

Returning the Sword and A Bowl Full of Peace

ABOUT THE BOOKS

These two powerful short titles, both beautifully illustrated, were published by Carolrhoda Books. They are based on true stories of people who found unique ways to reach out for peace after their lives were forever changed by war. *Returning the Sword* (illustrated by Amanda Yoshida) focuses on American soldier Orval Amdahl, who was finally able to make a moving gesture of reconciliation to a Japanese family sixty-eight years after the end of World War II. *A Bowl Full of Peace* (illustrated by Akira Kusaka) tells the story of Sachiko Yasui, who was six years old when the atomic bomb was detonated over her city of Nagasaki—and who waited fifty years to begin sharing her story as a plea for peace on behalf of children everywhere.

ABOUT THE GUIDE

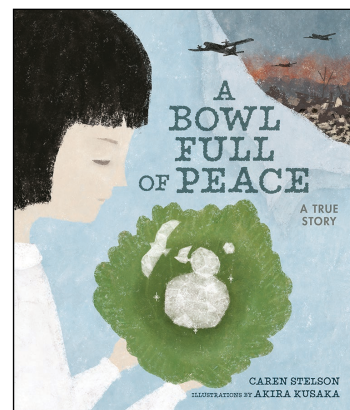
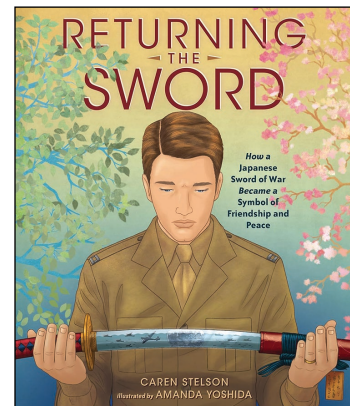
This guide contains questions and reflective prompts for adult discussion groups.

ABOUT CAREN STELSON

Caren Stelson is an award-winning author of nonfiction books that focus on war-and-peace themes. Along with the titles mentioned in this guide, her books include *Sachiko: A Nagasaki Bomb Survivor's Story* and *Stars of the Night: The Courageous Children of the Czech Kindertransport*. She is also active as a board member for World Citizen Peace, a nonprofit that seeks “to create, invigorate, and support Communities of Peace around the globe in their ongoing work.” You can visit Caren’s website at carenstelson.com.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. Both of these books tell true stories of individuals whose search for peace took decades following the end of the war that changed their lives. How did Orval and Sachiko each finally achieve some sense of peace? Were you surprised by how long it took for them to reach that point? Talk about the ways they each had to look both within themselves and outside of themselves to find peace.
2. Have you experienced a situation where peace seemed to be outside your grasp for many years? How was that situation brought to a resolution—or has it not yet been resolved? What would you like to share with the group about these personal experiences? Based on those experiences, did you resonate in different ways with Orval and Sachiko’s stories? Did their stories give you any ideas for how you might approach peacemaking differently in the future?



3. Early in *Returning the Sword*, it says, “Orval’s orders were to go to Japan not to fight but to keep the peace.” Sixty-eight years later, Orval made a choice that shows he was still following that order. What do you imagine the shift from making war to keeping peace is like for soldiers at the end of a war? Can you think of similar experiences in other areas of life that involve competition?
4. In what ways do you believe war is similar for a soldier and a civilian caught in a war zone? How do you think the impact on those individuals differs? How might those differences affect their search for peace after the war is over?
5. Back home in Minnesota, Orval carefully cares for the Japanese sword, cleaning the blade each week. Sachiko’s family creates a ritual around Grandmother’s bowl, found in the ruins of their home. Are there examples in your own life of an object that has taken on a deeper symbolic meaning for you — perhaps one that represents the search for peace in some way?
6. Both Orval and Sachiko ultimately end up speaking publicly for peace. Why do you think that was a critical part of their peace journeys? Have you ever spoken up publicly for peace? What were the challenges of doing so? What were the rewards?
7. Are peace, forgiveness, and reconciliation the same thing? Can you have one without the others?
8. In your experience, are there circumstances when disrupting the peace is an appropriate choice? What obligation do you feel to restore peace once it has been disrupted? Is peace possible if the other side of a conflict isn’t interested in reconciling?
9. Conflict seems to be part of being human. Are you willing to share any particular tools that have helped you in overcoming conflict and finding peace? Are there things you could do now to turn your life toward a more peaceful focus? What barriers do you sense are standing in your way to taking that step?
10. At the end of *Returning the Sword*, Orval says, “I return this sword to you in peace — peace with honor.” What do you believe “peace with honor” looks like? Can you name — silently to yourself or out loud to the group — one place in your life that you can commit to working toward peace with honor?