

The *Little Boy* for Children: Reactions to and Representations of the Atomic Bombings of  
Hiroshima and Nagasaki

By

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## ABSTRACT

The atomic bombs dropped on Hiroshima and Nagasaki at the end of the Second World War changed the world forever. There have been many studies done discussing the reasons for their dropping, reactions to the dropping, and modern interpretations of the bombs. However, all of these sources ignore a vital population that has been and continues to be affected by the atomic bombings – children. Children are vital to study because their idea of the bombs is not affected by politics or prejudice. This thesis finds that children in both Japan and the United States suffered traumatic experiences in the aftermath of the atomic bombings. However, despite this trauma, many found hope in the atomic bombings as well and used them instead as a symbol for a better future. Unfortunately, modern representations of the atomic bombings for children do not match this quality. Modern textbooks often neglect the full story of the bombings in both the United States and Japan. This could potentially be supplemented by children’s literature regarding the bombings, which does tend to show a more humanized perspective. However, this literature also falls victim to nationalistic messages and tropes surrounding the bombs in both countries. Because of these shortcomings, atomic bomb education in both the United States and Japan can be said to be lacking and requires great improvement to do justice to the stories of children who experienced the bombs firsthand.

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## INTRODUCTION

On August 6, 1945, and again on August 9, 1945, the world was forever changed by the first and only instances of atomic bombs being used on cities in warfare. These came after a period of expensive, intense secret research by the United States in cooperation with some of its selected allies, in what is called the Manhattan Project. The bombings of Hiroshima and Nagasaki were important in almost every area of life and continue to affect lives today. The bombings resulted in mass casualties, most of which were civilians. Many Japanese suffered sicknesses, homelessness, and starvation because of the bombings. But they did ensure the victory of the United States over Japan in World War II. The atomic bombs also saw the entrance of the world into what would be dubbed “the Atomic Age.” All of these areas of influence still affect people in the modern day; in short, Hiroshima and Nagasaki have not ended.<sup>1</sup>

The longstanding effects of Hiroshima and Nagasaki mean that generations past and generations to come have and will continue to learn about the bombings as part of their history education. Because of the importance of the bombings, it is important to examine how they are taught to see what ideas about the bombings are perpetuated. Especially across cultures as different (and with histories with the bombs as different) as the United States and Japan, understanding the differences in how the bombings and their aftermaths are taught provides us a deep insight into the ideals each country desires to pass onto its children.

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<sup>1</sup> Ingyu Oh and Douglas Ishizawa-Grbic, “Forgiving the Culprits: Japanese Historical Revisionism in a Post-Cold War Context,” *International Journal of Peace Studies* 5, no. 2 (Autumn/ Winter 2000): 45–59, 45.

The heart of this thesis is, in fact, children's experiences of the atomic bombs. I will examine early reactions to the atomic bombings, both from American and Japanese children, to better understand their holistic view of the bombings. Early reactions to the atomic attacks on Hiroshima and Nagasaki are vital to study because they are not as influenced by the distortions of time and nostalgia. Children, especially, are less influenced by political ideals when making judgments on world events. This is why they make an excellent case study for understanding the effects of nationhood on perspectives of the atomic bombings. As we will see, materials made to teach children about these events are not free of politics and the effect of nationalism, leading to very different emphases between countries.

I will examine the reactions to the atomic bombings from both American and Japanese children, and then show the representations of the bombings aimed towards children throughout history, particularly in the education system and through literature. This will show how the image of the bombs and the bombings has changed throughout history, as well as showing the modern difference in how the United States and Japan handle atomic issues. Through this examination of literature and primary sources, I have found that atomic bomb education is severely lacking in both Japan and the United States, despite a resilient initial response to the tragedy by children in both countries. In Japan and the United States, it is clear that the dropping of the atomic bombs caused emotional distress and unease for children hearing or living through the news. However, despite what may be expected of such a severe childhood trauma, both groups of children turned this fear into a hope for a better future. In Japan, this took the form of a pacifistic hope, where children sought to change the world so that no one else would have to

experience what they did. In the United States, this hope led to the development of a socially active youth culture that fought for a future free from the Cold War fears of their youth. Despite these strong reactions, representations of the bombings for children since the 1950s have stagnated in the United States and even deteriorated in Japan. While some children's literature does offer a more detailed, human perspective of the bombings, these books are still not free from nationalistic messages common in their countries. Overall, to do justice to the lived childhood experiences of the bombings, atomic education needs to be vastly improved.

Throughout history there have been many debates with the atomic bombs at their center, especially in the United States. Knowing that the detonation of the atomic bombs began years of a Cold War between the United States and the Soviet Union, many have retroactively wondered if the vast suffering caused by the bombings was necessary. There are few primary sources showing the reactions of people from the early days after the detonation of the bombs, especially those of children. There are some sources available that were made by adults for children, but all these can tell us is what adults intended for children to think and feel about the atomic bombings. As we examine the historiography of the atomic bombings, we must consider how adult-focused the entire field is. Seeing the different beliefs held by historians writing on the bombs – traditionalism, revisionism, and postrevisionism – it is vital to think about how these arguments were held in the child's world. Through this thesis' examination of the few available primary sources and later scholarly research, it is my hope that the world will gain a new perspective on the atomic bombings, and perhaps that children who study and participate in history will gain a voice. This would change the current historiography of the bombs, not only by focusing

more on the human impact of the decision to drop them, but also by removing the political and national biases held by adults who speak on the issue. Children *were* having these conversations, and developed their own views around the atomic bomb; these views centered hope over the destruction and division so commonly favored by adult authors.

From the moment the bombs detonated, the American public was interested in their story. From learning about the secret Manhattan Project, to hearing news of the casualties, to hoping the war to end because of the bombs, and finally celebrating the end of the war, American newspapers gave all details available on the bombs.<sup>2</sup> Scholarship on the atomic bombs and the decision to use them was limited in the years immediately following their use due to occupation era censorship. Thus, the first works published about the bombs were all heavily censored and unquestioning documents. It was not until 1946 that journalist John Hersey began the debate on the morality of the bombings with his book *Hiroshima*.<sup>3</sup> This shows that there were those who sought to tell non-standard narratives of the bombings as well early on, despite it being difficult to do so. *Hiroshima* is touted for being one of the first books to show the Japanese sufferings caused by the atomic bombs through the narratives of six survivors. It is because of this standout publication that the public as a whole began to see the atomic bombs as more nuanced than just a weapon of war and began to question the ethics of their use. Though he was not a historian, Hersey began the historiography of the bombs by questioning their use

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<sup>2</sup> “Missile Is More Powerful than 20,000 Tons TNT,” *The Ogden [UT] Standard Examiner*, August 6, 1945; “Truman Says Japan to Face Rain of Ruin from Skies,” *The Ada [OK] Evening News*, August 6, 1945; “Atomic Bomb Blasts Japan,” *The Tulsa [OK] Tribune*, August 6, 1945; “Good Evening...,” *Emporia [KS] Gazette*, August 7, 1945, <https://newscomwc.newspapers.com/image/10256387>.

<sup>3</sup> John Hersey, *Hiroshima* (New York: Vintage Books, 1985).

first. This provided a foundation for future historians to use when they wanted to highlight the atrocities of the bombs.

After *Hiroshima*, the main source of information on the decision to use the bomb came from primary source releases, such as Secretary of War Henry Stimson's *The Decision to Use the Atomic Bomb* in 1947 and President Truman's *Memoirs* in 1955.<sup>4</sup> They certainly took the view that the bomb was necessary to save American lives and end the war. As these sources were written by two of the primary decision makers involved with the bomb, they can be seen as a retroactive defense of their decision to those who may have begun to doubt the bomb's necessity. Truman especially highlights his responsibility as the decision-maker, stating, "The final decision of where and when to use the bomb was up to me. Let there be no mistake about it. I regarded the bomb as a military weapon and never had any doubt that it should be used."<sup>5</sup> The main characteristic of these primary sources is this kind of certainty with which they view the decision-making process. Stimson defends the decision, likewise, stating that nobody in his position, with full knowledge of the situation, could have made a different choice.<sup>6</sup> Thus, the beginning of the historiographical discussion of the decision to use the bomb was already a defensive argument over the absolute necessity of the bomb.

The publishing of Truman's memoir seemed to spur conversation over his decision. Soon after, in 1957, Louis Morton published his ten-year retrospective view of

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<sup>4</sup> Henry L. Stimson, "The Decision to Use the Atomic Bomb," *SAIS Review* 5, no. 2 (1985): 1–15; Harry S. Truman, *Memoirs*, vol. 1 (Garden City, NY: Doubleday & Company, 1955).

<sup>5</sup> Harry S. Truman, *Memoirs*, vol. 1 (Garden City, NY: Doubleday & Company Inc., 1955), 419.

<sup>6</sup> Henry L. Stimson, "The Decision to Use the Atomic Bomb," *SAIS Review* 5, no. 2 (1985): 1–15, 14.

the decision to drop the bomb. He argued that Truman and Stimson's publications did not adequately answer all of the questions posed by the bomb's critics, although they did provide more insight into the decision-making process. Morton especially stresses the importance that the interim committee appointed by President Truman played in deciding to use the bomb.

The interim committee consisted of Secretary of War Henry Stimson, George Harrison (special consultant to the Secretary), James Byrnes (Truman's personal representative, who held no official position at the time), Ralph Bard (under Secretary of the Navy), William Clayton (Assistant Secretary of State), Vannevar Bush, Karl Compton, and James Conant (all three were scientists involved with the Manhattan Project). In Stimson's words, the committee was never tasked with deciding whether or not to use the bomb, but rather their duties included "advising the President on the various questions raised by our apparently imminent success in developing an atomic weapon."<sup>7</sup>

Morton acknowledges that deciding to use the bomb was not one of the committee's duties, but argues that this is the very reason why the interim committee was so vital in the President's decision to drop the bomb. The interim committee never discussed with Truman whether or not the bomb *should* be dropped, only the practicalities of *how* to drop the bomb, when and if it was ready. Morton highlights the effect that this guidance would have had on the new president by sharing the committee's final report advising that the bomb should be dropped on a military target without

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<sup>7</sup> Ibid, 5.

warning.<sup>8</sup> He does mention that other prominent scientists in the Manhattan Project voiced objections to the committee's decision, but that these were ultimately ignored by the President.

Morton also stresses the lack of military consultation in the decision to use the bomb. This includes Truman's failure to consult with military or naval staff on the decision and what Morton calls the "distinctly favorable" military position of the Allied forces at this point in the war.<sup>9</sup> He also posits that President Truman failed to consider the effect that Russia entering the war combined with an American blockade would have on Japan's will to continue the war. Overall, Morton examines the atomic bomb through the lens of determining if it alone was the cause for the end of the war. He concludes that there is no way of knowing whether Japan would have surrendered without the bomb, yet his article is still staunchly anti-bomb in the evidence and arguments.

The 1960s brought an explosive turn in the discourse of the atomic bomb with the publication of *Atomic Diplomacy* by Gar Alperovitz in 1965. This book was the first of its kind and was built upon arguments never seen before in relation to the atom bomb. Alperovitz claimed that the decision to use the bomb was purely based on Roosevelt and Truman's diplomatic ideals with the Soviet Union. He states that American leaders at the time knew the bomb was unnecessary to end the war or save additional lives, as can be seen through General Eisenhower's objections to its use.<sup>10</sup> Through analysis of American

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<sup>8</sup> Louis Morton, "The Decision to Use the Atomic Bomb," *Foreign Affairs* 35, no. 2 (January 1957): 334–353, 337.

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.*, 339

<sup>10</sup> Gar Alperovitz, *Atomic Diplomacy: Hiroshima and Potsdam; the Use of the Atomic Bomb and the American Confrontation with Soviet Power* (New York: Simon and Schuster, Inc. 1965), 14.

diplomatic policy with the Soviet Union toward the end of World War II and at the beginning of the Cold War, Alperovitz concludes that the atomic bomb influenced diplomacy with the Soviets and the United States' possession of the bomb played a role in policy formation.<sup>11</sup> This was an unheard of argument and the time and it would come to be picked up by various scholars who agreed that the bomb was unnecessary to end the war.

After this, there was a lull in discussion of the decision to drop the bomb until the 1990s. The revival of the subject is most likely due to the 50th anniversary of the bomb dropping in 1995. The anniversary spurred many conversations about the morality of the bomb. This argument was epitomized by the failure of the Smithsonian's exhibit on the Enola Gay, the plane that dropped the atomic bomb. The exhibit followed what would be called a revisionist argument that the bomb was unnecessary to end the war and that the dropping of the bomb was fueled by racism against the Japanese. This caused an outlash from World War II pacific veterans, causing a very public argument over the exhibit and eventually leading to it being taken down.<sup>12</sup>

The 1990s brought nuanced arguments from both sides — camps that would come to be called either atomic bomb revisionists (those who argue the bomb should not have been dropped) or traditionalists (those who argue that dropping the bomb was the correct decision at the time). Many of the arguments of the 90s were built on the past arguments of authors like Louis Morton and Gar Alperovitz. The main issue at hand was still the

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<sup>11</sup> Ibid, 13.

<sup>12</sup> Lawrence S. Wittner, "The Enola Gay Exhibits, the Hiroshima Bombing and American Nationalism," *Social Alternatives* 24, no. 1 (February 2005): 38–42.

questioned necessity of the bomb. Many authors argued for or against this by examining how close the Japanese were to surrender, the accuracy of the projected American death count, and Truman's intentions for the bomb.

We continue to see the questioning of Truman's *Memoirs*, such as in Bernstein's *Writing, Righting, or Wronging the Historical Record*.<sup>13</sup> There was also the beginning of discussions on who exactly to blame for the decision, and we see authors straying away from pointing to Truman as the sole decision maker. There are arguments that blame the interim committee, Byrnes himself, or General Groves. Revisionist author Ronald Takaki is especially enthusiastic about blaming Byrnes, stating, "The minutes of the Interim Committee meetings clearly show that Byrnes was the single most important member promoting the proposal for a surprise atomic attack."<sup>14</sup> In contrast, J. Samuel Walker argues that General Groves was responsible for the decision:

The key decisions on targeting and timing were made not by the president or the secretary of war but by General Leslie R. Groves and other military commanders. Groves, especially, was anxious to justify the effort and the expenditures of the Manhattan Project, and he avoided outlining alternatives to Truman that could change existing plans and frustrate his objectives. Thus, the bomb fell more because of bureaucratic imperatives than because of carefully considered questions of national interest.<sup>15</sup>

The shift in blame for the decision from Truman to his advisors is a sign of the more critical readings of the primary sources that were characteristic of the 90s. This was another area for debate among historians with no clear answer.

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<sup>13</sup> Barton J. Bernstein, "Writing, Righting, or Wronging the Historical Record: President Truman's Letter on His Atomic-Bomb Decision," *Diplomatic History* 16, no. 1 (January 1992): 163–173.

<sup>14</sup> Ronald Takaki, *Hiroshima: Why America Dropped the Atomic Bomb* (Little, Brown and Company, 1995), 40.

<sup>15</sup> J. Samuel Walker, "The Decision to Use the Bomb: A Historiographical Update," in *Hiroshima in History and Memory* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), 11–37, 30–31

Who held primary responsibility for the dropping of the bomb was one of the few questions that was not based upon revisionist or traditionalist arguments. You could find authors from each camp arguing for or against the responsibility of one person. One of the most influential traditionalist scholars of the 1990s was Richard Frank, who published *Downfall: The End of the Imperial Japanese Empire* in 1999. He was one of the first scholars to examine Japanese sources as well as the existing American primary sources. Because of this, he is much more forgiving to Truman and highlights his very real fear of repeating “an Okinawa from one end of Japan to the other.”<sup>16</sup> He also directly argues against Alperovitz’s thesis, stating:

No doubt some American policy makers, especially Brynes, hoped that the atomic bomb would prove a useful diplomatic tool. But even before the Ultra revelations about the Japanese buildup on Kyushu became known, the solid consensus of the historians has been that the diplomatic fruits of the atomic bombs were at best a bonus or reinforcing reason, not the underlying one, for their employment.<sup>17</sup>

His argument is that Truman’s main goal was military victory over Japan rather than diplomatic victory over the Soviet Union. He also follows the standard traditionalist arguments that, whether or not causality estimates were accurate, they still moved Truman enough to encourage the use of the bomb.<sup>18</sup> He does break from the traditionalist argument that the atomic bomb was necessary to cause Japan’s surrender, and instead

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<sup>16</sup> Quoted in Richard B. Frank, *Downfall: The End of the Imperial Japanese Empire* (New York: Random House, 1999), 143

<sup>17</sup> Frank, *Downfall: The End of the Imperial Japanese Empire*, 250

<sup>18</sup> *Ibid*, 132 - 134.

argues that Truman believed an unconditional surrender to be unnecessary but did not put effort into changing public opinion on the matter.<sup>19</sup>

Another traditionalist author of the 1990s was Robert Ferrell, who did not stray from the usual traditionalist arguments as much as Frank did. Ferrell takes a very literal interpretation of the primary sources, taking Truman's words as fact. The two reasons that Truman decided to use the bomb, he proposed, are as revenge for the way that the Japanese had acted during the war and in response to the startling casualty estimates for the alternative plan to invade mainland Japan. He clearly follows traditionalist theory that the casualty estimates were to be believed based upon the previous fights at Iwo Jima and Okinawa, and cites this as the primary reason Truman decided to drop the bomb.<sup>20</sup> He argues that the decision to drop the bomb was based on the noble cause of saving American lives and leaves little room for revisionist arguments, stating that the decision-makers "sought single-mindedly to save the lives of U.S. soldiers and sailors during the crucial days and weeks in the summer of 1945."<sup>21</sup>

While there were many traditionalist arguments in the 1990s, the revisionist side seemed more popular and made waves as being the more politically correct argument, which potentially influenced the children's literature of the time as well. Revisionist arguments draw largely on the previous work of Gar Alperovitz, but in the 1990s more notable scholars in the field began to emerge and add new perspectives to the argument.

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<sup>19</sup> Ibid, 143.

<sup>20</sup> Robert H. Ferrell, *Harry S. Truman and the Bomb: A Documentary History* (Worland, WY: High Plains Publishing Company, 1996), 3.

<sup>21</sup> Ibid, 7.

Ronald Takaki takes the traditional revisionist arguments — the ideas that Truman knew the causality estimates were lower than projected and that the bomb was used as a diplomatic bargaining tool with the Soviet Union — and added a sociological layer to his thesis, arguing that racism against the Japanese played a part in the decision to drop the bomb. This is, in fact, similar to Ferrell's argument that remembrance of Japanese wartime atrocities contributed to the decision to drop the bomb. But, this fact interpreted by two different schools of thought leads to very different conclusions — Ferrell's stance that anything to stop the Japanese seemed positive, and Takaki's stance that the loathing for wartime atrocities turned into racism, which sparked the desire to commit a similarly heinous crime against the Japanese.

After this stark division of the 1990s, one may wonder which camp won the right to popular belief and interpretation in the 2000s and onward. Unfortunately, the 2000s did not bring an easy solution such as one that could be seen with a clear winner to the argument. Instead, the 2000s brought a more nuanced view to the bomb, and birthed a new camp called postrevisionism which is still not as well understood as the clear-cut arguments for revisionism and traditionalism are.<sup>22</sup> There was the emergence of authors such as J. Samuel Walker, who refused to take a side and instead focused on interpreting the facts as he saw them. Walker's work follows with revisionist thought that the bomb was unnecessary to win the war, but enters strikingly postrevisionist territory by asking if, despite the lack of necessity to end the war, was the bomb necessary for some other means?<sup>23</sup> He concludes that the bomb was used to end the war as early as possible, to

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<sup>22</sup> J. Samuel Walker, *Prompt & Utter Destruction: Truman and the Use of Atomic Bombs Against Japan* (The University of North Carolina Press, 2004). xii.

<sup>23</sup> *Ibid.*

justify the cost of Manhattan Project, to impress the Soviets, to deal with “the beast” that was the Japanese, and due to lack of any reasons to not use the bomb.<sup>24</sup> One can see the influence of revisionism in this argument, which raises the question — is postrevisionism really all that different from revisionist arguments?

Despite these similarities to revisionism, the arguments of authors in the 2000s do show more nuance than before. There was the acknowledgement that the decision to drop the bomb was not one decision, but rather many small decisions combined.<sup>25</sup> Even the traditionalist arguments of the 2000s acknowledge this fact and the nuance that went into the decision-making. Other than this added nuance, however, the traditionalist arguments remained relatively unchanged from their 90s predecessors. If anything, the traditionalist works of the 2000s doubled down on the preexisting division, with one publication even being subtitled *The Myths of Revisionism*.<sup>26</sup> This book provides a collection of essays with a scathing critique of revisionist research methodology and ideas. Another traditionalist book focuses on the purity of Truman’s intentions: “Those who seek to understand Truman's thinking during the early months of his presidency must appreciate the sincerity of his hopes and expectations for good relations with the Soviet Union.”<sup>27</sup> These arguments still focus primarily on debunking the arguments of Gar Alperovitz and putting to shame the revisionist thesis.

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<sup>24</sup> Ibid, 92-96.

<sup>25</sup> Sean L. Malloy, *Atomic Tragedy: Henry L. Stimson and the Decision to Use the Bomb Against Japan* (Cornell University Press, 2008), 7.

<sup>26</sup> Robert James Maddox, *Hiroshima in History: The Myths of Revisionism* (Columbia, MO: University of Missouri Press, 2007).

<sup>27</sup> Wilson D. Miscamble, *The Most Controversial Decision: Truman, the Atomic Bombs, and the Defeat of Japan* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2011), 39.

As we have seen, the majority of arguments about the decision to drop the atomic bomb have firmly chosen a side — either traditionalist, revisionist, or the newly coined postrevisionist. There has been little literature in recent years seeking a middle ground in this argument. Even the works that do claim to be “A Search for Middle Ground ” focus strongly on the camps of revisionist and traditionalist arguments with little solution in how to find this middle ground.<sup>28</sup> So far, the division of scholars into traditionalist, revisionist, and now postrevisionist camps has led more to arguing over who is in the moral right rather than carefully examining the sources to have an unbiased view of what went into the decision. It seems that alternate titles for revisionists could be “pro-Japan,” while traditionalist are more “pro-U.S.A.,” which is shockingly similar to Japanese camps regarding the history of the Second World War. In Japan, “revisionists” are those who wish to rewrite history as one where Japan committed no wartime atrocities and was the victim of western imperialism and, ultimately, the atomic bombs.

As we have seen, the decision to drop the atomic bomb is an important historiographical event and the interpretations of such have grave importance on the state of the world today. However, all of these interpretations are subject to the availability of primary sources regarding the decision-making process. It is inevitable that there will be silences in the creation, compilation, retrieval, and interpretation of them.<sup>29</sup> While these silences are inevitable, it is our job as historians to acknowledge these silences and to mitigate them where we can. The silences shape our view of the past just as much as what

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<sup>28</sup> J. Samuel Walker, “Recent Literature on Truman’s Atomic Bomb Decision: A Search for Middle Ground,” *Diplomatic History* 29, no. 2 (April 2005): 311–334.

<sup>29</sup> Michel-Rolph Trouillot, *Silencing the Past: Power and the Production of History* (Beacon Press Books, 1995). Pp. 26.

is available for examination. Through looking at the available primary sources regarding the decision to drop the bomb, we will examine the availability of information and the silences that are formed. Through this we will see the major limitations held by scholarly analysis thus far and the impact this has had on the field.

A unique fact in studying the atomic bomb is that, due to the military and confidential nature of the Manhattan Project, many of the primary sources regarding the decision to drop the bomb were not released until years after 1945. There are still no doubt some documents regarding the dropping of the atomic bombs that remain confidential. Because the documents surrounding this topic of study are shrouded in secrecy and confidentiality, there are certainly more silences than would be in a nonmilitary subject. It is important to remember that the available primary sources regarding the atomic bomb are a carefully curated collection of what is deemed acceptable to publish by the government and the officials represented in the sources.

This curation of content is certainly a silence, as information may be withheld on the deliberation of the decision to avoid leaders seeming indecisive or unsure about such an important decision. Truman especially wanted to avoid seeming indecisive. As a new president trying to make his way in the shadow of Roosevelt, Truman wanted to seem sure of himself and give off the airs of a steady leader. The use of strong language for a decision the minutes show was very clearly anguished over is an interesting feature of Truman's memoirs about the decision. However, Truman is unwavering in his desire to take full responsibility for the decision. He later reiterates:

With this order the wheels were set in motion for the first use of an atomic weapon against a military target. *I had made the decision.* I also instructed

Stimson that the order would stand unless I notified him that the Japanese reply to our ultimatum was acceptable.<sup>30</sup>

Truman's near obsession with being the solely responsible party for the decision is not only a silence in the primary source, but it directly contests other primary sources.

Stimson paints it as a decision that had been universally made, and questioned by nobody:

At no time, from 1941 to 1945, did I ever hear it suggested by the President, or by any other responsible member of the government, that atomic energy should not be used in war... I therefore emphasize that it was [the Interim Committee and all related government bodies'] common objective, throughout the war, to be the first to produce an atomic weapon and use it.<sup>31</sup>

These contradictions in the few primary sources available lead to more confusion and arguments in the responsive scholarship. Because of the lack of clarity within the primary sources there is still an argument over what party is the most responsible for the decision to drop the atomic bomb.

Authors of their respective primary sources are firstly concerned with protecting their image, thus leading to this distortion in the narrative. For Truman, this meant painting himself as a strong and reliable leader, one who makes difficult decisions with an easy swiftness. In Stimson's writing, however, this means presenting the situation as a long running narrative, in which he exercised precise control and followed protocol at every step of the way. Because of this, the primary sources provided in the form of memoirs and retellings need to be read carefully with each author's agenda in mind.

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<sup>30</sup> Ibid, 421. Emphasis added.

<sup>31</sup> Stimson, "The Decision to Use the Atomic Bomb," 2.

Telling history from these different perspectives both adds to and distorts the information available as we see the story unfold from various points of view.

The available primary sources that serve as the base stone for historical research into the decision to drop the atomic bomb are riddled with silences that muddle and confuse the narrative. Historians can examine memoirs, retellings, meeting minutes, documented conversations, or letters and still be left with more questions than answers. It should also not be forgotten that the availability of these primary sources is only thanks to the declassification of so many documents by the government. This means that there still may be silences in what documentation is available based on what has not been released for public view. There could be vital pieces of information missing that will never be made public. Going with this, many of the published primary sources were written with an almost propagandic purpose in mind — to make the authors and primary decision-makers appear as strong and steady leaders. These are a few purposeful tamperings with the primary sources that lead to silences.

In fact, many of the silences in the available primary sources are purposeful on one level or another. Whether it is through classification status, misnarration of the record, censorship, or information left to be assumed, all of the silences that these sources struggle with were a deliberate decision, whether conscious or unconscious. I do not mean to imply malicious intent with the revelation of these purposeful silences. Rather, it is my intention to explain that the number of actors in the process of making the decision to drop the bomb and in retelling that story muddles the narrative due to reasons of personal interest.

It is important to reveal these silences and the self-serving purpose they have so that readers view the primary sources more critically. As we have seen, the sources themselves do not agree on who was responsible for the decision, when the decision was made, or how the decision was made. Thus, historians must take care in crafting their narratives – reading only a few sources uncritically could result in a serious distortion of facts. In transmitting the information regarding the decision to drop the atomic bomb, it is important to show the nuance of the decision rather than just dividing it into black and white camps. A more nuanced narrative of the decision to drop the atomic bomb puts into perspective just how extraordinary the final days of World War II were and allows both historians and readers to think more critically about the past.

Much has been written about the atomic bombs in general that can guide those interested in reading full academic histories on the topic, but historians and other writers have generally ignored children in that context.<sup>32</sup> Hersey's *Hiroshima* is perhaps the most famous postwar work highlighting the humanity of the victims, and it does not mention adolescents among its cast of survivors.<sup>33</sup> When they are the focus of research related to the bombings, these studies are primarily health or medical studies of childhood exposure to radiation, such as in James Yamazaki's *Children of the Atomic Bomb*.<sup>34</sup> Besides these scientific studies, the stories of those who survived the bomb are largely written for other children, such as the books *Sadako and the Thousand Paper Cranes* in

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<sup>32</sup> J. Samuel Walker, "The Decision to Use the Bomb: A Historiographical Update," in *Hiroshima in History and Memory* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), 11–37.

<sup>33</sup> John Hersey, *Hiroshima* (New York: Vintage Books, 1985).

<sup>34</sup> James N Yamazaki, *Children of the Atomic Bomb: An American Physician's Memoir of Nagasaki, Hiroshima, and the Marshall Islands* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1995).

the United States and *Watashi ga Chiisakatta Toki ni* in Japan.<sup>35</sup> This literature can help educators teach about the atomic bomb, but may not be as helpful for academics seeking to understand children's reactions to the bombings. There is some research that focuses on educating children about the bombings,<sup>36</sup> but it pales in comparison to the abundant literature available on teaching the Holocaust to children. Resources regarding Holocaust education for children do focus on the nature of difficult histories and how to teach them to children in a way that can be applied to atomic literature as well.<sup>37</sup>

It is important to acknowledge that the teaching of history is oftentimes affected by what educators were taught in their childhood. From the moment the bombs dropped, there were messages and narratives being conveyed to both Japanese and American citizens about the bombings and their meanings. What adults learned after the bombs dropped is what they taught their children, and oftentimes when these children grew up, they teach the same messages that they were taught, causing a cycle of the repetition of information.

In order to focus on each area of study with the care they require, this thesis is segmented into four chapters. This will give sufficient space to discuss the reactions of and the representations for Japanese children and American children. Additionally, the

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<sup>35</sup> Eleanor Coerr, *Sadako and the Thousand Paper Cranes* (New York: G. P. Putnam's Sons, 1977); Arata Osada, ed., *Watashi Ga Chiisakatta Toki Ni [When I Was Small]* (Tokyo: Doshinsha Publishing Co., 1989).

<sup>36</sup> Mara Miller, "Terrible Knowledge and Tertiary Trauma, Part I: Japanese Nuclear Trauma and Resistance to the Atomic Bomb in the Classroom," *Clearing House* 86, no. 5 (July 2013): 157–63.

<sup>37</sup> David A Frolick, "Teaching Children about Children in the Holocaust or Why Am I Confused About Holocaust Education in the Public Schools," *Shofar: An Interdisciplinary Journal of Jewish Studies* 10, no. 2 (Winter 1992): 108–111., Paula Cowan and Tara Jones, "What Parents in Scotland Say about Their Primary Aged Children Learning about the Holocaust," *Educational Review* 73, no. 3 (April 2019): 312–329., Lydia Kokkola, *Representing the Holocaust in Children's Literature* (Hoboken: Routledge, 2013).

concluding segment of this thesis will remark on trends seen across the research and connect chapters one through four in the overarching story of the bombs.

Chapter 1 examines the reactions of Japanese children to the atomic bombings. It is vital to study these reactions because of the contrasting ways that children experience trauma compared to adults. There is much discussion of the ways that the bombings affected the quality of children's school lives since this is such a vital part of a child's social life and development. Professor of Social Work Robbie Gilligan even goes as far as to call schools the ally of children, particularly ones that are facing hardship, and a "guarantor of basic protection."<sup>38</sup> Perhaps this guarantee of protection after such a devastating attack is what makes schooling so important to the child survivors. Chapter 1 also examines the lack of aid programs specifically for child survivors of the atomic bombs. One may think that such devastation as that caused by the atomic bombs would lead to an equal emotional devastation in the minds of the children of Hiroshima and Nagasaki. Of course, the surviving children certainly were traumatized and did not have an easy existence after the bombings. But there are different ways to interpret the works of the child survivors, such as a defeatist, conqueror, or universalist framework. The surprising result of research into the child survivors shows that they turned much of their grief into hope for a better world.

Chapter 2 highlight the representations of the atomic bombings presented to Japanese children since 1945. I examine themes that Japanese nationalism present in the education and representations of the atomic bombs, such as the promotion of

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<sup>38</sup> Robbie Gilligan, "The Importance of Schools and Teachers in Child Welfare," *Child & Family Social Work* 3, no. 1 (January 1998): 13–25, 13.

universalism, pacifism, and the ignoring of Japanese wartime atrocities. The hope that Japanese children felt for a peaceful future after the bombings of their homes that was highlighted in Chapter 1 plays well into the Japanese victim-conscious perspective that is often used to support nationalistic views of the bombings.

Chapter 2 focuses heavily on the Japanese education system and Japanese children's literature, with the main sources used being textbooks and children's picture books. In the case that there is an official translation, that has been used for all text citations in Chapter 2. For the books that have not been translated, including the Japanese textbooks, I have translated the Japanese into the closest English approximation that best conveys the author's intent.

It should be noted that many of the books examined in Chapter 2 have had an American influence, despite being created for Japanese children. The same is true of there being a large Japanese influence on the authors of the stories for American children in Chapter 4. There seems to be quite a large overlap in interest on the atomic bombings between the countries, with American authors writing stories in Japanese, such as Arthur Binard's *Domu Gatari*, and Japanese authors writing stories that become popular in the States, such as *Barefoot Gen* and *Hiroshima no Pika*. Because of this, the author's nationality or experience in another country will be noted in the description of each book, but such concerns will not dictate which audience the author's book is intended for; American authors can write for the Japanese audience and vice versa. There may be some overlap between the stories discussed in Chapter 2 and in Chapter 4, as many stories of the bombings that were originally published in Japanese were translated and became synonymous with atomic children's literature in the United States.

Chapter 3 shifts focus to the United States and discusses how American children reacted to the news of the atomic bombs. There are relatively few sources describing children's reactions to the bombings, perhaps showing that they were similar to those of adults or even that adults chose not to have a conversation about the bombings with their children. Through the study of children's publications and resources made by adults for children in the years following the war's end, we see that children did have strong reactions to the news of the bombings, even if initially this reaction was mainly joy that the war was over. Many of the children's responses to the bombs were framed in a Cold War context and were also responses to the fear of another country's use of atomic weaponry. There are such resources that are still famous (or infamous) today, such as the bomb preparation video *Duck and Cover*. The interesting conclusion from the resources created by children, however, is that, similar to Japanese youth, American children came through the other side of their worries and found hope for the future because of the atomic bombings. Many older children became active in their communities and sought real change because they saw the hardships caused by war and the bombs. Quotes in yearbooks and children's publications encouraged each other to fight for democracy and not to lose hope. The hope that American children faced was unique, but like Japanese children it was a reclamation of fear. Because of the Cold War fears of the end of the world that were pressed on children from all sides, children began to hope for a better future. And through this hope spawned activism.

Chapter 4 continues focusing on American children, with an examination of the ways that the atomic bombs are represented in children's education and literature. As we are able to see through both the reactions to and representations of the bombs in Japanese

culture and the reactions to the bombs in American children, youths desire a comprehensive and nuanced discussion of the bombings, and notice when this is lacking. This is certainly the case in the American education system, in which textbooks' discussions of the bombings has not significantly changed since the 1950s. Because of the availability of more historical textbooks from the United States, this chapter is able to examine samples from each decade following 1945, up to the modern era. I also look at modern educational standards to highlight the lack of consensus on how to teach the bombings. The focus in these textbooks and standards appears to be aimed at making the United States look honorable in its uses of the bombs. This is done through an intense focus on the process of creating the bombs and on Truman's decision to drop them. All hope is not lost, however, as most of the children's atomic literature in the United States is more humanizing than the textbooks. American nationalism is also discussed, as it plays heavily into the American representations of the bombings, including popular reactions to atomic education and literature.

As one Japanese citizen recounted about their experience learning about the bombing, "In fifth or sixth grade, in the textbook of my social studies class I found a picture of the A-Bomb Dome. That's when I learned about the many people who died on that day."<sup>39</sup> This thesis asks why children must stumble upon these emotional images in order to learn the stories of the bombs. Throughout history children's understanding of the bombings has been ignored and brushed over. It is vital for these voices to be heard and for children to have safe spaces to discuss difficult topics. Overall, through the

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<sup>39</sup> Carey Schonegevel, *Original Child Bomb: Meditations on the Nuclear Age*, 2004, <https://video.alexanderstreet.com/watch/original-child-bomb-meditations-on-the-nuclear-age>, 24:40.

writing of this thesis I hope to highlight the importance of children's voices in atomic literature.

## CHAPTER 1: JAPANESE CHILDREN'S REACTIONS

The atomic bombs that were dropped on the Japanese cities of Hiroshima and Nagasaki changed the world forever. They ushered in a new technological era full of its own worries, separate from those of the World War II era. The catalyst into the atomic age was a violent attack that took hundreds of thousands of lives and destroyed entire cities. People's reactions to this event just after the attacks- before they knew what it meant for the rest of the world- show us the true devastation caused and the many ways in which their victims had to fight for their lives. The atomic bombings are important to study not just because of the changes they made to the world, but also in order to honor the lives of its victims, many of whom were civilians.

Despite the lasting effects of the atomic bomb on world peace and politics, very few people stop to study the tragic consequences on individuals. While the tragedy of Hiroshima and Nagasaki were results of war, we must not forget the altered lives of civilians in Hiroshima and Nagasaki. Understanding the experiences of those who have lived through the bombings will help the world to build a better future, in which this kind of suffering will not happen again. It is important, therefore, to acknowledge the experiences of the victims and understand the torments inflicted upon human lives.<sup>1</sup>

Children, especially, are a vital population to study because their views on the war and life at the time were so different from that of adults. Their thoughts at the time of the bombings were not clouded by political ideologies or beliefs about the war to put the atomic bombs into context.<sup>2</sup> This chapter seeks to document the early reactions of

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<sup>1</sup> Rachel Reece, "Poems of Hiroshima: Translations of Children's Poems in When I Was Small" (Middle Tennessee State University, 2019), 1.

<sup>2</sup> Arata Osada, ed., *Children of Hiroshima* (New York: Harper Colophon Books, 1982). xx.

children to the atomic bombs. These accounts differ from those of adults, which is extremely important to develop a fuller, more diverse picture of the atomic bombings. These reactions may be fueled by trauma, which is said to be experienced stronger in childhood than in adulthood, thus changing their experience of the bombing and its aftermath.<sup>3</sup> It is especially important to look at these works created soon after the attacks so that this experience is not distorted with time.

Though there are few works produced by children of this era, the ones we do have are vital to improve understanding concerning the unique experiences of childhood bomb survivors. Through this examination of the works and reactions of Japanese children to the atomic bombings, we can see that their childhood trauma is unique from that experienced by adults and warrants separate study for showing the unique stressors that children faced after the traumatic bombings, such as the loss of family, normalcy, and the Second World War. These bedrocks of trauma are highlighted throughout Japanese children's representations of the bombings, but hope is also present. These representations of hope in addition to suffering show a desire to move on and rebuild from the war.

Early literature is especially important because it was impossible to publish these kinds of works under occupation. As part of the Civil Censorship Detachment (CCD), GHQ banned any discussion related to the atomic bomb, enacted until 1952, the end of American occupation. While the laws for censorship did not explicitly state that talking about the atomic bomb was prohibited, it does proclaim that there shall be no criticism of

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<sup>3</sup> Caron Zlotnick et al., "Childhood Trauma, Trauma in Adulthood, and Psychiatric Diagnoses," *Compr Psychiatry* 49, no. 2 (2008): 163–9.

any Allied powers, there shall be no discussion of Allied troops movements, and that nothing should be printed that may disturb the public's sense of peace or tranquility (See Appendix 1 for the full Civil Censorship Detachment). Perhaps this is why censorship enforcement regarding atomic bomb literature seems to be laxer in 1951, one year before occupation ended. It was incredibly brave for early Japanese atomic authors to speak up despite the threat of the GHQ. It is thanks to their bravery that we have such powerful works to educate us on the atomic bombs.<sup>4</sup>

There are many retroactive works written by adults who survived the atomic bombings in their childhood, such as *Barefoot Gen*, covered in Chapter Two.<sup>5</sup> These, however, will not be included in this chapter because the experience of the author's childhood may be distorted through time and their new, adult perspective on the war. This chapter seeks to focus on the reactions of children to the atomic bombings, directly after these events in order to show what the general thoughts and feelings of children at the time were. Adults writing about their childhood experiences later in life show what messages adults wanted to convey about the bombings at different points in history.

Childhood reactions to traumatic events, such as the tragedy of the atomic bombings, are important to study because they are so different from those of adults. There are many studies showing how childhood traumatic experiences can impact the individual during adulthood.<sup>6</sup> However, there is little discussion of the effects of trauma

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<sup>4</sup> Reece, "Poems of Hiroshima: Translations of Children's Poems in When I Was Small," 39-40.

<sup>5</sup> Keiji Nakazawa, *Barefoot Gen: A Cartoon Story of Hiroshima*, trans. Project Gen, vol. 1 (San Francisco, CA: Last Gasp of San Francisco, 2004).

<sup>6</sup> John Briere, *Child Abuse Trauma: Theory and Treatment of the Lasting Effects* (Newbury Park, CA: Sage Publications, 1992); Shogo Hashimoto et al., "Victimization in Childhood Influences Presenteeism in Adulthood via Mediation by Neuroticism and Perceived Job Stressors," *Neuropsychiatric Disease and Treatment* 18 (May 31, 2022): 265-74; Martie Thompson, J.B. Kingree, and Dorian Lamis,

during childhood, other than psychiatric studies discussing treatment options.<sup>7</sup> Childhood expression of trauma is important, especially when the traumatic event is a national tragedy. Even within child populations there are differences, with the reactions of younger children varying from those of older children.<sup>8</sup> Studies suggest that traumatic events in childhood (younger than age 15) may also be more detrimental than those occurring in adulthood because, as psychiatrist Caron Zlotnick and her co-authors have noted, “children are less capable of organizing their responses to traumatic experiences coherently and are more vulnerable to adverse brain development that may play a role in psychiatric disorders.”<sup>9</sup> Overall, it is acknowledged that it is important to let children share their feelings and to grieve any losses they have experienced due to the traumatic event.<sup>10</sup> However, children are not as aware of this need to express themselves as adults are, and thus we have very few creations from children working through this trauma. There are some creations, such as James Yamazaki’s *Children of the Atomic Bomb*, that are a medical study of the children of Hiroshima and Nagasaki and do not focus on the

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“Associations of Adverse Childhood Experiences and Suicidal Behaviors in Adulthood in a U.S. Nationally Representative Sample,” *Child: Care, Health & Development* 45, no. 1 (January 2019): 121–128.

<sup>7</sup> Kedar Nath Dwivedi, Chris Nicholson, and Michael Irwin, *Children and Adolescents in Trauma: Creative Therapeutic Approaches* (London: Jessica Kingsley Publishers, 2010); Cynthia Monahan, *Children and Trauma: A Parent’s Guide to Helping Children Heal* (New York: Lexington Books, 1993); Joy D. Osofsky, ed., *Young Children and Trauma: Intervention and Treatment* (New York: Guilford Press, 2004).

<sup>8</sup> “Understanding Child Trauma,” Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration, last modified September 27, 2022, <https://www.samhsa.gov/child-trauma/understanding-child-trauma>.

<sup>9</sup> Caron Zlotnick, Jennifer Johnson, Robert Kohn, Benjamin Vicente, Pedro Rioseco, and Sandra Saldivia, “Childhood Trauma, Trauma in Adulthood, and Psychiatric Diagnoses,” *Compr Psychiatry* 49, no. 2 (2008): 163–9.

<sup>10</sup> “Helping Children Cope with Traumatic Events,” *HelpGuide*, last modified December 6, 2022, <https://www.helpguide.org/articles/ptsd-trauma/helping-children-cope-with-traumatic-stress.htm>.

reactions of these children, other than to say the most significant effect of the bomb was the terror it caused.<sup>11</sup>

Some works do exist where adults describe the situations that Hiroshima children found themselves in after the bombing. The state of Hiroshima schools after the bombing, for example, was truly dismal, as described by history professor Samuel Yamashita,

[Dr. Howard Bell, an education specialist in the Civil Information and Education Office of the Allied Occupation government of Japan,] went on to describe the children at that school attending classes in the burned-out concrete shell of their school building, which had no windows and no heating. They had to do their lessons with virtually no school supplies, not even pencil stubs; moreover, they were doing their best, Bell added, “to learn democracy.” He reported that he had managed to get a table and benches for them, but not school supplies or athletic equipment.<sup>12</sup>

This certainly affects the ways that children would react to the bombs, because their schooling is such a significant part of their lives.

While there are few written works expressing Japanese children’s feelings about the bombs, one can gain insight into children’s experiences through artwork made after the bombings. These types of artworks are depicted in the film *Pictures from a Hiroshima Schoolyard*, which tells the story of an American minister Arthur Powell Davies’ outrage at how the atomic bombs were being covered in American press. His outrage reached a staff member of General Douglas MacArthur, the head of the occupation of Japan; this staff member suggested that if Davies was really frustrated, he would help the children of Hiroshima by having members of his church send their leftover school supplies to Hiroshima schools. When the children of three Hiroshima

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<sup>11</sup> James N Yamazaki, *Children of the Atomic Bomb: An American Physician’s Memoir of Nagasaki, Hiroshima, and the Marshall Islands* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1995). ix.

<sup>12</sup> Samuel Hideo Yamashita, “Pictures for Our ‘Honorable American Friends,’” *Cross Currents e-Journal* 6 (March 2013), 175-85. 179.

schools, including Honkawa Elementary, received the donations, they were so grateful that they sent pictures the children had drawn as a gift for the church.

Yamashita explains that this artwork by child survivors can be interpreted in many ways, including a universalistic moral framework, a triumphalist geopolitical narrative, a suppressed loser's narrative, or a victims' narrative.<sup>13</sup> He cites the response of the artwork to the church's donations as why the children's works support a universalistic moral framework. He equates universalism here to Christianity and shows that the artworks sent by the children of Hiroshima can potentially support the universalistic idea that we are all just humans striving for peace. However, the artwork can also be read in a triumphalist geopolitical narrative that supports the American victory in Japan and sees the atomic bombs as an overall good. This can be seen through the happier drawings sent by the children of Hiroshima – ones that show children playing and normal school activities resuming; there is even one work of calligraphy that reads "Our honorable American friends." It should be noted however, that the intention of these drawings was to express gratefulness for the church's donation, so the children may have presented a happier veneer than what they actually felt.

Not all the children's drawings were happy. Notably, there is one child's drawing of the dilapidated *genbaku dome* (A-Bomb Dome), the hypocenter of the blast. There is another child's drawing of their teacher that stresses his role as a veteran of the Second World War, as well. Yamashita argues that these drawings may express a suppressed loser's narrative – the stories of those who refuse to forget the horrors of the war on

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<sup>13</sup> Yamashita, "Pictures for Our 'Honorable American Friends.'" 179.

normal Japanese people and seek vengeance against their wartime enemies. Finally, the children's artwork could be read as a victim's narrative. Similar to the suppressed loser's narrative, this idea is shown through the children who do not forget the war, yet instead of being vengeful and patriotic about the loss, the students see themselves as victims of the unjust atrocities that were committed. Through these artworks, one can see the complexity of the emotions resulting from the atomic bomb – there are many happy pictures of children playing and everyday school activities resuming, but there are still some drawings that show the trauma of the bombing will not be forgotten (See Appendix 2).

The victims themselves do not express many negative emotions when looking back on the drawings they made as elementary schoolers as adults in *Pictures from a Hiroshima Schoolyard*, although there is notably not an interview with the artist of the *genbaku dome* picture. One member of the church that received the drawings even goes so far as to say that “there is no sadness in these pictures.”<sup>14</sup> Even survivors expressed a similar sentiment looking back on their school days, stating, “what I remember most is the play. No matter what was happening, everyone played.”<sup>15</sup> Again, another survivor shared the hope that was felt by the schoolchildren after the bombing. “Of course, the atomic bombing was a terrible thing, but I think it was wonderful how strong we were and how positive, focused on the future and doing our best at our studies, and how friendly we were with one another.”<sup>16</sup> Of course, these statements were not made in the period directly after the bombing and may fall subject to the nostalgia of looking back on

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<sup>14</sup> Bryan Reichhardt, *Pictures from a Hiroshima Schoolyard*, 2012. 3:32.

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid*, 28:38.

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid*, 29:50.

the survivor's schooldays. Indeed, some historians stress how hard it must have been for children, stating that in some situations the yakuza ruled over Hiroshima in the chaos after the bombing and would use children to commit crimes such as murder and theft because children would face lesser punishments than adults.<sup>17</sup> However, it does speak as a testament to the hope that prevailed after the atomic bombings that childhood joy is what is remembered most by the artists of these pictures.

One of the main written sources showing how Japanese children reacted to the atomic bombs is Arata Osada's *Children of Hiroshima*. This book is a collection of stories written by the children who survived the Hiroshima bombings themselves. It exists in its native Japanese and in an English translation. In Japanese, there is an associated book sold as well, titled *Watashi ga Chiisakkata Toki ni [When I was Small]*, which includes a few poems and other stories by children not included in the original. There was also a movie based on the book and written by Osada, released in 1952, which follows a schoolteacher who survived the bombing in Hiroshima and returned to the city to visit acquaintances and three of her surviving students.<sup>18</sup>

Arata Osada – who compiled these children's stories – devoted his life to children. He studied pedagogy and, after living through the bombing in Hiroshima himself, became the first president of the Japan Association for the Protection of Children. He began collecting the stories of children who survived the bomb in Hiroshima in order to instruct the world in the ways of peace.<sup>19</sup>

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<sup>17</sup> Ibid, 24:01.

<sup>18</sup> Claudio Carvalho, "Children of Hiroshima (1952)," *IMDb*, accessed December 15, 2022, <https://www.imdb.com/title/tt0044497/>.

<sup>19</sup> Osada, *Children of Hiroshima*. xx.

The stories in *Children of Hiroshima* and *When I was Small* overwhelmingly show the despair of the atomic bombing in Hiroshima. This differs from many of the drawings analyzed above; perhaps because the drawings were gifts it would have been inappropriate to convey the message of the grief that they felt. Many mourn the loss of relatives who passed because of the bombing, such as the young Tomoyuki Satoh, who was 4 years old at the time of the bombing and in 4<sup>th</sup> grade at the time of writing; he ends his testimony with the simple, yet emotional, exclamation, “Goodbye, dear Mummy and Daddy!”<sup>20</sup> Others very openly grieve the day of the bombing as the day they became orphans. There are few children who did not experience the trauma of a loved one passing due to the bomb.

The writing of these testimonies may have been an exercise in coping with the author’s trauma. As noted above, it is important for children to express themselves after traumatic events. Such an expression may make the testimonies seem as if they deviate from the topic of the atomic bomb, especially when the survivors tell the tales of their family; however, it is important to remember that these tales are all tied to the atomic bomb in the survivor’s mind. Being able to discuss them as such may help with their healing. For example, 5<sup>th</sup> grade author Yukio Sekimoto, who was five years old at the time of the bombing spends the majority of their testimony explaining the different types of offerings that they and their sister presented to their parents’ grave after their passing as a result of atom bomb related illnesses.<sup>21</sup> These tales may seem only tangentially

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<sup>20</sup> Ibid, 4.

<sup>21</sup> Ibid, 24.

related to the atomic bombs, but we must remember that they are part of the narrator's story, which shows the long lasting effects of the bombs.

The desire to return to normalcy does seem to be a common theme. In Mitsugu Hanabusa's tale, who was in 4<sup>th</sup> grade during the bombing, and in 10<sup>th</sup> grade at the time of writing, he recounts the difficulties he faced in returning to school, mourning the time he had lost to the atomic bomb and the resulting sickness he suffered. He even grieves the fact that he had completely forgotten his multiplication tables during his absence from school.<sup>22</sup> The sorrow at the loss of such a seemingly small thing shows how the bombs impacted every area of the child survivors' lives.

Finally, many of the child authors use their testimonies to express their overall disdain for war due to the devastation that they have seen caused. This may appear as just general pacifistic feelings, or it may be a more directed hatred of specific events. At the time that Osada compiled these stories, the United States was in the midst of the Korean War, and there was even discussion of using an atomic bomb on the Korean Peninsula. The children writing to Osada were aware of this, and their stories reflect that. Yoshiaki Wada, who was 6 years old when the bomb dropped and in 6<sup>th</sup> grade at the time of writing, ends his story by open-endedly stating, "The war between Japan and the United States is over and it is peaceful in Japan again. Still, they have started to fight in Korea."<sup>23</sup> This is a rather depressing note to end on, expressing that even though the war in Japan and the atomic bombing has supposedly ended, there is still fighting going on and the suffering in Hiroshima and Nagasaki seems to have taught the world nothing.

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<sup>22</sup> Ibid, 155.

<sup>23</sup> Ibid, 61.

Some children began their testimonies with their disdain for war, such as Masako Ohta (7<sup>th</sup> grade, 1<sup>st</sup> grade at time of bombing), who states, “I hate war now.”<sup>24</sup> This change as a result of the atomic bomb shows how the bombings were intrinsically tied to the children’s views of war – whereas before war was not a thing to be detested (she cites that her brother even wanted to be an admiral when he grew up), because of the bomb she has now grown to hate the very idea of war. This new desire for peace may be tied to the feelings of hope that accompanied the children’s reactions to the bomb. With the war over, and the effects of the atomic bomb seen in Hiroshima and Nagasaki, there is a new hope that the bombed cities will act as a testament for peace and the bombings will not be repeated if Hiroshima and Nagasaki are remembered.

The reactions of Hiroshima and Nagasaki’s children are difficult to fully understand because so few primary materials exist discussing their feelings, especially in the case of the victims of Nagasaki. However, by examining children’s writings and artworks after the bombings, we can begin to see an overall dismay at the changes to everyday life that came about because of the bombs. Due to the long-lasting effects of the bomb and the total destruction caused by it, child survivors’ mourning was extended into a longer period of time because they were repeatedly met with situations to remind them of the bombings. However, as some of the artworks drawn by the children of Honkawa Elementary suggest, there may have been a glimmer of hope for schoolchildren as things began to return to normal after the bombings.

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<sup>24</sup> Ibid, 79.

Seeing the vulnerability and unique difficulties of the childhood survivors of Hiroshima and Nagasaki may cause one to wonder if there were any aid programs developed specifically for child survivors. It unfortunately seems that much of the aid for children of Hiroshima or Nagasaki was left to private organizations or benefactors, most likely because the Japanese government and American occupation had to rebuild an entire country on the brink of starvation and was thus unable to focus solely on the child survivors of one tragedy. For example, the aid provided to schoolchildren of Hiroshima in the form of school supplies was merely “inspired by the minister’s Unitarian faith and moral decency and realized through the generosity of his parishioners.”<sup>25</sup> This was an unofficial exchange that relied on the pity of an American church for the children of Hiroshima to receive any aid. American citizens also donated the majority of funds for the building of the Hiroshima City Children's Library in 1952.<sup>26</sup> Overall, there were some programs developed to provide medical care and legal support for all atomic bomb survivors, including those who were children at the time, but there was no government sponsored aid specifically for child survivors of the atomic bombs.

The aftermath of the bombings of Hiroshima and Nagasaki was a very emotionally charged time for children. In addition to all of the physical ailments and the loss of material objects, children had the loss of their prior lives to grieve as well. Their lives were affected by the loss of loved ones, sickness, evacuation, and much more as a result of the bombing. This trauma was unique from that of adults because the children

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<sup>25</sup> Yamashita, “Pictures for Our ‘Honorable American Friends,’” 175.

<sup>26</sup> Kensuke Murashima, “Did Hiroshima Receive Aid from America in the Aftermath of the Bombing?” *Peace Seeds*, accessed December 15, 2022, [https://www.hiroshimapeacemedia.jp/hiroshima-koku/en/exploration/index\\_20080929.html](https://www.hiroshimapeacemedia.jp/hiroshima-koku/en/exploration/index_20080929.html).

had a much smaller emotional vocabulary with which to deal with the bombings. The main sources we have showing children's reactions to the atomic bombings are Osada's *Children of Hiroshima* and the drawings featured in *Pictures from a Hiroshima Schoolyard*. While this is certainly not comprehensive, these two sources do show the importance that children placed on the normalcy of their lives and the glimmer of hope that was felt by survivors. Unfortunately, there were no aid programs targeted specifically at children to help with these adjustments, although they did sometimes receive aid from private organizations and were later included in aid programs developed for all survivors of the atomic bombs. Through an examination of these children's reactions, we can see the importance of the few testimonies of children that we have and better understand the emphasis placed on hope and the return to normalcy. Although, this return to supposed normalcy would be difficult specifically in the field of education, as teachers had to turn from teaching highly militaristic curricula to renouncing this and accepting that Japan lost the war.

## CHAPTER 2: JAPANESE REPRESENTATIONS

With the hope the Japanese children wrought out of the immediate aftermath of the bombings, one may wonder how the bombings have continued to be handled throughout Japanese history and in the education system. The atomic bombings of Hiroshima and Nagasaki were horrors that changed the course of history forever and ushered the world into the atomic era. Discussing these horrors with children is an especially difficult venture, as many parents worry about traumatizing children with the stories of such a horrific event. This may be especially true in Japan, which has the unique position of being the only country to have its citizens be victims of the atomic bombs. The children that receive these messages and stories of the atomic bombs in Japan may be descendants of those who have suffered from the bombs and may suffer from a generational trauma from the memory of the bombs. Because of this, it is especially important to study and understand the ways in which Japanese textbooks and children's literature discuss the bombings and their aftermath. Unfortunately, modern Japanese textbooks tended to give numbers over emotional descriptions of the dead and made all issues relating to the bomb seem as if they were purely the result of the Potsdam Conference. Japanese textbooks seem to have regressed in their discussions of the atomic bombings since the 1950s. This speaks to a Japan that is more hesitant to discuss nuances of the atomic bombings, such as the reasons for their dropping or even their horrific aftermath. This could be attributed to nationalistic ideals which seek to paint the bombings as universal issues rather than purely Japanese ones.

Children's picture books reveal a more nuanced approach that humanizes victims, yet it is still centered on using the bomb to promote peace. Overall, Japanese children's

atomic literature shows children the human perspective of the bombings more so than textbooks. They overwhelmingly use their platform to promote peace and nuclear abolition. However, in doing so, they also support Japanese nationalist and revisionist ideas through the universalization of the experience of the bombs and the overlooking of Japanese wartime aggressions being the reason that the bombs were dropped.

The education system of postwar Japan has been touted as one of the most successful achievements of the American Occupation.<sup>1</sup> However, the ways that educators have taught the bombings have changed drastically through Japan's postwar history. There have been many debates over the story of the bombings and their aftermath, with nationalism playing a heavy role in these conflicts. It appears that the story of the bombs is directly tied to the story of Japan in World War II, and representations of the decision to drop them can paint a picture of the nation as a wartime aggressor or as a victim of a unique atrocity. Because of this, the way that the bombings are taught in textbooks and children's literature provides a valuable insight into the ideals of the Japanese nation. It seems that the most important message that the current Japanese educational system expresses is the idea of universal peace through the expression of the atomic bombs as a universal tragedy, rather than a uniquely Japanese one.

Historical revisionism exists to blur the line between victim and perpetrator and many have argued that Japan tries to do such through their historical portrayal of the

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<sup>1</sup> Yoshiko Nozaki, "Education Reform and History Textbooks in Occupied Japan," in *Democracy in Occupied Japan: The U.S. Occupation and Japanese Politics and Society* (Oxford: Routledge, 2009), 120–46. 120.

atomic bombings.<sup>2</sup> Many of Japan's neighbors accuse the country of being overly "victim conscious," meaning they over-emphasize their role as a victim of the atomic bombs and disregard the Japanese atrocities committed during the war.<sup>3</sup> Political scientist Kamila Szczepanska explains that, "significantly, the discourse of atomic victimisation validated a 'myth of the new beginning' that represents the country's surrender as a point of break from the previous decades of war, replacing it with the vision of reborn, antiwar and pacifist Japan."<sup>4</sup> The overemphasis on peace in atomic bomb memorialization and literature strives to paint Japan in a better light and ignore its atrocities in the Second World War, giving it this "new beginning" as a peaceful nation that has done no wrong. In the previous chapter, we discussed how this can even be interpreted in children's reactions to the bombs, as discussed by Samuel Yamashita.<sup>5</sup>

Japan is notorious for its World War II revisionists, mainly due to the international infamy of the textbook controversies of the 1980s discussed below. However, many revisionist ideals still drive conservative and revisionist politics today. From the Rape of Nanking, to the "comfort women" issue, to just about all aggressions from the Japanese in the Second World War, there are some Japanese people (mostly right-wing nationalists) that re-write history to show Japan as purely a victim of the United States' atomic bombs. While modern textbooks are not blatantly revisionist in

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<sup>2</sup> Ingyu Oh and Douglas Ishizawa-Grbic, "Forgiving the Culprits: Japanese Historical Revisionism in a Post-Cold War Context," *International Journal of Peace Studies* 5, no. 2 (Autumn/ Winter 2000): 45–59, 46.

<sup>3</sup> Kamila Szczepanska, "Towards a 'Common' View of Difficult Past? The Representation of Atomic Bombings of Hiroshima and Nagasaki in Trilateral Teaching Materials," *Journal of Peace Education* 14, no. 1 (2017): 114–29, 115.

<sup>4</sup> Ibid, 117.

<sup>5</sup> Samuel Hideo Yamashita, "Pictures for Our 'Honorable American Friends,'" *Cross Currents e-Journal* 6 (March 2013): 175–85.

these ways, they still support the idea of universalism and often downplay the Japanese atrocities committed during the Second World War. Through the examination of textbooks, one can see that there is surprisingly little focus on the atomic bombs. This could be caused by the nationalistic desire to universalize the experience, and not treat it as a uniquely Japanese problem. It could also be out of the desire not to retraumatize children whose ancestors may have lived through the bombings (although, as we will see in regards to the supplemental atomic literature, discussing this trauma is often helpful in working through it). There is also little clarity about how teachers teach the bombs outside of the textbook or what kind of emphasis they are given in the curriculum.

Social Studies education in the early postwar period was criticized by teachers as being too “American focused” because of its top-down implementation.<sup>6</sup> The influence of the occupying American forces on Japanese education is undeniable and is even reflected in the American-drafted Constitution written for Japan in 1947. As Professor of International Social Science Yoshiko Nozaki puts it, “the constitution guaranteed academic freedom (Article 23) and the people’s right to an education (Article 26), thus giving shape to the ‘new education.’”<sup>7</sup> This does not mean that the Japanese were without agency, as the Japanese government did pass both the Fundamental Law of Education and the School Education Law in 1947. These two laws formed the basics of the Japanese education system, including the modern process for textbook review mentioned below. However, since the subject of history had been traditionally misused to spread a

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<sup>6</sup> Nozaki, “Education Reform and History Textbooks in Occupied Japan,” 137.

<sup>7</sup> Ibid, 132.

nationalistic message to students, occupation leaders exerted more control in history education.

One aim of the American occupation was to decentralize educational administration in the government. However, the Ministry of Education still held its power, especially once the occupation ended; but this power was not without internal resistance as well – the ministry found opposition in Japanese teachers, as seen with the Japan Teachers Union. The Japan Teachers Union was a large, leftwing group of Japanese teachers that held prominence in the postwar period. They advocated for a more liberal interpretation of history, and many members overlapped membership with the Communist Party, which was legalized by the American Occupation due to their common goals of eradicating militarism and ultranationalism from Japanese education.<sup>8</sup> Just one month after the Supreme Commander of Allied Powers (SCAP) authorized the teaching of history again in Japanese schools, the ministry of education (with some support from SCAP officials) used its power to announce the introduction of the subject of social studies. This took the focus away from “national history” and instead combined subjects that lead to a broader focus on society, such as morals, history, civics, and geography.

Despite what may be assumed about early postwar history education, textbooks were rather average in what we would consider covering the Second World War, if not more progressive than modern day. They included descriptions of the Nanking Massacre and used the term “aggression” often. Some books even mentioned aggression in other countries, such as the Philippines and Maylasia. Early postwar textbooks recognized

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<sup>8</sup> Benjamin C. Duke, *Japan's Militant Teachers: A History of the Left-Wing Teachers' Movement* (University of Hawaii Press, 2019), 31.

Japan's aggressions as problematic and sought to address them in that matter. Although, these books mainly blamed the military for the aggressions and did not imply any blame on Emperor Hirohito's part.<sup>9</sup>

However, this relatively fair representation of Japan's actions during the Second World War did not continue past the immediate postwar period. Debates about representations of history in Japanese textbooks have gone on since before the war but gained traction and notoriety internationally in the 1980s. A prominent figure in the progressive textbooks cause, Ienaga Saburo, summarized the issue by stating that Japanese textbooks simply did not show enough remorse for the past. On the other hand, the more conservative bureaucratic bodies criticized the proposed changes to textbooks as being too "red," originally meaning too communist, but changing in more recent years to mean too American or too Soviet in interpretation.<sup>10</sup> Of course the goals of Japanese textbooks have always been to present the country as unified and homogenous, as can be seen through the lack of blame placed on Hirohito in the postwar period and in the avoidance of the topic of victimization of other countries by the Japanese in the 1980s. But many felt that the textbooks of the 1980s were taking the revisionism too far with their treatment of colonialism and the Second World War.

In the 1990s, there was a slight rebound as a result of the controversies of the 1980s in which textbooks were more progressive. It is unclear how the atomic bombs were covered in these years, but all of the textbooks approved by the Ministry of Education included references to comfort women and coverage of the Nanking

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<sup>9</sup> Nozaki, "Education Reform and History Textbooks in Occupied Japan," 139.

<sup>10</sup> Alexander Bukh, "Japan's History Textbooks Debate: National Identity in Narratives of Victimhood and Victimization," *Asian Survey* 47, no. 5 (October 2007): 683–704, 684.

Massacre.<sup>11</sup> It seems that the textbook issue has historically swung like a pendulum, going back and forth between open discussions of Japanese nationalistic atrocities and the distortion of such histories since World War II. It seems that the case is often that the government bodies relating to education push for more conservative, revisionist interpretations, while they are opposed by educators who wish to teach a more open history.<sup>12</sup>

In modern Japan, history education does not begin until the final year of primary school (6<sup>th</sup> grade, ages 11-12). Primary aged students are taught mainly about important figures in history, while middle school students are taught about Japanese history. These courses are compulsory.<sup>13</sup> As will be seen in Chapter Four, withholding history education until children enter their preteen years and are better able to conceptualize history is not abnormal, either in the States or in Japan. Younger children spend their time preparing to learn about history in social studies courses that are history adjacent. The textbooks for these courses will often allude to or mention things from “long ago,” but history is not the main focus of the class until upper primary school. The older children’s history textbooks that are used in classrooms go through three stages of life before reaching a student: creation by a publishing company, examination and approval by the Ministry of Education, and selection by school districts.<sup>14</sup> This has been the case since the laws set forth by the Ministry of Education in 1947.

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<sup>11</sup> Ibid, 689.

<sup>12</sup> Peter Cave, “Japanese Colonialism and the Asia-Pacific War in Japan’s History Textbooks: Changing Representations and Their Causes,” *Modern Asian Studies* 47, no. 2 (March 2013): 542–580, 546.

<sup>13</sup> Hiroshi Mitani, “Nihon No Rekishi Kyoukasho Seido [Japan’s History Textbook System],” *Nippon.Com*, last modified April 12, 2012, <https://www.nippon.com/ja/in-depth/a00701/>.

<sup>14</sup> Ibid.

In an examination of three modern Japanese textbooks, Szczepanska concludes that most books do include a discussion of the Potsdam Conference, during which it was decided that the Allied Powers would only accept an unconditional surrender from Japan. Contrary to what may be expected of Japanese textbooks, Szczepanska also explains that “the number of victims is provided, yet the horrid consequences of the atomic bombings are only briefly touched upon.”<sup>15</sup> In my own examination of current Japanese textbooks, it appears that this is true of the focus on discussions on the end of the war. Many textbooks place the Potsdam Conference, demanding Japan’s unconditional surrender, in the same paragraph or section as the description of the atomic bombings. The descriptions of both are very academic and brief, showing that the topics are on the same scholarly level. The following examinations of three Japanese history textbooks highlight this focus on the Potsdam Conference while also showing that each book has a unique way of explaining the dropping of the bombs. These books were selected based on available books by some of the big textbook publishers in Japan. There are all for middle school aged children, which is when the history of the atomic bomb is first taught.

The first textbook, *Japan’s Progress and the World’s Movements*, does dedicate the final section of its chapter on the Second World War to “August 1945, The Dropping of the Atomic Bomb.”<sup>16</sup> After giving an overview of the United States’ victories in the Pacific, the section on the atomic bombs begins by describing the end of the war in Europe. It then describes the Yalta and Potsdam Conferences, highlighting the joint

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<sup>15</sup> Szczepanska, “Towards a ‘Common’ View of Difficult Past? The Representation of Atomic Bombings of Hiroshima and Nagasaki in Trilateral Teaching Materials,” 119.

<sup>16</sup> Hideo Kuroda, Tetsuo Owada, Ryuichi Narita, and Youichi Sato. *Chugakusei No Rekishi: Nihon No Ayumi to Sekai No Ugoki* [Middle School History: Japan’s Progress and the World’s Movements]. (Tokyo: Empire Publishing [Teikoku Shoin], 2011), 212.

declaration requesting unconditional surrender. “But Japan ignored this declaration and America, hoping to end the war quickly, dropped an atomic bomb on Hiroshima on August 6 and on Nagasaki on August 9.”<sup>17</sup> Compared to some of the other textbooks examined this is a rather neutral way of wording the events, though one cannot help but notice the lack of ill intent in this textbook’s version of the United States. This textbook does include a picture of the Atomic Bomb Dome and the destruction caused by the bombs. The text also highlights the destruction, stating that “with one bomb, 140,000 people lost their lives and the heart of Hiroshima was destroyed.”<sup>18</sup> It also discusses the suffering caused by the bomb rather starkly and explains that the initial death tolls were not the only suffering.

However, to detract from the somber mood, there is an illustration of one of the book’s cartoon characters rather casually asking, “I wonder why the atomic bomb was dropped on Hiroshima.”<sup>19</sup> This is meant to spur conversation in the classroom about the intentions behind the dropping of the atomic bombs, or the choice of Hiroshima specifically as a target, but making it into a sidebar thought of a cartoon character trivializes the question and makes it less serious than it should be. The discussion question included in the section, however, is rather interesting, as it encourages students to look at a map of the damage done to Hiroshima and see what kind of damage would be done to their region when the atomic bomb was dropped. This is rather unexpected as an American viewing this textbook, and one must wonder if there was any fear of digging up traumatic family stories with the inclusion of this discussion. There is another discussion

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<sup>17</sup> Ibid, 213.

<sup>18</sup> Ibid.

<sup>19</sup> Ibid, 212.

question asking why America dropped the bombs, however, which is an excellent topic of discussion; though it is notable that the textbook itself does not elaborate on the reasons why the United States would drop the bomb. It is left up to the teacher to determine how to portray Japan and what potential motivations for dropping the bombs to teach students.

The next textbook, *Opening the Future* is similar in its pictorial depiction of the destruction of the bombs. It contains an image of a destroyed Hiroshima and one of the bombs' iconic mushroom clouds. *Opening the Future* gives the atomic bombings their own subsection under the greater section discussing "the defeat of militarism" and the end of the Second World War.<sup>20</sup> Similar to the previous textbook, it describes the Yalta Conference, but does go into more detail about its relation to Japan and what was decided. Moving on to the Potsdam Conference, very similar wording to the first textbook is used to describe the call for Japan's unconditional surrender, with the books stating that it was ignored by Japan. But in explaining the dropping of the bomb, they do give a different motivation: "to gain an advantage over the Soviet Union in the postwar world, the United States dropped an atomic bomb on Hiroshima on August 6, and on Nagasaki on August 9."<sup>21</sup> This certainly falls more in line with American revisionist views of the atomic bombs, as there has been no definitive proof of the relationship with the Soviet Union being a motivation for dropping the bombs. There is the possibility that describing the decision to drop the bombs in this matter was meant to deflect blame from

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<sup>20</sup> Kasumo Fukuya, Kyoko Isoyama, Seiyo Oosumi, Koichi Kato, Satoshi Kamada, Jin Kawai, Yasuji Kimura, et al. *Chugaku Shakai Rekishi: Mirai Wo Hiraku* [Middle School Social Studies History: Opening the Future]. (Tokyo: Kyoiku Shuppan Kabushiki Gaisha, 2020), 228.

<sup>21</sup> *Ibid*, 229.

the United States, which is now one of Japan's allies. In placing the decision as an early part of the Cold War, it reassures Japanese students that their friend America did not have any ill wishes against them, but rather dropping the bombs was simply a political move to get ahead of the Soviet Union.

*Opening the Future* gives casualty figures from the bombs, similar to the books described by Szczepanska, with little other description of the horrors they caused. The many deaths and injuries caused by the bombings are portrayed simply as a number, with no humanization. Finally, the atomic bomb section closes with a description of Japan's surrender, highlighting the causal relationship between the bombings and the end of the war. There are no discussion questions about the atomic bombings, despite the inclusion of discussion questions about the end of the war and the Battle of Okinawa.

The final book examined will be the book *Japan's History and the World*. Like the previous book examined, the atomic bombings are included in a subsection in the main section about the end of World War II. However, this textbook does not even mention the atomic bombs in the subsection headings, and instead chooses to simply call it "Japan's Acceptance of the Potsdam Declaration."<sup>22</sup> This in itself is a loaded title, since Japan did not accept the Potsdam Declaration initially. The book explains the declaration similarly to the other books, as a meeting between the major Allied leaders in which unconditional surrender was demanded of Japan. The reason given for the refusal of these conditions, however, is interesting: "However, it was difficult to suppress the claims of soldiers who wanted to continue the war, so the government did not give a clear reaction

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<sup>22</sup> Hiroshi Mitani, Makoto Ueda, Keiko Okubo, Tomoyasu Kato, Kei Tsuruta, and Masaru Tonomura. *Chugaku Rekishi: Nihon No Rekishi to Sekai* [Middle School History: Japan's History and the World]. (Tokyo: Shimizu Shoin Kabushiki Gaisha, 2020), 243.

to the Potsdam Declaration.”<sup>23</sup> The next sentence states simply that America dropped atomic bombs on Hiroshima and Nagasaki in August, showing some cause and effect through the placement of the sentences, but it did not give an outright reason in the textbook as the other books did. There is one sentence describing the death tolls of the bombings, and then the paragraph continues on to describe the Soviet Union’s entrance into the war. It concludes by stating that, taking the situation into account, Japan accepted the conditions of the Potsdam declaration on August 14. This is a very curt way of describing the events that took place, and perhaps the most confusing out of the books examined. In this portrayal of events, Japan did no wrong, it simply just took a little time in deciding to accept the Potsdam Declaration. In placing the blame for initially ignoring the Declaration on Japanese soldiers, it absolves the responsibility of the everyday Japanese as well, telling readers that militarism only affected the military.

The overall theme of the textbooks on the bombings is that they were caused by Japan’s refusal to accept the conditions of the Potsdam Declaration. While there are differences in other reasons for the dropping of the bombs provided in the books, they are all similar in their clinical nature in discussing the dropping of the bombs and the deaths that followed. This could potentially be out of respect to the survivors and their descendants, or through textbook author’s not wanting to retraumatize readers. But one must wonder if the lack of description about the horrors of the atomic bombs accurately conveys the importance of the bombings.

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<sup>23</sup> Ibid.

Of course, these few textbooks are not the only way for a subject to be taught. In recent years, there have also been textbooks produced in collaboration with Japan, China, and South Korea that include sections on the atomic bombings. These include more nuanced views of the bombings, including questions of memory and the victimization of other countries at the hands of Japanese.<sup>24</sup> There are also an increasing number of resources being made available for children to learn about the atomic bombs, both in and outside the classroom.

There are a variety of children's books that discuss the atomic bombings in Japanese. These can be used to supplement the education that children receive in school and could be considered a trusted source of information by children seeking to learn more about the bombings. Overall, Japanese children's books about the bombings are targeted at teaching young children messages of peace through a difficult history. They aim to humanize victims and show the horrors of the end of the war for Japanese citizens. They all strongly emphasize a pacifist message, potentially contributing to the image of Japan as a peaceful, victimized country. Some books do mention the wrongs committed by the Japanese during the war, but they are shown as something that common Japanese citizens did not support, further reinforcing the image of Japan as a pacifist country that did not deserve to be bombed. There seem to be three common themes in Japanese children's atomic literature, including the telling of survivors' stories, the theme of nuclear disarmament tied to peace, and the use of indirect metaphors and imagery to describe the destruction of the bombs.

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<sup>24</sup> Szczepanska, "Towards a 'Common' View of Difficult Past? The Representation of Atomic Bombings of Hiroshima and Nagasaki in Trilateral Teaching Materials."

Many of the books discussed in this chapter were recommended on a blog post by a Japanese picture book seller, entitled “[Elementary School Read-A-Longs] How to Discuss War? Recommended Picture Books Based on School Year.”<sup>25</sup> This post was extremely useful, as it broke down books by age group and recommended books not only to teach about the atomic bombings, but to spur conversation about war and peace in general. However, the author recommends beginning this conversation with younger children by only discussing peace, as they might not understand history and war enough in the first and second grade (ages 6-8). They recommend books such as *Peace is Nice, Isn't It? And Peace? What's That?* that promote universal peace without mentioning World War II or the atomic bombs specifically.<sup>26</sup> Because of this, while most of the books examined are for elementary ages, they are considered to be for “upper elementary” years, once children have a better grasp of the concepts of war, peace, and historical time.

One of the quintessential works for children on the bomb is the graphic novel *Barefoot Gen*. Keiji Nakazawa, who survived the bombing of Hiroshima when he was six years old, is the author. While this is written by a survivor, it is from the perspective of an adult looking back on the events and fitting them into his new mature worldview, meaning there is certainly a message that is being conveyed. Nakazawa's father was an anti-war artist, which later inspired Nakazawa to become a *manga* artist. First written in

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<sup>25</sup> “【小学校読み聞かせ】戦争を、どう伝える？ 学年別おすすめの絵本[Elementary School Read-A-Longs] How to Discuss War? Recommend Picture Books Based on School Year,” *Ehon Navi*, August 15, 2019, [https://style.ehonnavi.net/ehon/2017/08/24\\_072.html](https://style.ehonnavi.net/ehon/2017/08/24_072.html).

<sup>26</sup> Keiko Hamada, *Heiwa Tte Donna Koto? [Peace? What's That?]* (Tokyo: Doshinsha, 2011); Yuuki Asato, *Heiwa Tte Suteki Da Ne [Peace Is Nice, Isn't It?]* (Bronze Publishing, 2014).

Japanese in 1972, *Barefoot Gen* is his slightly fictionalized autobiography, written about the character Gen.

Even though it takes a seemingly childish medium, it is important to remember that all ages enjoy graphic novels in Japan, and, therefore, the medium itself does not immediately signal that the book is for children. Indeed, the novels themselves are rather graphic about the suffering involved with the war and the atomic bomb, depicting illustrations of people being burned alive, bodies with their skin dripping off like water, and injured people drowning in Hiroshima's river.<sup>27</sup> This book is certainly for older children (ages ten and up), but because of these more mature messages, it has become essential atomic children's literature. Proponents of depictions as graphic as Gen's argue that its frankness may be vital to a child's understanding of the subject. The realism of the book informs child readers that they are being told the whole, important story of the bomb.

The picture book *Hiroshima no Pika* also shows the very human story of a little girl named Mii, as she traverses Hiroshima after the atomic bomb attack. Toshi Maruki, a Japanese artist who has done exhibitions with pictures about the atomic bombs, wrote the book in Japanese in 1981.<sup>28</sup> It was at one of these exhibitions that a survivor of the bomb in Hiroshima decided to tell the story of how she had carried her wounded husband and took her daughter Mii by the hand through Hiroshima, trying to escape the destruction. Maruki later wrote and illustrated the story for children, in the hope that children

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<sup>27</sup> Keiji Nakazawa, *Barefoot Gen: A Cartoon Story of Hiroshima*, trans. Project Gen, vol. 1 (San Francisco, CA: Last Gasp of San Francisco, 2004), 273, 278-79.

<sup>28</sup> Note: *Hiroshima no Pika* does not list a translator in the book, but sources online state that it is a translated work. For more information, see <https://alsc-awards-shelf.org/book/633/hiroshima-no-pika>.

knowing about the horrors of the bomb will keep similar bombings from happening again.<sup>29</sup> The book mixes informative pages, dates, and important vocabulary with Mii's story in a way that makes the information being taught feel extremely real for young readers. It zeroes in on the unique horrors of the bombing that readers are unlikely to think about at first, such as seeing injured animals roaming the city along with injured humans and dead bodies.<sup>30</sup> It also shows extreme human horrors, such as the death of Mii's father from radiation sickness, which is a collection of symptoms and sicknesses caused from being exposed to high amounts of radiation from the bomb; Mii's hand being closed for four days, wrapped around chopsticks she was holding at the time of the bombing; and the removal of glass shards from Mii's head.<sup>31</sup>

*Hiroshima no Pika* certainly frames the atomic bombings as a universal issue of peace. In describing the dropping of the bomb on Nagasaki, three days after the bombing of Hiroshima, Maruki specifically points out that "in addition to the Japanese [victims], were people from many other countries, such as Korea, China, Russia, Indonesia, and the United States."<sup>32</sup> While the book does clearly state that it was the United States that dropped the bombs, showing that Americans were victims of the bombs as well makes the atomic attacks much more of a universal issue, as if saying, "see? Everyone is suffering." Of course, the universalization of the experience of the bomb ignores the reasons why the bombs were dropped on Japan specifically.

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<sup>29</sup> Toshi Maruki, *Hiroshima No Pika*, trans. Kurita-Bando Literary Agency (New York: Lothrop, Lee & Shepard Books, 1980).

<sup>30</sup> *Ibid.*, 18.

<sup>31</sup> *Ibid.*, 33, 41.

<sup>32</sup> *Ibid.*, 39.

The next book also shows unique issues of the atomic bomb and promotes the message of universal peace. *Thoughts on 60 Years as a Hibakusha* tells the stories of six unique *hibakusha*, or survivors of the atomic bombings.<sup>33</sup> The author, Noriyuki Aida, is a Japanese photojournalist who studied at an American university in college. He states that the Second World War and the atomic bombs dropped on Japan were never something personal to him; he just considered them to be a historical event. However, in 2005, 60 years after the bombings, he came to realize just how many *hibakusha* were still living with injuries and suffering from the effects of the bombs.

Aida's experience living in the United States does not give him any sympathies regarding the dropping of the atomic bombs. In fact, the first sentence of *Thoughts on 60 Years as a Hibakusha* points to the Americans to blame: "In the summer of 2005, 60 summers have passed since Americans dropped atomic bombs on Hiroshima and Nagasaki."<sup>34</sup>

The book is a blatant cry for nuclear disarmament, using the phrase *kakuheiki no haizetsu*, or "nuclear weapon abolition" in every survivor's story. In fact, the author says that his one request after compiling the tales of survivors is to live in a world without nuclear weapons and to build a safe and peaceful world.<sup>35</sup> This call for nuclear abolition is a connecting thread throughout the stories of such varied survivors. The book does an excellent job at showing children that survivors do not fit into one mold or stereotype – there are survivors who are serious personalities and never laugh,<sup>36</sup> juxtaposed by

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<sup>33</sup> Noriyuki Aida, *Hibakusha 60 Nenme no Kotoba [Thoughts from 60 Years as a Hibakusha]* (Tokyo: Poplar Publishing [Popura Sha], 2005).

<sup>34</sup> *Ibid*, 3.

<sup>35</sup> *Ibid*, 3.

<sup>36</sup> *Ibid*, 20.

survivors who laugh every day.<sup>37</sup> It also shares the stories of survivors of the Nagasaki bombing, showing the similarities in the ongoing horrors suffered by victims of both of the bombings. Indeed, the purpose of the books is partially to show the lasting effects of the bombings, both through the tales of survivors and their injuries and illnesses, but also through the inclusion of a victim who was still in the womb at the time of the bombing, resulting in a birth defect.<sup>38</sup>

Survivor's tales are not the only form of atomic literature for children, however. *Story of the Dome* is the tale of the atomic bombing in Hiroshima told through the perspective of the personified A-Bomb Dome. The author is American-born Arthur Binard, who said he connected with the A-Bomb Dome because he visited it just before he turned thirty and learned that the building had its fierce fight with radiation when it was thirty years old.<sup>39</sup> He discusses being taught that the atomic bombings were necessary or correct in his American middle and high schools and thinking that it had no relation to him since it was just a bombing in a faraway country. But, upon seeing the dome for the first time, he began to connect with the bombings and wonder just what in the world happened.<sup>40</sup>

The book gives a slight historical perspective on Hiroshima and the Second World War, with the Dome explaining how it was built by a Czech architect and showing its use before the war as the Hiroshima Prefectural Industrial Promotion Hall. The narrative shows the transition to wartime, with the Dome expressing sadness that everyone who

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<sup>37</sup> Ibid, 22.

<sup>38</sup> Ibid, 29.

<sup>39</sup> Arthur Binard, *Domu Gatari [Story of the Dome]* (Tokyo: Tamagawa University Press, 2017), 31.

<sup>40</sup> Ibid, 31.

visited began to only discuss winning the war. The book also addresses issues of Japanese nationalism, painting it in a negative light:

In Hiroshima schools, teachers would shout everyday:  
 “We try hard for our country!”  
 “We grow for our country!”  
 It really weighed on my mind.  
 Who is “our country”?  
 Why not something like:  
 “For our fathers!” or  
 “For our mothers!”<sup>41</sup>

Stressing the importance of familial loyalties over patriotism shows child readers that Japanese perspectives were skewed during the Second World War. Although, this is the only negative discussion of Japan during the war, which could be criticized as not taking responsibilities for the actual atrocities committed in the name of “our country.”

The book certainly creates an emotional attachment to the main Dome character, making child readers upset that the dome was destroyed in the bombing. The creation of a non-human main character who experiences the atomic bombing may soften the story and make it more digestible for more sensitive children, while still expressing the same emotions of loss and damage. However, the book is still careful to show how horrible the bombing was. It dedicates an entire two-page illustration to the explosion of the bomb, wordlessly showing the readers the huge impact of the Little Boy (See Appendix 3). The next page uses stark language to describe what happened as well:

Our Hiroshima was killed.  
 My heart, and the cicadas, were also  
 killed.<sup>42</sup>

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<sup>41</sup> Ibid, 10.

<sup>42</sup> Ibid, 15.

The usage of the word *korosareta*, here translated as “killed,” is especially damning considering the page before the bomb drops states “It’s the American army... huh? Something dropped [from the army’s plane].”<sup>43</sup> The book is not antagonistic towards the United States or its army, but it is also very clear that they were the perpetrators of the bombing.

Even though *Story of the Dome*’s main character is not a human, it still gives a very humanized perspective of the victims of the atomic bombings. Indeed, most Japanese atomic literature for children offers very human stories of the bombings. Another book that does this well is *On August 6*. It tells the story of the author’s mother’s experience of the Second World War and the atomic bombing on Hiroshima living on the island of Setonaikai near Hiroshima. The book seems simpler in its language than the others, but it still addresses issues of wartime Japan and the atomic bomb. This may be because it is targeted at younger children than the other books; it is recommended for the “middle elementary school years” of third and fourth grade (ages 7-9).<sup>44</sup>

The author’s uncle, the main character’s older brother, is a soldier in the Japanese army and is stationed near the A-Bomb Dome. The book shows that war was difficult for civilians and soldiers alike, highlighting how the author’s mother would sneak food to her brother, taking the train alone when she was 16 and keeping watch so he would not get in trouble for getting caught eating.

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<sup>43</sup> Ibid, 12.

<sup>44</sup> “(Elementary School Read-A-Longs) How to Discuss War? Recommend Picture Books Based on School Year.”

Regarding the atomic bomb, it shows the horrors and the disruption caused by the bombing by juxtaposing it with the calmness of the sea near Setonaikai. The dropping of the bomb is described simply,

On August 6.  
 The ocean in Setonaikai was very calm.  
 My mother saw something very bright and flashed from her island far  
 away.  
 She felt like loudly crying cicadas stopped crying right at that moment.  
 It was the Atomic Bomb that America dropped.<sup>45</sup>

The book has a strong focus on nature and the unnatural force of the atomic bombs. Both *Story of the Dome* and *On August 6* describe the moment of the bombing as a time when cicadas stopped singing; in stating the damage done by the bomb, they both also expressed the totality of it by saying the cicadas died as well.<sup>46</sup> Of course, the passing of cicadas itself would not make readers grieve, but similar to the description of injured animals in *Hiroshima no Pika*, it highlights aspects of the atomic bombing that one would not normally consider, showing the entirety of the damage caused by such a devastating weapon.

Of course, the author's uncle passed away due to being in such proximity to the dropped bomb. The human death is not described as directly as the death of animals, and instead uses more gentle mode to describe the loss of the main character's brother. The book describes the young girl attempting to visit her brother with food again and finding Hiroshima in ruin. It solemnly states, "She couldn't reach her brother. // She lost beloved

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<sup>45</sup> Hirotaka Nakagawa, *8 Gatsu 6 Ka no Koto [On August 6]* (Tokyo: Hamonica Books, 2011), 12-15.

<sup>46</sup> Binard, *Domu Gatari [Story of the Dome]*, 12, 15; Nakagawa, *8 Gatsu 6 Ka no Koto [On August 6]*, 14, 18.

brother in a blink of an eye.”<sup>47</sup> There is also a stark illustration of a charred body that consumes the pages following the description of the bomb dropping, which could possibly represent the girl’s brother (See Appendix 3).<sup>48</sup>

The use of disturbing illustrations to show the horrors of the bomb seems to be extremely commonly utilized in Japanese children’s books. The illustrations in these picture books are certainly a vital part of the storytelling. This can be seen especially through the lack of words to describe the moment of detonation of the bombs. Both *Story of the Dome* and *On August 6* use wordless two-page illustrations to show the stark impact of the bomb. *Story of the Dome* does this to emphasize the power of the explosion, with the illustration showing bits of shrapnel flying everywhere. *On August 6* uses its wordless illustration to show the devastation of the bomb on human life, with its picture showing a burnt, disfigured body. *Hiroshima no Pika* also uses wordless spreads to highlight important moments in the story, such as people fleeing the fires from the bomb to the river and the collection of the dead bodies off of the beach (See Appendix 3). Even when the illustrations in these books are accompanied by prose, they are still powerful and sometimes graphic. As mentioned, *Barefoot Gen* starkly illustrates bomb-related injuries, including melting skin. *Story of the Dome* also shows a person with glass sticking out of various parts of their entire body. *Hiroshima no Pika* often shows abstract nudity, highlighting how even the victims’ clothes were disintegrated. Overall, the horrors of the atomic bombings are much more adequately discussed in children’s atomic literature outside of traditional textbooks. But this discussion is still full

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<sup>47</sup> Nakagawa, 8 *Gatsu 6 Ka no Koto [On August 6]*, 24-25.

<sup>48</sup> *Ibid*, 19-20.

of nationalistic tropes which could lead to a strongly one-sided view of the bombings. Of course, as we will see in Chapter 4, Japan is not unique in using its children's atomic literature to promote nationalistic views of the bombs. But it is important to acknowledge that these are the general messages being conveyed to children. Especially in the country that was victim to these attacks, it may be important for children to have a safe space to work through the generational trauma that has been given to both the people and the landscape memories of Hiroshima, Nagasaki, and all of Japan during the Second World War. As shown, the current sampling of textbooks provided for middle school students is not adequate and only further confuses students on the topic of the bombings. Many outside of Japan may assume that a thorough education on the atomic bombings is provided for Japanese students to learn about either the supposed "wrongs" that were committed against their country in the Second World War or the atomic bombings as a result of a brutal war from all sides. However, it has been shown that standard educational materials chose to avoid making a stance by hardly discussing the bombings at all. In conclusion, it is my hope that Japanese educators will band together and demand more guidance and detail on the vital topic of the bombs.

### CHAPTER 3: AMERICAN CHILDREN'S REACTIONS

The reactions of Japanese children to the atomic bombings showed a rich field of children expressing their grief openly, but to understand the story of the bombs more fully, we must look at the reactions and beliefs held by the citizens of the perpetrating country. Certainly, American citizens had the privilege of choosing to ignore the news of the bomb, which citizens of Hiroshima and Nagasaki did not have. However, many Americans reacted strongly to the news of the new weapon and the end of the Second World War. It is especially important to view the reactions of American children, both to compare them to those of Japanese children and to see the reaction of a younger age group than is normally researched. American children certainly knew about the war, but there is little discussion about the difficulties they may have faced in reconciling with the fact that their country used such a destructive weapon.

This chapter examines how American children reacted to the news of the atomic bombings and the end of the Second World War. This includes looking at what adults were telling children about the atomic bombs, to gain a better idea of the image Americans were trying to portray of the bombings. We will also look at resources that were made specifically for children about the atomic bombs and bombings. The reactions of America's children to the atomic bombs were surprisingly poignant. Atomic Age youths shared their parents' fears of the times, but they were amplified by the fact that this fear was almost all they had ever known. There seems to be little focus of the effect of the bombings on Japanese life, with the few mentions of Japan being as a warning that Hiroshima or Nagasaki could be your town. The knowledge of the atomic bombs and what they could do led to a generation that was unsure that they would live to be adults.

This, in some instances, led to a sense of nihilism or fear, but it seemed to manifest itself in hope as well. Like the Japanese children that survived the atomic bombs, American children in the Atomic Age turned their fear and despair into hope that the future could be changed.

Much of the historical focus on reactions to the atomic bombings has prioritized adult voices. Because of this, there are few primary sources from children themselves stating what they felt about the situation. What exists mainly comes from limited publications, such as yearbooks or school newspapers. This chapter utilizes these sources where available, to avoid multiple layers of interpretation of children's reactions and to keep these reactions in the child's voice. There have been some researchers that have asked questions pertaining to the emotional effects of the bombings on American children, such as historian Michael Scheibach in the book *Atomic Narratives and American Youth* and Robert A. Jacobs' book chapter on *The Atomic Kid*.<sup>1</sup> However, these share an intense focus on the Cold War period and how its ideologies affect children, with almost no discussion of the period immediately after the bombs were dropped. This period has been discussed in relation to adults' thoughts, most notably in Paul Boyer's *By the Bomb's Early Light*, but there is a notable lack in studies of children's thoughts at the dawn of the Atomic Age.<sup>2</sup> This chapter hopes to fill the gaps in the current research and

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<sup>1</sup> Robert A. Jacobs, "The Atomic Kid: American Children vs. the Bomb," in *The Dragon's Tail: Americans Face the Atomic Age* (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 2009), 99–117; Michael Scheibach, *Atomic Narratives and American Youth: Coming of Age with the Atom 1945-1955* (Jefferson, NC: McFarland & Company, 2003).

<sup>2</sup> Paul S. Boyer, *By the Bomb's Early Light: American Thought and Culture at the Dawn of the Atomic Age* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1994).

provide an overview of children's reactions to and thoughts about the dropping of the atomic bombs and the birth of the Atomic Age.

In addition to the lack of research materials on children's reactions to the atomic bombs, resources to help them cope with such a historic change were lacking in the 1940s as well. Consequently, parents in the last half of the decade had little support if they hoped to educate their children about the atomic bombings or the end of the Second World War. There seems to be very little information provided for parents of the 1940s to educate their children about the atomic bombings. Most newspapers in the days following the bombings go into heavy detail about what is known about the development of the bombs, sharing the President's statement on the matter and speculations about how quickly they will end the war.<sup>3</sup> However, there is no mention of discussing this topic with children, which may signify that the subject was deemed too technical for children or seen as simply a detail in the end of the war that did not warrant extra explanation. In the case of parents of younger children, the details of the bombings may also have been considered too gruesome to share, since most of the early information was death tolls and destruction.

After the war ended, there was an increase in adults trying to interpret the bombings for children. These interpretations were often focused on mitigating fear of an atomic war or attack. Perhaps interpretations such as these sought to prevent the next generation from living in the intense fear of the Atomic Age that gripped adults. Of

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<sup>3</sup> "Atomic Bomb Blasts Japan," *The Tulsa [OK] Tribune*, August 6, 1945; "Truman Says Japan to Face Rain of Ruin from Skies," *The Ada [OK] Evening News*, August 6, 1945; "Missile Is More Powerful than 20,000 Tons TNT," *The Ogden [UT] Standard Examiner*, August 6, 1945.

course, children still absorbed some of these fears, although they were markedly different from those of adults, as Jacobs has noted:

The parents felt it as a threat to the American way of life, to their health and well-being and those of their families. The children were threatened by the loss of a future they could grow into and inhabit, by the knowledge that they might be the last children on the earth.<sup>4</sup>

This fear – that the atomic generation would be the last generation of children on earth – did not seem far-fetched to a group of adolescents who had only ever known their world at war. It certainly would have been appropriate for the children to mourn the future they were unsure they would receive or the loss of a peaceful childhood. However, while there was much fear present, there was not an air of mourning. The knowledge of danger evident in American children's lives may have led to a kind of nihilistic view of the future.

While nihilism is certainly not a normal ideal for a child's outlook on life, children of the atomic age may have gained the reputation of handling the stress of the times better than their adult counterparts. Adults seemed to want children to become numb to the threat of a bomb. A spokesman for the Atomic Energy Commission is quoted saying, "If all the school children in the nation could witness an A-bomb blast, it would do much to destroy the fear and uncertainty which now exist."<sup>5</sup> This quote refers specifically to children who attended school near a nuclear testing sight and witnessed many atomic tests, but it seems to imply that children were hoped to be role models to resist fearing the bomb. Indeed, children were likened to "soldiers on the home front" despite their age and were responsible to "perform each task efficiently and willingly in

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<sup>4</sup> Jacobs, "The Atomic Kid: American Children vs. the Bomb," 99.

<sup>5</sup> Quoted in Jacobs, "The Atomic Kid: American Children vs. the Bomb," 99.

order to help in every way possible to establish a lasting peace.”<sup>6</sup> It seems that adults found a way to weaponize the nihilism that children used to mentally protect themselves from the stresses of their world in the Cold War, blurring the lines between civilian and soldier.

This is not the only instance of the militarization of schools and their children. In fact, an editorial in the high-school aged magazine *Senior Scholastic* compared the conquered nation of Japan at the end of World War II to “hard-to-handle pupils” while the United States was their schoolteacher in “the world’s largest reformatory school.”<sup>7</sup> This further blurred the lines between student and soldier, and taught children that war was comparable to school, thus preparing them for the future adults feared.

The adults who were preparing these children for the future hoped that their fear would not be passed down to the next generation. Because of this, a large number of resources created by adults for children during the Cold War focused on mitigating fear. Chairman of the Atomic Energy Commission, David Lillienthal, pressed students not to be afraid in a commencement address at a Gettysburg, Pennsylvania High School:

I doubt, somehow, that you young people will take much stock in these predictions of dire and utter calamity. In every other generation there were many people who were sure that the world was going to the dogs. Most of us, however, are firm in a faith that we will go right on, meeting new difficulties as they come, struggling thru them, and doubtless creating new problems as old ones are solved or managed. This is surely no time to despair and lose hope, just because we are acquiring more knowledge than we yet know how to apply for human benefit.<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>6</sup> Quoted in Scheibach, *Atomic Narratives and American Youth*. 73.

<sup>7</sup> “Rise and Fall of Japan’s Empire,” *Senior Scholastic* 47, no. 1 (September 17, 1945): 3–5.

<sup>8</sup> David Lillienthal, “Youth in the Atomic Age,” *Journal of the National Education Association* 37 (1948): 370–71.371.

This presented adults as perhaps more fearless of the times than they actually were, in an attempt to encourage the children of the era. This push for fearlessness continued in the classroom, where it was apparent that the teacher's job was to interpret atomic narratives for students in a way that minimized any anxieties about the bombs or their destructiveness.<sup>9</sup> Despite being subjected to "duck and cover" drills, and frightening facts about the bombs, teachers' handbooks encouraged teachers to somehow share the "awful facts" of the mortality rates of the bombs, but not to dwell on the bombs' horror, which would frighten the students.<sup>10</sup> This also had the effect of giving little representation to the Japanese victims of the American bombings. Certainly, the stories of victims or anything highlighting Japanese humanity would be reduced to "the bombs' horror," meaning that all students learned about the atomic bombing in Japan was cold facts such as the number of casualties.

At the same time that teachers were being told not to frighten students over the bombs, they were also showing bomb preparation videos, such as *Duck and Cover*. *Duck and Cover* is a famous informational video that was played in schools across the nation to inform children of the dangers of an atomic attack. The film features a friendly-looking animated turtle mascot, Bert, who "did what we all must learn to do" – duck and cover in the event of an atomic bomb attack.<sup>11</sup> The video draws often on the common fear of the bombs, with the narrator stating in the introduction that "we all know the atomic bomb is very dangerous."<sup>12</sup> However, it does not go into the potentially frightening details of this

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<sup>9</sup> Scheibach, *Atomic Narratives and American Youth*. 57.

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid*, 61.

<sup>11</sup> *Duck and Cover*, 1952, <https://www.loc.gov/item/2022604365/>. 0:33.

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid*, 1:34.

danger. When discussing how the bomb can hurt children in many ways, the narrator only lists such casualties as “knock[ing] you down hard, or throw[ing] you against a tree or a wall.”<sup>13</sup> It is notable that this is the extent to which the video plays on fear – there is no mention of the astounding casualty rates or the horrors that the Japanese civilians suffered.

*Duck and Cover* also stresses the importance of maturity and independence, as adults may not be present when the bomb goes off – “getting ready means we will all have to be able to take care of ourselves.”<sup>14</sup> This manifested a feeling that children in the atomic generation could not be helped by adults in their lives and had to take the future into their own hands. The Cold War era developed a strong youth culture, which often led to children feeling distinctly different from adults. Cold War historian Michael Scheibach argues that this youth culture was partially created by the social narrative of the atomic bomb, because it was so prevalent to children’s lives in a way that their parents and other adults had never experienced.<sup>15</sup> Children were seeing adults in a state of uncertainty that discredited them as figures of authority. This contributed to the fear that children were feeling during the Cold War and in relation to the atomic bomb. Of course, adults tried to warn against fearing the bomb specifically, instead encouraging students to “fear authoritarian personalities, defeatism, the influence of so-called ‘hate-mongers,’ the growing sense of helplessness, human tendencies like obtuseness, and threats to free institutions – not the atomic bomb itself.”<sup>16</sup> In encouraging fear of these however, adults

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<sup>13</sup> Ibid, 2:35.

<sup>14</sup> Ibid, 5:51.

<sup>15</sup> Scheibach, *Atomic Narratives and American Youth*. 8.

<sup>16</sup> Ibid, 26.

may have contributed further to their alienation from children of the Atomic Age. Indeed, these children were receiving a variety of mixed messages from the adults in their lives, sinking their credibility and contributing to confusion and fear. One moment students are told not to fear at all, the next they are told only to fear threats to democracy, all while at the same time they see the adults in their lives living under constant stress and fear of the atomic bombs.

Overall, the messages that adults were sending to children in the atomic age contradicted their actions, leading to a discreditation of their encouragement. To the children of the atomic age, adults seemed hopelessly out of touch, as they simply parroted encouragement towards children, without treating them as equals in important discussions on the atomic bombs and the future. Soon after the bombing of Nagasaki, on August 18, 1945, *The New Yorker* wrote, “No matter about grown-ups; the children are already at home in the atomic world.”<sup>17</sup> While adults certainly felt this to be true, children were less “at home” than was believed and experienced many stresses related to the Atomic Age. However, their transformation of these fears into hope did give children a better chance at adjusting to the stress of the Atomic Age than the adults in their lives.

There is little that tells us of how American children reacted among themselves immediately after the bombings of Hiroshima and Nagasaki. Perhaps parents sat their children down after reading the news to explain that a terrible new weapon had been created. Or maybe the news of the bombings was just another happening in a war that had already been waged for a significant portion of the children’s lives. Perhaps no one

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<sup>17</sup> Quoted in Scheibach, *Atomic Narratives and American Youth*. 5.

thought to tell the children at all, and they found out later once the effects of the bombings became more apparent.

What we do know is that the children of the atomic age eventually came to hold a variety of views and opinions on the atomic bombs and the bombings; however, they were seen first and foremost “as the weapon that brought an abrupt end to a devastating war.”<sup>18</sup> The bombs may have initially been far from the children’s minds, just a side note in the thrall of victory. This is not unexpected or strange. We must remember that these children spent a large portion of their lives in the middle of a world war, where news of their country’s gains and losses seeped in daily. Even for adults, the importance of the bombings in Hiroshima and Nagasaki may not have been immediately apparent. News of a new type of bomb being deployed is one thing - the realization that these bombs have changed the world and the international playing field, ushering in a new era of modernity - is another. After two atomic bombings and the news of victory in Japan, “the focus... was not on the opening of the Atomic Age. Rather, it was on the final victory in a war that witnessed more than 400,000 American deaths and estimate of 50 to 70 million deaths worldwide.”<sup>19</sup> The immediate relief of the end of the war and the ensuing celebrations most likely took precedence over any civilian concerns or quandaries about the bombs. This is certainly a luxury that the Japanese children affected by the bombings did not have.

However, once the initial euphoria of victory passed, there came the practical realizations of such a powerful, world-changing weapon. The immediate postwar years

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<sup>18</sup> Ibid, 19.

<sup>19</sup> Ibid, 24.

were plagued with questions about what to do with the atomic bombs now that they had been developed and used. Many discussions were held debating whether to share the secrets of the creation of the atomic bombs, and these discussions inevitably seeped into children's worlds, through schools and child-specific publications. Teachers reminded students that Germany almost beat the United States to creating the bomb.<sup>20</sup> Children's magazines mirrored discussions that children and adults across the United States were having about the quandary, having a caricatured "Professor X" state that "it is silly to talk about keeping the atomic bomb our secret because scientists all over the world already know how to make it."<sup>21</sup> Children were having these discussions as well, most likely as debates in and outside of classrooms. One poll taken by a youth's magazine showed that 58 percent of teenagers in one high school opposed sharing the secrets of the atomic bomb.<sup>22</sup> There was a widespread stress that someone needed to be making these decisions and this was followed by an uncertainty of whether it should be the United States government. This led to widespread support for world governance and similar international groups, such as the United Nations, among children and youth groups.<sup>23</sup>

Of course, once the Soviet Union exploded its first atomic bomb in 1949, the fear of nuclear weaponry being used against the United States became shockingly real. This is when children began to feel the real fear of total nuclear war. The destructive power of the atomic bombs was widely publicized, and the knowledge that it could now be turned

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<sup>20</sup> Ibid, 110.

<sup>21</sup> "A Forum Discussion on Atomic Bomb Control," *Senior Scholastic* 47, no. 9 (November 12, 1945): 4-5.

<sup>22</sup> Scheibach, *Atomic Narratives and American Youth*. 30.

<sup>23</sup> Ibid, 73.

against the United States must have been overwhelming for children who were unsure if they would have a future to look forward to.

This fear for the future was transformed (no doubt with a large thanks to adult encouragement) into a fight for democracy in the world, drawing largely on typical Cold War fears of communism and the spread of Soviet ideals. As covered above, adults sought to transform children into soldiers on the home front during the Cold War, and it seems that this is a role that children eagerly accepted, though with the messages being ingrained in children's minds at the time, there was almost no choice but to embrace the fight for democracy:

For the Atomic Generation – urban and rural, male and female, white and black – the central theme in the social narrative of the atom was articulated clearly in the classrooms, hallways, auditoriums, and school newspapers: Safeguard democracy and ensure the world peace... or face certain death.<sup>24</sup>

To the children of the atomic age, acting against communism was almost a compulsion – it meant avoiding death and playing an active role in shaping their future. This fear was the underlying feeling for Atomic Age youth, but they were able to turn it into hope for a better world, which was exemplified by their activism for democracy. As teenagers during the Second World War had joined Y-Teens, JROTC, and the Junior Red Cross to feel useful in the war effort, so did teenagers during the Atomic Age join Youth on the Bean Bible Clubs, The Hi-Y, Girl Reserves, and Peace Clubs to make changes in their world.<sup>25</sup> These organizations all encouraged social responsibility, community involvement, and other desirable traits for American youth.

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<sup>24</sup> Ibid, 75.

<sup>25</sup> Ibid, 28, 38.

The theme of fear was present in children's lives throughout the years following the atomic bombings. The interesting thing about this fear, however, is that much in the way Japanese children transformed their despair, American children were able to channel this fear into hope for the future. There was an overwhelming feeling that while the world was scary, and its end could be at any moment, the one thing that could prevent the end of the world was action on the part of the next generation set to inherit it – America's Atomic Age youths. Indeed, rather than focusing on fear, many children's works at the time were calls to action and calls for hope for other children. Take, for example, a poem appearing in one high school yearbook:

O Youth, the world is in your hands;  
 A tragedy of war, it still  
 Remembers peace and understands  
 Life's formerly ecstatic thrill.  
 From you mankind derives its hope  
 For lasting bonds of harmony;  
 Yours is the future's horoscope,  
 And yours is opportunity.<sup>26</sup>

This opportunity was unique to Atomic Age youth, because of their unique fear that they would not have a future to inherit.

Even within Atomic Age youth, however, there were differing ideas on what opportunities were to be seized. Older children and high schoolers in the late 1940s came believe the idea of world government, as discussed above, was critical in "saving the world from simply blowing up." On the other hand, in the 1950s, younger children of the generation learned that containing communism was the key to world peace.<sup>27</sup> Children

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<sup>26</sup> Quoted in Scheibach, *Atomic Narratives and American Youth*. 179.

<sup>27</sup> *Ibid*, 182.

became extremely outspoken in expressing these views and calling each other to action.

For example, teenager Hampton Stevens stated in his award-winning oration:

As science shrinks the earth and simultaneously increases each nation's potentialities for mutual and self-destruction, Necessity, the mother of Invention, pleads with us to adopt obligations towards world citizenship. There is no such thing as an inevitable war. *IF* war comes, it will be from failure of human wisdom.  
This is the important issue of the hour!<sup>28</sup>

Again, children knew the world was in their hands and that preventing a catastrophic third world war was their responsibility. They lived with the constant stress that “freedom must not die,” as high school student Delores Ross put it, but still understood that “it is our heritage and our privilege to preserve [freedom] that humanity may live, so that the children of tomorrow may profit by the wisdom of today.”<sup>29</sup>

The reactions to the atomic bombings by American children were varied and heavily influenced by adult rhetoric at the time. However, the youths of the Atomic Age shaped this rhetoric into their own views and beliefs about the bombs and defined themselves as distinct from older generations. At first the atomic bombs may not have warranted much attention amidst more pressing celebrations of the end of the Second World War. But Americans quickly realized how much they had altered the world. Children began to worry about world governance and the issues involved with sharing the bombs' secrets. Then, as other countries began to develop their own atomic weapons, American children began to fear the atomic bombs. This fear was unique from the fears held by American adults, and the children of the Atomic Age were able to channel this fear into hope for a better future that only they could create. This is shockingly similar to

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<sup>28</sup> *Sachem* (Kansas City, MO: Southwest High School, 1947). 181.

<sup>29</sup> Quoted in Scheibach, *Atomic Narratives and American Youth*. 188.

the reactions of Japanese children, despite the fact that American children seldom focused on Japan as a victim of the bombings. This hope means that the reactions of all children to the atomic bombings is much more nuanced than is often taught. The reactions of Japanese and American children are culturally distinct, but it seems that childhood hope prevails in both cultures against two distinct types of fear.

## CHAPTER FOUR: AMERICAN REPRESENTATIONS

Educators and adults throughout history have—as part of their education--taught the children of their countries a collective memory, and this is certainly the case in the United States. This formal history and social studies curriculum—along with the informal curriculum (including the celebration of holidays) – aids in the creation of a national identity and the transmission of the country’s history. However, when these histories do not align with the nation’s self-images of nobility, charity, or benevolence, they can become one of what historian Lauren McArthur Harris calls “difficult histories” to teach. Indeed, the atomic bombings are difficult histories to teach, especially in the United States, because they “require looking at how people have treated others, how people have gained and used power, and who has suffered and why.”<sup>1</sup> There are other difficult histories of this sort, but the U.S. atomic bombings of Hiroshima and Nagasaki, Japan at the end of World War II are unique, especially for the WWII era, for many reasons. First, as the only use of atomic weaponry in history, these bombings teach us about both the past and future horrors of warfare, especially in terms of the mass civilian deaths involved. Second, the atomic bombings contrast with other potentially “difficult histories,” such as the German Holocaust of the Jews in WWII, because the United States was the perpetrator. Despite the difficulties, it is vital for teachers and students of all ages to engage with this difficult history, because nuclear weapons, peace, and conflict continue to affect the world that students live in today.

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<sup>1</sup> Lauren McArthur Harris, Sara A. Levy, and Maia Sheppard, eds., *Teaching Difficult Histories in Difficult Times: Stories of Practice* (New York: Teachers College Press, 2022), 9.

The dropping of the bombs is certainly vital to education on American and world history, as they were one of the main factors in ending the Second World War in the Pacific, not to mention the world's first use of atomic weaponry and the entrance into the atomic era. But they can also cast an undesirable light on the United States for causing as many as 215,000 deaths between the two cities and destroying Hiroshima and Nagasaki with just two bombs. Educators may find it difficult to justify the suffering caused as a result of the bombs, though Harris states it is necessary to explain *why* the suffering takes place for a difficult history.<sup>2</sup> Additionally, parents may be concerned that tales of the bombs' destruction can be quite graphic or distressing to read, especially for younger children. Because of this, students are noticing the deficits apparent in traditional atomic bomb education. In one interview, after discussing the aftermath of the bomb in Hiroshima, one seemingly high-school-aged student stated, "For me, in school, like reading about it, like our history books and stuff, they sort of beat around the bush about the whole situation, you know. They don't give us the full description and, you know, images."<sup>3</sup> Students desire this education but notice that adults are hesitant to discuss it. To teach this topic with the respect it deserves, more resources are needed by both teachers and students. This chapter argues that since 1945, U.S. education of elementary and high school-aged children has not significantly changed, being focused primarily on U.S. technical advances in creating the bombs and justifications for President Harry S. Truman's decision to use those bombs against Japan. While this is unsurprising and attributable to U.S. nationalism, teachers can humanize and help their students understand

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<sup>2</sup> Ibid.

<sup>3</sup> As quoted in Carey Schonegevel, *Original Child Bomb: Meditations on the Nuclear Age*, 2004, <https://video.alexanderstreet.com/watch/original-child-bomb-meditations-on-the-nuclear-age>.

this important event in a broader, more humanizing, and more historically accurate way by supplementing traditional textbook accounts with children's literature that brings in a Japanese perspective and helps students learn historical empathy. Overall, this chapter examines the currently vague state standards on this subject, reviews the academic textbook coverage, and highlights available enrichment resources that educators can use to supplement the curriculum and prepare students to be engaged citizens as they mature.

Although there is no one way in the United States to teach about or represent the bombings, American nationalism seems to consistently seek to ignore the horrible suffering caused by the bombs, instead focusing on the scientific and engineering achievements of the Manhattan Project. In this way, the focus is on positive American achievements rather than Japanese suffering. As historian Lawrence Wittner explains, one of the ways we see the influence of American nationalism with the atomic bombs is with the controversy surrounding the Smithsonian's exhibit of the *Enola Gay*, the famous plane that dropped the bomb on Hiroshima. The exhibit was controversial for a number of reasons, including that it showed the horrors suffered by the Japanese as a result of the bombs.<sup>4</sup> These resulting protests eventually resulted in the exhibit being extremely altered and the director of the museum resigning. These themes of nationalism continue throughout other discussions of the bombings and into American education, as well.

Modern K-12 education about the atomic bombs tends to follow this same pattern. As will be demonstrated, textbooks have the tendency to over-explain the circumstances leading up to the dropping of the bombs, while hardly spending any time on the aftermath

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<sup>4</sup> Lawrence S. Wittner, "The Enola Gay Exhibits, the Hiroshima Bombing and American Nationalism," *Social Alternatives* 24, no. 1 (February 2005): 38-42.

or humanitarian issues caused by the bombs. Ignoring the aftermath diminishes the experiences of those who lived through the bombings and leaves readers largely ignorant of the horrors of atomic warfare. As the textbooks of the 1960s show, even when textbooks do encourage students to debate whether the bombs should have been dropped, they provide little evidence to support the view that they were unnecessary. Authors of children's literature on the bombs do focus more on the humanitarian side of things, but often find the need to justify the bombs through comparison to other events during the war. American nationalists may feel that this supports their position through the implications that the Japanese "deserved" the atomic bombings or that they were not worse than traditional bombings.

The earliest descriptions of the atomic bombs in U.S. textbooks were extremely vague on all details about them, including their construction, the decisions to drop them, and the aftermath of the bombs on the Japanese people. Sometimes this crucial event received only a few sentences, compared to multiple paragraphs on the same subject in the 1960s and later. For example, a 1953 textbook simply states,

But the final blow was delivered by a terrible new weapon, the atomic bomb. On August 6, 1945, one of these bombs, with an explosive force equal to 20,000 tons of TNT, was dropped on Hiroshima, destroying 60 per cent of the city and killing over 80,000 people. Three days later a second bomb laid waste the city of Nagasaki.<sup>5</sup>

This brevity may be because much of that history remained classified. Truman's memoirs, which describe his decision to drop the bomb, were not even published until 1955. This severe lack of primary sources would have largely prevented a more

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<sup>5</sup> David Saville Muzzey and Horace Kidger, *The United States* (Boston: Ginn and Company, 1953), 304.

informed and detailed discussion about the historical impact of the bombs. However, even here we see the beginning of a pattern that would persist: the textbook description above—like others of the time—is extremely focused on the sheer power of the bomb, the equivalent of 20,000 tons of TNT, and that it destroyed Hiroshima.<sup>6</sup> Missing is any discussion of why the U.S. developed or chose to use the bombs. Subsequent authors did remedy the vagueness of the 1940s and 50s in the following decades, leading to much more room in textbooks for this story; they nonetheless spent the additional space in elaborating primarily on the American side of the story.

A new emphasis in the textbooks of the 1960s was on Truman's "warning" to the Japanese about the impending attack first, which did not lead Tokyo's government to surrender unconditionally.<sup>7</sup> However, these textbooks largely ignore the fact that Truman's warning to the Japanese in the Potsdam Declaration did not explicitly warn about the bomb, which was entirely new to history, but only threatened "prompt and utter destruction."<sup>8</sup> The textbooks of the 1960s present Truman as giving fair warning to the Japanese to surrender and present their failure to respond to this warning by surrendering unconditionally as the sole reason the U.S. President used the bombs. For example, one textbook describes the decision simply: "President Truman warned the Japanese to surrender or face the consequences. When he received no answer to his warning, he

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<sup>6</sup> Ibid.

<sup>7</sup> Richard Carl Brown, Arlan C. Helgeson, and George H. Lobdell, Jr., *The United States of America: A History for Young Citizens* (Morristown, NJ: Silver Burdett Company, 1963), 516; Harold H. Eibling, Fred M. King, and James Harlow, *Our United States: A Bulwark of Freedom* (River Forest, IL: Laidlaw Brothers Publishers, 1962), 575.

<sup>8</sup> Asia for Educators, "The Potsdam Declaration (July 26, 1945): Primary Source Document with Questions (DBQs)," Columbia University, <http://afe.easia.columbia.edu/ps/japan/potsdam.pdf>, accessed December 10, 2022.

authorized the use of the atomic bomb.”<sup>9</sup> This contributes to the idea that the United States was completely just in its actions and downplays the horrors suffered by those Japanese civilians who suffered and/or died as a result of the bombs.

This intense focus in the textbooks of the 1960s on Truman’s “warning” is part of a larger emphasis on explaining the decision to drop the bombs. One of the textbooks also spends a large amount of space in discussing the decision to build the bomb, even going to such detail to include the worry that it “would cost a great amount of money.”<sup>10</sup> In modern academic discussions of the decision to build the bombs, money certainly does play a part, with some historians stating that the bombs were dropped in order to justify the expense of their research.<sup>11</sup> However, this textbook does not include any of the nuance around the cost of the Manhattan Project—not even to cite that it was worth it to beat the Germans to creating the bomb. It simply seems to include the detail of cost to bulk up the information about the decision-making on the President’s part. There is much build-up to the dropping of the bombs, but authors discuss very little about the after-effects of them, other than the response of the world being “astounded and horrified” by the destruction of Hiroshima<sup>12</sup>

Both textbooks studied from the early 1960s include discussion questions. The books suggest debating or outright asking students about the wisdom of dropping the bombs on Japan.<sup>13</sup> However, there is nothing in the text showing why the decision could

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<sup>9</sup> Eibling, King, and Harlow, *Our United States*, 575-76.

<sup>10</sup> Brown, Helgeson, and Lobdell, *The United States of America*, 516.

<sup>11</sup> J. Samuel Walker, *Prompt & Utter Destruction: Truman and the Use of Atomic Bombs Against Japan* (The University of North Carolina Press, 2004). 92-96.

<sup>12</sup> Eibling, King, and Harlow, *Our United States*, 575-76.

<sup>13</sup> Brown, Helgeson, and Lobdell, *The United States of America*, 517; Eibling, King, and Harlow, *Our United States*, 577-78.

be considered a bad one or explaining the negative effects of the atomic bombs.

Although, it should be noted that these textbooks were published in the midst of the Cold War. As seen in the previous chapter, this most certainly affected children's views of the bombs and thus it may have been assumed by the authors of the textbooks that students would be profoundly aware of the negative impact of the bombings.

The textbooks of the 1970s were similar to those of the 1960s, though notably lacking the in-depth discussion questions of the previous decade. The authors give even more detail about the creation of the bombs, now naming scientist Enrico Fermi, the Manhattan Project, and Los Alamos, New Mexico, as vital parts of the process of creating of the bombs. This vocabulary was absent from earlier descriptions of the efforts to build the bombs. In fact, the Manhattan Project and the efforts to create the bombs become a separate section in these textbooks, appearing in earlier parts of the chapter than those that describe the dropping of the bombs.<sup>14</sup> In the 1970s, we saw the Manhattan Project become a separate topic from the decision to use and the aftermath of the bombs.

One textbook from the 1970s did, however, stand out as providing such a comprehensive outline of the development, use, and effect of the atomic bombs that it is even better than the most recent textbooks examined in this paper. *Decisions in United States History*, published in 1972, provides pages of in-depth discussion of the bombs, ranging from the decision to build and drop the bombs to the aftermath of the attacks on

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<sup>14</sup> Richard Nelson Current, Alexander DeConde, and Harris L. Dante, *United States History: Search for Freedom* (Glenview, IL: Scott, Foresman and Company, 1977), 544; Richard C. Wade, Howard B. Wilder, and Louise C. Wade, *A History of the United States*, Teachers Edition (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1972), 739.

Hiroshima and Nagasaki.<sup>15</sup> Its chapter, “Shall We Drop the Atomic Bomb?” includes three sections that ask, “Can We Make the Bomb,” “Shall We Drop the Bomb,” and “Will the Bomb End the War?”<sup>16</sup> These questions alone are more than some other textbooks have even asked, but the discussion of these questions is quite detailed as well, with each section being at least four pages and discussing the positive and negative ramifications of each issue.

However, as this textbook seems to mainly focus on big decisions in U.S. history and forgoes the structure of an average textbook, similar to a topical reader, it is unclear how much it was used in schools and if students were able to access this wealth of knowledge on the bombs. If it was commonly used as a textbook, it would have made a valuable resource to both students and teachers for atomic bomb education. Using more academically focused readers, such as this one, along with supplementary children’s literature, such as those discussed below, may be a solution to lacking atomic bomb education.

The 1980s and early 90s brought about even more information on the bombs, although the textbooks examined were still lacking in a comprehensive education on the bomb, such as discussions on why the bomb would be opposed by Americans. It may be assumed that with the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991 the story of the bombings in textbooks would be affected. However, there is very little nuance added after the collapse of the Soviet Union. Textbooks continue the practice of devoting an entire section to the splitting of the atom and the creation of the bombs, with even more scientific detail than

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<sup>15</sup> George Armin Shaftel, *Decisions in United States History*, Ginn Social Science Series (Lexington, MA: Ginn and Company, 1972).

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid.* 604-619.

before. There was also a revival of the focus on Truman's "warning" to the Japanese, as seen in the 1960s. However, the 1990s did provide more nuance than the previous mentions of the "warning" in the sixties, with one textbook even explaining that the Japanese were "unaware of what the warning really meant."<sup>17</sup>

However, there may have been a regression of views, with only one of the textbooks prompting discussion questions on whether or not the bombs should have been dropped. In fact, the bombings are hardly considered a bad thing in these textbooks— one textbook makes it look noble to drop the bomb by stating that the cost of lives was certain to be less than if the United States had invaded Japan.<sup>18</sup> The exception to this is the textbook *The United States and its People*, which does include a small section on the horrors suffered as a result of the bomb, even going as far as to describe victims' skin peeling off from burns and the effects of radiation sickness.<sup>19</sup> However, this is still not fully comprehensive, as the book does not mention other potential reasons to oppose the dropping of the bomb (such as its possible military unnecessary or racial motivations behind the dropping), which stifles students' abilities to debate the issue effectively.

Nationalism was also heavily present, shown through the emphasis placed on Japanese barbarism compared to American scientific progress, while ignoring the horrific aftermath of the bomb. Textbooks brought this focus into attention through their choice of vocabulary words for their chapters, which included things like "kamikaze," but not

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<sup>17</sup> James West Davidson and Mark H. Lytle, *The United States: A History of the Republic* (Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice Hall, 1990), 684.

<sup>18</sup> Daniel J. Boorstin and Brooks Mather Kelley, *A History of the United States Since 1861*, Annotated Teacher's Edition (Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice Hall, 1990), 340.

<sup>19</sup> David C. King, Norman McRae, and Jaye Zola, *The United States and Its People*, Teacher's Edition (Menlo Park, CA: Addison-Wesley, 1995), 662.

Hiroshima or Nagasaki.<sup>20</sup> This brings students' attention to the extremes of the Japanese military and may even imply the justification of the bombings by highlighting Japanese brutality.

The problem is that textbooks are seen as authoritative by students and are a major tool for teachers to use in designing curricula. If textbooks do not provide a fuller picture of the bombings, including discussion of the horrors of the bombings, then students and teachers are not likely to seek this information out on their own. These issues have not disappeared in the past several decades. For instance, in a 2020 Tennessee high-school history textbook, most of the discussion focuses on the political decision to drop the bombs, with only a few paragraphs actually discussing the dropping of the bombs and their aftermath. An issue with textbooks giving insufficient space to describing different perspectives, such as the aftermath of the bombs, is that it does not provide a reliable, trusted source for students to encounter and interact with challenging ideas. A textbook with sufficient space given to discuss the end of the war and the bombs would include information on the aftermath of the bombs as well as information on their development and the decision to use them. As mentioned, the few paragraphs devoted to the bombs in the Tennessee textbook focus on the political decision to drop the bombs. There is no discussion of the aftermath of the bombs or even their development.<sup>21</sup>

There are certainly deficiencies in atomic bomb education provided by textbooks. However, teachers do not solely base their lessons on what is in a textbook. State standards for the teaching of history can also be used as an indicator of the current state

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<sup>20</sup> Davidson and Lytle, *The United States*, 682.

<sup>21</sup> *Ibid.*, 352-56.

of atomic education. Within these standards, there is still no consensus on how to teach the bomb, or even to which age group it should be taught. The National Council for the Social Studies, which is the largest organization dedicated to K-12 social studies in the United States, merely provides guidelines and goals for general historical ways of thinking, rather than focusing on specific subjects of study.<sup>22</sup> Similarly, the Common Core State Standards Initiative (established in 2009) folds history under its reading and language arts standards. For primary-school-aged children (grades K-5, ages 5-11), the “history goals” are one and the same as the reading initiatives. For grades 6 through 12, there are separate standards for “literacy in history/social studies, science, & technical subjects.” However, these are still mainly focused on reading comprehension instead of historical knowledge, rather than having standards for specific historical events to be taught. For example, a goal for literacy in history for grades 6-8 is to be able to “cite specific textual evidence to support analysis of primary and secondary sources.”<sup>23</sup> Despite being largely language-arts-focused, these national guidelines can point toward improved education about the atomic bombs. For example, Common Core lists a goal for fifth grade (10-11 years old) is to be able to “analyze multiple accounts of the same event or topic, noting important similarities and differences in the point of view they represent.”<sup>24</sup> If this specific goal was applied to learning about the atomic bombs, it could lead to enriching activities, such as comparing and contrasting U.S. government officials’

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<sup>22</sup> “College, Career, and Civic Life (C3) Framework for Social Studies State Standards: Guidance for Enhancing the Rigor of K-12 Civics, Economics, Geography, and History,” National Council for the Social Studies, last modified June 2017, <https://www.socialstudies.org/standards/c3>.

<sup>23</sup> “English Language Arts Standards,” Common Core State Standards Initiative, accessed October 20, 2022, <http://www.corestandards.org/ELA-Literacy/>.

<sup>24</sup> Ibid.

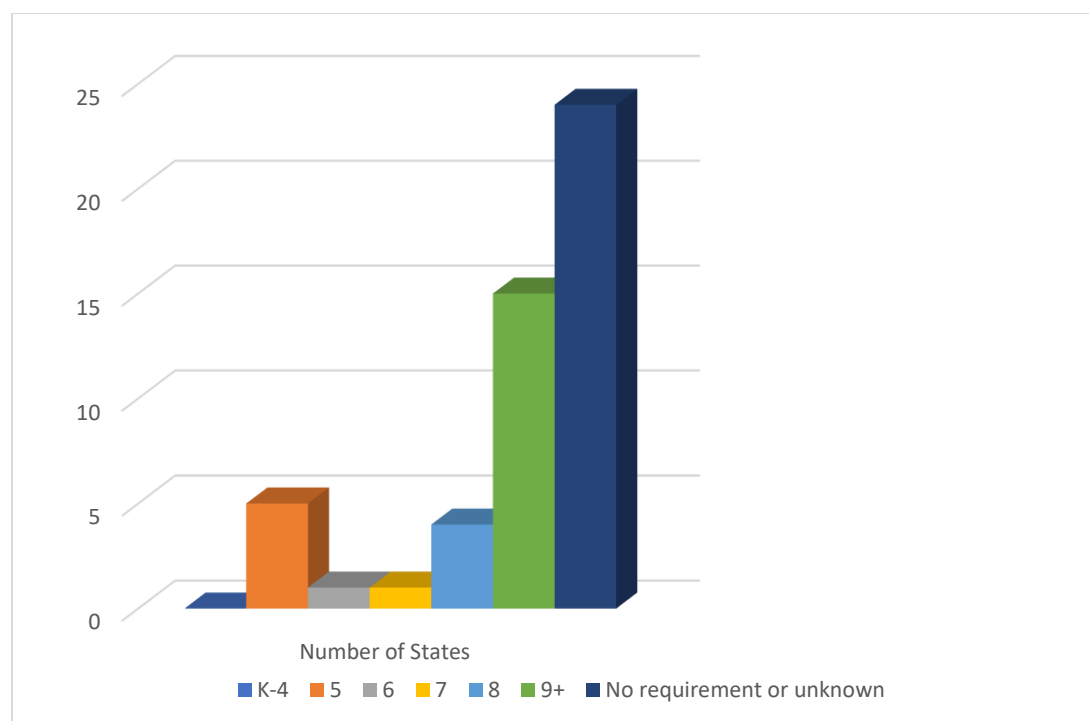
opinions on the dropping of the atomic bombs. Such an activity seems to be reserved for high-school students currently in Tennessee, despite the fact that fifth graders in the state are enrolled in post-Reconstruction-era U.S. history.<sup>25</sup>

This all means that individual states are left largely on their own in regards to creating history curricula for child learners. Because children's learning about the bombings is emotionally charged and is subject to many interpretations, it is important to have educators who choose to focus on the nuances of the bombings. One major way that the states vary is in something as basic as which social studies topics are taught to what grades. Many states, such as California, do not even teach history past the Reconstruction era until middle school (grades 6-8, ages 11-14).<sup>26</sup> This certainly affects atomic bomb education, as the age that children are learning about and processing such vital knowledge is so varied. And, if the curricula in question follow the Common Core standard suggestions, then the goals and guidelines for the child's historical knowledge are also different based on what grade they are in when they are taught a subject. See Chart 1 for a breakdown of the age when the states teach post-Reconstruction U.S. history to students:

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<sup>25</sup> Appleby et al., *United States History & Geography*, 356.

<sup>26</sup> "Alabama Academic Standards," Alabama Department of Education, last modified May 2010, <https://www.alabamaachievers.org/academic-standards/>; "CA Content Standards," California Department of Education, accessed September 29, 2022, <https://www2.cde.ca.gov/cacs/history/>; "Social Studies," Minnesota Department of Education, last modified 2012, <https://education.mn.gov/MDE/dse/stds/soc/>; "Subject Matter Standards," Hawaii Department of Education, last modified October 2018, <https://www.hawaiipublicschools.org/TeachingAndLearning/StudentLearning/Pages/standards.aspx>.



**Chart 1**

**Table 1**

Grade when Post-Reconstruction History Is First Taught to Students	Number of States
K-4	0
5	5
6	1
7	1
8	4
9+	15
No requirement or unknown	24

Thankfully, in individual state guidelines, many states do elaborate more than the national guidelines on goals for historical knowledge and subjects to be covered. However, no single state defines how the atomic bombings should be taught or what views and beliefs should be studied about this key event. It seems that most of the examined guidelines for younger students do not explicitly state that the bombings need to be taught but rather list them as additional or supplemental learning within the overall theme of the Second World War. For example, Minnesota lists in the requirements for seventh-grade American history that students should be able to “outline the causes and conduct of World War II including the nations involved, major political and military figures and key battles, and the Holocaust” and lists the “development and deployment of the atomic bomb” as an example of subjects that can be studied to achieve this goal.<sup>27</sup> Alabama has similar goals, with “describing the development and use of the atomic bomb” listed under “additional content to be taught.”<sup>28</sup> This may be partly due to the European focus of World War II in American education. It should also be noted that, as with most history textbooks since the mid-twentieth century, both of these guidelines focus specifically on the development of the atomic bombs (though the curricula refer to them as a singular bomb) and do not suggest teaching about the impact or the aftermath of the bombs. In curricula for grades younger than middle-school-age students, there no

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<sup>27</sup> “Social Studies,” Minnesota Department of Education, 77.

<sup>28</sup> “Alabama Academic Standards,” Alabama Department of Education, 41.

mention of the bomb. In Tennessee, which is one of the states that teaches World War II history the earliest, fifth-grade students are not expected or required to learn about the bombs, despite learning about other traumatic war-time events, including the Holocaust and Pearl Harbor.<sup>29</sup>

Because of these factors, most American students do not really learn about the atomic bombs until they are in high school, typically tenth or eleventh grade (ages 15-17). But even this education falls subject to vague guidelines that are left to the interpretation of individual teachers. Compared to primary school, more states make the atomic bomb an actual learning goal that contributes to an overall goal of understanding the Second World War. But even these one-sentence guidelines can differ wildly from state to state, let alone taking teacher interpretations into account. For example, some states focus on the Manhattan Project and the American perspective of making the decision to drop the bomb, as seen in Tennessee: “describe the Manhattan Project, and explain the rationale for using the atomic bomb to end the war.”<sup>30</sup> Other states, such as California, focus more on the aftermath of the bombs: “discuss the decision to drop atomic bombs and the consequences of the decision (Hiroshima and Nagasaki).”<sup>31</sup> This may be accounted to demography – there are more students of Japanese descent in California and Tennessee is home to Oak Ridge, an important site for the Manhattan project. But, even states like Hawaii that have similarly high populations of Japanese students, do not seem to advocate a specific aspect to study and merely list topical words-

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<sup>29</sup> “Social Studies,” Tennessee Department of Education, last modified July 2017, <https://www.tn.gov/education/instruction/academic-standards/social-studies-standards.html>, 67.

<sup>30</sup> *Ibid.*, 212.

<sup>31</sup> “CA Content Standards,” California Department of Education.

-such as Manhattan Project, Hiroshima, and Nagasaki--as subjects to be covered.<sup>32</sup>

Overall, the high-school curriculum guidelines are clearly more detailed than those for primary schools in regards to atomic bomb education. Regardless of the state's focus on the construction or the aftermath of the bombs, it seems that the goal is to generate a somewhat meaningful discussion about the nuances of the bombs (including the decision to drop them and their consequences).

With the deficiencies apparent in standard education on the development, use, and effects of the atomic bombs, one may worry that there are no resources available for children to study the atomic bombs. One of the few academic articles on teaching the story of the bombs also includes recommended readings for individual or class study.<sup>33</sup> Nonfiction books are an excellent resource for learning more about a subject both inside and outside of the classroom. Additionally, students seeking their own information and understanding of the bombs are likely to perceive books on the subject as a reliable source for this knowledge. As such, this essay seeks to examine available children's literature on the atomic bombs in order to ascertain what kind of information is being directed towards children.

There are a variety of resources available to American children to educate them on the atomic bombs, such as there are in Japan. I will focus on books intended for younger audiences here, with most of the resources being for children from kindergarten to sixth grade—as these are the grades most ignored by current state standards. However, it does appear that the Japanese atomic literature is aimed for younger audiences than its

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<sup>32</sup> "Subject Matter Standards," Hawaii Department of Education.

<sup>33</sup> As quoted in Miller, "Terrible Knowledge and Tertiary Trauma, Part II," 164–73.

American counterparts. All of the Japanese children's books examined were picture books for young children, while most of the American books fall into the "middle-grade" categorization. These resources include explanatory nonfiction, biographies, or even fiction books in which the characters experience the bombings. However, it is important to keep in mind that these resources for children are different than those for adults. Adult literature on the bombs often intends to challenge traditional views or to highlight the real horrors of atomic warfare (for example, Gar Alperovitz's *Atomic Diplomacy* or John Hersey's *Hiroshima*).<sup>34</sup> Children's resources, on the other hand, must walk a much finer line with the stories they tell in order to be considered age-appropriate by teachers and guardians.

Because of the distinctness of children's atomic literature, there are a few topics or tropes that seem to be common in the United States. The first is that many books are biographies of elementary-aged children who survived the bombs themselves.<sup>35</sup> This allows children to relate personally to the books, which likely makes the event more "real" to children who could not otherwise imagine themselves in such a situation. Second, children's atomic literature tends to be more humanizing and victim-focused than textbooks or traditional school materials.<sup>36</sup> Showing the horror of the bombs in an age-appropriate manner is an important foundation for students to begin thinking about

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<sup>34</sup> Gar Alperovitz, *Atomic Diplomacy: Hiroshima and Potsdam: The Use of the Atomic Bomb and the American Confrontation with Soviet Power* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1965); Hersey, *Hiroshima*.

<sup>35</sup> Coerr, *Sadako and the Thousand Paper Cranes*; Keiji Nakazawa, *Barefoot Gen: A Cartoon Story of Hiroshima*, trans. Project Gen, vol. 1 (San Francisco, CA: Last Gasp of San Francisco, 2004); Caren Stelson, *Sachiko: A Nagasaki Bomb Survivor's Story* (Minneapolis, MN: Carolrhoda Books, 2016).

<sup>36</sup> Lois Lowry, *On the Horizon* (New York: Houghton Mifflin Harcourt, 2020); Toshi Maruki, trans. Kurita-Bando Literary Agency, *Hiroshima No Pika* (New York: Lothrop, Lee & Shepard Books, 1980); Donna Jo Napoli, *In a Flash* (New York: Wendy Lamb Books, 2020).

peace studies and the problems associated with nuclear attacks. For example, the poems in *On the Horizon*, such as the haiku discussed below, show age-appropriate depictions of the horrors of the bombs. Third, and finally, some American children's atomic literature does try to frame the bombings within a broader historical context, associated with either the attack on Pearl Harbor or the fire bombings of Tokyo, despite most being written for the purpose of informing about the atomic bombings.<sup>37</sup> The literature that does this juxtaposes the atomic bombings with the attacks on Pearl Harbor in a way that seems to subsume the discussion of the atomic bombs; it serves as a reminder that Japan attacked the United States first and implies that because of this, the atomic bombings were somewhat justified. Some books forego the comparisons to Pearl Harbor and instead overdo comparisons with the fire bombings in other cities, such as Tokyo. By comparing the newly created atomic bombs to previously used and conventional firebombs, authors imply that the atomic bombings were not unique in the scale of their horrors or that the bombings should be accepted because fire bombing was. Authors seemingly frame the bombings in comparison to other historical events to lessen perpetrator's guilt in American children by comparing the atomic bombs to other attacks or even sometimes implying that a regular bombing was just as horrific. Perpetrator's guilt here refers to the sense of responsibility that those who have committed wrong deeds or people who are associated with those who have committed such deeds feel. These three topics are not unique to children's atomic literature but are exceedingly common within it. In the remaining portion of this chapter, we will examine these tropes in the literature and

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<sup>37</sup> Wallace B. Black and Jean F. Blashfield, *Hiroshima and the Atomic Bomb* (New York: Crestwood House, 1993); Lowry, *On the Horizon*; Napoli, *In a Flash*.

explain how they come together to present a more humanizing overall picture of atomic bomb victims than textbooks do alone. Since children can find some of these books and books like them in school libraries, they can be a valuable resource for teaching about the bombings.

The first category is biographies of children who survived the bombings. *Barefoot Gen*, which was discussed in Chapter Two, is one such story that has become quintessential to American atomic children's literature. The message of the graphic novel is strongly focused on the wrongs of Japanese imperialism as well as the American wrongs in the Second World War. In fact, in the foreword of the 2004 translation, fellow author and cartoonist Art Spiegelman of the Holocaust-focused *Maus* states that

by locating the causes of the bombings exclusively in the evils of Japanese militaristic nationalism rather than in the *Realpolitik* of Western racism and cold-war power-jockeying, Nakazawa may make the work a little *too* pleasurable for American and British readers.<sup>38</sup>

Perhaps the Western-positive message is part of what makes the novel suitable for children in the United States, despite such graphic depictions of the bombing. Because of such stark images of the atomic bomb, many American parents online do, in fact, recommend against letting younger children read the book.<sup>39</sup> However, there are even more arguments made for exposing children to such an accurate story, with lesson plans online and guides by comic book associations and librarians advising how to keep the

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<sup>38</sup> Nakazawa, *Barefoot Gen*.

<sup>39</sup> Leisa K., "Awesome Thought Provoking Series for Teens and Adults," *Amazon*, last modified September 21, 2022, [https://www.amazon.com/review/R1N5N3MREWKQLK/ref=cm\\_cr\\_srp\\_d\\_rdp\\_perm?ie=UTF8&ASIN=0867196025](https://www.amazon.com/review/R1N5N3MREWKQLK/ref=cm_cr_srp_d_rdp_perm?ie=UTF8&ASIN=0867196025); Steve Raiteri, "Nakazawa, Kenji. *Barefoot Gen*. Vol. 1: A Cartoon Story of Hiroshima," *Library Journal* 128, no. 12 (July 2003): 70.

book in a school library even if it is challenged.<sup>40</sup> The graphic nature of the book is the very reason that it is considered important, because it shows the horrors that were inflicted upon Hiroshima.

Another well-known biographical children's book is the story of *Sadako and the Thousand Paper Cranes*. Eleanor Coerr, who lived in Japan and heard about the story of a girl named Sadako from friends in Hiroshima, wrote the book. She found the collection of Sadako's letters titled *Kokeshi* and translated the story for American children to read. Sadako was around two when the United States bombed her hometown of Hiroshima. Her grandmother passed away as a result of the attack, but the rest of her immediate family seemed relatively unharmed. This story is unique, because it does not take place during the atomic bomb attacks, but rather nine years after, to highlight the horrible, long-term effects of the bombs' radiation on the people of Hiroshima. Because it is a children's book (for ages 9-12), told from a child's perspective, the tone of the book is initially rather light-hearted, and it does not describe the bombings or its victims with the reverence that we normally see in atomic literature. For example, in the description of Sadako's day at the "carnival," which is actually the memorial day marking the bombing of Hiroshima, the book says,

The worst part [of Sadako's day] was seeing people with ugly whitish scars. The atom bomb had burned them so badly that they no longer looked human. If any of the bomb victims came near Sadako, she turned away quickly.<sup>41</sup>

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<sup>40</sup>"Manga Study Guide: Barefoot Gen," *WikiBooks*, last modified September 23, 2021, [https://en.wikibooks.org/wiki/Manga\\_Study\\_Guide:\\_Barefoot\\_Gen/Printable\\_version](https://en.wikibooks.org/wiki/Manga_Study_Guide:_Barefoot_Gen/Printable_version); Meryl Jaffe, "Using Graphic Novels in Education: Barefoot Gen," Comic Book Legal Defense Fund, last modified September 26, 2013, <https://cblfd.org/2013/09/using-graphic-novels-in-education-barefoot-gen/>; Caitlin McCabe, "Adding Barefoot Gen to Your Library or Classroom Collection," Comic Book Legal Defense Fund, last modified August 11, 2015, <https://cblfd.org/2015/08/adding-barefoot-gen-to-your-library-or-classroom-collection/>.

<sup>41</sup> Coerr, *Sadako and the Thousand Paper Cranes*, 19-20.

This childish aversion to the horrors of the bomb soon changes when Sadako learns she has leukemia, the “atomic bomb sickness” caused by the massive amounts of radiation released by the bombs. Going through the experience of suffering due to the bomb causes Sadako to empathize with other victims of the bomb and to better understand their problems. The transition from naivety to emotional maturity through the lived experience of the bomb may in some ways mirror the reader’s journey as they progress through the book towards Sadako’s ultimate death. Many readers start out ignorant of the horrors of the bomb and simply enjoy the story of a young Japanese girl visiting the peace festival and trying to join her school’s running team. However, as they follow Sadako’s story and the progression of her disease, they too gain a new, horrific knowledge of the effects of the bombs, as a character they have grown attached to gets sicker and dies.

Despite the dark ending, the book uses the story of the atomic bombs to spread a message of hope in adversity, personified by the paper cranes Sadako ultimately created through the Japanese paper-folding art of origami. Sadako had received a golden paper crane from her best friend along with the legend that folding one thousand origami cranes would grant the folder a wish, collectively they “reminded Sadako that there was always hope.”<sup>42</sup> Sadako worked tirelessly in her final days with aspirations to fold one thousand cranes and heal herself of leukemia. Although this goal was not accomplished, Sadako’s persisting hope provides hope to others who have survived the bombings.

The final biographical book is the story of Sachiko, a survivor of the atomic bomb in Nagasaki that provides another stark, humanizing picture of a child survivor of the

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<sup>42</sup> Ibid., 56.

bombing. Author Caren Stelson met Sachiko Yasui in 2005 at an anniversary event for the bombings of Hiroshima and Nagasaki. Years later they connected again through a mutual friend, this time with the goal of writing a book telling Sachiko's story. Stelson states that she has always had a personal relationship with the Second World War, with her father having served as a rifleman in Germany, but she had to relearn what she knew about it upon hearing the story of Sachiko's suffering. The book tells the story of Sachiko living through the war and the bombing of Nagasaki. It chronicles the death of many of her siblings from atomic-bomb-related injuries and ailments. But it also provides a larger story, continuing the tale past the immediate effects of the bomb and showing how Sachiko has regained agency by talking about her experience. The story is the most empirically informative out of the biographies examined so far, with inserts at the end of each chapter that explain the "big picture," or what was happening globally that was affecting Sachiko's life. These are often rather insightful and descriptive for a children's book, even including sections on the racism that fueled the Second World War (both from the Japanese and the Americans).<sup>43</sup> The addition of a wider perspective of the bombings, juxtaposed against a single girl's story both allows the reader to see the importance of the bombings globally and to see the devastating effects on a very personal level. Indeed, the book shows a relatively long timeline after the war, similar to Sadako's story, which shows the long-lasting effects of the bombings beyond the initial horrors. It also, however, shows the lasting hope and the various symbols for peace that Sadako sees throughout her life, including a visit from Helen Keller (a famous deaf and blind author

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<sup>43</sup> Stelson, *Sachiko*, 14-15.

and advocate) to Nagasaki and the fiftieth anniversary of the bomb dropping's peace festival.

It seems to be a common theme for authors of children's books to highlight the importance of hope or to have a "good side" to the story despite the massive losses suffered. This may be specifically because the books are aimed at children and do not wish to carry a wholly negative message. Some authors could also be trying to show a "brighter side" of things to avoid implications of wrong-doing on the United States' part, which could potentially outrage veteran communities, similar to the protests against the Enola Gay exhibit in 1995.<sup>44</sup> Or, it could simply be fueled by the human desire to see the good in each situation and to have a happy ending despite all that has occurred (even overcoming death in Sadako's case, and the death of the majority of one's family in Sachiko's case). It is notable that the American children's literature uses fewer graphic drawings than its Japanese counterparts, and less drawings overall. This may be a sign that the atomic bombings are considered to be for a more "mature" audience and are not considered to be picture book material in the United States. It could also be a sensitivity towards the victims, not wanting to show graphic depictions of their bodies to an American audience that historically celebrated these deaths.

Biographies are not the only genre capable of showing the human story of the aftermath of the bombs. One example that does this well is Lois Lowry's collection of poems, *On the Horizon*. Lowry was born in Hawaii but moved away before the start of the Second World War, during which her father was stationed in the Pacific. When the

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<sup>44</sup> Wittner, *The Enola Gay Exhibits, The Hiroshima Bombing and American Nationalism*, 41.

war ended, her father was stationed in Tokyo, Japan, giving Lowry the experience to live abroad. She wrote *On the Horizon* to honor her memories of Hawaii and Japan and those who died in the attacks on Pearl Harbor and Hiroshima. These poems begin with a simple, bare-bones description of the dropping of the bomb on August 6, 1945, that gives minimal information in order to allow the poems to speak for themselves.<sup>45</sup> The book then continues into a collection of poems about the day of the bombing that seek to inspire a sense of reverence for the survivors of the bomb in readers through their gravity.

Take, for example, the short *haiku*:

White light, whirling cloud  
Next a strange ghostly silence  
Then startling black rain<sup>46</sup>

The use of natural symbols, such as clouds and rain here, juxtaposed by the unnaturalness of the situation, seen in the silence and the black rain, gives a visceral feeling of *wrongness* even to readers who have little experience with the horrors of the bombs. *On the Horizon* also juxtaposes the horrors of the atomic bombs with those of Pearl Harbor. The book is split into two sections, one with poems about the attacks on Pearl Harbor and one focused on the bombing on Hiroshima. This communicates that the attacks were equal, implying to readers that one may be “just as bad” as the other or that the bombing on Hiroshima was the just response to the attack on Pearl Harbor. *On the Horizon* teaches children about the bombings, including this nationalistic message, in a more artistic medium than most atomic literature that allows for an emotional response to the horrors of the bombings.

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<sup>45</sup>Lowry, *On the Horizon*, 31.

<sup>46</sup> *Ibid.*, 37.

The human side of the bombings can even be shown through works of fiction. A prime example of this is the middle-aged (9+) children's novel *In a Flash*, which tracks the fictional story of Italian sisters Simona and Carolina in Japan throughout World War II, including in Hiroshima on August 6, 1945. The girls follow their father, who is the new chef for the Italian ambassador to Japan, to their new home in Tokyo in 1940; but they soon find themselves in a Japan that is engrossed in the Second World War. They experience fire bombings in Tokyo and are eventually sent to an internment camp, where they are separated from their father. Simona and Carolina manage to run away from the internment camp and find themselves in Hiroshima, where they make new friends and survive through the war and the atomic bombing.

Keeping with the themes of the previous books covered, *In a Flash* seems to focus on the message of peace and togetherness through difficulties rather than on the actual suffering caused by the bomb. There is also a strong focus on comparing the fire bombings of Tokyo with the atomic bombings in the book, both of which the main characters live through. Aside from the main characters' experiences with bombs in the book, there is also a postscript included that gives data on the atomic bombings and the fire bombings. However, this is problematic in the way that it tries to compare the events to each other, and even specifically states that the fire bombings of Tokyo were more deadly than the atomic bombs (despite the true number of casualties of the atomic bombs not being known—there is no agreed upon casualty estimate for the atomic bomb).<sup>47</sup> Framing the bombings in such a way diminishes the very real horrors of the atomic

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<sup>47</sup> Napoli, *In a Flash*, 383.

bombs and implies that the atomic bomb was only as bad as a regular bombing. This supports nationalistic views by implying that since firebombs and atomic bombs were similar in casualties caused, there is no question about whether the bomb should have been dropped, removing all historical agency from the discussion of the decision.

When teaching difficult histories, “Attention to resistance, rebellion, and survival in the face of such oppression should be a crucial part of the difficult history curriculum.”<sup>48</sup> This can be seen through the above characters, as their survival can be seen as resistance and rebellion against the bombings. Authors normally give this attention in the outside resources we provide for children to study on their own, but not in standard textbooks. This means that if teachers choose only to follow the standard recommended curriculum, students will miss a necessary part of their education about the difficult history of the atomic bombings.

There are various representations of the atomic bombings for children throughout history. While there are some analyses from the humanitarian perspective of the aftermath of the bombs and some analyses that are informative on the creation of and decision to use the bombs present in children’s literature, there is overall a deficit in the standard United States education on the bombings. Textbooks, both historically and recently, have focused too strongly on the U.S. decision to drop the bomb and provide little information about the aftermath for their readers. If teachers strictly applied modern educational guidelines atomic bomb education, students would be better prepared and would not have to voluntarily supplement their education with outside literature. This

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<sup>48</sup> Harris, Levy, and Sheppard, eds., *Teaching Difficult Histories in Difficult Times*, 12.

could include a comprehensive analysis and discussion of the decision to drop the bomb, as well as its consequences. The outside literature tends to be comprised of biographies of children, humanizing tales of the bombs' after-effects, and historical comparisons to other events. The issue with both standard curricula and even the children's literature, however, is that heavy nationalistic themes are present. It is my hope that through this examination of the historical representations of the bombs, we can improve the way that adults communicate with children about "difficult histories" and allow them a chance to form cogent thoughts and opinions about these subjects.

## CONCLUSION

Through the examination of the literature, it can be seen that while the ways in which the atomic bombings are represented for children are tightly linked to nationhood, it appears that there is something universal in the reactions to the bombing that leads to finding hope through fear. In Japan, this means that, despite having heart-wrenching experiences and initial reactions to the bombings, children found a way to focus on the joys of what normalcy they had, such as attending school and drawing. In the United States one must remember that the new atomic bombs very quickly became frightening even for children of the country that perpetrated the attack because of the fear of both how to manage this power and of attacks from other countries that had harnessed nuclear energy. But, like Japanese youths, they worked past this fear, turning it into hope for a better future. Despite the hope that came out of this tragedy, it seems that in both countries there is a lack of proper atomic bomb education in standard textbooks and schooling guidelines. This is somewhat remedied through the availability of children's literature on the subject, which aims to humanize victims. But this literature is not free of nationalistic narratives, and it is only available to those children or educators that seek out this information, meaning that a large audience is still missing a vital aspect of atomic education.

While both Japanese and American representations of the bombings are influenced heavily by nationalism, it seems that Japan has taken more steps to denounce outright nationalism. This may be because of its history as an aggressor in the Second World War. It may also be partially due to the fact that Japan is a smaller country with less hard power and more pressure to denounce nationalistic ideas. It is apparent that both

countries share a nationalistic message through their children's literature on the bomb, often with competing narratives. Japanese children's literature seems to pin the United States very plainly and openly as the perpetrator of the bombings. With phrases such as the "Atomic Bomb that America dropped" and references to the American army, it is clear who is to blame for the suffering shown in the pages of these books.<sup>1</sup> The United States, on the other hand, very rarely, if ever, points to itself as the aggressor, referring instead to the bomb that passively "was dropped."<sup>2</sup> There are also many American children's books that purposely bring up the atrocities committed by the Japanese, such as the attack on Pearl Harbor, as if to justify the atomic bombings in the historical context of the war. It is interesting that while neither country's books outright state that the bombs were dropped because of the aggressions of the other country, it is heavily implied that the other country is to blame for the atomic bombings in supplemental children's literature.

With this conclusion to my research, many more questions have come about. How did both countries change from initially courageous youth reactions to the bombs into education systems that have relatively little focus on the importance of the bombings? Is this change entirely fueled by nationalistic interventions in the education system and the stories of the bombs or are there other aspects at play? Are there ways to remedy the current education deficit without making the curricula overly bomb focused? The breadth of these questions is beyond this research, showing that more work certainly needs to be

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<sup>1</sup> Hiroataka Nakagawa, *8 Gatsu 6 Ka No Koto [On August 6]* (Tokyo: Hamonica Books, 2011), 15; Arthur Binard, *Domu Gatari [Story of the Dome]* (Tokyo: Tamagawa University Press, 2017), 12.

<sup>2</sup> David Saville Muzzey and Horace Kidger, *The United States* (Boston: Ginn and Company, 1953), 304.

done in the field. As has been shown, there is so little academic work highlighting children's relationship to the bombings. It is my hope that with this contribution to the blooming academic field, it can continue to grow and that future researchers will shed light on more children's voices.

It can be seen through this research that there are still many strides to be made in the education of the atomic bombs in both Japan and the United States. It cannot even be said that education has improved in the years since the bombings. But there is hope for atomic education. We have seen through the reactions of both sets of adolescents that children can find hope even after living through something as traumatic as the atomic bombings. This means that potential fears of distress from learning about the bombings are largely unfounded and that there is hope for a humanizing education on the atomic bombings of Hiroshima and Nagasaki.

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APPENDICES

Appendix 1:

## The Civil Censorship Detachment

From the Gordon W. Prange Collection, University of Maryland

GENERAL HEADQUARTERS  
 UNITED STATES ARMY FORCES, PACIFIC  
 Assistant Chief of Staff, G-2  
 Civil Censorship Detachment

To RYOBO

21 Sept 1945

CODE FOR JAPANESE PRESS

In accordance with the Supreme Allied Commander's objective of establishing freedom of the press in Japan, a Press Code for Japan has been issued. This PRESS CODE, rather than being one of restrictions of the Press, is one which is designed to educate the press of the Japanese in the responsibilities and meaning of a free press. Emphasis is placed on the truth of news and the elimination of propaganda. This Press Code will cover, in addition, all publications printed in Japan.

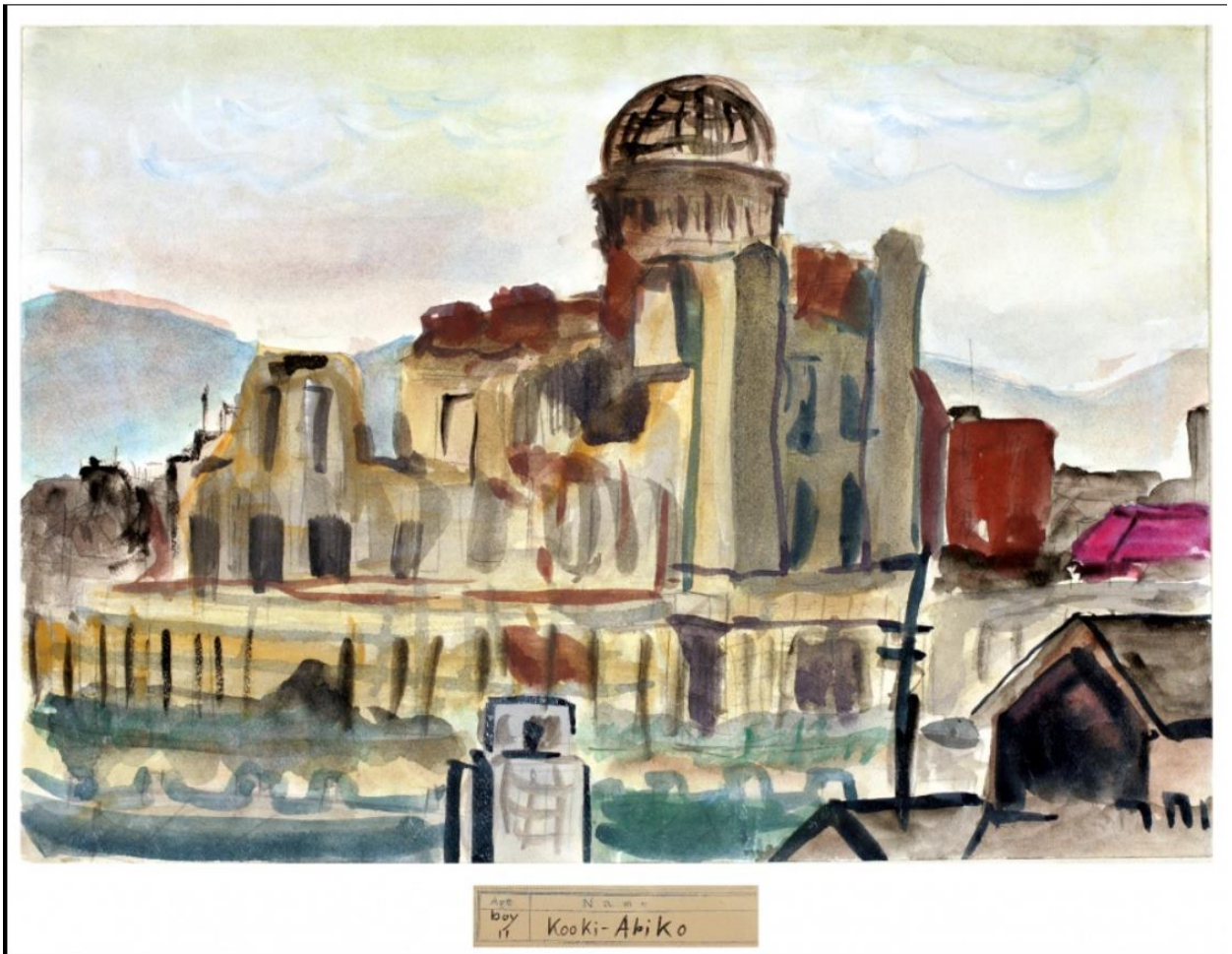
This is the Press Code for Japan;

1. News must adhere strictly to the truth.
2. Nothing should be printed which might, directly or indirectly, disturb the public tranquility.
3. There shall be no false or destructive criticism of the Allied Powers.
4. There shall be no destructive criticism of the Allied Occupation and nothing which might invite mistrust or resentment of those troops.
5. There shall be no mention or discussion of Allied troops movements unless such movements have been officially released.
6. News stories must be factually written and completely devoid of editorial opinion.
7. News stories shall not be colored to conform with any propaganda line.
8. Minor details of a news story must not be over-emphasized, stressed or develop any propaganda line.
9. No news story shall be distorted by the omission of pertinent facts or details.
10. In the make-up of the newspaper no news story shall be given undue prominence for the purpose of establishing or developing any propaganda line.

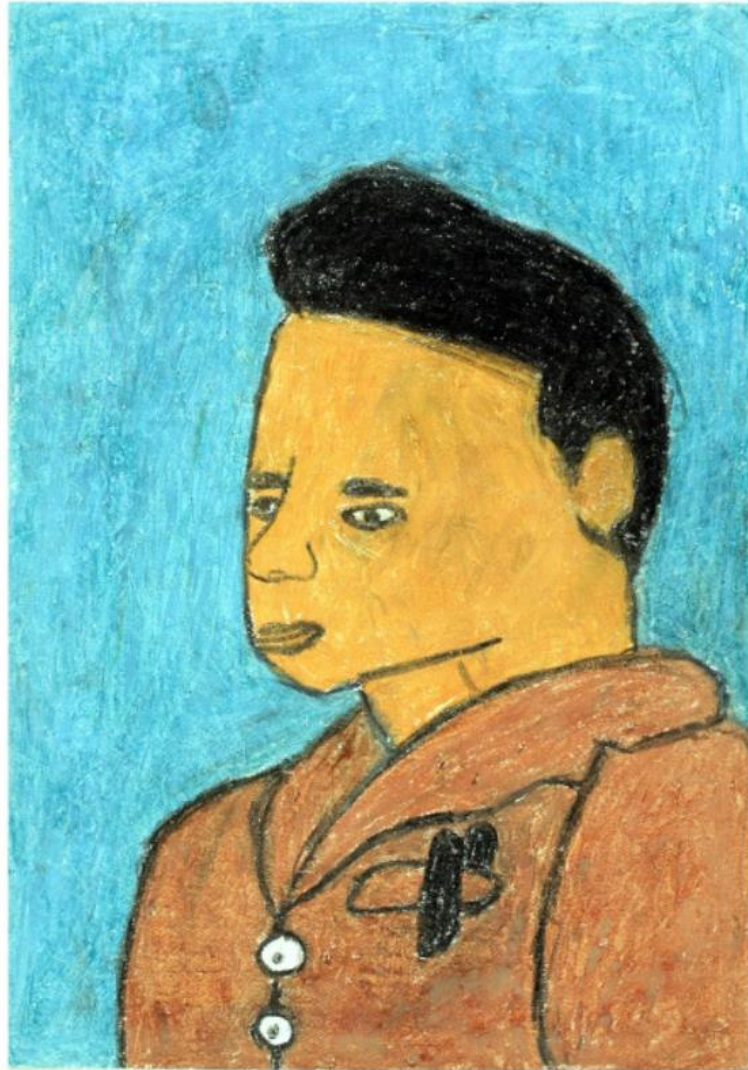
**Appendix 2:**

A selection from Hiroshima Children's Drawings

From *Cross Currents e-Journal* Photo Essay, Volume 6, March 2013.



*A-Bomb Memorial Building* by Kooki Abiko, age 11.



by Naoyuki-Mitsuda

*Teacher Kaya Susumu* by Naoyuki Mitsuda, age 9.



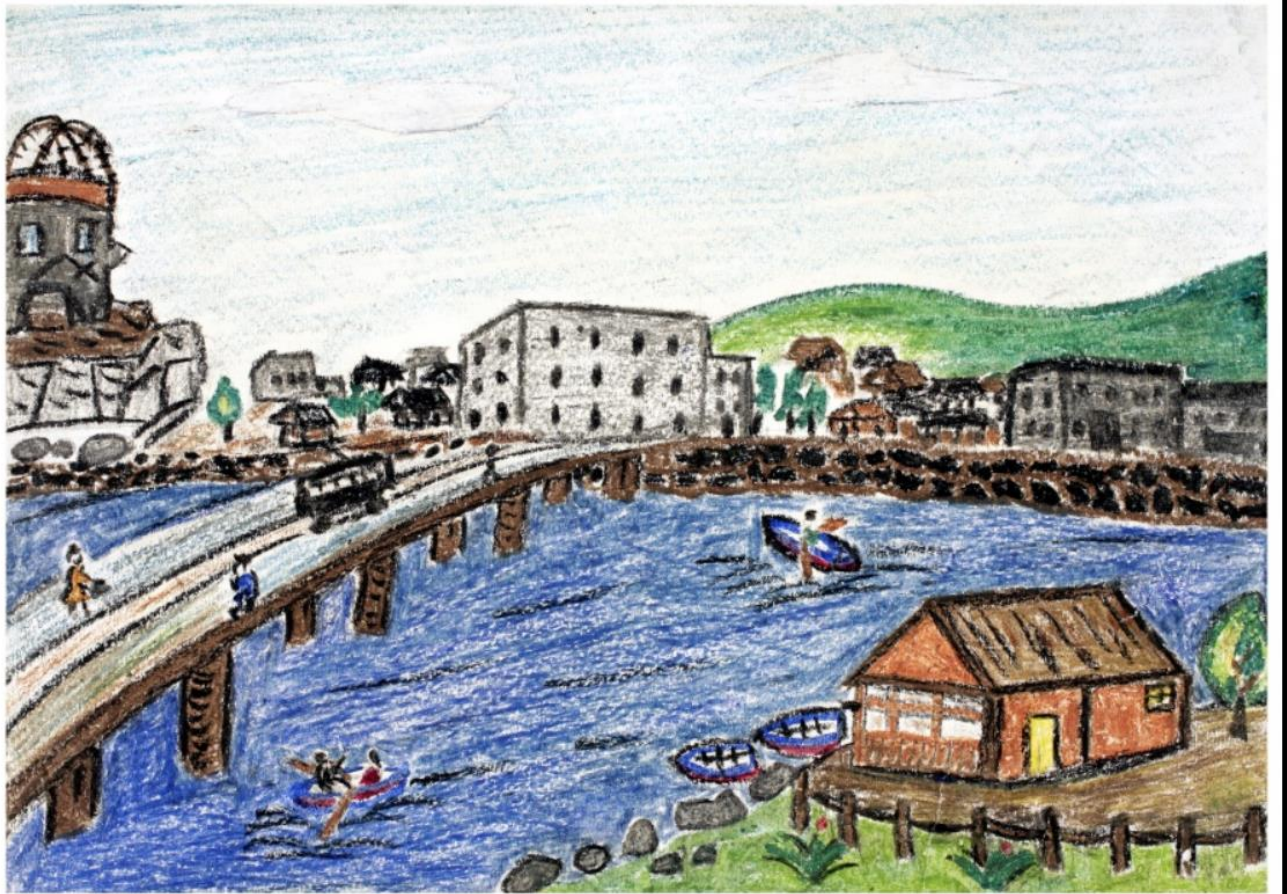
8<sup>11</sup>  
11 Yasuko-Nakagawa

*America is Our Friend [Our Honorable American Friends]* by Yasuko Nakagawa, age 11.



Age  
boy 9  
Name  
Eiji-Yokota

*Field Day in October* by Eiji Yokota, age 9.



girl  
10  
N E W C  
Misako-Simomura

*Honkawa River and Dome* by Misako Simomura, age 10.



girl  
12  
NAME  
Kimie-Tsuboi

*Memories of Hometown* by Kimie Tsuboi, age 12.

### Appendix 3

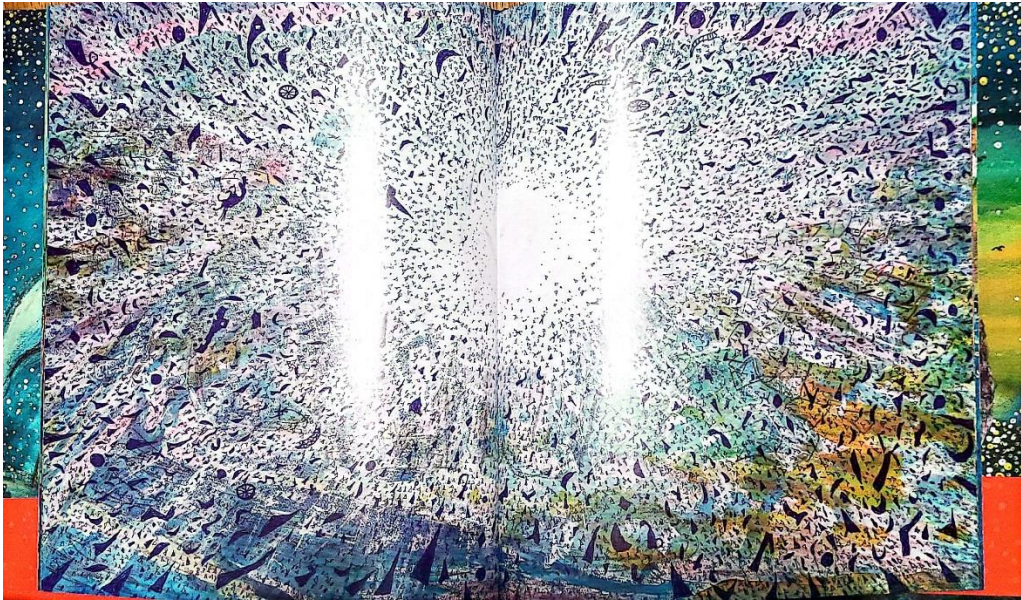
#### 2-page Illustrations in Japanese Children's Books



*Hiroshima no Pika* by Toshi Maruki, 15-16. Depicts the child Mii and her mother, who is carrying her wounded father, attempting to escape the fire into the river.



*Hiroshima no Pika*, 35-36. Shows firemen taking away the dead bodies days after the atomic bombing of Hiroshima.



*Story of the Dome* by Arthur Binard, 13-14. The explosion caused by the atomic bomb, shown in a wordless two-page spread.



*On August 6* by Hirotaka Nakagawa, 19-20. Depicts a body mangled by the atomic bomb. Though no explanation is given for this image, it can be inferred that this is the main character's brother.