



Honoring the Past,
Inspiring the Future

The Blackened Canteen

Supporting resources and guiding questions

Overview

Students will study the novel The Blackened Canteen by Jerry Yellin to **identify** important events and people related to the story, **discuss** themes of peace, courage and reconciliation, and, ultimately, **evaluate** the importance of honoring the past with events such as the Blackened Canteen Ceremony. Additionally, these activities and discussions will prepare students to be knowledgeable and active participants in the Blackened Canteen Ceremony and Symposium on December 6th, 2016.

Learning Outcomes

- Using the resources described in this document, students will summarize the historical context of the Blackened Canteen and the importance of preserving the story for future generations.
- Based on the Blackened Canteen story, students will examine themes of peace, courage, and reconciliation through group discussions.
- Working together, students will compose a group essay summarizing their discussions and presenting their responses to the themes of peace, courage, and reconciliation exemplified in The Blackened Canteen story

Historical Context

On the night of June 20th, 1945 while on a bombing raid over Shizuoka, Japan, two U.S. Army Air Forces' B-29s from the 314th Bomb Wing collided and crashed killing 23 crewmen. In the same raid, over 2000 Shizuoka citizens also died.

Dr. Hiroya Sugano, a child at the time, and his family lived through the raid. He visited the crash site the next morning but found no crewmen alive. He has never forgotten the death and destruction that surrounded him.

Another person at the scene was Mr. Fukumatsu Itoh. Mr. Itoh pulled two American airmen from the wreckage. They were still alive but died shortly thereafter. Mr. Itoh also retrieved a mangled, blackened canteen from the wreckage, which appeared to bear the handprint of its former owner.

Being a devout Buddhist, Mr. Itoh gave the American crewmen a proper burial alongside the local residents who had also died. For his selfless act of compassion, Mr. Itoh was roundly condemned by people in his community. He bore the hatred silently.

Instead, Mr. Itoh began conducting a modest annual ceremony to honor those who had paid the ultimate price that war often exacts. A silent prayer was offered and bourbon whiskey was poured from the blackened canteen onto the crash site memorial as an offering to the spirits of the fallen, both Japanese and American. Eventually, he erected two monuments in their memory and the annual ceremonies continued. Dr. Sugano witnessed Mr. Itoh's display of courage and benevolence, which affected him deeply.

Before his death, Mr. Itoh passed the blackened canteen to Dr. Sugano, who promised to carry on the tradition. Since 1972, he has personally funded and hosted the annual ceremony at the monuments, which are attended by many Japanese and American dignitaries, both civilian and military. He has also conducted similar ceremonies at other locations both in Japan and the United States.

2016 marks the 16th year that Dr. Sugano has attended the December 7th commemoration at Pearl Harbor. When the occasion has permitted, he has sometimes conducted an unobtrusive, semi-private ceremony at the Memorial in the company of close friends.

Supporting resources and guiding questions

Guided Reading Suggestion

The book, The Blackened Canteen, has many characters. To help readers remember the significance of each, it is advised to make a character list as you read. This will allow the reader to quickly recall and add additional information regarding each character.

Section 1

Resources:

-The Blackened Canteen, Pages 7-26

-Appendix 1: Crews of B-29s

-AFN News story [WWII Ceremony of Jerry Yellin and B-29 Losses](#)

-National Parks Service Recording of [2015 Blackened Canteen Ceremony at the USS Arizona](#)

-Recommend to begin at 21:00 to see Dr. Sugano's remarks and 'the pour' (stop at 28:22)

Discussion:

1. How does the author's note on page 9 help you prepare to read this book?
2. Conflict and war are sometimes viewed as exciting and noble activities. How do the experiences described in the chapter contrast with that view? How would you describe the feelings and reactions of the American crew members to their situation?

Section 2

Resources:

-The Blackened Canteen, Pages 29-60

-News Reel "[Bombing of the Gunboat USS Panay](#)"

-Video: [Tommy Dorsey "Marie"](#)

-[Frank Sinatra with Tommy Dorsey Orchestra "This Love of Mine"](#)

Discussion:

1. Describe the difference between popular culture in the United States (baseball, Tommy Dorsey Orchestra, homecoming dances, etc.) experienced by Jack, Monroe, and Mary, and the news of events that occurred in Japan, China, and Europe in the years prior to 1941.
2. If you were an American teenager in 1941, how might events in Japan and Europe affect you?
3. If you were a Japanese teenager in 1941, how might you view the problems between the U.S. and your government?



4. Consider the relationship between Jack O’Conner and his parents compared to Fukumatsu and Taro Itoh. How are these parent-son relationships different and how are they similar? What factors contribute to the differences between the two families?

Section 3

Resources:

The Blackened Canteen, Pages 61-98

Johns Hopkins Library: [Modern Hippocratic Oath](#)

Discussion:

1. Focus on the discussion on page 64 and 65. What factors contribute to poor translations between the US and Japanese officials as described by Admiral Yamamoto in the book? What are the results of these poorly translated messages? From our vantage point in the 21st century, what should we learn from these events?
2. Many of the characters in this story are, or aspire to be, doctors. Using the “Modern Hippocratic Oath” as a starting point, discuss how a person’s calling to be a doctor may influence the way s/he views war.
3. On page 93, we learn that Monroe “felt like he had a calling” to become a doctor. How would you describe having a calling? Do you believe that Monroe is correct in that “it would be wrong and self-centered” to not follow that calling? What is the relationship between “having a calling” and “having a duty?”

Section 4

Resources:

The Blackened Canteen, Pages 99-133

Discussion:

1. How do Itoh’s actions reveal his character when he confronts aggressive military officers in the market ?
2. In chapter 24, Itoh meets with a local Buddhist priest. The priest advised him to study the *koans* (Buddhist riddles and sayings) because “the act of studying and contemplation were more important than the answers to the ancient riddles.” What are some possible interpretations of these *koans*?
-*What is the color of wind?*
-*When you can do nothing, what can you do?*
3. On page 113, Yamamoto says, “The people in Tokyo, eager for war, know nothing of America.” Does not knowing an opponent make it easier or harder to hate them? Why? How might these feelings affect wartime decisions? How would it affect peace making?

Section 5

Resources:

-The Blackened Canteen, Pages 134-161

-[Pearl Harbor Newsreel December 7th 1941](#) (note the summary of the film before viewing)

-[National Parks Service: Pearl Harbor Survivors](#) (Richard Fiske is page 5)



Discussion:

1. What is Ken Yamakawa's connection to Shizuoka City? Do you think this connection was a deciding factor to his family being sent to a Japanese relocation center? Why or why not?
2. Consider how Takeshi Maeda and Richard Fiske experienced the hours after the December 7th attack, as described in chapter 36 and 37. How do you think Fiske felt about the Japanese who participated in the attack? Are these feelings justified?

Section 6:

Resources:

The Blackened Canteen, pages 162-184

[First Japanese Prisoner of War](#) (Article about Kazuo Sakamaki, who is referenced on page 181)

Discussion:

1. Do you agree Admiral Yamamoto's view of Kazuo Sakamaki? Why or why not?
2. Considering the fact that Itoh Taro was killed by American Forces in an attack, how did this final message to his son affect Fukumatsu Itoh's choices in the future?
 "...we must do what is honorable and just actions at all times, event to our enemies
 for one day they will be our friends."
3. If you were Fukumatsu Itoh, would you have allowed the Navy to honor your father with a full military funeral? Why or why not?

Section 7

Resources:

The Blackened Canteen: Pages 185-222, *Reread pages 16-26

[WWII adversaries meet face-to-face](#)

Discussion:

1. What contributes to the lack of closure for the families of the airmen who died in the B-29 crash over Shizuoka City?
2. How do you define reconciliation? How is reconciliation related to peace and forgiveness?
3. Considering the savagery and violence of war that was experienced on Iwo Jima and the firebombing of Shizuoka, what can a person do to begin the process of personal reconciliation?

Section 8

Resources:

The Blackened Canteen: pages 225-275

Discussion:

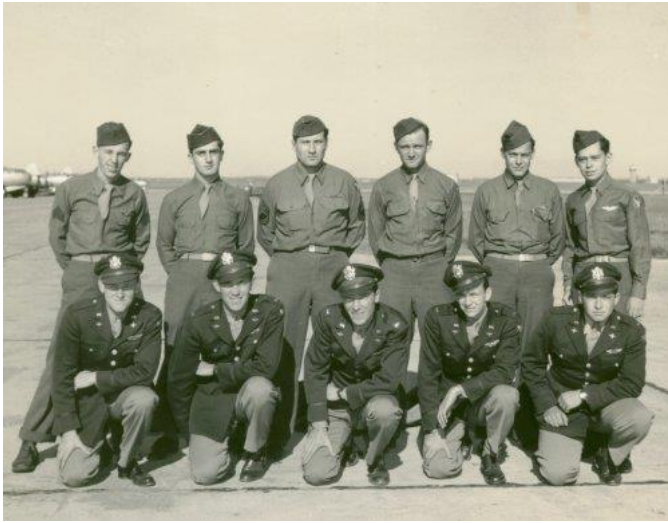
1. Chapter 66 illustrates how the events of the war filled twelve-year-old Hiroya Sugano with hate and anger towards Americans. Considering what you know about WWII and what you've learned in this book, was Hiroya's anger at American's justified?
2. How did Ken Yamakawa help young Hiroya set aside his anger and begin the process of reconciliation?



3. What are barriers that prevent us from continuing to develop peace and reconciliation between Americans and Japanese?
4. How did Fukumatsu Itoh demonstrate courage when burying the American airmen who died in the B-29 crash over Shizuoka City?
5. Examine how the legacy of the Blackened Canteen passed from Fukumatsu Itoh to Dr. Hiroya Sugano. Do you think that carrying on the legacy of the Blackened Canteen is a calling or a duty for Dr. Sugano? Defend your opinion.



Appendix 1: Crews of B-29s that collided over Shizuoka, Japan



Crew of B-29 (#42-65373)

Barczak, Raymond E., Sgt, Tail Gunner, Maryland
 Colli, Kenneth, Sgt, Right Gunner, Connecticut
 Durham, Kenneth E., FO, Navigator, Missouri
 Hopkins, Donald Q., Capt, Plane Commander, Indiana
 Joyce, William G., FO, Pilot, Texas
 Kuehler, Gerhard J., M/Sgt, Flight Engineer, Texas
 Long, Maurice E., FO, Radar Observer, Indiana
 Mose, Edward J., Jr., S/Sgt, Radio Operator, Illinois
 Patsey, Justin J., Sgt, Left Gunner, New York
 Powsner, Maurice J., FO, Bombardier, New York
 Ulrich, Thomas, S/Sgt, CFC Gunner, Wisconsin



Crew of B-29 (#44-69881)

Arhutick, Tim, FO, Pilot, Michigan
 Bergeron, Ernest D., Sgt, CFC Gunner, Massachusetts
 Cameron, John W., Corp, Left Gunner, Ohio
 Cohen, Monroe M., FO, Radar Observer, New York
 Everdon, Waldo C., 1st Lt, Plane Commander, Michigan
 Kellogg, Herbert A., Corp, Radio Operator, Pennsylvania
 Morretta, Arthur J., Corp, Tail Gunner, New York
 O'Conner, John J., 2nd Lt, Bombardier, New York
 Puciloski, John, Sgt, Right Gunner, Pennsylvania
 Rodeheffer, Edwin A., Jr., 2nd Lt, Navigator, Ohio
 Stockburger, William B., Corp, Engineer, Georgia
 Towle, Newton E., Jr., 2nd Lt, Passenger, AO, Maine

Final Resting Place of
 Crews #42-65373 and #44-69881
 Zachary Taylor National Cemetery
 Louisville, Kentucky, USA

