Sadako and the Thousand Paper Cranes

INTRODUCTION

BRIEF BIOGRAPHY OF ELEANOR COERR

Born in Saskatchewan, Canada, Eleanor Coerr attended the University of Saskatchewan but ultimately received her bachelor's degree from American University in Washington, D.C., and then went on to earn a master's degree in library science from the University of Maryland. She remained in America, teaching literature and writing at universities in California, and also working as a reporter and newspaper columnist. She was married to an American ambassador, and often travelled with him during his diplomatic trips to countries all over the world—including Japan. Coerr traveled to Japan for the first time in 1949 and found the country devastated by the violence of the Second World War. In the mid-1960s, on one of her trips to the Japanese archipelago, Coerr became compelled by the story of Sadako Sasaki and began writing her story. Over the course of her nearly five-decade career, Coerr wrote books for children such as *Jane Goodall*, *Sam the Minuteman*, and *Meiko and the Fifth Treasure*. She passed away in New York City in 2010, leaving behind a legacy of education and empathy and a collection of work that reflected her deep interest in the lives of remarkable girls and women all around the world.

HISTORICAL CONTEXT

Sadako Sasaki was a real girl whose life—and death—made her a martyr and a heroine in the eyes of many in Japan and all over the world. Her death from leukemia at just eleven years old opened people's eyes to the effects of nuclear warfare and became a rallying cry for peace, nonviolence, and an end to nuclear programs the world over. When the United States dropped two atomic bombs over Japan in an attempt to end World War II—Little Boy over Hiroshima and Fat Man over Nagasaki—an unimaginable loss of life took place. The first instance of a nuclear attack shocked the world, and as the scientists who had developed the bombs witnessed what they had wrought, they began to understand the consequences of what they had created. "I am become Death, the destroyer of worlds," one scientists behind the Manhattan Project—the government program tasked with developing nuclear weapons during the war—famously proclaimed about the bombs he had helped to create. The bombs ushered in a new chapter in warfare: large-scale destruction, annihilation of not just human life but plants, animals, and infrastructure as well, and residual fallout and radiation which would ripple through the sites of the bombings for years and years to come. *Sadako and the Thousand Paper Cranes*, a rallying cry for peace, demonstrates the devastating aftereffects, both practical and logistical, of nuclear war. Sadako's family and friends are emotionally tormented by the losses they have suffered, and as the psychological effects of the bombings extend through their communities, the physical effects too continue to ravage the residents of Hiroshima—Sadako, who was just a baby at the time of the bombing, is nine years later a casualty of destructive and unforgiving nuclear warfare.

RELATED LITERARY WORKS

Sadako Sasaki's short and tragic life—and the message of hope and pacifism her untimely death inspired—have been the subject of many works of fiction and nonfiction. Aside from Eleanor Coerr's original account, aimed at young children, there is a picture book called *Sadako*, a reinvention of Coerr's novel which incorporates images by Caldecott medalist Ed Young, and a forthcoming biography of Sadako composed by Masahiro Sasaki, her older brother. The book will be published in 2018, and is tentatively titled *The True Story of Sadako Sasaki*. Other books inspired by the Hiroshima bombing and also aimed at children as a means of spreading messages of pacifism and nonviolence include *My Hiroshima* by Junko Morimoto and *Hiroshima No Pika* by Toshi Maruki. John Hersey's book, *Hiroshima*, documents the aftermath of the bombing of Hiroshima, but is in no way aimed at children.

KEY FACTS

- **Full Title:** *Sadako and the Thousand Paper Cranes*
- **When Written:** 1960s and 1970s
- **Where Written:** Japan; California, USA
- **When Published:** 1977
- **Literary Period:** Contemporary
- **Genre:** Fiction; children's literature
- **Setting:** Hiroshima, Japan
- **Climax:** Having folded over six hundred origami paper cranes in an attempt to reach one thousand as a means of making a wish to restore her health, eleven-year old Sadako—a survivor of the Hiroshima bombing—succumbs to leukemia in her hospital bed, looking up at her cranes hanging from the ceiling as her family stands all around her.
- **Antagonist:** War; the atom bomb; leukemia
- **Point of View:** Third-person

EXTRA CREDIT

A Goal Completed. Though the novel claims that at the time of her death Sadako had only completed roughly 640 cranes, in real life, Sadako folded well over one thousand paper cranes

while hospitalized and receiving treatment for leukemia. Her classmates did contribute additional cranes to her project, however, and very many were buried with her.

PLOT SUMMARY

Eleven-year-old Sadako Sasaki lives with her mother, father, and siblings in Hiroshima, Japan. Sadako is a born runner who dreams of joining her junior high school's racing team next year. She approaches everything in life with excitement and positivity, and is constantly on the lookout for "good luck signs" and other small auspicious details in the world around her. On Peace Day—an annual festival in remembrance of the victims of the atom bomb that was dropped on the city nine years before at the end of World War II—Sadako joins her family and her best friend Chizuko at the Peace Park to mourn the dead and celebrate the life that still goes on in Hiroshima. As Sadako moves through the festival, she eats and drinks and laughs with her friends, but also sees many people who bear horrible scars and disfigurations. At the end of the evening, Sadako and her family lower paper lanterns into the river to commemorate those they have lost, and Sadako heads home feeling that good luck is indeed all around her.

One fall day Sadako comes home with wonderful news—she has been picked to race on her class's relay race team, which will up her chances at making the junior high racing team the following year. As she trains for the race her friends and family support and encourage her, and on the big day, Sadako runs hard and wins big. As soon as the race is over, though, Sadako is struck by a dizzy spell, and can hardly even enjoy her great success. After the race, as winter approaches, Sadako trains hard every day, even though the dizzy spells still come on after a long run.

In February of the new year, after several weeks of good health, Sadako faints at school while running during recess. Her father takes her to the Red Cross Hospital, and after the doctor, Dr. Numata, performs a series of tests, it is determined that Sadako has leukemia—an effect of lingering radiation in the air after the bombing nine years ago. Sadako is admitted to the hospital, and though a kind woman named Nurse Yasunaga assures her everything will be okay, Sadako is overcome by fear and sadness.

Sadako's friend Chizuko comes to visit her in the hospital, and gives Sadako several pieces of colorful paper and a pair of scissors. She tells Sadako that, according to legend, if someone folds one thousand origami paper **cranes**, their wish will come true—if Sadako make the cranes, Chizuko says, she can be healthy once again. Chizuko folds a beautiful golden crane as an example, and soon Sadako starts making cranes of her own. That evening, when Sadako's older brother Masahiro comes to visit, he offers to hang the many cranes she has already folded from the ceiling for her.

Sadako's family, Chizuko, and even the doctors and nurses at the hospital begin saving paper for Sadako to use for her project. Masahiro hangs every single one, just as he promised he would, and over the next few months Sadako has good days and bad days as she receives treatment for her illness. Her flock grows to over three hundred. Sadako meets another patient—a boy named Kenji who also has leukemia. Though Kenji wasn't born when the atom bomb was dropped, his mother suffered from radiation poisoning and passed it onto him. Both of Kenji's parents are dead, and Kenji knows that he too will soon die. When Kenji at last passes, Sadako is very sad, but Nurse Yasunaga comforts her, explaining that Kenji is at last free from all his pain.

As the rainy season settles in, Sadako grows pale and listless and is unable to eat. Though her mother brings her some of her favorite foods in a special care package, Sadako's swollen gums prevent her from enjoying them. Sadako's mother hopes that when the sun comes back out, Sadako will be feeling better. Her family continues providing her with spare paper and even candy wrappers to make cranes out of, but as Sadako's weakness increases she has trouble making even a couple of cranes at a time, and is stalled at just over five hundred paper cranes.

By the end of July, however, Sadako begins feeling better, and Dr. Numata agrees to let her go home for a visit. During her week at home Sadako makes another hundred cranes, but the constant visits from friends and family drain her and leave her weak, and when Sadako at last returns to the hospital she is actually relieved to be back in her quiet, private room. Sadako receives more shots and transfusions than ever in her first days back, and begins to really fear the prospect of her own death. As the fall leaves turn to gold, Sadako's family comes to visit her. They bring her the gift of a beautiful hand-stitched traditional kimono robe, and though Sadako doesn't understand why her family would spend time and money making something she'll never get to wear, she accepts the gift graciously.

In the middle of October Sadako begins to lose track of the days. She can no longer fold even one paper crane, and she drifts in and out of consciousness. Her family comes to visit one last time, and she smiles warmly up at them—and her ceiling full of beautiful and free paper cranes—as she succumbs to her illness and passes away.

CHARACTERS

MAJOR CHARACTERS

Sadako – The novel's protagonist, Sadako Sasaki is a spirited and ambitious eleven-year-old girl with a passion for running free. Sadako was only a year old when the nuclear bomb was dropped on Hiroshima nine years previously (at the end of World War II), but swears she remembers the heat and light of

the blast as clearly as if it were yesterday. Sadako's enthusiasm for celebrating life is sometimes mistaken by her mother and father as disrespect for the past. She longs to join the racing team at her junior high school next year, though as she begins running small races against her friends at school, she finds herself growing dizzy and faint rather quickly. Sadako is soon brought to the hospital where she is diagnosed with leukemia, an effect of the radiation from the nuclear bomb that still lingers throughout Hiroshima. As Sadako struggles in the hospital, her friend Chizuko instructs her in the art of folding paper cranes, and Chizuko gives Sadako hope with by telling her the legend that anyone who folds one thousand cranes is granted their wish—Sadako's, of course, is to be healthy again and return home to her family. As Sadako's illness worsens, she is comforted by her family, her friends, and others in the hospital—a boy named Kenji, whose passing shows her the freedom death can offer for those who are truly ill, and her kind caretaker Nurse Yasunaga. Though Sadako eventually perishes, she comes to accept the freedom death represents, and her illness—the casualty of a tremendous act of violence—becomes a rallying call for her community as they finish folding one thousand paper cranes in the name of peace, unity, and kindness on Sadako's behalf.

Chizuko – Sadako's best friend from school. When Chizuko first visits Sadako in the hospital, she brings Sadako several pieces of colorful papers and a pair of scissors, and instructs Sadako in the art of making origami paper cranes. She tells Sadako that, according to legend, if a sick person folds one thousand paper cranes, he or she will become healthy again. The cranes Chizuko introduces into Sadako's life give her a goal and a purpose during her long stay in the hospital, and allow her to feel hope even in her darkest moments.

Kenji – A young boy who is staying at the Red Cross Hospital at the same time as Sadako. Kenji is also sick with leukemia though he was not even born when the atom bomb went off—he took the "poison" of the disease in from his mother as a baby. Kenji's death forces Sadako to think more and more about her own imminent death, but she also understands when Kenji dies that death can also mean freedom from pain and sickness.

MINOR CHARACTERS

Masahiro – Sadako's older brother. Supportive and loving, Masahiro helps Sadako to string every paper crane she makes from the ceiling of her hospital room.

Mitsue – Sadako's younger sister.

Eiji – Sadako's youngest brother, who is shy but eager to bring her gifts during her stay in the hospital.

Mrs. Sasaki – Sadako's mother. Watching her daughter suffer takes a great toll on her and brings her a great deal of grief. However, she remains supportive and loving until the very end, praying each and every day for her daughter's health to be restored.

Mr. Sasaki – Sadako's father.

Dr. Numata – Sadako's doctor at the Red Cross Hospital.

Nurse Yasunaga – A kind nurse at the Red Cross Hospital who offers Sadako support, hope, and wisdom as Sadako struggles with her illness. She also helps Sadako to understand that while death can be seen is something to be feared, it can also be seen as offering freedom from suffering.

THEMES

In LitCharts literature guides, each theme gets its own color-coded icon. These icons make it easy to track where the themes occur most prominently throughout the work. If you don't have a color printer, you can still use the icons to track themes in black and white.

PEACE AND PACIFISM

The story of Sadako Sasaki is many things—an ode to optimism, an exploration of what constitutes freedom, a meditation on family—but above all, perhaps, it is a plea for peace. Sadako contracts her illness as a result of radiation poisoning from the nuclear bomb dropped on her city, Hiroshima, when she was just a baby. Eleanor Coerr tells the story of Sadako's senseless death in order to underscore the importance of peace and nonviolence.

The general atmosphere in Hiroshima at the start of the novel is one of mourning and apprehension. Though Sadako herself is sunny, optimistic, full of hope for her dreams as a runner, a good friend, and a good student, her parents and the families who live around the Sasakis are haunted by their memories of the nuclear bomb and are still grieving the losses they suffered as a result of it. By describing such an environment, Coerr sets the stage for a narrative which encourages its readers to learn about pacifism. Moreover, she creates an opportunity to explain pacifism to readers by using a main character like Sadako—a member of the younger generation who is aware of the effects of the atom bomb but doesn't understand what truly happened to her town, her family, and her people.

As Sadako falls ill, it becomes evident that she is a vehicle for the novel's argument about the importance of pacifism and nonviolence. Sadako's illness and her eventual death are senseless tragedies—as the residual effect of a nuclear attack, an innocent girl with dreams and hopes for her future is struck down before her life has even really begun. Sadako's life, then, becomes a metaphor for the lingering physical and psychological scars that can rend a community—and the larger world around it—asunder in the wake of such violence and devastation. Coerr uses the tragedy of Sadako's death to demonstrate the horrors of war, and the ways in which violence

only begets more violence—physical, psychological, and emotional—as memories and physical traces of war echo through the years.

In the book's epilogue, Eleanor Coerr writes that the statue dedicated to Sadako in the Hiroshima Peace Park bears the inscription "This is our cry, this is our prayer: peace in the world." Sadako's story is a tragic one, but a hopeful one as well, as Sadako, in death, became a martyr—a cautionary symbol of the horrors of nuclear war and a rallying cause for peace, unity, and hope.

HISTORY, FAMILY, AND TRADITION

At eleven years old, Sadako Sasaki is the eldest girl in her family and the most outspoken of all her siblings. She struggles to balance her sunny and outgoing disposition with the historical burden her family carries from the losses it suffered in the nuclear bombing of 1945. Though Sadako does not mourn her parents' losses in the exact same way they do, she feels just as overwhelmed when she attempts to reckon with the violence and horror that have forever impacted their family and their country. As Sadako's illness slowly ravages her, she begins to understand the full weight of the history and the traditions that have made her family what it is—just as it is all about to slip away from her forever. In positioning Sadako's valuable lessons about family, history, and tradition at the end of her short life, Coerr argues that understanding and honoring one's personal, familial, and cultural history is a necessary part of fulfilling one's destiny.

At the start of the novel, as the Sasaki family prepares to attend the Peace Day memorial and festival on the ninth anniversary of the bombing of their city, Sadako is more concerned with running in the street, eating cotton candy, and spending time with her friends than she is with honoring the pain and suffering that have forever transformed the history and trajectory of her family, her city, and thus her own life. Though Sadako insists that she prays each day for her departed family members and her ancestors, she is still learning much about where she comes from. As Sadako grows ill, however, and begins to understand that her disease is a direct result of the nuclear bomb, her relationship to herself, her family, and her city's violent history begins to shift.

While in the hospital, Sadako's friend Chizuko brings her origami paper and scissors, and tells her the legend of the thousand-year-old crane who is said to grant the wish of anyone who folds one thousand **paper cranes** in its image. As Sadako devotes herself entirely to the task of folding one thousand cranes, she engages directly with a piece of Japanese cultural history which opens her eyes to the importance of learning about and honoring her culture's traditions, myths, and history. Sadako informs others of the legend, and her friends, family, nurses, and doctors all begin saving paper and helping Sadako to string her cranes from the ceiling of her hospital room. Thus, Sadako brings the people around her together, simultaneously reviving an older tradition. In this way, she demonstrates that she has become a full-fledged member of her community in the months just before her untimely death—after which she, too, will become a part of her city and her country's legends, history, and traditions.

In the last days of her life, Sadako's family presents her with a traditional kimono. Sadako knows that her death is near, and asks why her family would present her with such a lavish but ultimately useless gift—as she knows she will never have an occasion to wear it. Nevertheless, she allows her family to dress her in the traditional robe, thereby signaling that she has finally come to understand that it is the traditions and history shared between friends, families, and countrymen which make life so rich. As Sadako approaches her death, she does so as a conscious and even enthusiastic participant not only in her family's traditions, but in her people's history.

HOPE, STRENGTH, AND PERSEVERANCE

Sadako is just eleven when she is admitted to the Hiroshima Red Cross Hospital with leukemia. Frightened and alone for the first time in her life, Sadako begins her long stay in the hospital. As Sadako's condition worsens, her hope is challenged again and again. Though her physical strength wanes, her desire to meet her goal of folding one thousand **paper cranes** keeps her going and provides her friends and family with a tangible means of showing Sadako all the support they can as she wrestles with a very serious illness. Although Sadako's leukemia proves fatal, she inspires those around her to hope more radically, persevere in the face of adversity, and find strength in unexpected places. Through Sadako, Coerr suggests that while such demonstrations of hope, strength, and perseverance may not guarantee survival, they can have a profound impact on the lives of anyone who witnesses them.

Sadako's family members are her greatest supporters. When Sadako is healthy, they encourage her to chase her dreams of being a runner and urge her to push through the fear and nervousness she feels during her big races at school. When Sadako becomes ill, her mother sits by her bedside almost daily to offer her comfort, share stories, and bring her her favorite foods, while her brother Masahiro takes it upon himself to hang from the ceiling each and every paper crane Sadako folds. He does this until he has helped her to create a flock of beautiful birds which then become their own symbol of support, solidarity, and the rewards of perseverance. Sadako's goal of folding cranes in hopes of securing her own health ultimately brings light, hope, and comfort into the lives of her parents and her siblings, who are themselves struggling to persevere and keep faith in the face of their beloved Sadako's debilitating illness.

Nurse Yasunaga is a constant support to Sadako as she

struggles with the physical difficulties of her illness—including pain, disorientation, and countless tests, transfusions, and treatments meant to combat or slow the spread of Sadako's leukemia. Nurse Yasunaga remains positive in the face of pain and employs unconventional methods of support. She supports Sadako practically as well as emotionally, bringing her medicine packages to use as paper for more cranes and encouraging her to fight against her illness but not to let herself become embittered or paralyzed by her fear of death. Nurse Yasunaga, a woman with a difficult job, is herself reminded of the strength of the human spirit as she watches Sadako, day in and day out, fold cranes in the face of an often fatal disease.

Sadako's story, in real life, has inspired countless children and adults to invest in their hopes and to persevere in the face of insurmountable odds and unspeakable tragedy. Sadako's commitment to folding paper cranes is symbolic of the eternal human struggle to press on in the face of doubt, fear, illness, and the threat of pain or death, even when there is no guarantee of a reward. Sadako's perseverance speaks to the resilience of the human spirit and the triumph of hope and love over fear and isolation.

DEATH AS FREEDOM

When Sadako is first diagnosed with leukemia, illness is new to her. Though she knows that many people come down with the "atom bomb sickness," no one in her family has been touched by it, and although she was a baby during the bombing, the atomic explosion "hadn't even scratched her." Death is a frightening prospect for Sadako, as it is for anyone, but as her stay in the hospital goes on and her condition worsens, Sadako begins to see that freedom can take many forms. The schoolyard, the racing track, and the streets of her neighborhood always represented freedom to Sadako, but these wide open physical spaces no longer offer her the freedom she once knew. As Sadako prepares to die, she turns to her flock of **paper cranes**, and considers how free they seem. Sadako longs for a new kind of freedom—freedom from pain, from illness, and from the grief her sickness has brought into the lives of her friends and family. Eleanor Coerr, taking up a relatively solemn theme for a children's story, nonetheless argues through Sadako's story that death can offer freedom to those who truly suffer.

Kenji, another boy stricken with leukemia who is in the hospital at the same time as Sadako, is the character most representative of this theme. When Sadako meets Kenji, they share stories from their lives, and Sadako learns that Kenji is an orphan whose parents presumably (though it is never confirmed) perished due to the "atom bomb sickness" as well. Kenji, who is only nine, had not been born at the time the bomb was dropped, but was poisoned when his mother's radiation poisoning was passed on to him during her pregnancy. Kenji knows that he will soon die, and has no hope to live. Sadako attempts to get Kenji on board with her paper crane project, insisting that, if he completes a thousand, he too will be able to wish for his health back, but Kenji doesn't believe that the cranes will save him.

After Kenji's death, Sadako is devastated, but Nurse Yasunaga comforts her by assuring her—and perhaps illuminating for her for the first time ever—that Kenji has gone on to a better place and is now free from all the pain he endured. Sadako's only frame of reference for death are those people who died in the bombing or had their lives cut short by atom bomb sickness. Thus, death has only ever been presented as a great tragedy to her. Nurse Yasunaga helps her to understand for the first time that death can be a welcome reprieve at the end of a life full of pain, illness, and suffering.

As this is a book of children's literature, it may seem somewhat unusual that Coerr offers a vision of death as freedom, but introducing children to such an idea at a young age has the benefit of relieving them of some of the fear they might feel about the subject of death. Others' preoccupation with death—whether the deaths of the past or the impending deaths of characters like Sadako and Kenji—has consumed Sadako's childhood, arguably preventing her from ever experiencing true freedom. In her honest depiction of the tragic truth of Sadako's life, Coerr argues that, in light of Sadako's incurable disease, death offers her a type of freedom inaccessible to *everyone* in life: freedom from suffering.

SYMBOLS

Symbols appear in **teal text** throughout the Summary and Analysis sections of this LitChart.

PAPER CRANES

When Sadako enters the Red Cross Hospital with a diagnosis of leukemia—a result of exposure to lingering radiation from the atom bomb dropped on Hiroshima at the end of World War Two—she is devastated and frightened. Little brings her comfort during her long days of tests, shots, and transfusions, and even visits from her family only make her sadder and more afraid. One day, Sadako's best friend from school, Chizuko comes to visit her, and she brings with her several pieces of origami paper and a pair of scissors. Chizuko reminds Sadako of the legend of magical cranes which live for a thousand years, and tells Sadako that if she folds one thousand cranes, surely she will be restored to health and live a long, happy life. Chizuko folds a golden crane for Sadako and teaches her how to make her own, and soon Sadako—with the help of her family, nurses, and doctors—is well on her way to her goal of folding a thousand cranes.

The cranes are the central symbol of the novel and represent the book's themes and motifs of hope, perseverance, and the

acceptance of death. Though these things might seem in conflict with one another, the cranes serve as a symbol of how freedom can take many different forms. In the wake of the horrific attacks on Hiroshima and Nagasaki, many Japanese citizens died immediately, but many others also suffered residual effects of the radiation from the bombs—Sadako is a casualty of these residual effects, and winds up in the hospital with leukemia. The cranes, as she builds them, seem at first to offer the promise that Sadako will live—that if she can just make enough of them, she will be spared from death. As Sadako grows weaker, though, and the cranes become harder and harder to build, the act of folding even just one is a feat of great strength. The many cranes that surround Sadako's hospital beds symbolize all she has conquered during her illness, but also come to symbolize the freedom and peace that death offers from suffering. In addition, they more broadly symbolize a hope for a world that is free of such suffering. As Sadako dies, she looks up at her hundreds and hundreds of cranes and remarks on how free they seem—how empty of pain and how beautiful.

QUOTES

Note: all page numbers for the quotes below refer to the Puffin Books edition of *Sadako and the Thousand Paper Cranes* published in 2004.

Chapter 1 Quotes

❝ Sadako was born to be a runner. Her mother always said that Sadako had learned to run before she could walk. One morning in August 1954 Sadako ran outside into the street as soon as she was dressed. The morning sun of Japan touched brown highlights in her dark hair. There was not a speck of cloud in the blue sky. It was a good sign. Sadako was always on the lookout for good luck signs.

Related Characters: Sadako

Related Themes:

Page Number: 9-10

Explanation and Analysis

In the novel's opening lines, Eleanor Coerr establishes Sadako as a headstrong, ambitious, optimistic child who has always been eager to excel and impress. As Sadako greets what seems to be a special morning, she looks all around her for good luck signs—emphasizing that what she sees in the world are harbingers of happiness, peace, and success in the future. Sadako is always pitched full-tilt ahead, running into the future and believing that if something can go right, it will. As the atmosphere of Sadako's family and hometown become clearer, and begin to register as one of guilt, loss, worry, and pain as a result of the devastation from the atomic bomb dropped on Hiroshima, Sadako's happy-go-lucky nature and enthusiasm for the future will stand out in stark contrast to the things that everyone else around her believes. Sadako is both a beacon of hope and a reminder of all that has been lost in Hiroshima, and it is with this energy that the novel begins.

❝ Rushing like a whirlwind into the kitchen, Sadako cried, "Oh, Mother! I can hardly wait to go to the carnival. Can we please hurry with breakfast?"

Her mother was busily slicing pickled radishes to serve with the rice and soup. She looked sternly at Sadako. "You are eleven years old and should know better," she scolded. You must not call it a carnival. Every year on August sixth we remember those who died when the atom bomb was dropped on our city. It is a memorial day."

Related Characters: Mrs. Sasaki, Sadako (speaker)

Related Themes:

Page Number: 10-11

Explanation and Analysis

Sadako's excitement and optimism brush up against her mother's somber mourning in this passage, as Sadako is scolded for referring to the annual commemoration of the atom bombing as a "carnival." Even on a sad, reflective day, Sadako cannot be tamped down. She is excited to see her friends and neighbors and to "celebrate." Some of this is childhood naiveté, as Sadako was just a baby when the bombed was dropped and is still only eleven now. Her parents expect that she will be mature and thus respectful in a, but Sadako—ever the optimist—shows her respect for the losses her family and her town have suffered in a different way. Sadako wants to celebrate life and resilience—and also longs simply to run free and have fun with her friends.

Sadako bowed her head. She fidgeted and wriggled her bare toes while Mr. Sasaki spoke. He prayed that the spirits of their ancestors were happy and peaceful. He gave thanks for his barbershop [and] for his fine children. He prayed that his family would be protected from the atom bomb disease called leukemia. Many still died from the disease, even though the atom bomb had been dropped on Hiroshima nine years before. It had filled the air with radiation—a kind of poison—that stayed inside people for a long time.

Related Characters: Mr. Sasaki, Sadako (speaker)

Related Themes:

Page Number: 11-13

Explanation and Analysis

As the Sasaki family gathers at their prayer altar to give thanks and mourn the dead privately before joining the Peace Day "festivities," readers catch a glimpse of what life is really like now in Hiroshima in the years after the nuclear bombing.

Small things, once taken for granted, are now seen as enormous blessings, and the threat of illness and death has not gone away for even one day in over nine years. Though the threat of leukemia is a very real physical one, the leukemia brought on by lingering radiation poison also mirrors the emotional "poison" of trauma and loss that has settled into daily life in Hiroshima in the post-war years.

Chapter 2 Quotes

At the entrance to the Peace Park people filed through the memorial building in silence. On the walls were photographs of the dead and dying in a ruined city. The atom bomb—the Thunderbolt—had turned Hiroshima into a desert. Sadako didn't want to look at the frightening pictures. She held tight to Chizuko's hand and walked quickly through the building.

"I remember the Thunderbolt," Sadako whispered to her friend. "There was the flash of a million suns. Then the heat prickled my eyes like needles."

"How can you possibly remember anything?" Chizuko exclaimed. "You were only a baby then."

"Well, I do!" Sadako said stubbornly.

Related Characters: Chizuko, Sadako (speaker)

Related Themes:

Page Number: 16-18

Explanation and Analysis

As Sadako and Chizuko enter the Peace Day memorial building, the two girls are confronted with images of loss, suffering, death, and destruction from the nuclear bombing. Though they are just schoolgirls, these images, and the legacy of the "Thunderbolt," are very alive in their minds each and every day. This is perhaps why Sadako thinks she can remember the bombing—she has been told stories and seen images of that fateful day so many times that it has become real in her mind. As Sadako passes through the building, she turns away from those images when confronted with them directly—perhaps they are already burned into her mind, or perhaps looking at them up close is too distressing. In this moment, the book makes clear that the bombing is something that is both a part of Sadako and something she hopes to escape. That binary situation, of wanting to escape that which has been made inescapably a part of you, will only become more intense when Sadako is diagnosed with leukemia.

When the ceremonies were over, Sadako led the others straight to the old lady who sold cotton candy. It tasted even better than last year. The day passed too quickly, as it always did. The best part, Sadako thought, was looking at all the things to buy and smelling the good food. The worst part was seeing people with ugly whitish scars. The atom bomb had burned them so badly that they no longer looked human. If any of the bomb victims came near Sadako, she turned away quickly.

Related Characters: Sadako (speaker)

Related Themes:

Page Number: 18-20

Explanation and Analysis

Just as Sadako turned away from the images lining the halls of the Peace Day memorial building, she now turns away too from actual victims of the bombing, whose disfiguring burns and scars tell the story of their people's suffering more acutely and more viscerally than any picture or story ever could. Sadako wants to celebrate, have fun, and retain her sunny optimism—she does not want to look to closely at the damage that has been done to her city and the people around her, as an underlying fear threatens the happiness and optimism she has perhaps cultivated as a defense mechanism against the reality of her life and the lives of her friends and family. Sadako's innocence, then, is both enticing

but also involves a degree of willful ignorance.

Chapter 3 Quotes

It was the beginning of autumn when Sadako rushed home with the good news. She kicked off her shoes and threw open the door with a bang. "I'm home!" she called.

Her mother was fixing supper in the kitchen.

"The most wonderful thing has happened! Guess what!"

"Many wonderful things happen to you, Sadako. I can't even guess."

"The big race on Field Day!" Sadako said. "I've been chosen from the bamboo class to be on the relay team." She danced around the room, swinging her school bag. "Just think. If we win, I'll be sure to get on the team in junior high school next year." That was what Sadako wanted more than anything else.

Related Characters: Mrs. Sasaki, Sadako (speaker)

Related Themes:

Page Number: 21-22

Explanation and Analysis

Sadako's dreams of running are symbolic of her desire to help those around her move forward and away from the trauma and tragedy of the past. Sadako desires freedom—freedom from the pain that surrounds her on all sides, and freedom from the fear of being attacked again or becoming waylaid by the poisonous and omnipresent atom bomb sickness. Running is a means of feeling free for Sadako, and as she realizes she has the chance to really be a star runner at her school, it seems as if things are about to change for her—and her family—for the better, forever.

At the signal to start, Sadako forgot everything but the race. When it was her turn, she ran with all the strength she had. Sadako's heart was still thumping painfully against her ribs when the race was over. It was then that she first felt strange and dizzy. She scarcely heard someone cry, "Your team won!" The class surrounded Sadako, cheering and shouting. She shook her head a few times and the dizziness went away.

Related Characters: Sadako (speaker)

Related Themes:

Page Number: 24

Explanation and Analysis

Sadako competes in the relay race with her class at school in this passage. After her initial nerves, which are quelled by her loving parents, she runs the race with strength, vigor, and passion. Her team wins, and Sadako's running dreams seem as if they have finally come true. However, just as her team is celebrating all around her, she is waylaid by an unsettling dizziness which seems to portend a break in the happiness Sadako has been striving so hard for. Sadako shakes the dizziness away, but nevertheless something has intruded on her happiness and safety.

Given that the book has already revealed in its prologue that Sadako will contract and die from leukemia, the reader at this point experiences dramatic irony: the reader knows that Sadako does not. This sense of dramatic irony forces the reader to experience the nature of post-ware life in Hiroshima, as life both returns to normal and people have everyday dreams and experiences, and at the same time the lingering effects of the war remain like an inescapable fate.

Chapter 4 Quotes

By now the rest of Sadako's family was at the hospital. Her parents were in the doctor's office. Sadako could hear the murmur of their voices. Once her mother cried, "Leukemia! But that's impossible!" At the sound of that frightening word Sadako put her hands over her ears. She didn't want to hear anymore. Of course she didn't have leukemia. Why, the atom bomb hadn't even scratched her.

Related Characters: Mrs. Sasaki, Sadako (speaker)

Related Themes:

Page Number: 29-30

Explanation and Analysis

After suffering more and more dizzy spells over the course of several months, Sadako is finally admitted to the Hiroshima Red Cross Hospital after she falls down at school and is unable to stand back up. When the news that Sadako has fallen ill with leukemia arrives, she plugs her ears—just as she turned away from the pictures and the burn victims at the peace day festival. Sadako cannot tolerate bad news or gruesome images or thoughts, and as she tries to turn away from the reality of her situation, she wonders how the illness could have struck her when the bomb had not even "scratched" her. She is still attempting to deny the effects of the atom bomb attack not just on the lives of those around her but on her own life as well, even as it becomes apparent

that the atom bomb did indeed "scratch" her.

Chapter 5 Quotes

That afternoon Chizuko was Sadako's first visitor. She smiled mysteriously as she held something behind her back. "Shut your eyes," she said. While Sadako squinted her eyes shut, Chizuko put some pieces of paper and scissors on the bed. "Now you can look," she said.

"What is it?" Sadako asked.

Chizuko was pleased with herself. "I've figured out a way for you to get well," she said proudly. "Watch!" She cut a piece of gold paper into a large square. In a short time she had folded it over and over into a beautiful crane.

Sadako was puzzled. "How can that paper bird make me well?"

"Don't you remember that old story about the crane?" Chizuko asked. "It's supposed to live for a thousand years. If a sick person folds one thousand paper cranes, the gods will grant her wish and make her healthy again." She handed the crane to Sadako. "Here's your first one."

Sadako's eyes filled with tears. Sadako took the golden crane and made a wish. The funniest little feeling came over her when she touched the bird. It must be a good omen.

Related Characters: Chizuko, Sadako (speaker)

Related Themes:

Related Symbols:

Page Number: 34-36

Explanation and Analysis

In the hospital, Sadako is alone for the first time, and deeply frightened. She is saddened by the reality of her illness and afraid of what comes next. When her friend Chizuko visits, her company alone lifts Sadako's mood, but things really turn around when Chizuko introduces Sadako to the legend of the paper cranes.

Sadako, whose optimism and hope had begun to slip away, finds it restored by the promise of the idea that folding cranes could be her path back to health and her old life. Just touching the crane that Chizuko has made for Sadako with love fills Sadako with a strange happiness and lightness, and Sadako, always on the lookout for good luck signs, takes the introduction of the cranes as the greatest good luck sign or "omen" she's had in a very long time. Sadako, who has always believed in luck and her own capacity to achieve a good future, seizes again on that idea here as she begins to believe that she can actually defeat the leukemia that has afflicted her.

Chapter 6 Quotes

Everyone saved paper for Sadako's good luck cranes. Chizuko brought colored paper from class. Father saved every scrap from the barbershop. Even Nurse Yasunaga gave Sadako the wrappings from packages of medicine. And Masahiro hung every one of the birds, as he had promised.

Related Characters: Masahiro , Nurse Yasunaga, Mr. Sasaki, Chizuko, Sadako

Related Themes:

Related Symbols:

Page Number: 40-41

Explanation and Analysis

As Sadako's illness progresses, the cranes become the only thing keeping her positive and focused on recovery. The cranes have given Sadako a means of returning to the hope and optimism that defined her before her illness, and as she throws her heart and soul into the project of folding one thousand of them her family, friends, and caretakers find themselves pulled into the hope the cranes offer along with Sadako. Everyone helps Sadako as she strives to achieve her goal, and though the myth of the crane is just that—a myth—it bolsters everyone's hope and courage and gives Sadako's family and friends real, tangible belief in the idea that she could recover. This passage speaks directly to the power of tradition and perseverance.

Sadako was feeling especially tired one day when Nurse Yasunaga wheeled her out onto the porch for some sunshine. There Sadako saw Kenji for the first time. He was nine and small for his age.

"Hello!" she said. "I'm Sadako."

Kenji answered in a low, soft voice. Soon the two were talking like old friends Kenji had been in the hospital for a long time, but he had few visitors. His parents were dead and he had been living with an aunt in a nearby town.

"She's so old that she only comes to see me only once a week," Kenji said. "I read most of the time."

Sadako turned away at the sad look on Kenji's face.

"It doesn't really matter," he went on, "because I'll die soon. I have leukemia from the bomb."

"You can't have leukemia," Sadako said. "You weren't even born then."

"That isn't important," Kenji said. "The poison was in my mother's body and I got it from her."

Sadako wanted to comfort him, but she didn't know what to say. Then she remembered the cranes. "You can make paper cranes like I do," she said, "so that a miracle can happen."

"I know about the cranes, but it's too late. Even the gods can't help me now."

Related Characters: Kenji, Sadako (speaker), Nurse Yasunaga

Related Themes:

Related Symbols:

Page Number: 42-44

Explanation and Analysis

When Sadako meets Kenji, she is excited to have a friend around her age whom she can connect with. However, Kenji is morose and resigned, so beaten down by his illness that he almost seems to welcome death as a reprieve from the misery of his life. Sadako is taken aback both by the fact of Kenji's illness and his fatalist attitude about death, and wants to teach him how to fold paper cranes so that he can draw the same hope and strength from them that she does. Kenji, though, believes he is beyond the cranes' help—he does not want to fight back against his illness, and accepts the truth of the fact that he will soon succumb to leukemia and pass on.

Kenji operates as a kind of counterpoint to the way that Sadako sees the world. Where she is optimistic, he is pessimistic. Where she sees death as something to be defeated, he sees it as something that is inescapable. Sadako's way of seeing the world is both more inspiring and more attractive, and yet as the book progresses Sadako will have to grapple with the fact that Kenji's worldview also seems, in some ways, to be more realistic than her own.

One day Kenji didn't appear on the porch. Late that night Sadako heard the rumble of a bed being rolled down the hall. Nurse Yasunaga came in to tell her that Kenji had died. Sadako turned to the wall and let the tears come. After a while she felt the nurse's hand on her shoulder. When Sadako finally stopped sobbing, she looked out [the window] at the moonlit sky.

"Do you think Kenji is up there on a star island?"

"Wherever he is, I'm sure that he is happy now," the nurse said. "He has shed that tired, sick body and his spirit is free."

Related Characters: Nurse Yasunaga, Sadako (speaker), Kenji

Related Themes:

Page Number: 45

Explanation and Analysis

When the news of Kenji's death arrives, Sadako is deeply saddened. She mourns the loss of a new friend, she mourns Kenji's beaten-down spirit, and, underneath it all, she mourns the idea that Kenji's death has forced her to realize that her own death is a possibility as well—that maybe she won't be able to defeat death as her crane-building project has made her believe. That Sadako *continues* to make cranes even after this realization is part of what makes her perseverance so heroic.

Seeing Sadako's pain and sadness, the kind and generous Nurse Yasunaga comforts Sadako and attempts to free her from the fears that are surely starting to burn beneath the surface. But she does so not by saying that Sadako won't die. Rather, she explains that death can sometimes be a welcome friend rather than a thing to fear, and that for someone as sick as Kenji was, relief and deliverance are far better than clinging to a life of pain, suffering, loneliness, and misery just because it means staying alive. Kenji's death, then, causes Sadako to think about the meaning of death in a new way.

Chapter 7 Quotes

Mrs. Sasaki was worried Sadako didn't eat enough. One evening she brought a surprise wrapped in a bundle. It contained all of Sadako's favorite foods—an egg roll, chicken and rice, pickled plums, and bean cakes. Sadako propped herself up and tried to eat. But it was no use. Her swollen gums hurt so much that she couldn't chew. Finally, Sadako pushed the good things away. Her mother's eyes were bright as if she were going to cry.

"I'm such a turtle!" Sadako burst out. She was angry with herself for making her mother sad. She also knew that the Sasaki family had no extra money for expensive food. Tear stung Sadako's eyes and she quickly brushed them away.

Related Characters: Sadako (speaker), Mrs. Sasaki

Related Themes:

Page Number: 49

Explanation and Analysis

Attempting to lift Sadako's spirits and encourage her to invest in restoring her health through physical, practical means rather than just folding cranes and investing in abstract hope, Sadako's mother brings her a whole bundle of her favorite foods. Sadako is in too much pain, though, and her rejection of the food symbolizes her inability to return to the life she had before her illness.

Sadako is angry at herself, and sad that she is no longer able to please her mother, to nourish herself, or to recover who she was before she fell ill. Sadako knows she has reached a low point, but also knows there is nothing she can do—she is in too much pain. She does not want to become resigned and morose like Kenji, but she can't be the optimistic, enthusiastic girl she once was. It is important to realize that Sadako is not simply optimistic in a delusional kind of sense. As her leukemia progresses, she grows to be fully aware of its effects on her, and on her inability to fight it, and yet still she fights—still she brushes away the tears that come.

Masahiro dug into his pocket and pulled out a crumpled piece of silver paper. "Here," he said, giving it to [Sadako.] "Eiji said this is for another crane." Sadako sniffed the paper. "It smells like candy," she said. "I hope the gods like chocolate."

[Sadako, Masahiro, and their mother] burst out laughing. It was the first time Sadako had laughed in days. It was a good sign. Perhaps the golden crane's magic was beginning to work. She smoothed out the paper and folded a bird.

Five hundred and forty one…

But she was too tired to make more. Sadako stretched out on the bed and closed her eyes. As Mrs. Sasaki tiptoed out of the room, she whispered a poem she used to say when Sadako was little:
"O flock of heavenly cranes

Cover my child with your wings."

Related Characters: Mrs. Sasaki, Sadako, Masahiro (speaker), Eiji

Related Themes:

Related Symbols:

Page Number: 51

Explanation and Analysis

Sadako has been feeling terrible both physically and emotionally. As her illness makes her feel worse, those around her feel terrible, too, at having to witness her pain and the changes within the bright, beautiful girl they once knew. When Masahiro brings Sadako the chocolate wrapper to use as a crane—a contribution from her little brother Eiji—it lifts everyone's spirits. The cranes are still bringing Sadako's family and community together as they support her in her goals, though many days she is too weak to use the materials people bring her in service of her project.

As the tired, overwhelmed Sadako falls asleep after making Eiji's contribution into one of her cranes, her mother sings a poem—and a prayer—that the cranes Sadako's friends and family have come together and helped her to make will indeed "cover [her] with [their] wings" and heal her body, her spirit, and her heart. The meaning of the cranes has begun to both grow and become more abstract to many of the characters. For Sadako they were initially a source of hope for escape from her disease, but they become over time a symbol of freedom more generally, and freedom from suffering. The cranes seem to undergo a similar symbolic shift for her mother. When her mother spoke the poem before the leukemia struck, she meant it in terms of the crane wings offering protection from harm. But now that harm has come, the meaning changes so that the protection

is from suffering.

Chapter 8 Quotes

Near the end of July it was warm and sunny. Sadako seemed to be getting better. "I'm over halfway to one thousand cranes," she told Masahiro, "so something good is going to happen." And it did. Her appetite came back and much of the pain went away. Dr. Numata was pleased with her progress and told Sadako she could go home for a visit. That night Sadako was so excited she couldn't sleep. To keep the magic working she made more cranes.

Six hundred and twenty one.

Six hundred and twenty two…

Related Characters: Sadako (speaker), Dr. Numata

Related Themes:

Related Symbols:

Page Number: 52-53

Explanation and Analysis

As the summer wraps up, the origami cranes' power seems to finally be working. Sadako has achieved an important milestone and made it halfway to one thousand—always on the lookout for good luck signs, still, she sees this as an omen of good things to come. Whether it is a coincidence or not, her health begins to improve and her pain goes away, and so Sadako believes even more strongly in the cranes' healing effect. As she prepares to go home for a visit, she continues folding more and more of them furiously, as fast as she can, hoping to "keep the magic working" and hasten her recovery even more.

By the end of a week [at home] Sadako was pale and tired again. She could only sit quietly and watch the others.

"Sadako certainly has good manners now," Mr. Sasaki said. "Oba chan's spirit must be pleased to see how ladylike her granddaughter has become."

"How can you say that!" Mrs. Sasaki cried. "I would rather have our lively Sadako back." She dabbed at her eyes and hurried into the kitchen.

I'm making everyone sad, Sadako thought. She wished she could suddenly turn into her old self. How happy her mother would be then!

As if he knew what was in Sadako's mind, her father said gruffly, "There now, don't worry. After a good night's rest you'll feel fine."

Related Characters: Mrs. Sasaki, Mr. Sasaki (speaker), Sadako

Related Themes:

Page Number: 55

Explanation and Analysis

Sadako was happy to be home at first, but towards the end of her stay she becomes weak, ill, and quiet. Her father attempts to lighten the mood by remarking upon how docile and agreeable Sadako has become, but her mother genuinely misses her wild, free-spirited girl. This stands in contract to her parent's stances toward her behavior before the leukemia struck, in which her father admired Sadako's indomitable spirit and her mother despaired at her daughter's lack of respect. The implication is that her father is just trying to make the best of things, while her mother can no longer even pretend to do so.

Sadako, meanwhile, maintains the interior hope that she will recover, but the carefree and happy-go-lucky attitude she once showed to the world is gone. Sadako wishes she could get it back, but knows that as weak as she is she cannot be the girl she once was. Yet Sadako, even in the throes of illness, is still worried about the emotions of those around her, and wishes she could still have the bolstering, cheering effect she once had on her friends, family, and neighbors.

Dr. Numata gave Sadako blood transfusions or shots almost every day. “I know it hurts,” he said, “but we must keep on trying.” Sadako nodded. She never complained about the shots and almost constant pain. A bigger pain was growing deep inside her. It was the fear of dying. She had to fight it as well as the disease. The golden crane helped. It reminded Sadako that there was always hope.

Related Characters: Sadako, Dr. Numata (speaker)

Related Themes:

Related Symbols:

Page Number: 56

Explanation and Analysis

Sadakos’ visit home left her even more tired and debilitated than she was months ago, during the rainy season, when her illness was at its worst. As she returns to the hospital her doctors and nurses double down on treatments, hoping that they can still make Sadako better. Just as Sadako fights on, so do her doctors.

The pain of her illness, though, is not even the worst thing anymore—now, Sadako is worried that she will never recover and will die as a result of her leukemia. Even after witnessing Kenji’s death and hearing Nurse Yasunaga’s words about how Kenji was saved from pain and suffering when he dies, Sadako is not ready to relinquish hope that she will get better, and turns once again to her golden crane to keep the embers of her optimism burning.

The leaves on the maple tree were turning rust and gold when the family came for one last visit. Eiji handed Sadako a big box wrapped in gold paper and tied with a red ribbon. Slowly Sadako opened it. Inside was something her mother had always wanted for her—a silk kimono with cherry blossoms on it. Sadako felt hot tears blur her eyes.

"Why did you do it?" she asked, touching the soft cloth. "I'll never be able to wear it and silk costs so much money."

"Sadako chan," her father said gently, "your mother stayed up late last night to finish sewing it. Try it on for her."

With a great effort Sadako lifted herself out of bed. Mrs. Sasaki helped her put on the kimono and tie the sash. Sadako was glad her swollen legs didn't show.

Related Characters: Mr. Sasaki, Sadako (speaker), Eiji, Mrs. Sasaki

Related Themes:

Page Number: 57

Explanation and Analysis

As Sadako’s illness worsens, her family, fearing their time with Sadako has grown short, brings her a beautiful gift of a traditional kimono. Her mother has worked hard sewing it from beautiful fabric, and when Sadako opens the present she knows that her whole family has put time, money, and love into the beautiful gift. Sadako herself knows that she is not getting any better, and at first she is upset and overwhelmed by the kimono, as it is something she will never have the chance to wear outside of a hospital. But as her family helps her to put the kimono on, she feels surrounded by love and support. The kimono represents her parents’ love, her family’s traditions, and the hope Sadako has inspired in everyone around her to believe in the best and remain optimistic even in the face of struggle, sickness, and turmoil.

Chapter 9 Quotes

As Sadako grew weaker, she thought more about death. Would she live on a heavenly mountain? Did it hurt to die? Or was it like falling asleep?

If only I could forget about it, Sadako thought. But it was like trying to stop the rain from falling. As soon as she concentrated on something else, death crept back into her mind.

Related Characters: Sadako (speaker)

Related Themes:

Page Number: 60-61

Explanation and Analysis

Sadako has gone back and forth with regard to her fears about death. When she was first diagnosed with leukemia, she was scared all the time, but as her sickness has progressed and she has witnessed the death of Kenji, the kindness and empathy of Nurse Yasunaga, and the deterioration of her own once-indestructible body and spirit, Sadako has come to wonder whether death is indeed a kind of freedom or deliverance. As Sadako wonders more and more what death feels like and what it will offer her, she has trouble keeping thoughts of it out of her mind, but those thoughts seemed to be tinged with fascination and genuine curiosity now rather than just fear.

Already lights were dancing behind her eyes. Sadako slid a thin, trembling hand over to touch the golden crane. Life was slipping away from her, but the crane made Sadako feel stronger inside.

She looked at her flock hanging from the ceiling. As she watched, a light autumn breeze made the birds rustle and sway. They seemed to be alive and flying out through the open window.

How beautiful and free they were! Sadako sighed and closed her eyes.

She never woke up.

Related Characters: Sadako (speaker)

Related Themes:  

Related Symbols: 

Page Number: 63

Explanation and Analysis

As Sadako, weak and worn down by her illness, finally comes to accept her impending death and the freedom from pain and sickness it will off her, she looks up at the ceiling and considers her hundreds and hundreds of beautiful paper cranes. The cranes are free and seem to be alive and actually flying away. Sadako is about to "fly away" from her own pain and suffering, and the cranes, though they did not heal her illness, have managed to heal her spirit and help her to accept her own death. The golden crane especially remains Sadako's warmest touchstone, and reminds her that even as she prepares to pass on, she is an emblem of strength and hope to so many around her.

SUMMARY AND ANALYSIS

The color-coded icons under each analysis entry make it easy to track where the themes occur most prominently throughout the work. Each icon corresponds to one of the themes explained in the Themes section of this LitChart.

PROLOGUE

The reader is informed that the novel has been based on the life of a real little girl who lived in Japan from 1943 to 1955. The real-life Sadako was in Hiroshima in 1945 when the United States Air Force dropped an atomic bomb on the city in an attempt to end World War II, and ten years later, the young Sadako died from leukemia as a result of radiation from the bomb. Sadako, the narrator says, became a heroine to the children of Japan through her courageousness in the face of strife, illness, and death.

In this brief prologue, Coerr establishes Sadako as a real-life figure whose short but difficult life—and tragic death—have made her story an emblem of strength and perseverance as well as a rallying cry for peace, nonviolence, and an end to the devastating destruction and violence of nuclear war.

CHAPTER 1: GOOD LUCK SIGNS

The young girl named Sadako Sasaki was born to be a runner, and, according to her mother, learned to run even before she could walk. One August morning in 1954, Sadako runs out to the street outside of her home—it is a clear, beautiful day, which Sadako sees as a good sign. She is always on the lookout for signs of good luck around her.

Sadako's carefree and ambitious personality is established right away, painting her as a character whose optimism and desire to succeed and blaze trails have made her, even as a young girl, a beacon of joy and hope.

Sadako runs back inside and wakes her siblings. She pokes her older brother Masahiro and excitedly tells him that today is Peace Day. Like all fourteen-year-olds, Masahiro is lazy, but he loves to eat, and the smell of bean soup cooking for breakfast gets him out of bed. Sadako helps her younger brother Eiji, who is only six, to get dressed, and then Sadako and her sister Mitsue, who is nine, put away the siblings' bed quilts in a linen closet.

In this passage Sadako is established as an empathetic sibling and a caregiver to her younger brother and sister. Her playful relationship with her older brother Masahiro contrasts—but complements—her sense of duty to the younger children, and to her family and home life in general.

Sadako runs into the kitchen, calling to her mother about how excited she is to "go to the carnival." Her mother, preparing breakfast, scolds Sadako. Sadako is eleven, her mother says, and should know better than to refer to Peace Day as a "carnival"—it is a memorial day for those who died when the atom bomb was dropped on the city of Hiroshima. Sadako's father comes in from the back porch and urges her to show some respect—Sadako's own grandmother was killed that day. Sadako insists she does respect her grandmother, and prays for her spirit every morning.

As Sadako gleefully looks forward to celebrating Peace Day at a "carnival," her parents remind her that the purpose of the festival is to mourn and remember. Her parents are clearly still haunted by their losses, and are trying as hard as they can to instill values of respect for the dead and the desire to honor the past, good and bad, in their children.

Mr. Sasaki says that it is in fact time for morning prayers, and the family gathers around their altar shelf. Mr. Sasaki prays that the spirits of their family's ancestors are at peace and gives thanks for all his life's blessings—his thriving barbershop and his beautiful family. Finally, Mr. Sasaki prays that his family will be protected against leukemia—the "atom bomb disease" which many people in Hiroshima are still dying from even though the bomb was dropped nine years ago. The air was filled with radiation after the bomb dropped, and the poison from it can stay inside people for a very long time.

Mr. Sasaki's prayers are hopeful and grateful, but also tinged with fear. He hopes to safeguard his family against leukemia—the physical manifestation of the lingering effects of the atomic bomb. Leukemia is both a very real, practical fear and a physical embodiment of all the deeper-rooted emotional and psychological fears that still continue to plague the Sasakis and their larger community nearly a decade after the nuclear attack on their hometown.

Sadako gulps down her breakfast, thinking of last year's Peace Day and dreaming of what this one will bring. She finishes breakfast before anyone else and urges Mitsue to help her wash the dishes so that they can go to the festival as fast as possible. Sadako finishes cleaning up, ties red ribbons in her hair, and stands by the door, but her mother urges her to sit quietly until it is time to go. Sadako plops down onto the floor, angry that nothing ever makes her parents hurry. While she sits near the door, she spots a spider—a good luck sign. Sadako cups the spider into her hands and sets it free outside.

Sadako's excitement and optimism are again shown to be qualities that her family frowns upon. She is eager to observe Peace Day with her family, friends, and community, perhaps as a method of ameliorating the fears that she and her family all still fear, and which were just stirred up again, probably, by Mr. Sasaki's morose and slightly fearful prayers. At the same time, Sadako's excitement and inability to really understand the sadness that is part of the festival help to mark her as an innocent, who was not only not a part of the war that led to the nuclear bombing but too young to even understand it.

CHAPTER 2: PEACE DAY

As Sadako and her family start out for the festival, the air outside is warm and the streets are busy. Sadako runs to her best friend Chizuko's house—the two of them have been "close as two pine needles on the same twig" since kindergarten. Sadako chides Chizuko for being a "turtle" and moving slowly, and the two of them take off. Mrs. Sasaki calls after the two of them, warning them not to go to quickly and get overheated. Mrs. Sasaki worries aloud to Mr. Sasaki about Sadako's impatience, but Mr. Sadaki takes pride in his daughter, who is a fast, strong runner and an adventurous soul.

Though Sadako's parents have done their best to establish the Peace Day atmosphere as one of somber remembrance, Sadako and Chizuko run toward the festival gleefully, relishing the warm sun and their togetherness. Sadako's parents, worried that their daughter won't understand the legacy of pain and suffering in her family and her hometown, nevertheless reluctantly admire their daughter's optimism and her resilient spirit.

The Sasaki family arrives at the Peace Park, and together they enter the memorial building in silence. On the walls of the building there are photographs of the aftermath of the bombing of Hiroshima—pictures of dead bodies and ruined buildings line the walls. Sadako looks away from the pictures and holds Chizuko's hand tightly. Sadako tells Chizuko that she remembers the bombing—"there was the flash of a million suns [and] then the heat prickled [her] eyes like needles." Chizuko protests, saying that Sadako can't possibly claim to remember something that happened when she was just a baby, but Sadako stubbornly insists that she does.

As Sadako navigates the memorial at the Peace Park, she experiences several conflicting emotions. She is afraid of the images of the bombing, but purports to remember it very clearly in her own way. The bombing—its physical, emotional, and psychological aftereffects—have been so prevalent and overwhelming since her childhood that she experiences a mix of horror, fascination, and even a strange fondness for memories and depictions of the event.

Buddhist priests and the city's mayor deliver speeches, and then hundreds of white doves are released from their cages to commemorate the dead. After the ceremony, Sadako runs straight to the cotton candy stand, and finds that the sweet treat tastes even better than it did last year. The rest of the festival day passes far too quickly as Sadako runs from stall to stall, looking at things to buy and smelling delicious foods. Though the day is full of joy, there is sadness and pain, too, as Sadako walks past many people who have been "burned so badly [by the atom bomb] that they no longer look human."

After the somber speeches at the memorial event, Sadako roams the festival excitedly. Though she tries very hard to enjoy herself, seeing burned and scarred victims of the atom bomb is a physical reminder of the great pain this day represents. Though hope and a desire for peace drive the day, so too do the gruesome memories of the bombing, and Sadako struggles to understand how both sentiments can coexist.

After the sun goes down, a beautiful fireworks display begins. The Sasaki family sends a flight of six paper lanterns down into the river, to commemorate the losses their family suffered when the atom bomb dropped. That night, after the family returns home and Sadako goes to bed, she lies awake for a very long time, thinking about the day, and the good luck the spider brought her after all.

Though the day was tinged with sadness and pain, Sadako—optimistic as ever—feels confident that the festival was a positive and even lucky event. Sadako knows the horror of what has happened to her people, her family, and her city, but is drawn to the tender rituals and beautiful celebrations of the life that have re-emerged in the years after the attack.

CHAPTER 3: SADAKO'S SECRET

It is early autumn, and Sadako rushes home from school one afternoon with good news. She runs into the kitchen to tell her mother that she has been chosen from the bamboo class at school to be on the school relay team. If she wins the big race, she will be a shoo-in for the junior high school team next year—to be on that team is what Sadako wants more than anything else in the world. That night at dinner, Sadako is too excited to eat, and as the days pass by she can think only of the relay race. She practices every day at school and often runs all the way home. Her older brother Masahiro times her one day using their father's watch, and Sadako's speed surprises and impresses her whole family.

Sadako, a born runner, has finally been given the opportunity to show her talent off to her friends and family. Being selected to take part in the relay race is a major milestone for her, and seems to signal the continuation of her good luck and happiness. The race metaphorically represents forward motion for Sadako, as she attempts to outstrip and escape the atmosphere of pain and tragedy that lingers over her family, her friends, and her hometown.

Finally, it is the day of the big race. Sadako is nervous and afraid her legs won't work at all as she surveys the parents, families, and friends gathered to cheer her and her opponents on. Sadako tells her mother that she is afraid, and Mrs. Sasaki tells Sadako that while it is natural to be nervous, Sadako is sure to run fast once the race starts. Sadako, grateful for her parents' love and support, takes her place at the starting line.

In this passage, as Sadako confronts her fear and nerves right before the big race, her family is shown to be supportive and empathic. Though they have chided Sadako for seeming frivolous or disrespectful in the past, they support her pursuit of her passion and want her to know that they are behind her every step of the way.

Sadako runs the race, and after she crosses the finish line her heart is still thumping. She feels faint and dizzy as her classmates surround her, shouting that her team has won the race. Sadako shakes her head and the dizziness goes away. All winter, Sadako continues working hard to improve her running, but sometimes after a long run she has dizzy spells. She decides not to tell her family about them—she needs to do all she can to qualify for the junior high racing team. Sadako tells herself that the dizziness will go away, but as the weeks go by it only gets worse.

Sadako experiences triumph and happiness, but something is off. Symbolically, even though she has success as a runner, she can't run away from the pain and trauma all around her—literally, she has a sinking feeling that despite the good luck signs all around her, something is very wrong inside of her. In this way, the book connects Sadako to her city and her people: both moving on from a terrible past, and still connected to and unable to escape the legacy of that past in ways both emotional and physical.

On New Year's Eve, Sadako hopes that in the New Year her dizzy spells will go away. On New Year's Day, the Sasakis visit a local shrine. Her mother is dressed in a fine silk kimono, and she promises that as soon as their family can afford it, she will buy one for Sadako as well. As the Sasakis mingle with throngs of happy people visiting the shrine, Sadako forgets about her secret for a little while. At the end of the day, she races Masahiro home and wins easily. As she crosses the threshold into her house, she passes the good luck symbols her mother has placed at the door to protect them all in the new year, and Sadako wonders, with a beginning like this, how anything bad at all could happen in the new year.

Though the dizzy spells scare Sadako and leave her with a sinking feeling deep inside, as the New Year rolls around she is once again plunged into an atmosphere of happiness, remembrance, and togetherness. That she can't believe that anything all that serious could be wrong once again emphasizes her innocence. And at the same time, it emphasizes the horror of the violence of war, and nuclear war in particular, since readers know from the prologue that, in fact, Sadako is going to die of leukemia. The book makes it clear that Sadako deserves her innocence, and yet is clear-eyed in the way it shows how war and its legacy don't acknowledge innocence and are, instead, inescapable.

CHAPTER 4: A SECRET NO LONGER

For the first few weeks of the new year, Sadako feels strong and healthy. One cold February day, though, as Sadako practices in the schoolyard, everything whirls around her, and she falls to the ground. Sadako tries to stand up, but she cannot. Her teacher sends her younger sister Mitsue home to fetch Mr. Sasaki.

Sadako has, for a time, been able to forget her worries in the happy light of the new year. However, just as it is not so easy for those around her to run away from the pain of the atom bomb, it is not so easy for Sadako to run away from the truth: something is wrong.

Mr. Sasaki leaves work and takes Sadako to the Red Cross Hospital. As they enter the building, Sadako is full of fear—there is a wing of the hospital, she knows, devoted entirely to patients sick with the atom bomb illness. A nurse x-rays Sadako's chest and takes her blood. A doctor named Dr. Numata comes into the room and asks Sadako a lot of questions. The rest of the Sasakis join Sadako and her father at the hospital, and as Sadako overhears her mother talking to one of the doctors, she realizes the awful truth: she has leukemia.

Sadako is afraid, but just as she was fearful at the race and then found comfort in her parents' reassurance, here she goes with her father and submits to many tests at the hospital to determine what is wrong. Her diagnosis—leukemia—is a symbolic reflection of the lingering effects of the atom bomb attack on Hiroshima, both on a practical, physical level and an emotional one.

A nurse named Nurse Yasunaga takes Sadako to a private hospital room and gives her a cotton hospital gown to wear. Sadako climbs into bed, and her family comes into the room to tell her that she must stay in the hospital for a little while. They all promise to visit her every day. Sadako, troubled, asks her family if she really has the atom bomb disease. Her father looks troubled and tells her that the doctors are still completing their tests, and need to keep her in the hospital for a few weeks. Sadako is sad, knowing she will miss her graduation into junior high school and will not be able to join the racing team.

Sadako meets Nurse Yasunaga, the first really comforting figure she's met at the hospital. As Sadako is forced to settle into life there, Nurse Yasunaga will become a friend and confidante, helping Sadako as she comes to terms with the reality of her illness. For now, Sadako still seeks comfort from her family, who—though they love her deeply—are themselves so wracked with despair that they are unable to offer her true comfort.

Sadako's parents fluff her pillows and offer to bring her anything she needs, but all she wants is to go home. She worries, knowing that many people who come into this hospital never come out. Nurse Yasunaga returns and sends Sadako's family away so that she can rest. Once she is alone in the room, Sadako buries her face in her pillow and cries.

Sadako, who has grown up in a busy, loving household within a supportive community bound together by grief and responsibility, finds herself alone for the first time in her life—not just physically, but isolated emotionally and psychologically by her illness.

CHAPTER 5: THE GOLDEN CRANE

On her first morning in the hospital, Sadako wakes up slowly. She expects to be at home, and slowly remembers that she is in a hospital as she adjusts to the unfamiliar sounds. Nurse Yasunaga comes in to give her a shot, and though Sadako flinches, Nurse Yasunaga warns her that she must get used to getting shots.

Sadako awakens, both literally and figuratively, to the harsh reality of her circumstances—she is sick, and if she wants to get any better she will have to face uncomfortable and sometimes even debilitating treatments in pursuit of restoring her health.

Sadako's first visitor that afternoon is Chizuko. She approaches Sadako's bed and tells Sadako to shut her eyes. When Sadako opens them again, there are some pieces of paper and a pair of scissors laid out on the bed. Chizuko cheerily announces that she has figured out a way for Sadako to get well, and she then begins demonstrating the steps to building an origami **paper crane** as she makes one out of golden paper. When Sadako asks how the bird could possibly make her well, Chizuko reminds her of the legend of the crane, which can live for a thousand years. Chizuko explains that if a sick person folds one thousand paper cranes, the gods will make her healthy again.

Chizuko offers Sadako the first real comfort she has felt in months, after the fear over her dizzy spells and the realization that she has the atom bomb sickness. Sadako listens raptly as Chizuko explains the legend of the crane, and offers Sadako a practical and achievable goal. Sadako, an optimist and a believer, is grateful for Chizuko's concern, and watches carefully so that she can learn the new, hopeful tradition her best friend is passing on to her.

Sadako's eyes fill with tears—she is grateful to her friend for bringing her a good luck charm. Sadako takes the first golden **crane** into her hand and feels a funny feeling come over her. When Chizuko leaves, Sadako sets to work on folding cranes. Some of them are lopsided, but Sadako is able to make ten birds that afternoon. Sadako knows she will be able to quickly finish making a thousand, and is confident that they will make her strong enough to go home.

Sadako is inspired by the "magic" of the cranes, and right away sets to her task. As she folds cranes she has some successes and some failures, but begins improving pretty much right way. Sadako, who had been stripped of all hope and happiness when she entered the hospital, now has something to look forward to—and something to keep her going as the rough road ahead begins. Sadako's embrace of the possibility of this magic cure once again highlights both her innocence and her perseverance, her willingness to work toward a goal, that is being tragically cut-off by the lingering effects of the war.

That evening, when Masahiro brings Sadako her homework from school, he offers to string the **cranes** from the ceiling so that she has room to keep making more and more. When she tells him she is planning to make a thousand Masahiro expresses his doubts, but agrees to help Sadako however he can.

Sadako, bolstered by the idea of the paper cranes, draws her family into her project. Though Masahiro is uncertain at first, the family ties between the two of them cause him to offer his sister his support and lend her his strength no matter how large the task. Sadako's story is one of both her perseverance, and the unwavering perseverance of her family in the support they give her (and the support she inspires others to give her).

After supper, Mrs. Sasaki arrives at the hospital with Mitsue and Eiji in tow. The two young children like Chizuko's **golden crane** the best, but Sadako's mother picks one folded from green paper out as her favorite—she knows that the smallest ones are the most difficult to make. After her family leaves when visiting hours end, Sadako feels lonely, and begins making crakes to keep up her courage. With each one, she makes a wish to get better.

As the rest of Sadako's family learns about her project, her mother encourages her to press forward and admires her strength, perseverance, and commitment. Meanwhile, when Sadako is lonely after visiting hours are over, she draws comfort from the cranes, seeing the hope they bring her as an extension of her family's love.

CHAPTER 6: KENJI

All of Sadako's friends and family start saving paper for her to use to make the good luck **origami cranes**. Chizuko brings Sadako paper from school, her father saves every scrap he can from his barbershop, and Nurse Yasunaga gives Sadako wrappers from packages of medicine. Masahiro hangs every one of Sadako's birds from the ceiling for her. She folds over three hundred as the months pass by.

As Sadako takes comfort in the making of the cranes, her friends, family, and caretakers, too, become invested in her journey and inspired to help her as she perseveres in search of hope in the face of her debilitating illness. Sadako's optimism, hope, and perseverance are an inspiration to others during her life, not just after her death.

As the leukemia begins to sap Sadako's energy, she experiences throbbing headaches, pain in her bones and her joints, and suffers more and more dizzy spells. One day, when Sadako is feeling especially tired, Nurse Yasunaga wheels her outside to get some fresh air and see the sunshine. Out on the porch, Sadako sees a boy, whose name is Kenji. He is nine years old and small for his age. Sadako introduces herself, and soon the two are talking like old friends. Kenji has been in the hospital for a long time but has very few visitors—his parents are dead. Kenji insists that it doesn't matter that he has no visitors—he will be dead soon, he says, of leukemia contracted from the atom bomb.

Sadako has support and solidarity from those outside of the hospital, but very few friends inside the hospital. When she meets Kenji, she sees someone whose struggle very closely mirrors her own. Whereas Sadako, however, has chosen to subscribe to hope in the face of her illness, Kenji seems resigned to being sick. He has come from a much more difficult background and does not have the same support system Sadako does, and his will to persevere, it is implied, is compromised by his lack of friends and family.

Sadako tells Kenji that he can't possibly have leukemia—he wasn't even born when the atom bomb was dropped. Kenji explains that the radiation poison got into his mother's body and was passed onto him. Sadako doesn't know what to say to comfort Kenji, but soon thinks of the **cranes**, and tells Kenji that he can start folding with her if he likes. Kenji insists that it is too late, though, and even the gods cannot help him now. Nurse Yasunaga comes out and scolds Kenji for thinking so fatalistically, but Kenji tells her that he can read his blood count on his charts, and knows he is getting worse every day. Nurse Yasunaga wheels Kenji back inside.

Sadako, seeing Kenji's low spirits and hearing the sad story of his illness and isolation, volunteers to help him and bring him into her crane-building project. Sadako has seen how the cranes have helped not just her but everyone around her to come together, and hopes that the cranes will have this effect on Kenji, too. However, the somber Kenji is unable to see past the suffering inflicted by his illness in order to see the point of fighting for his future.

Back in her room, Sadako tries to imagine what it would be like to be sick and have no family. She thinks of how brave Kenji is, and makes a big **crane** for him out of her prettiest paper. She brings it across the hall to him, and then begins folding more birds for her own flock, reaching four hundred cranes—a big milestone.

Kenji's fatalism doesn't bring Sadako down at all—rather, it inspires her to build even more cranes for herself and to show Kenji some support and solidarity, even though he does not have the same hope and drive that she herself does.

Late one night, Nurse Yasunaga comes into Sadako's room to inform her that Kenji has died. Sadako cries, but Nurse Yasunaga comforts Sadako by assuring her that Kenji has shed his tired body and now his spirit is free. Sadako asks Nurse Yasunaga if she herself will die next, but Nurse Yasunaga assures Sadako that she won't. Nurse Yasunaga urges Sadako to build one more **paper crane** before bed, and promises her that once she makes it to one thousand cranes she will live to be an old woman. Sadako folds some more cranes, each time wishing that Nurse Yasunaga's prediction would come true.

Kenji's death marks a turning point for Sadako. Up until this point, she has seen her illness as something she must overcome. Even though she was in constant pain, she could not understand why Kenji could not see things in the optimistic way that she herself saw them. But now Sadako must face the fact that leukemia might not, in fact, be beatable—that Kenji's pessimism might actually be realism, and her own optimism might be unfounded. And she begins to think differently about death. She has until now seen freedom as only possibly by beating death. But now, as Nurse Yasunaga explains that Kenji's illness was so terrible that death was the only thing that would bring him freedom and peace, Sadako understands that there are many different kinds of freedom. She continues folding cranes, though, and remains steadfast in her plans to make a wish for her own recovery.

CHAPTER 7: HUNDREDS OF WISHES

June comes, and so does the rainy season. As the room grows humid and musty, Sadako becomes pale and listless. Only her parents and Masahiro are allowed to visit her, though her class at school sends her a traditional wooden kokeshi doll to cheer her up. Mrs. Sasaki is worried that Sadako is not eating enough, and so one night she surprises her daughter with a bundle full of all of Sadako's favorite foods. Sadako's swollen gums hurt so badly, though, that she cannot chew. Sadako pushes the food away, apologizing for not being able to eat—she knows that her family does not have extra money for such expensive food. Mrs. Sasaki comforts Sadako, and the two hope together that when the sun comes out again Sadako will be feeling better.

Sadako's illness is getting worse and worse, and even the comforts sent to her by those who love her do not make her feel any better. Her classmates send her a beautiful traditional doll, but it does not ease her pain or her fear, and when her mother spends money on fine foods, hoping that Sadako will enjoy them and eat them with more gusto than she has the hospital food, Sadako can only berate herself for inspiring her parents to waste their hard-earned money. Nevertheless, Sadako's family and friends hope to inspire the sunny optimism that once defined Sadako, and bring back the old her. The traits in Sadako that her mother used to sometimes criticize, she now wishes she could renew.

Masahiro arrives and regales Sadako with stories from school. He presents her with a present from Eiji—a crumpled piece of silver paper to be used to build a **crane**. Sadako smells the paper and finds that it is a chocolate wrapper—she and her brother hope aloud that the gods like chocolate, and the two of them laugh. It is the first time Sadako has laughed in a long time, and she hopes that it means that the golden crane's magic is beginning to work. Sadako folds Eiji's paper into a crane, but is too tired to make any more, and she falls asleep as her mother whispers a poem into her ear, asking a flock of heavenly cranes to cover Sadako with their wings.

Sadako's siblings try to lift her spirits, too, and Eiji's gift of a chocolate wrapper makes Sadako feel joy and hope for the first time in a while. Again, constructing the cranes—though sometimes an overwhelming feat for the weak and fatigued Sadako—are really the only things that bring her hope and inspiration anymore, and Sadako's faith in the cranes' power has begun to extend to her family, as well, as evidenced by Eiji's involvement and her mother's bedtime prayer to the crane gods who supposedly have the power to restore Sadako's health.

CHAPTER 8: LAST DAYS

By the end of July the weather has turned warm and sunny, and Sadako is feeling a little bit better. She is halfway to one thousand **cranes**, and she feels that something good is about to happen. Soon, her appetite comes back, and her pain recedes. Dr. Numata tells Sadako that she can go home for a visit. The night before her trip home, Sadako is so excited that she cannot sleep, and stays awake making cranes until she reaches six hundred and twenty two.

Sadako's excitement at the prospect of going home offers her a bolt of excitement and a renewal of faith. This faith is connected once again to the cranes: as she regains her hope and optimism, Sadako engages in a burst of crane-making. Her faith in her project—and in her recovery—newly restored.

When Sadako arrives home it is time for O Bon, the biggest holiday of the year—a celebration for spirits of the dead who return to visit those they had loved on earth. The Sasakis have cleaned the house and filled it with fresh flowers and Sadako's **cranes**, and Sadako's parents are preparing delicious holiday food. As Sadako watches her mother place a lantern outside their home so the spirits can find their way, Sadako hopes that maybe she can stay home for good.

Sadako's arrival at home makes her feel safe, loved, and optimistic for the first time in a long while. Being surrounded by familiar comforts makes her feel as if her illness is far away from her, at least for the moment, and the idea of returning home for good brings her a new kind of joy, purpose, and excitement.

Over the next several days friends and family come and go from the Sasaki house all the time, calling on Sadako. By the end of the week she is pale and tired again, and when Mr. Sasaki remarks that Sadako has "good manners now," Mrs. Sasaki laments having lost the "lively Sadako." Sadako knows she is making everyone around her sad, and wishes she could suddenly turn into her old self.

As the week progresses, Sadako is drained of all the excited energy she felt at being home. Her parents are upset and uncomfortable in the face of her listlessness, and while her father attempts to lighten the mood, her mother is devastated by the loss of her bright, sunny daughter. Sadako begins to realize the impact that her illness has on those around her.

The next day, Sadako returns to the hospital, and finds herself strangely glad to be back in her quiet hospital room. Her parents sit beside her as she drifts in and out of sleep, and she asks them to put bean cakes on the family altar for her spirit once she has died. Her parents assure her she will live a long time, and beg her not to give up. As Sadako falls asleep, she vows to get better and one day "race like the wind."

Sadako, who had been so excited to leave the hospital and visit home, now finds herself relieved to return to the peace and quiet of her room. This is a big change in Sadako—a change that she recognizes in herself. She is exhausted, demoralized, and for the first time beginning to seriously consider the prospect that she'll never really return home, though her hopes of having her health and strength restored continue to color her dreams and fantasies.

From that day on Sadako receives numerous transfusions and shots every single day. Sadako does not complain about the pain from the treatments, and instead grows overwhelmed by a "bigger pain"—the fear of dying. She has to fight the fear as hard as she has to fight her disease, and often looks to the golden **crane** for comfort and hope.

Sadako's illness grows worse, and she feels more and more isolated as the pain sets in. Her cranes continue to offer her comfort, and the hope that she might still one day be able to live a life without pain and the fear of death.

Sadako's mother spends more and more time at the hospital, and it hurts Sadako to see her mother so worried all the time. As fall approaches, her whole family comes for a visit. Eiji hands Sadako a box wrapped in gold paper—when Sadako opens it, she finds a silk kimono with cherry blossoms on it inside. Fighting back tears, Sadako asks her parents why they spent the money on something she'll never wear, but Mr. Sasaki tells Sadako to try it on—her mother was up all night the night before sewing it.

Sadako knows that she will never be able to wear the beautiful and luxurious kimono her family has made for her, and sees the garment as a waste of time and money. She doesn't realize that as the cranes have offered her hope of recovery, making the kimono has perhaps offered her family—and especially her mother—the hope that one day Sadako will be healthy enough to wear it.

Sadako's parents help her try on the kimono, and as she takes small steps around her room, everyone agrees that she looks like a princess. Just then, Chizuko comes in for a visit, and tells Sadako that she should wear the beautiful kimono to school once she is well again. The Sasakis and Chizuko sing songs and play games while Sadako sits in her chair in pain. That night, after Sadako's family leaves, she folds just one paper **crane** before falling asleep—it is the last one she will ever make.

The kimono is emblematic of the love Sadako's family has for her, and the family and cultural traditions that they still, against all odds, hope she will one day be able to be a part of. However, as her family and Chizuko attempt to lift her spirits, Sadako settles into the sad realization that she will never get better, and though she cannot happily accept the kimono as a touchstone or an object of hope, she turns to her cranes for comfort one final time. By this point in the book the symbolism of the cranes has become more complicated. Initially they symbolized Sadako's hopes of recovery. But as that recovery became ever more unrealistic, and Sadako nonetheless kept making cranes, they have become something else: a symbol of both Sadako's perseverance in the face of hopelessness, and a dream of freedom from suffering that connects to both Sadako's desire for an escape from her personal suffering and the broader hope for a world that does not inflict such suffering through war or violence.

CHAPTER 9: RACING WITH THE WIND

Sadako grows weaker and weaker, and thinks more and more often about death. She wonders if death will hurt, or whether it will just be like falling asleep. She tries to push the thoughts from her mind, but she cannot—thoughts of death always creep in no matter what she does.

Sadako's thoughts about death are shown to have become more complicated in this passage. Through much of the book she has feared death and seen it as something to try to escape or defeat. Now she continues to fear death, but also is beginning to wonder if death might be able to bring her a kind of freedom that her illness has held her back from for so long.

Toward the middle of October, Sadako begins having trouble keeping track of the days and nights. One day she awakes to find her mother crying at her bedside, and Sadako begins crying too, knowing that she has brought her mother a great deal of grief. Sadako tries to fold some more **cranes**, but her fingers are too weak and clumsy. Dr. Numata comes into the room and tells Sadako she needs to rest, and soon she falls asleep.

As Sadako's strength falters and fails, she worries not just about the freedom her illness has taken from her, but the freedom it has taken from her family as well. Still, Sadako longs to push forward with her project, but now it seems as if her goal is to wish for her health back in order to ease the burden on her family more than the burden on her own body and mind.

When Sadako wakes up again, her family is gathered all around her. She smiles at them, and sees lights dancing behind her eyes. Sadako holds the golden **crane** as she feels life slipping away from her. She looks up at her flock hanging from the ceiling and smiles as they sway in the breeze coming through the open window. Sadako marvels at how beautiful and free her birds are, and then, with a final sigh, she passes away.

As Sadako examines the room around her and sees her beautiful cranes swaying freely in the breeze, she realizes that death will indeed be the freedom she has longed for rather than a fearsome thing. Knowing that she and her family will soon be unburdened, she realizes that the cranes have granted her wish of freedom from her illness after all.

EPILOGUE

After Sadako's death in October of 1955, her classmates at school folded the remaining 356 **cranes** needed to reach one thousand. After her funeral, her class collected Sadako's letters and journals and published them as a book which they called *Kokeshi*. In 1958, after young people all over the country heard about Sadako's story and started a collection, a monument to her life was constructed in the Hiroshima Peace Park. The statue of Sadako depicts her holding a golden crane in her hands. On August 6th of every year, Peace Day, visitors to the Peace Park place origami cranes at the base of Sadako's statue, just beside the inscription at its base which reads *This is our cry, this is our prayer: peace in the world.*

Though Sadako's story has finished on a tragic note, Coerr includes an epilogue to comfort her readers and remind them of the vast impact Sadako's story has had not just in Japan but in the rest of the world. Sadako has become a beacon of hope, pacifism, and cultural memory. In remembering and sharing Sadako's story, and in participating in her practice of making cranes, those values she both espoused and inspired continue to live on in the minds and hearts of all children and adults who encounter her tale and find their own strength and peace in her story. Further, because Sadako's hope and perseverance came in the face of suffering that afflicted her as the direct result of war, Sadako's legacy has become not just of facing affliction with strength but, rather, of facing and refusing to accept the legitimacy of the wars and violence that create such afflictions.

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