

Literacy Skills Teacher's Guide for

Under the Blood-Red Sun

by

Graham Salisbury

Book Information

Graham Salisbury, Under the Blood-Red Sun
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Tomikazu Nakaji's biggest concerns are baseball, homework, and a local bully until life with his Japanese family in Hawaii changes drastically after the bombing of Pearl Harbor in December 1941.

Award: Misc./Other; Scott O'Dell Award

Topics: Countries/Regions, Japan; Family Life, Misc./Other; READNOW - Demco Media Turtleback Books, Demco Media - Read Now Grades 9+; Recommended Reading, California Recommended Lit., English, 3-5; Recommended Reading, California Recommended Lit., English, 6-8; U.S. States/Regions, Hawaii; Wars, World War II

Main Characters

Billy Davis Tomi's best friend, who resists adopting the racist attitudes of the community

Grampa Nakaji Tomi's well-meaning grandfather, who still feels a strong tie to Japan

Keet Wilson the son of Tomi's landlord, who routinely antagonizes Tomi

Kimi Nakaji Tomi's vulnerable five-year-old sister

Mama Nakaji Tomi's resilient and loving mother

Taro Nakaji (Papa) Tomi's peace-loving father

Tomikazu Nakaji (Tomi) a young boy who tries to live up to the expectations of his family

Vocabulary

antiaircraft gun a weapon used against airplanes

barracks housing for soldiers

kimono a traditional Japanese dress that resembles a robe

sampan a small, flat-bottomed boat

samurai a warrior of Japan

trench a long, deep ditch

Synopsis

Set in the fall of 1941 in Hawaii, *Under the Blood-Red Sun* is a historical novel about an eighth-grade Japanese boy, Tomikazu Nakaji, and his family at the onset of World War II.

The story begins with Tomi coming home to find Grampa drying the Japanese flag on the clothesline. Tomi is upset because his father has warned the family about the anti-Japanese sentiments developing in Hawaii and has asked them to emphasize their affiliation with America. After arguing with Grampa about the flag, Tomi is confronted with another problem: their landlord's son, Keet Wilson, is tormenting the pigeons. Tomi is not allowed to fight, so the conflict finally comes to an end when Keet's friend gets him to go play elsewhere.

As Tomi struggles to control his feelings about Keet, he recalls when he and Keet were once friends and how that friendship came to an end when Keet tried to take Tomi's knife and Tomi fought him. His father scolded him by saying that fighting disgraces the family. This reprimand rings in Tomi's ears whenever he is tempted to fight.

Tomi's best friend, Billy Davis, helps him avoid fights. Although the boys come from very different backgrounds, they both enjoy playing baseball. Some of their differences are highlighted when Billy joins Tomi and his father on a fishing trip. Billy inadvertently insults Mama by not finishing the traditional Japanese rice dish she serves him. Later he struggles five hours to land a huge tuna. Papa and his helper, Sanji, then note that it is a haole (white) man's privilege to fish for fun, but they would have chosen to cut the line. Despite these differences, Billy bonds with Papa and Sanji, mainly because he lacks the prejudice that is causing so many people to shun the Japanese.

Two months later Pearl Harbor is bombed. During the attack, Tomi and Billy find Grampa waving the Japanese flag in an attempt to get the planes to stop

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bombing. Later Billy helps Tomi convince the soldiers who come to investigate the incident that no one in the Nakaji family was signaling the Japanese, but the relationship between Tomi and Billy suffers temporarily. Billy worries that he has protected a spy because Grampa is so proud of his Japanese heritage.

The next day soldiers come looking for Tomi's father. He is out fishing, and the family does not expect him back for a few days. When the soldiers don't find Papa, they order Tomi and Grampa to slaughter the pigeons, claiming they are messenger birds. Later that same day Mama finds out that the Wilsons will no longer let her in the house to do her work. The family also learns that all fishermen not flying the American flag are to be shot. Frightened by the anti-Japanese sentiment, the family hurriedly buries everything that is related to their Japanese heritage.

In the evening, Grampa goes down to the harbor to watch for Papa. He discovers that Papa was shot in the leg and arrested and Sanji was shot and killed. It is in the middle of this family crisis that Tomi realizes that he has not seen or heard from his friend Billy since he lied about the flag for them. A few days later Grampa remembers to tell him that Billy came looking for him. Tomi takes one of his puppies as a gift, and the two boys mend their friendship.

In the meantime, Tomi discovers how deeply ashamed his grandfather is about the actions of the Japanese military. He finds Grampa and Charlie in the woods oiling the katana, an heirloom sword which Grampa feels represents the honor of the family. Grampa tells Tomi Japan has disgraced the family. He allows Tomi to hold the sword, and Tomi feels a connection to his grandfather that he had not felt before.

Soon afterward, Tomi decides he must find out what has happened to his father. He impulsively swims out to Sand Island, where he has heard the Japanese fishermen are being held. There he finds his father in a camp. He looks ill, but Tomi is relieved to find him alive. After dark he goes home and tells

his mother the news. She is angry with him for risking his life, but she also tells Tomi he is very brave.

On New Year's Day, Billy comes to take Tomi to play a baseball game with a group of boys in a tough neighborhood across town. Tomi's spirits are lifted a little when they win the game, but before they leave, a local gang attacks them. The boys are saved when the opposing baseball team chases the gang off, and Tomi is able once again to honor his father's wishes by not fighting.

Shortly before school resumes Mrs. Wilson comes to tell Mama that Billy's parents have persuaded her to rehire Mama. Despite this good news, the family misfortunes continue when they learn that Papa has been shipped to the mainland, and the FBI comes to take Grampa away.

To comfort himself, Tomi goes to the katana's hiding place and takes it out. While he is holding it, Keet Wilson surprises him by pointing a rifle at his head. Tomi is already extremely angry with Keet. Not only has Keet shot at Tomi before, but Tomi also suspects that Keet or his family reported the "messenger" pigeons and Grampa to the government. He struggles to control himself according to his father's wishes, but he tells Keet he will pay for it if he tells Mr. Wilson about the sword.

School is in session again. Tomi finds many of his classmates have been unable to return, and his favorite teacher is joining the navy at the end of the year. After class Tomi goes down to the harbor and finds his father's sunken ship. His friends discuss Tomi's situation, and Tomi is partially consoled by their companionship. The story ends with him dreaming of the day when his father and grandfather will come back and he can proudly show them the care with which he has protected the katana and the family.

Open-Ended Questions

Use these open-ended questions as the basis for class discussions, student presentations, or extended writing assignments.

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Initial Understanding

What did Papa mean when he tells his family, "Too many people worried about Japanee ... speak Ing-lish," or "Speak 'merican."

He thought that if the family tried to show that they wanted to learn American ways, people would not think that they were still loyal to Japan. He also meant that speaking Japanese reminded people that they were originally from Japan.

Literary Analysis

Why do the Nakajis have mixed feelings about Mr. Wilson?

He is extremely unpredictable and tends to transfer his feelings about current events onto the Nakajis. At times he is very pleasant towards the family, as when he comes to see them after they have returned from the fishing trip with Billy. Other times he is very abusive, such as when he yells at Tomi about Grampa's flag waving when the Germans sink an American ship. He is more tolerant than some others in Hawaii who treat the Nakajis unkindly, but he does not always treat them with respect or understanding. It is clear that his support of them can be withdrawn at any time.

Inferential Comprehension

Will Tomi ever see Papa and Grampa again?
Support your answer using details from the story.

The story gives many clues to show that Tomi's expectation that Papa and Grampa will return is very optimistic. Papa was shot and apparently received little medical attention for it. When Tomi sees him on Sand Island he not only notes that Papa does not look well, but he also sees the substandard living arrangements the army has provided for their Japanese prisoners. Grampa has already suffered a stroke, and he also has difficulty controlling his temper. The army is shown to have little tolerance for the Japanese Hawaiians in general, and it is doubtful that they will be understanding when the old man is frustrated with them. Given these factors, it is unlikely that Tomi will be reunited with both family members, and he would be fortunate to have even one of them return.

Constructing Meaning

Why will Tomi probably choose to stay in Hawaii even though his family has been treated poorly by many of his neighbors?

Although Tomi's family has suffered at the hands of the army, the FBI, and people like the Wilsons, Tomi realizes that there are also many good people in his community who are trying to help his family. Billy and his family convince the Wilsons that the Nakajis pose no threat to them. Mr. Ramos tries to help the children understand why it is important for them to fight for their rights. Tomi's friends offer him compassion as well as a way to escape from his worries. Tomi's mother tries to help Tomi focus on the positive rather than the negative. All of these factors mean that Tomi will probably continue to consider Hawaii the place where he belongs.

Teachable Skills

Understanding Hist./Cultural Factors Have the students read other historical accounts of what happened to American citizens of Japanese heritage during World War II. Have them discuss whether their research changes their previous

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understanding of this time period.

Comparing and Contrasting Tomi's ideas about his family go through many alterations in this story, the most dramatic of these being the transformation of his relationship with his grandfather. Have the students write a short paper showing how Tomi's feelings about Grampa change as the story progresses.

Recognizing Feelings Many traumatic events happen to Tomi. In order for students to better understand the emotions involved in these events, have them consider what Tomi might tell his father if he could write to him. Have them draw a postcard for Tomi to send to his father and include a brief message from Tomi.

Differentiating Fact and Opinion The characters in this story express a lot of opinions based on prejudices and assumptions. Have the students make two lists, one of opinions stated about the Japanese immigrants in Hawaii and another of the facts about the characters shown by events in this book. Have the students discuss both lists and identify the relationship between the mistaken assumptions.