After the Atomic Bomb: Lessons from Hiroshima’s Survivors

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LESSON DESCRIPTION
The decision to drop the atomic bomb on Japan was considered a military one. In this lesson, students will learn about the impact of the bomb from a humanistic one. 

Hibakusha is a Japanese word used to describe survivors of the atomic bombings. Their perspective has been preserved in drawings, testimonials, and artifacts. Students will explore the impact of an atomic bomb through the experiences of the hibakusha in Hiroshima.

IMPORTANCE
More than 65 years have passed since the atomic bombings of Japan. With the A-bomb survivors aging and peace conscious fading among the young, communicating the A-bomb experience to future generations is crucial in learning the lessons of nuclear warfare through its survivors. Students will analyze and organize the meaning of the A-bomb survivors’ desire for world peace and the abolition of nuclear weapons in the 21st century. The first part of the lesson will examine the immediate impact of A-bomb explosion on the people & structures in Hiroshima. Using the Hiroshima Peace Memorial Museum Web Site, students will view drawings and read eyewitness testimony from A-bomb survivors. Students will reflect on the commitment of Hiroshima and the hibakusha to peace and a world without nuclear weapons.

AGE LEVEL
Grades 9 - 12

TIME REQUIRED
2 class periods: DAY ONE Procedure #1-9; DAY TWO Procedure # 10-12

TERMS
Black rain ~ Following the bombing on August 6, 1945, black, muddy, radioactive soot fell north, northeast of hypocenter.

Building demolition ~ Purposeful destruction of wooden homes to create open firebreaks in case of fires caused by air raids.

Hibakusha ~ hee-bah-koo-shah; Japanese word for survivors of the atomic bombings at either Hiroshima or Nagasaki.

Student mobilization ~ Students in 7th grade and above worked in factories and building demolition sites throughout the summer.

LESSON NOTE
The Hiroshima Peace Memorial Museum website [http://www.pef.city.hiroshima.jp/top_e.html] offers unlimited possibilities for the classroom. Using the navigation on the left side or bottom the website contains: 1. Outline, museum exhibits & displays. 2. Virtual museum tour, view artifacts and displays as if one was at the museum. 3. The Kids Peace Station, animated information centered around the children’s story Sadako and the Thousand Paper Cranes. 4. Peace Declaration and Step Toward Peace, Hiroshima’s recovery and commitment to a world with nuclear weapons; 5. Peace Database, primary sources from hibakusha including testimonials, photos, and drawings.

OBJECTIVES
Students will:
1. Describe the devastation caused by a nuclear explosion including the impact of shock waves, heat rays, and radiation on people and buildings.
2. Understand the experiences of a-bomb survivors through an analysis of photos, drawings, and testimonies of hibakusha.
3. Analyze the commitment by the hibakusha and city of Hiroshima for peace and world without nuclear weapons.

MATERIALS
- Worksheet: A-bomb Drawings by Survivors
- Worksheet: Lessons from the Hibakusha
- Access to Hiroshima Peace Memorial website either through a lab for student exploration or display on LCD for classroom viewing.

PROCEDURE

DAY ONE
1. Energizer: Imagine going about your normal daily routine, a bright sunny day in August. What would you be doing? Everything is a normal summer day and then BOOM. Life as you know it, is gone, everything has been changed by a previously unknown weapon. What would you do? How would you survive? This is precisely what happened on August 6, 1945. The people of Hiroshima began their daily routine and at 8:15 am experienced the trauma of having their world destroyed and those who survived lived through the chaos and unknown.

2. Assess previous knowledge, have students brainstorm what happens when an atomic bomb is detonated:
   a. What happens to people & living things?
   b. What happens to buildings or structures?
   c. What happens to people or living things that survive the atomic blast?

3. Use the PowerPoint: Hibakusha
4. *Slide 4 ~* An August summer morning that started out like so many others...read the excerpt from Eyewitness Testimonies: Appeals from the A-bomb Survivors: “Hiroshima before the bomb: On the morning of August 6th, the skies were perfectly clear without a speck of cloud. As the midsomer sun rose, the temperature also began to rise rapidly. When a yellow air-raid warning, issued at 7:09 am, was cleared at 7:31 am, the citizens gave a sigh of relief and started their daily activities. Many people had entered the city from neighboring towns and villages for building demolition work. About 350,000 people are believed to have been in the city on that day, including more than 40,000 military personnel.

There was no vacation for students during wartime. Students in the upper grades of national (elementary) and middle-level schools (junior high, girls high or secondary schools, and vocational schools) and above were working day in factories and at building demolition sites. On that day, a total of 8,400 students were working on building demolition. Elementary school children in third through sixth grades were urged to evacuate to the countryside for protection from air raids. Mainly younger children in the first and second grades had remained in the city with their families.²

5. *Slides 5 & 6 ~* On August 6, 1945, three B-29 bomber planes took off from Tinian Island to drop the atomic bomb on Hiroshima. The plane known as “Enola Gay” carried a long cylindrical bomb called “Little Boy” from an altitude of 9,600m. The bomb exploded 600m above the city of Hiroshima. Optional: video clip of bomb dropped. [http://video.google.com/videoplay?docid=-6255586282622099221](http://video.google.com/videoplay?docid=-6255586282622099221)

6. *Slides 7-14 ~* Mini lecture to explain the types of destruction created by an atomic bomb
a. Explain nuclear reaction in the bomb.
b. Damage from shock waves & blast
c. Damage from thermal blast
d. Damage from radiation
e. Human toll

7. *Slide 15 ~* In an instant, Hiroshima went from a vibrant city of 350,000 to rubble, fire, littered with dead and injured. Imagine what it would be like for a survivor of the atomic bombing. What you do? Where would you go? Hibakusha, hee-bah-koo-shah, is the Japanese word for a survivor of the atomic bombing. Learn from their experiences, get a sense of the destruction and struggle to survive through their stories and drawings. [http://a-bombdb.pcf.city.hiroshima.jp/pdbe/search_rule.do?class_name=pict](http://a-bombdb.pcf.city.hiroshima.jp/pdbe/search_rule.do?class_name=pict)

8. *Slide 16 ~* Using the Hiroshima Peace Memorial Museum website investigate the destruction and chaos the hibakusha experienced through their a-bomb drawings. [http://a-bombdb.pcf.city.hiroshima.jp/pdbe/search_rule.do?class_name=pict](http://a-bombdb.pcf.city.hiroshima.jp/pdbe/search_rule.do?class_name=pict)

9. *Debrief with students.* Reflect on the images of Hiroshima and drawings by the hibakusha:
   a. Describe the physical trauma.
   b. Describe the emotional trauma.
   c. Predict what will happen to the hibakusha. Physically and emotionally, what does the future hold for them?

**DAY TWO**

10. *Slide 17 ~* Use the testimonies of the hibakusha to have students investigate what happened to the hibakusha.
   b. Assign at least one hibakusha testimony to each student. Students should read the text and complete worksheet Lessons from Hibakusha. [http://www.pcf.city.hiroshima.jp/virtual/VirtualMuseum_e/visit_e/testimony_e/testimo00.html](http://www.pcf.city.hiroshima.jp/virtual/VirtualMuseum_e/visit_e/testimony_e/testimo00.html)

11. *Slides 18 ~* Debrief
   a. Students share the summary of their assigned hibakusha.
   b. What did the hibakusha have in common?
   c. How did their experiences differ?
d. What surprised you?
e. What is the purpose of hibakusha sharing their stories?

12. *Slide 19 ~* Share with students the Prayer of Hiroshima “Hibakusha say simply, ‘I met with the A-bomb.’ Perhaps they use this expression because the event they ‘met with’ defies description—an instant of massive destruction, mind-numbing death and injury, and the grief of watching helplessly as family members, relatives, friends, and neighbors died in agony. They also say, ‘It’s painful even to remember.’ The A-bomb witnesses have overcome that pain and are passing on their experiences of that day. They feel duty bound to tell the world why nuclear weapons must never be used again. The continual prayer of the A-bombed City Hiroshima is to unite humankind toward our common goal, genuine and lasting world peace.”

http://www.pcf.city.hiroshima.jp/virtual/VirtualMuseum_e/visit_e/est_e/panel/A6/6101.htm

**CONCLUSION**

Students should compare their predictions from day one to what they learned from the hibakusha. As a class, students will identify lesson(s) learned from the hibakusha.

**EXTENSION ACTIVITIES**

1. Following the earthquake in March 2011, many hibakusha question the use of nuclear power in Japan. Students can apply the lessons of Hiroshima to a 21st Century dilemma as the Japanese struggle to move forward and recovery from another nuclear crisis. “Fukushima evokes dark memories: Hibakusha turn against nuke power”

http://search.japantimes.co.jp/cgi-bin/nn20110807a4.html

2. Form a lit circle, read the book Hiroshima by John Hersey.


3. Take action in your community. Share the story of the hibakushas with elected officials in your community. Encourage your community to join the Mayors for Peace http://www.mayorsforpeace.org/english/index.html

**SOURCES**


**FOOTNOTES**


**ADDITIONAL RESOURCES**

1. Hibakusha Stories passes the legacy of the atomic bombings of Hiroshima and Nagasaki to a new generation, and empowers them with tools to build a world free of nuclear weapons. http://www.hibakushastories.org/index.html

2. Hibakusha, Our Life to Live is a film about the survivors of the atomic bomb attacks on Hiroshima and Nagasaki. On August 6, 1945, a great terror was thrust upon the world. David Rothauser's 80 minute documentary, Hibakusha, Our Life to Live, probes the life stories of Japanese, Korean and American survivors of the terror; the atomic bomb attacks on Hiroshima and Nagasaki. Life is a precious gift. May we live it without fear. http://www.hibakusha-ourlifetolive.org/

3. This website was created for students, educators, and the general public to understand the science, history and consequences of the atomic age. It serves as an online companion to the award winning CD-ROM, Atomic Archive: Enhanced Edition. http://www.atomicarchive.com/Docs/Hibakusha/index.shtml