybee.org](https://storybee.org), which is used in schools, libraries, hospitals, and homes all over the world. Shirley graduated from Cornell University and is an alumna of the Radcliffe Writing Seminars. She lives in Amherst, Massachusetts.

## REVIEWS

"Vernick's (*The Black Butterfly*) well-researched novel centers two 14-year-old girls—one in America, one in Japan—as they grapple with survival during WWII's final months... Inspired by true events and told in alternating first-person perspectives that cover different periods in each girl's life before converging at its affecting climax, Vernick's moving prose renders both voices with empathy." —*Publishers Weekly*, **starred review**

"Vernick's absorbing historical WWII novel alternates between the perspectives of two teenage girls: Nellie Doud in Oregon and Tamiko Nakaoka in Japan." —*The Horn Book*, **starred review**

"Ultimately the larger topic is one that is highly relevant to today's world, showing that people can be taught different truths based upon the beliefs of their leaders. This book could easily be used as a companion to lessons about World War II in the classroom as it also includes a collection of historical notes and a glossary." —*School Library Connection*

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