

## THE POWER OF ART AND LITERATURE

Grade Levels: 9-12 and college/university

Subject Areas: Social Studies, U.S. History, World History, Art, Literature, Personal Stories, Japanese History, Asian Studies

### Materials:

- 1) Copy of *Witness to Hiroshima*
- 2) Copies of the poem “The Witness Remains” by Thich Nhat Hanh
- 3) Access to Internet for student research

The artwork and literature of survivors of Hiroshima and Nagasaki remind us of the human consequences of atomic weapons and help those of us who have not experienced an atomic bombing attempt to imagine the horror of it. In addition to being valuable documents of history, art and literature can also serve as forms of healing for the survivors who sometimes feel compelled to convey their story to future generations. As you will see in the film *Witness to Hiroshima*, art plays a central role in the telling of Mr. Tsuchiya’s testimony. In the following lessons, students are asked to think about and discuss the power of art and literature and to engage in creative projects that connect art to their own lives and communities.

### PRE-VIEWING UNIT 1: ART BY A-BOMB SURVIVORS

Ask students to view the virtual exhibit “A-bomb Drawings by Survivors” on the website of the Hiroshima Peace Memorial Museum.

[http://www.pcf.city.hiroshima.jp/virtual/VirtualMuseum\\_e/visit\\_e/vist\\_fr\\_e.html](http://www.pcf.city.hiroshima.jp/virtual/VirtualMuseum_e/visit_e/vist_fr_e.html)

There are fifteen paintings/drawings depicting various scenes survivors witnessed in Hiroshima. Students can click on each picture to see a larger version, which includes the artist/survivor’s age and how far away he or she was from the hypocenter at the time of the bombing. If there is an explanation written in the picture, this is translated as well.

- **Class Discussion:**
  - Q: What do you notice in the paintings?
  - Q: What is the nature of the artwork? Are they realistic? Abstract?
  - Q: What do you think of the artistry of the paintings?
- **In-class Activity 1:** As a group, analyze one of the paintings from the Hiroshima Peace Memorial Museum with students.
- **In-class Activity 2:** Ask students to choose one of the paintings or drawings and write about it for 10 or 15 minutes. Have students share responses with class.

- **Homework 1 (Creative):** Ask students to draw or paint a picture or create a short “comic” about a tragic episode in his or her own life, the life of a family member, or his or her community’s history trying to convey the feeling of the experience.
- **Homework 2 (Research):** Have students research the artists Iri and Toshi Maruki and be prepared to discuss them in class the following day.  
“Marukis’ Hiroshima Panels” (<http://www.aya.or.jp/%7Emarukimsn/english/genbakuE.htm>)

**Q:** What are some of the differences and similarities between the Marukis’ work and the survivors’ art that you saw in the virtual museum?

**Q:** Is the work of both groups art?

## **PRE-VIEWING UNIT 2. –POEM BY VIETNAMESE WAR SURVIVOR**

- **Class Discussion:**
  - Q:** What does it mean to be a witness or to “bear witness”?
  - Q:** How do the various usages of the word “witness” differ? How do they overlap? (Think of phrases like “witness for the prosecution” or “eye witness testimony.”)
  - Q:** What does it mean to experience an event rather than witness it?
  - Q:** What expectations do we have of a witness?
- **In-Class Activity 1:** Have a student read aloud the following poem by Tich Nhat Hanh, a Buddhist monk who was born in Vietnam.

Flarebombs bloom on the dark sky.  
A child clasps his hands and laughs.  
I hear the sound of guns,  
and the laughter dies.  
But the witness  
Remains

From *The Witness Remains, Call Me by My True Names: The Collected Poems of Thich Nhat Hanh*. Parallax Press, 1999

- **Class Discussion:**
  - Q:** Where is the narrator of the poem in relation to the event described in the beginning of the poem? The middle? The end? (Did you notice how the narrator uses the word “I” in the middle of the poem and ends with the word “remain(s)”?)
  - Q:** What does that suggest about the narrator?
  - Q:** What does the poet think a witness is?
  - Q:** Is there a responsibility for the witness who remains? If so, what are those responsibilities? If not, why not?

- **In-Class Activity 2:** Have students suggest a next line for the poem. Write them all on a large sheet of paper, without comment. Leave the poem and list of last lines tacked up.
- **Homework 1 (Creative):** Ask students to write about what “flarebombs are blooming” in their communities or other communities they know about where there is great violence, and how witnesses (and other people) respond to it. Have them share their thoughts with each other the following day. Ask if they want to add any other final lines to the poem by Tich Nhat Hanh?
- **Homework 2 (Research):** Have students research information about Tich Nhat Hanh.

## POST-VIEWING UNIT 1: DISCUSSION OF WITNESS TO HIROSHIMA AND ART

- **Class Discussion:**  
Ask for general reactions to the film.  
**Q:** In the introduction to the film the narrator tells us that often *hibakusha* (atomic bomb survivors) cannot talk about what they experienced or witnessed. Why do you think Mr. Tsuchiya, who is not an artist and never made a painting before, made these paintings 50 years after his experience?  
**Q:** What do you think of his paintings? Are they “artistic?” Are they moving?  
**Q:** Were there some commonalities with the art you saw on the Hiroshima Peace Memorial Museum website?  
**Q:** How do the words and paintings interact? If you separated the words and paintings would the story be as effective? Why? Why not?  
**Q:** Do you think Mr. Tsuchiya’s art helps you understand his story in the film? If yes, how?
- **Class Discussion:** We all take in information and communicate best in different ways: visual, aural, kinetic, verbal. Some people are more visually oriented, some prefer the written word, and others are most comfortable with sound or dance as a medium. Some are good in more than one.  
**Q:** What do you think of the way Mr. Tsuchiya told his story?  
**Q:** What did it get across to you in terms of emotion?  
**Q:** What role does music play in the film?
- **In-Class Activity 1:** Visual art and poetry are compressed forms compared to prose in history books or narrative fiction.  

Have students write for 10-15 minutes about how they would compare what they learned and felt about Hiroshima or war from the various art forms they have experienced so far with what they learned about Hiroshima and/or the Vietnam War in history texts, essays or novels. What are the values of each?

## **POST-VIEWING UNIT 2: STORYTELLING AND TESTIMONY**

Storytelling and testimony have held an important role in human society since the invention of language. Compelled to communicate with each other, we create stories and give personal testimonies to preserve history, teach moral values, entertain, and connect with others through pain and joy. Some of the creative ways humans have shared and continue to share their stories are oral storytelling, poetry, prose, songs, art, film, and blogging. The lessons below ask students to put some thought to what storytelling and personal testimonies are and how they shape history, identity, and our understanding of the world.

- **Class Discussion:**

Ask students for general response to the film, *Witness to Hiroshima*

**Q:** Did you find Mr. Tsuchiya's "story" in the film compelling? Why or why not?

**Q:** What do you think are the elements of a good story or a powerful testimony?

**Q:** What are the differences between or commonalities of "storytelling" and "testimony"?

**Q:** In what ways do storytelling and personal testimonies help people understand history?

- **In-Class Activity 1:** With students, choose a theme of great moment that they are witnessing now such as gang wars in the cities or the genocide in Darfur.

\*Have students break into the following equal sized groups (depending on class size): Dancers, poets, painters and body musicians (who make music using their bodies and voices as instruments).

\*Ask students to be witnesses in their various media to the event they chose: Painters make individual paintings, dancers and musicians make a single performance piece, poets write individual poems.

\*Share with class.

(If there is time, discuss the differences between individual responses (poets and painters) and collaborative responses (dancers and musicians).

\*How do we translate that to political action?

- **Homework 1 (Research):**

Ask students to visit the virtual exhibit "Looking at the Main Exhibits" on the website of the Hiroshima Peace Memorial Museum. Students may find a map of Hiroshima that has dots on which they can click or links to the exhibits listed below. Either way, pop-up "video" boxes that tell the stories behind the items featured and the people who owned them will appear. The exhibits include photos, diaries, clothing, a charred lunchbox, and other artifacts.

Hiroshima Prefectural Girls High School

Hair that Fell from Hiroko Yamashita's Head

First Municipal Girls' High School

Belongings of Three Municipal Junior High School Students

First-year Student at Second Hiroshima Prefectural Junior High  
Children's Dress and National Railway Ticket Dated August 6  
A Girder of the Aioi Bridge  
Shin's Tricycle

LOOK AT EXHIBITS

[http://www.pcf.city.hiroshima.jp/virtual/VirtualMuseum\\_e/visit\\_e/vist\\_fr\\_e.html](http://www.pcf.city.hiroshima.jp/virtual/VirtualMuseum_e/visit_e/vist_fr_e.html)

- **Class Discussion:**

**Q:** Did you notice any similarities in the stories of the students you read about on the Hiroshima Peace Memorial Museum and Mr. Tsuchiya's? What were they?

**Q:** Tich Nhat Hanh in the very act of writing his poem tells us what he thinks the role of the witness is. What is it? (To remember and remind, to tell the story, to act).

**Q:** In what ways are he and Keiji Tsuchiya alike? Different? What lessons did each take away from their experience of horror?

- **Homework 2 (Creative/Research):** Ask a parent, neighborhood merchant, community elder, or religious leader to tell you a story about something important that he or she witnessed which she or he would like the world to remember. Tape or write the story and share it with the class.