Espionage, explosions, and Einstein. Though Steve Sheinkin’s Bomb has all the makings of a dramatic spy movie, it’s actually a thrilling nonfiction account of the race between American, German, and Soviet scientists to build atomic weapons. Within a few years of the discovery of nuclear fission, the world is engulfed by the idea of making powerful weapons, including American professor Robert Oppenheimer. He is selected to lead the research and recruits a brilliant team of physicists to work in the deserts of New Mexico. In Europe, special forces work to thwart the German efforts by destroying the resources and preparing to kidnap scientists. The Soviet Union also establishes networks of spies to seek information about the development of the bomb. With elaborate secret meetings, persuasion, and codes they are able to stay only a step behind the Manhattan Project in the creation of their own bomb. The Americans conduct the first successful nuclear test in July of 1945 with relief and celebration. However, when two bombs are used to end the war in Japan one month later, the team’s reactions are colored by shades of horror, grief, and guilt. The US government eventually catches the Soviet spies and then falsely accuses Oppenheimer after he speaks out against the arms race.

Sheinkin does an excellent job of addressing the many layers of the story of the atomic bomb. As a result, this book will likely appeal to a broad range of readers. Descriptions of the science behind the bomb will fascinate some while the details of Americans committing treason by giving Soviets secrets will intrigue others. More than just entertaining or informing readers, Sheinkin also prompts them to consider questions of technology, heroism, patriotism, and morality without a didactic voice. Though filled with precise historical detail, the text never loses the feeling of being a narrative. It is the richness of the storytelling that places Bomb above other historical texts for young adults and makes it deserving of the National Book Award, YALSA, and Newberry recognition it received.