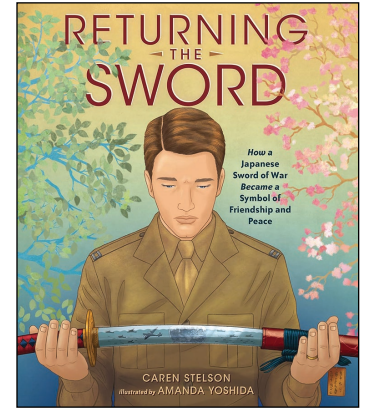


Returning the Sword: How a Japanese Sword of War Became a Symbol of Friendship and Peace

ABOUT THE BOOK

By Caren Stelson
illustrated by Amanda Yoshida
Carolrhoda Books, Grades 2-5

Returning the Sword focuses on the true story of American soldier Orval Amdahl. Decades after his life was forever changed by World War II, Amdahl reached out with an unexpected gesture of reconciliation to a Japanese family. By doing so, he helped forge a lasting bond between two families that are separated by thousands of miles but who have now been united in a desire to focus on peace and friendship for generations to come.



ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Caren Stelson is the award-winning author of the nonfiction books *A Bowl Full of Peace: A True Story*; *Sachiko: A Nagasaki Bomb Survivor's Story*; and *Stars of the Night: The Courageous Children of the Czech Kindertransport*. You can visit Caren's website at <https://www.carenstelson.com/>.



RESOURCES FOR TEACHERS

World Citizen Peace

<https://worldcitizenpeace.org/>

Jane Addams Peace Association/Children's Book Awards

www.janeaddamschildrensbookaward.org

Peace Literacy Institute

www.peaceliteracy.org

International Day of Peace

<https://internationaldayofpeace.org/>

Edutopia's "How to Help Students Develop Interviewing Skills"

<https://www.edutopia.org/service-learning-center-urban-pedagogy-interviewing>

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. What do you know about World War II? What was the relationship between the United States and Japan during that war? What is their relationship when this book begins? What is their relationship now?

2. What happens when a war is over?
3. When this story begins, Orval is a soldier. His country has been at war, but now the war is over. His orders are to “keep the peace.” What do you think “keeping the peace” means? How do you think it would feel for a soldier to make that shift – from being at war to keeping the peace?
4. Orval’s heart is hurt by what he sees in Japan. What are the things that hurt his heart? Why do you think his heart hurts even though his country won the war?
5. Are you involved in an activity where you compete with somebody – maybe in sports or in another kind of contest? How does it feel when you are the winner? When you are the winner, do you ever think about the person or team that has lost? How does it make you feel now to think about somebody having to be a “loser” every time someone else is a winner?
6. When Orval gets home, he decides he will “try not to think about war again.” Does that work or not? Do you think Orval is still thinking about the war sixty-eight years after it ends? Why do you think that?
7. Orval is told he can take a sword as a “souvenir.” What is a souvenir? Have you ever gotten a souvenir, maybe something to take home from a special trip? How does it make you feel to think about that souvenir now that you’re back home? Do you think Orval feels that way about the sword once he is back home?
8. After Orval has been home for some time, a man offers to buy the sword from him. What does Orval decide to do at that point in the story? Why does he make that decision? Do you think you would have done the same thing?
9. Orval carefully cares for the Japanese sword, cleaning the blade each week. Why do you think he does this? How do you think that cleaning the sword makes him feel?
10. One definition for “reconciliation” is “to return to being friends.” When Orval returns the sword, is that an act of reconciliation? Why do you think so? Think back to an earlier part of the story, when Orval gives candy to Japanese children. Is that also an act of reconciliation? Other than giving them something, what other ways can you think of to reconcile with someone? How could you make an act of reconciliation after fighting with a friend?
11. Have you ever had a big fight with someone and then reconciled? How did that feel?
12. Does your family have an object that has an important meaning for you? What would it mean for your family to lose that object? How do you think it would feel if it was later returned to you?
13. What are some ways to settle a problem without fighting about it?
14. What happens if one side of a conflict wants to reconcile but the other side doesn’t?
15. In the book, a researcher visits Orval at his home. She helps Orval find the Japanese family that first owned the sword. Have you figured out the name of that researcher?