

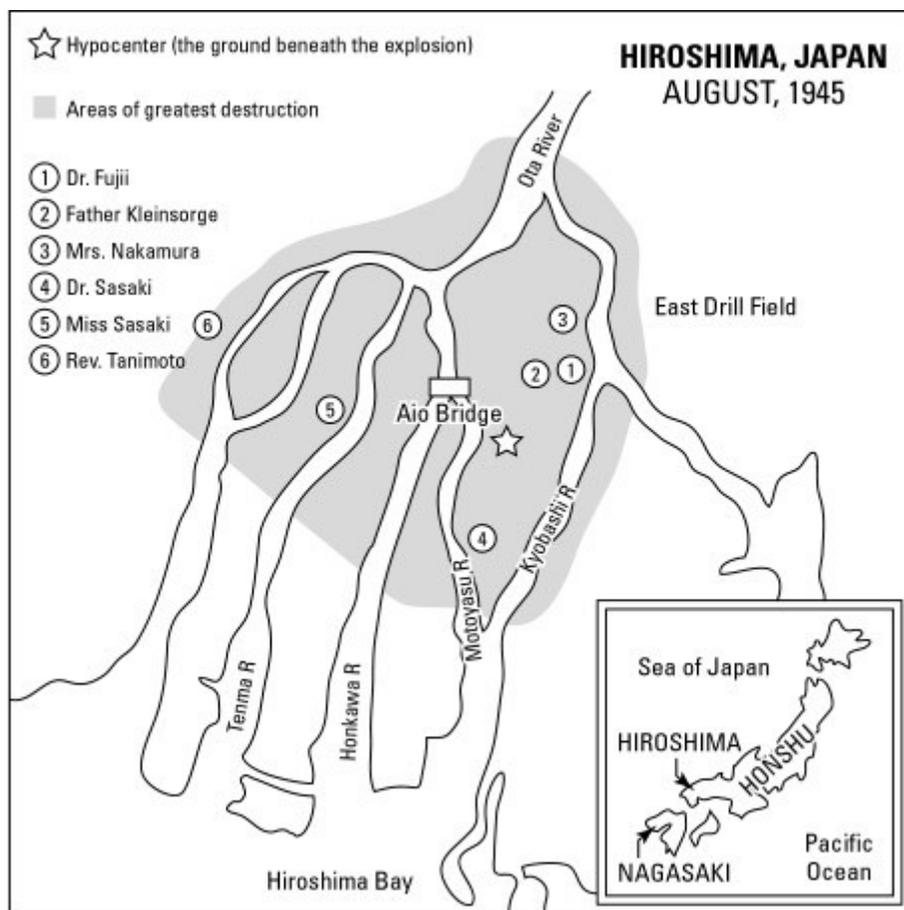
Fremont Great Books Book Club
Discussion Questions for “Hiroshima” by John Hersey
August 22, 2025

1. [James Richard Smart's thesis](#) "argues that Hersey constructed, using rhetorical and narrative techniques, a story designed to engender sympathy for survivors of the bomb, which at the time of publication of the story in 1946 were still considered America's bitter enemies." Do you think Hersey was successful and what techniques did you notice, if any?
2. Hersey was inspired by the structure and premise of Thornton Wilder's "The Bridge of San Luis Rey." In "TBOSL," 5 random people die when a bridge crashes; the reader knows immediately when the deaths occurred and Wilder focuses on why each person ended up on the bridge when they did. How did the structure affect your impression of each subject and the overall bombing of Hiroshima? Bonus points: compare and contrast "TBOSL" and "Hiroshima."
3. John Hersey is considered an early practitioner of the New Journalism school of reporting, which is characterized by the reporter immersing themselves into facts and using literary and subjective approaches to tell a story. What do you think of Hersey's style in comparison to authors who followed in his footsteps that the group has read, such as Truman Capote, Hunter S. Thompson, and Norman Mailer?
4. What glimpses do we get of Japanese culture, values, and attitudes?
5. Hersey interviewed thirty individuals who survived the bombing of Hiroshima. From the thirty interviewees, he selected a widowed mother, a female office clerk, two doctors, and two clergymen.
 - How did the selection of these six specific people and backgrounds affect the story Hersey wanted to tell, particularly to the American audience?
 - Did the individual's stories end up being more or less representative of humanity?
 - If Hersey had simply reported facts about the day without presenting it through the eyes of these six people, would that have changed how the story was received?
 - Which survivor's story resonated with you the most?
 - Did the shifts back and forth between the six stories add to or distract from the story?
6. Were you surprised when one of the story's subjects interacted with another featured subject, such as just after the bomb at Adano Park or years later?
7. "Hiroshima" was originally published in August 1946 as the almost sole content of a weekly "New Yorker" magazine. About 40 years after original publication, the book was reissued with an additional chapter entitled "The Aftermath." How does this chapter affect the reader's reaction to the earlier chapters? How do Hersey's six subjects display different ways of coping with tragedy in the years following the bombing?
8. How does "Hiroshima" balance reporting what happened on August 6, 1945 (and the aftermath) without being overly sensational?

Fremont Great Books Book Club
Discussion Questions for "Hiroshima" by John Hersey
August 22, 2025

CHARACTER MAP

[Source: Cliffs Notes](#)



SOURCES AND LINKS

[James Richard Smart's thesis Rhetorical and narrative structures in John Hersey's Hiroshima: How they breathe life into the tale of a doomed city How they breathe life into the tale of a doomed city](#)

[John Hersey and the Hiroshima Cover-up](#)

[Revisiting John Hersey's Groundbreaking "Hiroshima"](#)

[Oral History of Enola Gay Crew](#)

[SparkNotes Essay Questions for Hiroshima](#)

[GradeSaver Essay Questions for Hiroshima](#)