

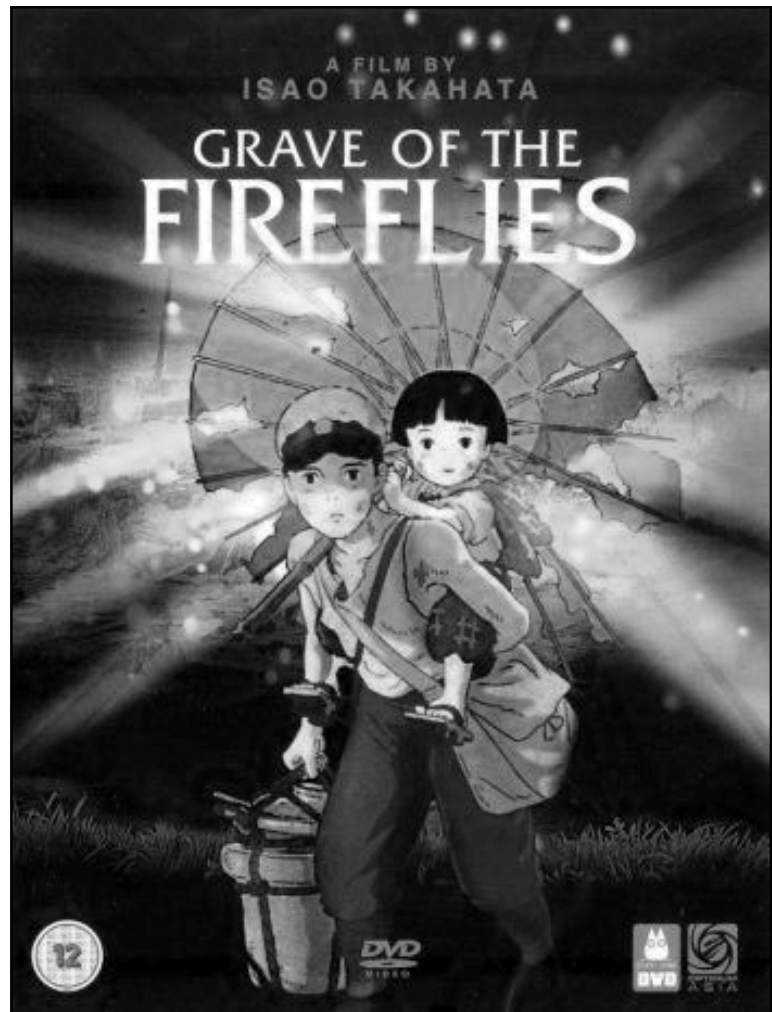
Comprehension and Discussion Activities for the Movie

GRAVE OF THE FIREFLIES

This module has been designed to accompany the film *Grave of the Fireflies* (1988).

Grave of the Fireflies is an animated film based on the novel by Akiyuki Nosaka, about his experience during and after World War II. The film tells the story of a Japanese teenage boy called Seita, and his younger sister, Setsuko. Their father is in the Japanese Imperial Navy, and their mother dies in the firebombing of Kobe. Seita and Setsuko struggle to survive as the war causes death, famine and hostility throughout Japan.

The module consists of teacher's notes and two handouts that you can copy and give to your students. If you don't have access to a copier, you can write these on the board.



You might like to do many of these activities in students' first language. It is important that they understand the ideas behind the story, and this is easier in their own language.

1. Before You Watch

1.1: Japan at War

Ask students what they know about World War II. What countries fought in the war? Students brainstorm what they know. Write their answers on the board.

Brainstorm about Japan's part in World War II. How did Japan enter the war? Whose side was it on? What happened to it at the end of the war?

Give copies of **Worksheet 1: Before You Watch** to your students. Read through the information with students.

With students, read through the vocabulary definitions in **Worksheet 1** and check their understanding.

Students complete 1.1 and 1.2 on **Worksheet 1**.

Answers to 1.1

Exercise A:

1. *T*
2. *T*
3. *F – The U.S. dropped two atomic bombs on Japan.*
4. *F – Japan had no control over what happened next because it surrendered unconditionally.*
5. *T*

Exercise B:

1. *1942*
2. *500,000, 67*
3. *five million*
4. *1945, 650,000*
5. *200,000*
6. *15th, 2nd*
7. *70 million*

1.2: Characters in the Movie

Answers to 1.2

1. *b*
2. *c*
3. *a*
4. *e*
5. *d*

2. While You Watch

2.1: The Kobe Firebombing 00.00 – 21.30

Give copies of **Worksheet 2: While You Watch** to your students, or write the questions for 2.1 on the board. Give students a few minutes to read the questions. Play the film to 21.30.

Answers to 2.1

Exercise A:

1. While Seita is lying on the floor of Sannomiya Station, a cleaner looks through his things and finds a candy tin with ashes inside.
2. Seita's spirit begins to tell the story of what happened to him and Setsuko.
3. During the air raid, Seita, Setsuko and their mother are preparing to go to the bomb shelter.
4. The firebombs cause fires to start all over the city.
5. Seita says that there is "black rain" from all the bombing.
6. After the bombing, they go to the elementary school, which is being used as a hospital for people who were hurt.
7. Seita and Setsuko's mother is completely bandaged because of her injuries.
8. Seita and Setsuko go to stay with their aunt after their mother dies.

Exercise B:

1. Fireflies and Setsuko's ashes come out of the tin.
2. Because they heard the air raid sirens (alarms).
3. Because she did not arrive at the bomb shelter quickly enough, and was in the street when the firebombs were dropped.
4. Possible answer: his father is in the Japanese Imperial Navy, and Seita thinks they will punish the USA for this attack.
5. Possible answers: he doesn't know how to tell her; he doesn't want to upset her; he doesn't want her to lose hope; he doesn't want to believe it; he wants to protect her from the truth.

2.2: Living with their Aunt 21.31 – 38.54

Give students a few minutes to read the questions. Play the film to 38.54. If students don't have **Worksheet 2**, write the exercises on the board before you play the film.

Answers to 2.2

Exercise A:

1. T
2. F – When Seita tells the aunt that his mother died after the firebombing, she says that he should write to his father to tell him the news.
3. F – Seita does not return to school because his school burned down in a bombing.
4. T
5. F – Seita has a memory of his mother coming to get him and Setsuko from the beach.
6. F – Their aunt wants Seita to sell his mother's kimonos, but Setsuko does not want him to.

Exercise B:

1. *Possible answers: they will get extra help and more food; he has a job and money; when Japan wins the war, he will be a hero.*
2. *Because salt and soy sauce are rationed, so people have to make their own salt.*
3. *Because their aunt says that he can get lots of rice in exchange for the kimonos, and because Seita wants to have rice to eat.*

2.3: Leaving the House 38.55 – 59.50

Give students a few minutes to read the questions. Play the film to 59.50. If students don't have **Worksheet 2**, write the exercises on the board before you play the film.

Answers to 2.3

Exercise A:

1. *b*
2. *d*
3. *e*
4. *c*
5. *a*

Exercise B:

1. *F – Setsuko eats the rice, even though she is angry that they exchanged it for her mother's Kimonos.*
2. *T*
3. *T*
4. *F – Their uncle says it's "about time" that they cook their own food (meaning that they should be taking care of themselves).*
5. *F – Seita and Setsuko leave their aunt's house because she treats them badly and makes them feel guilty for living there.*
6. *T*
7. *F – Seita and Setsuko catch fireflies to light the shelter.*

Exercise C:

Students work in groups or as a class to answer the questions. (There are no right or wrong answers to these questions.)

1. *Possible answers: because there is not enough food for everyone; their aunt thinks they are lazy; they are not working, going to school, or helping Japan fight the war; she doesn't like them and wants them to leave.*
2. *Possible answers: they hate their aunt; they know she wants them to leave; Seita thinks he is old enough to take care of both of them.*
3. *Possible answers: because they are dead and she wants to bury them; she wants the fireflies to be with her mother; she thinks every person and animal should be buried when they die; she couldn't bury her mother, so she is burying the fireflies instead.*

2.4: Trying to Survive 59.51 – end

Give students a few minutes to read the questions. Play the film to the end. If students don't have **Worksheet 2**, write the exercises on the board before you play the film.

Answers to 2.4

Exercise A:

1. A farmer tells Seita and Setsuko that he has no food to share, and they should return to their aunt's house.
2. Seita tries to steal sugar from a farmer because they are starving and Setsuko is sick.
3. The policeman tells the farmer that because the farmer kicked and beat Seita, he is "tempted to call it assault."
4. Seita returns to their shelter and finds Setsuko lying on the grass.
5. When Seita goes to the bank, he discovers that Japan has surrendered unconditionally.
6. At the bank, Seita also discovers that his father is probably dead.
7. Setsuko is putting marbles in her mouth because she believes that they are candy.
8. While Seita is cooking, Setsuko dies on the bed.

Exercise B:

Students write a *wh*-question for each of the answers. There are a few different ways of asking the same question; here are some possibilities:

1. Why do Seita and Setsuko steal tomatoes from a farm?
2. Where does Seita get food (and other things) during the air raids?
3. What does Seita try to trade with the woman?
4. What does the doctor say about Setsuko?
5. Why is Setsuko making "rice balls" out of dirt?

Exercise C:

Students choose the best answer. If students have answered differently to below, ask them to give reasons.

1. *b*
2. *c*
3. *b*

3. After You Watch

3.1: Is it always wrong to steal?

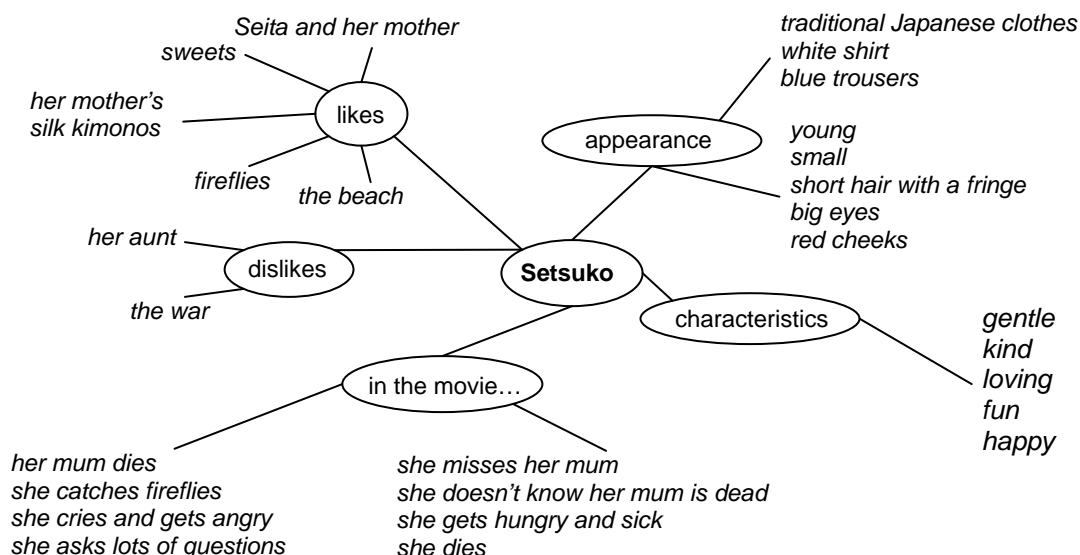
Exercise A: When Seita and Setsuko become desperate for food, Seita begins to steal. He is caught stealing sugar and tomatoes, for example. When people run from their houses during air raids, Seita steals food and other things to trade. Normally, these acts are considered wrong. But if there are special circumstances, such as war and starvation, do you think they are still wrong?

As a class, discuss whether it is OK to steal sometimes, and whether the house owners and farmers should share their food.

Put students in groups. Half the students in each group are the poor children, the other half are the angry house owners and farmers. Students write short plays (two or three minutes) or perform role plays for the rest of the class. This can be in English or in students' own language.

3.2: Focus on the Characters

Exercise B: On the board, make a vocabulary map with the name Setsuko in the middle. Elicit as much information as possible about Setsuko. See example below:



Exercise C: In groups, students make a vocabulary map of a different character from the movie, giving as much detail as possible about: appearance, characteristics, likes, dislikes, actions in the movie. Then groups present their vocabulary map to the class.

Exercise D: Students imagine they are Seita and write a letter to Setsuko. Students should describe Seita's feelings towards her death, explain why she died, and why Setsuko did the things he did before she died.

Worksheet 1: Before You Watch

Japan at War

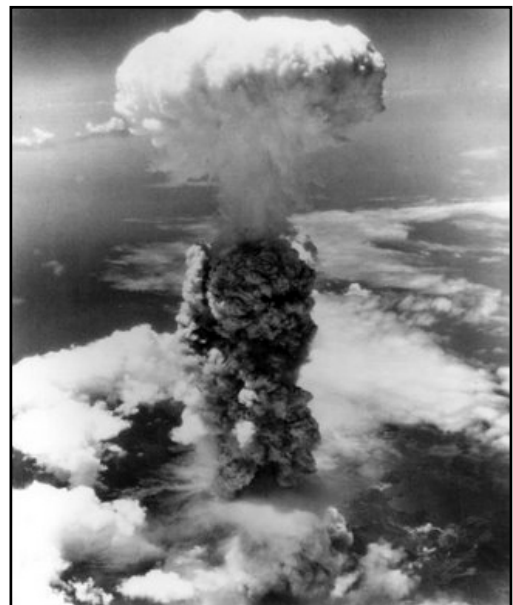
During World War II (1939-45), Germany tried to take control of Europe and the USSR. In 1941, the Pacific War (part of WWII but located in the Pacific) started when Japan invaded British Malaya and attacked the US naval base at Pearl Harbour in Hawaii. Japan was one of the Axis powers and was supported by Germany, Italy and Thailand. After the attack on Pearl Harbour, the US joined the Allies and fought against Japan, Germany and Italy.



The U.S. bombed Japan between 1942 and 1945. The bombing was heaviest in 1945, when they used firebombing and atomic bombs. The firebombing caused extreme destruction in 67 Japanese cities, killing about 500,000 people and destroying the homes of about five million. Kobe was firebombed twice, in March and June 1945, making about 650,000 people homeless. In August 1945, the US dropped atomic bombs on Hiroshima and Nagasaki, killing over 200,000 people. Soon after the bombings, on August 15th, Japan surrendered unconditionally to the Allies. World War II officially ended on September 2nd, 1945.

By the end of the war, Japan's economy was badly damaged. Its cities were mostly ruined and it could not produce enough food for its people.

Over 70 million people worldwide were killed in World War II, which ended with victory for the Allies in 1945.



Useful Vocabulary:

Allies / Allied powers: the countries that fought against the Axis powers in World War II. The main three Allies were the UK, the US and the USSR (communist Russia)

ally: a country that agrees to cooperate with another country for military action

Axis powers: the alliance of Germany, Italy, Japan during World War II

firebomb: a bomb that starts fires

firebombing: attacks with firebombs

kimono: a long, loose robe worn as formal clothing in Japan

malnourished: not having enough good quality food to eat

atomic bomb: a powerful bomb that uses nuclear reactions for destruction

USSR: the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics, which does not exist anymore

to surrender unconditionally: to stop fighting a war and have no power or control over what happens to the country afterwards

1.1: Japan at War

Exercise A: True or false? If false, write the correct sentence.

1. The US joined the war after Japan attacked Pearl Harbour.
2. Japan became an ally of Nazi Germany and Italy.
3. Japan dropped an atomic bomb on the U.S.
4. When Japan surrendered, it had some control over what happened next to the country and people.
5. Japan invaded colonies in Southeast Asia that were controlled by Europe.

Exercise B: Fill the gaps with the correct numbers from the background information.

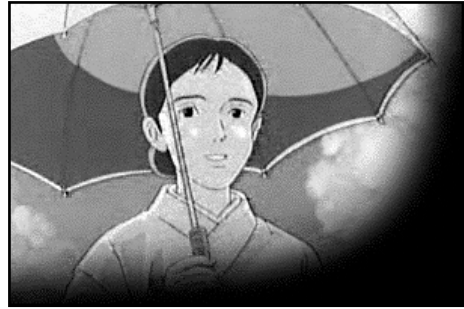
1. The US started bombing Japan in _____.
2. The firebombing of Japan killed about _____ people from _____ Japanese cities.
3. The firebombing made about _____ people homeless in Japan.
4. Kobe was firebombed in March and June _____. About _____ became homeless.
5. The US atomic bombing killed over _____ people.
6. On August _____ 1945, Japan surrendered, and on September _____ the war ended.
7. Over _____ people died during World War II.

1.2: Characters in the Movie

Read the descriptions of the characters and match them to the pictures.

1. Seita is 14 years old. He is Setsuko's older brother, and he takes care of her after their parents die. They lived in Kobe, Japan.

a.



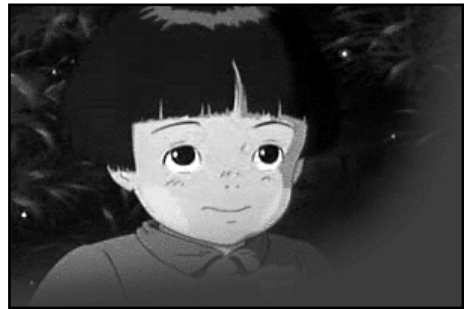
2. Setsuko is Seita's younger sister. She is four years old and she doesn't know that her mother is dead.

b.



3. Seita and Setsuko's mother is kind and loving. She dies at the start of the movie, when the city is firebombed. The children think about her a lot.

c.



4. Seita and Setsuko's aunt lives in Nishinomiya. She is the only person Seita and Setsuko can stay with after their mother dies. She treats the children badly.

d.



5. Seita and Setsuko's cousin is a little kinder than her mother, and tries to help them in the movie.

e.



Worksheet 2: While You Watch

2.1: The Kobe Firebombing 00.00 – 21.30

Exercise A: Complete the following sentences with words from the box.

bomb shelter black candy tin aunt mother elementary school Setsuko firebombs

1. While Seita is lying on the floor of Sannomiya Station, a cleaner looks through his things and finds a _____ with ashes inside.
2. Seita's spirit begins to tell the story of what happened to him and _____.
3. During the air raid, Seita, Setsuko and their mother are preparing to go to the _____.
4. The _____ cause fires to start all over the city.
5. Seita says that there is " _____ rain" from all the bombing.
6. After the bombing, they go to the _____, which is being used as a hospital for people who were hurt.
7. Seita and Setsuko's _____ is completely bandaged because of her injuries.
8. Seita and Setsuko go to stay with their distant _____ after their mother dies.

Exercise B: Answer the questions below.

1. When the cleaner throws the candy tin outside, what comes out of it?
2. How does the family know that they must escape to the bomb shelter?
3. Why did their mother get burned by the firebombs?
4. Why do you think Seita says, "Dad will make them pay for this"?
5. Why do you think Seita doesn't tell Setsuko that their mother has died?

2.2: Living with their Aunt 21.31 – 38:54

Exercise A: True or false? If false, write the correct sentence.

1. Seita digs up food and supplies that he had buried in the ground, and gives them to his aunt.
2. When Seita tells his aunt that his mother died after the firebombing, she says that he should not tell his father the news.
3. Seita does not return to school because he is lazy.
4. When they hear the air raid siren (alarm), the family goes to the bomb shelter.
5. On the beach, Seita sees his mother coming to get them.
6. Setsuko wants Seita to sell their mother's kimonos.

Exercise B: Answer the questions below.

1. Why does Seita's aunt say to him, "It's lucky your father is in the Navy"?
2. Why are the people at the beach collecting sea salt?
3. Why does Seita agree to sell his mother's kimonos, even though it makes Setsuko upset?

2.3: Leaving the House 38.55 – 59.50

Exercise A: Match the quotes below with the person who said them.

- | | |
|--|----------------|
| 1. "Do you think a lazy slug like you deserves the same as the people who are working so hard for our nation?" | a. Children |
| 2. "I'm making a grave. Mama's in a grave too." | b. Aunt |
| 3. "I'm telling Dad to write back soon, because you're waiting." | c. Store owner |
| 4. "You can't buy a stove like this easily nowadays." | d. Setsuko |
| 5. "A ghost! A ghost!" | e. Seita |

Exercise B: True or false? If false, write the correct sentence.

1. Setsuko does not eat the rice, because she is angry that they exchanged it for her mother's kimonos.
2. The aunt asks Seita if they have relatives in Tokyo that they can go and live with.
3. Seita decides to take money from the bank, because he remembers that there is 7,000 yen in his mother's bank account.
4. The uncle feels sorry that Seita and Setsuko are cooking their own food.
5. Seita and Setsuko leave their aunt's house because she forces them to leave.
6. Seita and Setsuko decide to live in an abandoned bomb shelter.
7. Seita and Setsuko catch fireflies to eat them.

Exercise C: Discuss the following questions in groups or as a class.

1. Why do you think their aunt gives less food to Seita and Setsuko? Why does she say they do not deserve rice?
2. Why do you think Seita and Setsuko leave their aunt's house and move to the shelter?
3. Why do you think Setsuko digs a grave for the fireflies? How does she respond to hearing about her mother's death?

2.4: Trying to Survive 59.51 – end

Exercise A: Complete the following sentences with words from the box.

<i>Japan cooking sugar Setsuko father marbles food policeman</i>
--

1. A farmer tells Seita and Setsuko that he has no _____ to share, and they should return to the aunt's house.
2. Seita tries to steal _____ from a farmer because they are starving and Setsuko is sick.
3. The _____ tells the farmer that because the farmer kicked and beat Seita, he is "tempted to call it assault."
4. Seita returns to their shelter and finds _____ lying on the grass.
5. When Seita goes to the bank, he discovers that _____ has surrendered unconditionally.
6. At the bank, Seita also discovers that his _____ is probably dead.
7. Setsuko is putting _____ in her mouth because she believes that they are candy.
8. While Seita is _____, Setsuko dies on the bed.

Exercise B: Write the correct questions for the answers below.

1. Because they are hungry and the farmer won't sell them any.
2. From people's houses.
3. Cloth.
4. That she is weakening from malnutrition.
5. Because she is hungry and sick, and thinks she is making real rice balls.

Exercise C: Choose the best answer for the questions below

1. Why don't Seita and Setsuko return to the aunt's house when they are struggling to survive?
 - a. *They don't know where it is.*
 - b. *They think she won't want them.*
 - c. *It was destroyed by fire.*
 - d. *They are poor but happy.*
2. Why does the doctor behave like he doesn't care that Setsuko is malnourished?
 - a. *He is an American.*
 - b. *He has no medicine.*
 - c. *He can't help her.*
 - d. *They have no money.*
3. How do you think Seita feels when he finds out that Japan has surrendered, and that his father's Navy fleet is gone?
 - a. *Angry towards Japan and his father.*
 - b. *Like he has nothing to live for.*
 - c. *Hopeful about the future.*
 - d. *Happy that the war is over.*

Plot Summary

Grave of the Fireflies is set in Japan, near the end of World War II. The movie begins with a boy named Seita lying on the floor of the train station, starving to death. A cleaner takes a candy tin from him, and throws it outside when he sees it is filled with ashes. When the tin is opened, Seita and his younger sister Setsuko's spirits are released along with a swarm of fireflies. When the spirits are released, Seita begins to tell the story of what happened to their family during World War II. The rest of the movie is a replay of his memories.

Seita and Setsuko live with their mother in Kobe, Japan. Their father is in the Imperial Japanese Navy. When the U.S. launches an attack on Kobe, Seita sends his mother to a bomb shelter, while he helps Setsuko. Seita and Setsuko survive, but their mother is caught in the firebombing. When the attack ends, Seita and Setsuko go to the local school that is being used as an emergency medical center. Here, Seita finds out that his mother is dying but he does not tell Setsuko. Instead, he tells her they are going to stay with their aunt until their mother gets better.

Seita gives the aunt all of the supplies that he hid underground before the bombing, except for a tin of candy that he saves for Setsuko. But the aunt soon starts to say mean things to them and limits how much food she gives them. The aunt tells Seita he must sell his mother's kimonos in exchange for rice, because she does not want to look after them.

With some of the money left in his mother's bank account, Seita buys supplies, including a stove. He begins to cook their meals, so that the aunt does not complain about them. Their aunt starts to get very angry with them, so they decide to live in an abandoned bomb shelter. They cook their own food there, and make a bed to sleep in. They catch fireflies to create light inside the shelter. They begin to run out of rice, and a farmer living nearby says he has no more food to share with them.

Soon Setsuko gets very sick, because they do not have enough food to eat. Seita is forced to steal from farmers and nearby houses during air raids to find things he can trade for food or sell. When Setsuko collapses in a field, Seita brings her to a doctor. The doctor says that Setsuko is malnourished, but he does not give them any help. When Seita goes to the bank to get money to buy food, he hears people say that Japan has surrendered. He realises that his father is probably dead. He returns to the shelter and sees that Setsuko is very unwell. He feeds her some watermelon and begins to cook food. But Setsuko does not wake up again. A farmer gives Seita coal to cremate Setsuko, and Seita puts some of her ashes in the candy tin.