

WORLD WAR II AND ITS AFTERMATH

Primary Source

On August 6, 1945, an American plane dropped an atomic bomb on the Japanese city of Hiroshima. John Hersey's classic book *Hiroshima*, written in 1946, vividly captures the aftermath of the bombing. Hersey interviewed six residents who survived the blast, and in the book he recounts their experiences. ♦ *As you read this excerpt, think about the experience of people living in Hiroshima when the United States dropped the bomb. Then, on a separate sheet of paper, answer the questions that follow.*

From *Hiroshima* by John Hersey

As Mrs. Nakamura stood watching her neighbor, everything flashed whiter than any white she had ever seen. . . . She had taken a single step (the house was 1,350 yards, or three-quarters of a mile, from the center of the explosion) when something picked her up and she seemed to fly into the next room . . . pursued by parts of her house.

. . . The debris did not cover her deeply. She rose up and freed herself. She heard a child cry. . . . As Mrs. Nakamura started frantically to claw her way toward the baby, she could see or hear nothing of her other children. . . .

[Dr. Terufumi Sasaki, the Red Cross Hospital surgeon] . . . was one step beyond an open window when the light of the bomb was reflected, like a gigantic photographic flash, in the corridor. . . . Just then (the building was 1,650 yards from the center), the blast ripped through the hospital. The glasses he was wearing flew off his face . . . his Japanese slippers zipped out from under his feet—but

**Atomic bomb blast**

otherwise, thanks to where he stood, he was untouched.

. . . The hospital was in horrible confusion . . . windows had blown in and cut people, blood was spattered, . . . many of the patients were running about screaming, many more lay dead. . . . Dr. Sasaki found himself the only doctor in the hospital who was unhurt.

Dr. Sasaki, who believed that the enemy had hit only the building he was in, . . . got bandages and began to bind the wounds of those inside the hospital; while outside, all over Hiroshima, maimed and dying citizens turned their unsteady steps toward the Red Cross Hospital. . . .

. . . Mr. Tanimoto saw an astonishing panorama. . . . as much of Hiroshima as he could see through the clouded air was giving off a thick, dreadful miasma [poisonous fog]. . . .

He had thought of his wife and baby, his church, his home, his parishioners, all of them down in that awful murk. Once more he began to run in fear—toward the city.

Questions to Think About

1. What was Mrs. Nakamura's first response when the atomic bomb went off?
2. How did Dr. Sasaki respond to the crisis? What did Mr. Tanimoto do?
3. **Demonstrate Reasoned Judgment** When President Truman decided to use the atomic bomb against the Japanese, no one knew

exactly what the effects would be. Knowing what we know now, do you think the atomic bomb should ever be used again? Why or why not?

4. **Activity** Research the bombing of Hiroshima. Then, write a poem or story to represent the effects of the bomb on the city and people.