



Graphic Novel Study Group  
Study Guides

## ***Barefoot Gen Vol. 1*** **by Keiji Nakazawa** Study guide by Robyn Chapman

1. Gen is a Japanese name meaning “root” or “source.” Nakazawa stated, “I named my main character Gen in the hope that he would become a root or source of strength for a new generation, one that can tread the charred soil of Hiroshima barefoot, feel the earth beneath its feet, and have the strength to say ‘NO’ to nuclear weapons.” How do you feel Barefoot Gen stands up as a protest novel against war and nuclear proliferation?
2. Barefoot Gen has been described as a comic book for both children and adults – do you agree with this statement? What audience do you feel is most appropriate for this book?
3. One thing that makes Barefoot Gen unique is that it describes the day-to-day life of ordinary men, women and children living in wartime. The bulk of the book deals with suffering outside of the battlefield. Select and describe a scene that occurs before the bombing that you found affecting or moving.
4. Despite the serious nature of the story, Barefoot Gen uses slapstick violence and crude humor. Describe how this approach affects the story – what are its advantages and disadvantages?
5. Describe Nakazawa’s drawing style. Is it well suited for this narrative?
6. Throughout the book, there are instances in which characters who are initially portrayed as villains are later shown in a sympathetic light. Select and describe a passage where this occurs. What do you believe Nakazawa was trying to achieve?
7. Barefoot Gen’s main focus is the Nakaoka family; the story unfolds through their words, thoughts and actions. At times, a separate narrative voice is present, in the form of captions. This unknown narrator conveys information beyond the family’s experience, such as facts about the war. How well do these two storytelling approaches work together?
8. The pages of this book are filled with scenes of violence – from childish brawls to cruel beatings. Even within the Nakaoka family, violence is commonplace. How did the prevalence of violence affect you as a reader? How did it affect your sympathy for Gen and his family?
9. Though this story has a large cast of characters and many subplots, Gen plays the central role. Describe Gen and the pivotal role he plays throughout the novel.
10. Barefoot Gen is a drama, but the character’s facial expressions and body language (the comic’s “acting”) are often cartoony in the extreme. How does this sort of cartooning work with the subject matter?
11. The final section of this book chronicles the immediate aftermath of the atomic blast. These pages are extremely powerful and have long been lauded in comics academia. Choose the passage from this section that you felt was most powerful, and explain your choice.