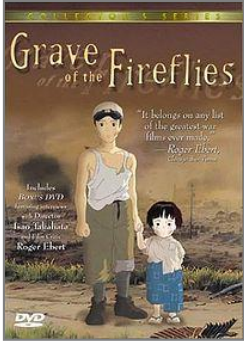


Grave of the Fireflies

Hotaru no haka, 1988, Japan

Film Overview



Set in post-war Japan, only a few weeks before the American occupation, director Isao Takahata's powerful anti-war masterpiece centers on the lives of two brave siblings, a fourteen year old boy named Seita and his four year old sister, Setsuko. With their father away serving in the imperial navy and their mother tragically killed in an air raid, the two children are forced to stay with their aunt, a cruel woman who proves to be a poor caregiver for the two children. After quarreling with their aunt, the two siblings leave the city and venture out on their own, eventually taking up residence in a cave-turned-abandoned bomb shelter. With no adults to turn to, the youngsters must depend solely on each other to survive. But it isn't long before their resources are exhausted, and Seita is forced into stealing so he can feed the starving Setsuko. And sadly, it seems his little sister is getting weaker by the moment. These dark times are illuminated only by the light of the fireflies.

Based on the semi-autobiographical novel by Akiyuki Nosaka, this Studio Ghibli-produced film has been universally hailed as a classic since its 1988 release. The emotionally charged motion picture highlights the suffering endured by the innocent victims of war, a stunning portrayal that has resonated with audiences worldwide. Ultimately, *Grave of the Fireflies* is an unforgettable film, sure to bring even the most jaded audience to tears with its poignant tale of the horrors of war, and the children left behind in its wake. -*Yesasia.com*

Cultural Notes

- **Firebombing of Kobe** The film is precipitated not by one of the atomic bombs, as is sometimes assumed, but by American firebombing of the Japanese city of Kobe. Firebombing is a bombing technique designed to damage a target, generally an urban area, through the use of fire, caused by incendiary devices, rather than from the blast effect of large bombs. Of the city's residents, 80,841 were confirmed to have been killed in the resulting firestorms, which destroyed an area of three square miles and included 21% of Kobe's urban area. At the time, the city covered an area of 14 square miles. More than 650,000 people had their homes destroyed, and the homes of another million people were damaged.
- ***Hotaru no haka*** Because Japanese does not distinguish between singular and plural, the title of the film could refer to a single firefly or multiple fireflies. The single firefly in question may refer to the frailty of Setsuko's life. Furthermore, *hotaru* is not written with its normal character, but instead with a pair of characters that mean "drops of fire." This may be a metaphor for the firebombing or a reference to a certain type of sparkler firework that must be held very still or it will drop and die. This, along with the general short lifespan of fireflies, lends itself to a message of impermanence, a traditional theme in Japanese works.
- **Sakuma Drops** The fruit drops Seita keeps for his sister are a real candy. They are a recognizable icon in Japan, having been around since the Meiji period (1868-1912). A tin featuring Setsuko has been released to commemorate the film. (*Adapted from Wikipedia*)

