

On the Horizon

by Lois Lowry



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About the Book

Lois Lowry looks back at history through a personal lens as she draws from her own memories as a child in Hawaii and Japan, as well as from historical research, in this stunning work in verse for young readers.

On the Horizon tells the story of people whose lives were lost or forever altered by the tragedies of Pearl Harbor and Hiroshima. Based on the lives of sailors and Marines at Pearl Harbor and civilians in Hiroshima, *On the Horizon* contemplates humanity and war through verse that sings with pain, truth, and the importance of bridging cultural divides. This work emphasizes empathy and understanding in search of commonality and friendship, vital lessons for students as well as citizens of the world. Kenard Pak's stunning illustrations depict real-life people, places, and events, making for a vivid return to our past.

About the Author and Illustrator

Lois Lowry is the author of more than forty books, including the *New York Times* best-selling Giver Quartet and the popular Anastasia Krupnik series. She received Newbery Medals for two of her novels, *Number the Stars* and *The Giver*. Ms. Lowry lives in Maine. Visit her at loislowry.com and on Twitter @LoisLowryWriter.

Kenard Pak is the illustrator of many picture books including *Cat Wishes* and *Flowers Are Calling*. After studying at Syracuse University and California Institute of the Arts, he worked at DreamWorks Animation and Walt Disney Feature Animation. Visit him at pandagun.com and on Twitter and Instagram @kenardpak.

Pre-reading Activities

Before sharing this book, set the stage by providing a brief background on the bombing of Pearl Harbor and Hiroshima. The National World War II Museum offers many classroom resources, including traveling trunks of actual artifacts called “Operation Footlocker” (www.nationalww2museum.org/operation-footlocker). Or show vintage photos found through the digital resources of the National Archives (www.archives.gov/publications/prologue/2011/winter/ph-decklogs.html) or at National Geographic (www.nationalgeographic.com/photography/proof/2017/08/fire-fury-hiroshima-nagasaki-anniversary-nuclear-atomic-bomb-pictures). Talk about how this Lowry's novel in verse offers a personal glimpse into these events through poetry.

Discussion Questions

As students read or listen to *On the Horizon*, invite them to consider the relationships, conflicts, and surprises in the story. Ask open-ended questions that motivate them to dig deep and challenge them to find poems or passages that support their opinions or analysis. Possible discussion questions include:

1. How does the author begin the story?
2. How does the perspective change as the book moves along from present to past, from place to place? Work together to identify the time in history and each place on a map (e.g., Honolulu, Pearl Harbor, Hiroshima, Tokyo, Pennsylvania).
3. This novel in verse is presented in three parts. What is the primary focus of each part?
4. The three sections of this book are labeled “On the Horizon,” “Another Horizon,” and “Beyond the

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Horizons.” What is the significance of each title?

5. Why does the author present the sailors by name in Part 1? What do you learn about them?
6. Who are the focus individuals for Part 2 and Part 3? Why might they be the focus? What do you learn about them?
7. How does Lowry use bicycles (a red one and a green one) as symbols in the story?
8. What is the significance of 8:15 in the telling of these events? (see “8:15, December, 1941.” p. 24; “Names.” p. 32–33; “8:15, August 1945.” p. 47.)
9. The author incorporates many names and non-English words throughout the poems: Hawaiian words, proper names in English and Japanese, ship names, even the named atomic bomb that fell on Hiroshima (“Names,” p. 32). Work together to locate key words and names, pronounce them, and discuss their meaning and significance.
10. Family relationships are important in this story and many different relationships are highlighted, including mothers, fathers, sons, brothers, grandmothers, grandfathers, and more. Why might this be an important component of this story?
11. Why might Lowry have titled this book *On the Horizon*? The phrase is used throughout the book as well. Encourage students to discuss how and why this repeated phrase might be important in the story. (See Introduction to Part 1, p. 1; “She Was There,” p. 9; “Leo Amundson,” p. 10; “Child on a Beach,” p. 27; Author’s Note, p. 69–72)
12. What was happening in the world during the year the students were born or at age three (like the author is the story begins)? How do we react when our personal lives intersect with historical events? How can we make our mark on history?
13. One of the major themes of this book is the powerful connection between human beings— a crisis, within families and communities, as well as across cultures and across time. How does Lowry reveal those connections? Identify examples of

such connections between people and discuss their role in the story. Encourage students to cite lines or examples from the poems in this novel in verse to support their responses.

Writing Triolet Poems

Since this is a novel in verse, every page of the book is a poem (or part of a poem). Students may also notice that the author has used several different forms of poetry throughout the book. In particular, Lowry moves between rhyming poems and free verse poetry. Talk about each poem, how each one is composed and arranged, and why the author might have chosen that form for that moment in the story. In particular, Lowry includes three triolet poems (“Pearl Harbor,” p. 29; “Hiroshima,” p. 49; “*Tomodachi*” p. 67). Explain that the triolet is “a poem of eight lines, typically of eight syllables each, rhyming abaaabab and so structured that the first line recurs as the fourth and seventh lines and the second line recurs as the eighth” (from Dictionary.com). Review these triolet poems and try composing one together as a whole class. Then invite students to work with a partner to try writing their own triolet poem.

Writing Haiku Poems

In addition to rhyming poetry, free verse, and triolet poems, Lowry includes a single haiku poem (“Afterward,” p. 37) within the story. “A traditional Japanese haiku is a three-line poem with seventeen syllables, usually written in a 5/7/5 syllable count. Often focusing on images from nature, haiku emphasizes simplicity, intensity, and directness of expression” (from Poets.org). Lowry chooses to use the Japanese haiku to describe the aftermath of the explosion of the atomic bomb at Hiroshima; a powerful symbolic choice. Discuss the implications of this with students and invite them to try writing haiku poems of their own. They could reframe a story event in a haiku poem or craft their own response to the whole book as a haiku poem.

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Art: Kenard Pak

Consider the role of the illustrations by Kenard Pak in this book. How do they contribute to the story? If one only “reads the pictures,” what information is gained and what emotions does the reader experience? Consider the connection between Lowry, an American author, and Pak, an Asian American artist—a powerful combination for bringing this particular story to life. Invite students to select a poem from the book that is not illustrated and create a drawing or digital image to accompany it. They can work solo or with a partner. Share finished art and poems in a display and oral reading.

Art: Allen Say

In the “Author’s Note,” Lowry describes meeting the award-winning illustrator Allen Say. They discover their childhood connection, an unusual and fascinating bond. Take this opportunity to explore the life and work of Allen Say. Gather, share, and discuss some of his many beautiful picture books, such as *Grandfather’s Journey*, *Tree of Cranes*, *The Bicycle Man*, *Tea with Milk*, *Home of the Brave*, and *Drawing from Memory*, among others. How does his work reflect his heritage, his personal connections with WWII, and his experience with American life?

Art: Origami Cranes

In the poem, “Sadako Sasaki” (p. 44), Lowry briefly describes the true story of a young girl affected by the bombing of Hiroshima who believed that folding one thousand origami paper cranes would grant a wish. Although she died from the effects of radiation, her life and this gesture have become a symbol for innocent victims of war. The crane itself, the *orizuru* in Japanese, is considered the most classic shape of all Japanese origami. Challenge students to try folding origami paper cranes themselves. (One resource is: www.wikihow.com/Fold-a-Paper-Crane.) If possible, hang them to display along with the poems the students write.

Nonfiction and Research

As students learn more about these events and places in history, they may want to research additional background information and seek out visuals and firsthand accounts. Facsimiles of original photographs and documents from this period can also add to their studies. Look for “The Bombing of Pearl Harbor” at jackdaw.com. Lowry also provides a brief bibliography of resources, and the following websites offer additional information:

Smithsonian, National Museum of American History: americanhistory.si.edu/blog/eyewitness-pearl-harbor

Pacific Historic Parks (the *Arizona* and other ships): ussarizonamemorial.org

Pearl Harbor National Memorial: www.nps.gov/valr/index.htm

Hiroshima Peace Memorial Museum: hpmuseum.jp/?lang=eng

Great Torii of Meiji Shrine: www.meijijingu.or.jp/english/index

Obon Festival: www.nationalgeographic.com/travel/destinations/asia/japan/summer-obon-festival-of-the-dead

www.youtube.com/watch?v=Tu-56xHGpPM

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