‘The Morning After’, by Tony Harrison
Lesson plan

Introduction

Look at the photos below:
These photos, taken on the same day in different cities around the world, show people celebrating an event. What event do you think they are celebrating? What clues are there in the photos?

Development

Read the first part of Tony Harrison's poem 'The Morning After'.

Answer the questions, quoting lines of the poem to support your answer.

1) Where is the poem set?

2) When is the poem set?

3) How do the people celebrate?

4) What evidence is there that this is an emotional event?

5) How old is the narrator at the time of the poem?

6) What are the people celebrating?

What do you know about ‘V J’? Look at the photos on the following page.
Do you know what these photos show?

On the 6th of August, 1945, the United States of America dropped an atomic bomb on the Japanese city of Hiroshima. Three days later, on the 9th of August, it dropped an atomic bomb on the city of Nagasaki.
The USA dropped the two atomic bombs – the first and thus far only time they have been used in warfare – in an attempt to end its on-going war with Japan. The USA and the British Empire had been at war with the Empire of Japan since the 8th of December, 1941, the day after Japan launched surprise attacks on the US naval base at Pearl Harbor, Hawaii and on the British colonies of Malay, Singapore and Hong Kong.

By July 1945, after many battles in east Asia and the Pacific in which tens of thousands of soldiers and civilians were killed, Japan had lost much of its conquered islands and territory. Though defeat was inevitable, Japan refused to surrender. Japanese soldiers fought to the bitter end rather than be taken prisoner, to the increasing horror and frustration of American military commanders. For example, in February 1945, to capture Iwo Jima, an eight-square mile island in the Pacific, took the US Marine Corps five weeks and cost the lives of nearly 7,000 soldiers. Faced with such a stubborn opponent, the United States decided to use an atomic bomb.

US and British scientists had developed the atomic bomb in a secret project codenamed the Manhattan Project in 1944-45. On the 26th of July 1945, two weeks after the first successful test, the US President, Harry Truman, warned Japan to surrender unconditionally or "suffer prompt and utter destruction." When Japan refused, the US decided to use its new weapon.

The atomic blasts killed 150,000 people instantly and obliterated the two cities. Many thousands of people suffered severe burns and radiation poisoning.

On the 15th of August, six days after the second atomic bomb had destroyed Nagasaki, the Empire of Japan surrendered. In Britain this date became known as Victory over Japan, or V-J Day, just as the 8th of May is Victory in Europe, or V-E Day.

Re-read part one of ‘The Morning After’. Underline the words or phrases that echo the destruction caused by the two atomic bombs that brought about V-J Day.

Now read part two of ‘The Morning After’. Answer the questions below, quoting line(s) of the poem to support your answers.

1) What do the boys put on the bonfire?

2) What does the narrator know about Hiroshima and Nagasaki?

3) Who does the narrator pretend to be?

4) What does the narrator use as a costume?

5) What does the narrator imagine in the spot where the bonfire had been?

6) What ‘hovers’ above the fire?
'The Rising Sun' refers to the literal translation of 'Japan' as 'Land of the Rising Sun'. This name is the inspiration for the flag of Japan:

The line ‘The jabbering tongues of fire consumed its rays’ suggests that the boys used the war flag of the Japanese navy:

Discuss
In the last line, what does ‘Scaleless’ refer to? What constellation takes the Latin name for weighing scales? What are scales often used to represent? Where might you see a statue of somebody holding weighing scales?

What is the narrator trying to suggest by describing a universe with no scales?

Activity
Read Anthony Thwaite’s poem ‘Hiroshima: August 1985’. Underline words or phrases that also appear in ‘The Morning After’. Write 400-500 words comparing and contrasting the two poems. Note the structure of the poems, as well as the content.