

PEACE EDUCATION NETWORK

Teach Peace Pack

Assembly: Sadako and the thousand cranes



Aim: to explore the human cost of war and see how children, so often the innocent victims, can work together for peace.

Planning/Preparation: You may want to display an image of Sadako during the assembly.

This assembly is most effective if it is followed up in the classroom with the making of origami cranes carrying the children's messages of peace.

Some children may find the content of this assembly upsetting, so be aware of the need for sensitive follow up.

1 Introduction

Explain that you are going to tell the children a story. The story is about a girl called Sadako. It is a sad story, but it also a story of courage and hope.

2 Telling the story

Sadako Sasaki was only two years old on 6th August 1945, the day when a very big bomb called an atomic (or nuclear) bomb was dropped near her home by Misasa Bridge in Hiroshima, Japan. Sadako was blown out of the window by the huge explosion but somehow, although her clothes were burnt, she wasn't hurt.

Whilst Sadako, her parents and her brother escaped to safety, lots of other people were killed or badly injured, and a large part of the city was destroyed in seconds. The bomb also let out a sort of poison called radiation, which can kill or badly hurt people it touches.

Sadako and her brother Masahiro grew up just like most other children around the world, despite what happened on that terrible day in 1945. When Sadako was 11, she was a very fast runner. But one day that year, she noticed that she had strange lumps on parts of her body. She went to see a doctor and they did some tests on her. It was bad news. The doctor said that Sadako had a type of cancer caused by the bomb, called leukaemia. She was very ill and would have to go into hospital. Unfortunately, unlike today where most people with leukaemia survive, back in 1954 most people died from it. Sadako's parents were heartbroken. They could not bear the thought of losing her. They bought her a kimono – a special Japanese dress – with pictures of cherry tree blossom on it, and it may have helped Sadako to feel a bit better about things.

Soon after Sadako went into hospital, her Father told her the Japanese legend that if you fold one thousand paper birds called cranes you would be granted a wish. This is because the crane is very special in Japan, and origami is the Japanese art of folding paper to make shapes such as animals. Sadako began to fold cranes. Despite being very tired and in a lot of pain, and despite having to use any scrap paper she could find (because paper was very rare and expensive back then), she managed to fold 1000 cranes. It was an amazing achievement. She made her wish: to get well, and also for her parents to have more money, as they were quite poor.

Sadako then started to try and fold another 1000 cranes. Sadly, she only managed to fold around 600 more cranes before she died. It was 25th October 1955. On the day of the funeral, each of her classmates put a paper crane that they had folded into her coffin.

Sadako's friends wanted to make sure that Sadako was remembered. They started collecting money to build a statue of her, including by writing to school head teachers asking them for a donation. Some newspapers spread the word across the whole of Japan, which led to lots more people giving money towards the statue. In 1958, a statue of Sadako holding a life-size golden crane, was built in Hiroshima Peace Park. It is called the Children's Peace Monument. At the bottom of the statue there is a plaque that says: 'This is our cry, this is our prayer, peace in the world.'

3 Conclusion

This is sad story, but it is also one of courage and hope, because Sadako has inspired children all over the world. Children (and adults!) from many different countries learn to make the paper cranes. Sometimes they write their own wish for peace on the cranes. Thousands of paper cranes are sent to Hiroshima, and they are put on display next to the statue of Sadako.

The peace cranes can't give Sadako her life back, but each of us can think of one thing we can do to make our family, friends, school or the world a bit more peaceful. What would your wish be?

Follow up activities/resources:

- For other activities about Sadako, to learn how to make your own paper cranes, and for your free peace education pack, see www.cnduk.org/information/peace-education.
- Cranes can be hung on strings and make a beautiful school display.
- Read *The Complete Story of Sadako Sasaki* by Masahiro Sasaki and Sue DiCicco, 2018.
- Watch a short film or animation about Sadako, there are lots available online.
- Learn about other stories of children affected by war, such as: *Gervelie's Journey: A Refugee Diary* by Anthony Robinson and Annemarie Young, 2010. This is part of a series of Refugee Diary books: *Mohammed's Journey* (Iraq) *Hamzat's Journey* (Chechyna) and *Meltem's Journey* (Turkey).
- Discover the message of peace and good will sent out by the young people of Wales annually on the Day of Goodwill, 18 May, (the date of the first peace conference in the Hague in 1899), to young people around the world. See www.urdd.cymru/en/humanitarian/hum.
- Join the movement in support of International Day of Peace on 21 September – find ideas for action and share your plans for peace day to help inspire other around the world. Visit: www.un.org/en/events/peaceday.