

L e t ' s T h i n k a b o u t ' P e a c e '

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I am a junior high school teacher in Hiroshima, Japan. I met about twenty teachers from Chugoku District at a conference this spring. Our group also included two teachers from Tottori prefecture. We were divided into six groups and instructed to create teaching materials which develop students' international understanding. We prepared many kinds of things for visiting the USA during summer vacation.

This report is about our preparations and experiences in Japan and the USA that contributed to the creation of new teaching materials about peace.

During our trip to the USA, we visited Minneapolis, Minnesota for three days, Washington, D.C., for two days and Greenville, North Carolina for seven days. We had American colleagues who supported us in Minneapolis and Greenville.

《 In Japan 》

We discussed what kind of materials we should make and what kinds of field work we should do in the USA.

What kind of theme would you like to emphasize or what kinds of field work would you like to do?

We decided to focus on the theme of 'peace' because 1995 marked the 50th anniversary of the end of World War II, and we wanted to get some ideas about peace from interview with Americans. We planned to have interviews with American students in their classrooms and to have interviews with American teachers about how they develop peace education. We sent our plan to our American colleagues and asked if it seemed feasible. Our colleagues in the USA replied that our plan would be rather difficult to realize.

Do you know why it would be difficult to realize our plan?

One reason was our English. Our English was not good enough to have deep communication with Americans.

The biggest problem, however, was that when we were to visit the USA, it would be summer vacation. Hence, students would not be in school, and teachers would be too busy preparing for the new term to have time to for interviews.

We found that their life during summer vacation in the USA was very different from ours. We thought about sending questionnaires and asking American students to write essays about peace, but we were told that this plan was also difficult because it was the end of June and students had already finished their school year.

It was at this impasse that a teacher from another group advised us.

What kind of advice was it?

It was that we could get American students' essays not at school but at 'summer school.' He said that there are many kinds of summer school in the USA and it would be possible to collect American students' essays there. We were very glad to find a new way and sent questionnaires to

our American colleagues. We hoped that we could get many essays.

Our other job was to collect Japanese students' essays about peace. We got our students to write essays about 'peace' and translated them.

Japanese students listened to John Lennon's song 'Imagine' and learned about his wish for peace. After that, the students wrote their opinions. I got my students to write their essays in Japanese, and the other teachers got their students to write in English. I felt English essays would be better than Japanese essays.

Why were English essays better?

There were two reasons. One was that it was very difficult to translate students' essays into English. That work required huge labor and too much time. The other was that even essays which were not perfect were enough to convey students' ideas if we added some comments to the essays.

Now we took 123 essays to the USA!

《 In Minneapolis 》

Our first visit was Minneapolis in Minnesota. We met our American colleague, Ms. Elizabeth Simmer, who had a one-year-old boy and had visited Japan once. She collected seven essays from different generations about 'dropping atomic bombs,' and she explained them to us. At first, I was afraid that I would not understand English, but I became more hopeful and confident after I saw and listened to Ms. Simmer.

Why did I get hopeful even though I didn't understand English very well?

The reason was that though I feared I would not be able to speak with Ms. Simmer, I found that she never viewed me as an inferior person. She was rather modest. I was moved by her attitude. Therefore, I felt comfortable asking questions to her.

We worked very hard to translate the essays which Ms. Simmer had passed to us. We wanted to ask as many questions as possible during our short stay in Minnesota.

We particularly interested in two essays that were written by older people. They were veterans of World War II. We wanted to know how they felt about the dropping of atomic bombs. Men were Ms. Simmer's father and father-in-law.

The essays are as follows:

I was discharged from the Navy with a rating of AMM3/c and an Aviation Gunner on July 21, 1945. This was almost a month before the hostilities ceased. My discharge was allowed as my two brothers, both Marine pilots, were killed due to the Japanese war machine. My college roommate was killed, as a bombardier in a B-29, over Tokyo. The student manager of our high school basketball team died on the march from Bataan. I knew fellow gunners in TBF's and SBC's who were killed during torpedo attacks. I knew men on ships who were killed by Kamikaze pilots. ... Our island-hopping proved to us we could get the job done. We could win. We would win. The Japanese who would die for his Emperor on Okinawa would be more stubbornly resistant on his homeland soil. Killing of civilians, like in the firestorms of Tokyo, were accepted by the military, although I do not recall how they were publicized in the press. So the atomic bomb was dropped.

How did we feel?

Relief! There was to be an end of bloodshed. Both theirs, and ours. With the WARTIME feelings, we were more concerned about OUR blood than THEIRS. That is the way it was.

(Robert Wagner, 71, Male)

The Japanese are wonderful people with a rich heritage, but they had nothing to say when Tojo and the military group attacked Pearl Harbor. As the war progressed, it became evident that the Japanese forces were conditioned never to surrender. The Americans lost 30,000 men taking Iwo Jima. As to the bomb, warning was of no avail.

After Hiroshima, the people were not told, and since there was no surrender gesture, there was no alternative. The way Japan was fortified, and mired, it would have cost the Americans more than 300,000 lives to take Japan.

(Leo Simmer, 78, Male)

How do you feel when reading these two essays?

We were very interested in this comment by Mr. Wagner:

"With the WARTIME feelings, we were more concerned about OUR blood than THEIRS." It is a very natural feeling during wartime, but this phrase moved us deeply!

We also asked Ms. Simmer to give some comments about Mr. Simmer's essay. He is her father. His essay said, "There was no alternative [but to drop the atomic bombs]." She answered, "It is unavoidable for him to think like that concerning his experience in World War II."

She also told us about her experience. When she wished to go to Japan to work as an assistant English teacher, her father objected and said, "Why do you want to go to Japan?"

Mr. Simmer also could have had the same kind of experience in the World War II as Mr. Wagner and he could have had the same kind of feelings, namely that Japan is a country of the enemy. But Mr. Simmer's essay said that the Japanese were wonderful people with a rich heritage.

Mr. Simmer said, "The Japanese are wonderful people with a rich heritage." He appreciates Japan now. What has changed his mind?

Ms. Simmer explains it this way:

He had hated Japan for a long time. But since I got interested in Japan and went to Japan, something has changed little by little in his mind. I told many things about Japan to my father. He also heard about Japan from his friends. As he knows Japan and Japanese people more deeply, his mind has gradually changed.

"Is it really possible that people who hurt during the war could overcome hatred of the other and understand each other?" we had wondered until we heard her talk. But her talk encouraged us very much. We read the transcription of her talk again and again, and talked about the possibility of international understanding with great joy.

But we also recognized a very big problem. Ms. Simmer explained the problem this way:

It is not easy to change their minds by themselves. It would be possible for open-minded people or highly-educated people to change their minds by themselves, but not so many.

Examples like my father's case are uncommon.

《 In Washington, D.C.》

We flew to Washington, D.C., remembering Minnesota. I saw the buildings of Washington, D.C., through trees, and when I got out of the airport, I saw the scenery of the big city and I felt something wonderful.

Washington, D.C., is the capital city of the USA and has many federal buildings, memorials and museums.

If you visited Washington, D.C., where would you like to visit?

We decided to go to two places.

Where are we going in Washington, D.C.?

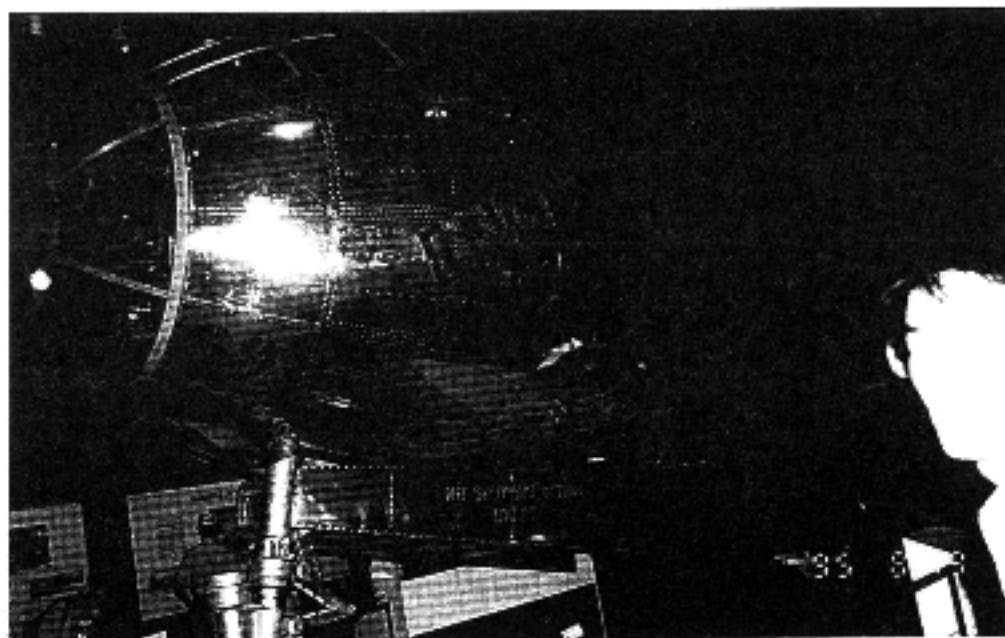


Photo 1 is from the Holocaust Memorial Museum. There are many articles, photographs and videos which document the genocide carried out by Nazis against European Jews. We waited in line and waited for three hours until the museum opened. We were very surprised that we could not see the end of the line when the museum opened.

Photo 2 is from the Enola Gay Exhibition at the Smithsonian Institution's Air and Space Museum. This exhibition made big news all over the world because of the debate in the USA over whether the museum should have shown the destruction and suffering caused by dropping the atomic bombs on Hiroshima and Nagasaki. In the end, the damage from the bombs was not exhibited, but we wanted to see the exhibition with our own eyes and wanted to see how people reacted to the exhibition. The museum was so crowded that we could not walk around freely, and we had to wait two hours to get tickets for the exhibition.

At both the Holocaust Memorial Museum and the Enola Gay Exhibition, we felt that people viewed the exhibition very seriously. I could understand their seriousness at the Holocaust Memorial Museum because the articles and photographs were extremely shocking. But at the Enola Gay Exhibition, though the articles and photographs were not so shocking, people looked very interested and serious. We learned that in Washington, D.C., there were many different opinions about the dropping of the atomic bombs, and the Smithsonian's exhibition about it. Clearly, many people in the USA have given a great deal of thought to this issue.

《 In Greenville 》

Our hopes for developing international understanding increased in Minnesota and Washington, D.C. But we knew that Ms. Simmer's words presented us with a problem to be solved. As we saw it, our task would involve the following:

We needed to open up our minds to develop real international understanding.

○ What do we teachers have to do to encourage international understanding among junior high school students?

○ What kinds of efforts are American teachers making to develop mutual understanding? This seemed an interesting question in light of the fact that America is a multiracial nation.

We flew to Greenville, North Carolina, thinking about these questions. Our colleague there was Dr. Bell, an instructor at East Carolina University (E.C.U.). We talked to him about our purpose for visiting the USA and told him our questions. We also gave him the Japanese students' essays. He gave us the American students' essays. He had collected about thirty-five essays from students at a summer school called 'Satori.' After reading the essays, we talked about our schedule and about how to make progress in our study.

Do you think there were differences between American and Japanese students' essays?

If so, what do you think were some of the differences?

Here are some typical opinions:

Which is an American student's essay and which is a Japanese student's essay?

Essay 1

I wish for peace all over the world. My dream is to live in a world where there is no war and violence. Everyone just gets along very well. It doesn't matter what race you are. To make this dream come true, we should all work together and seek first to understand then to be understood. We should all try to understand and learn one another's culture. When you understand one's beliefs through his or her point of view (through their glasses), you can somehow try to understand that particular culture.

I wish for all the countries to get along and never have wars. A person should try to understand and appreciate one's culture. Sometimes a person can make a difference so that way we should all try to change ourselves. I wish for the countries to help one another and try to solve conflicts in a way in which no one gets hurt and everyone agrees. We should all sharpen our wits before we do anything. We should all be proactive, so that way we can all make a peaceful world, where no one hurts anyone and everyone is in peace and happiness.

Essay 2

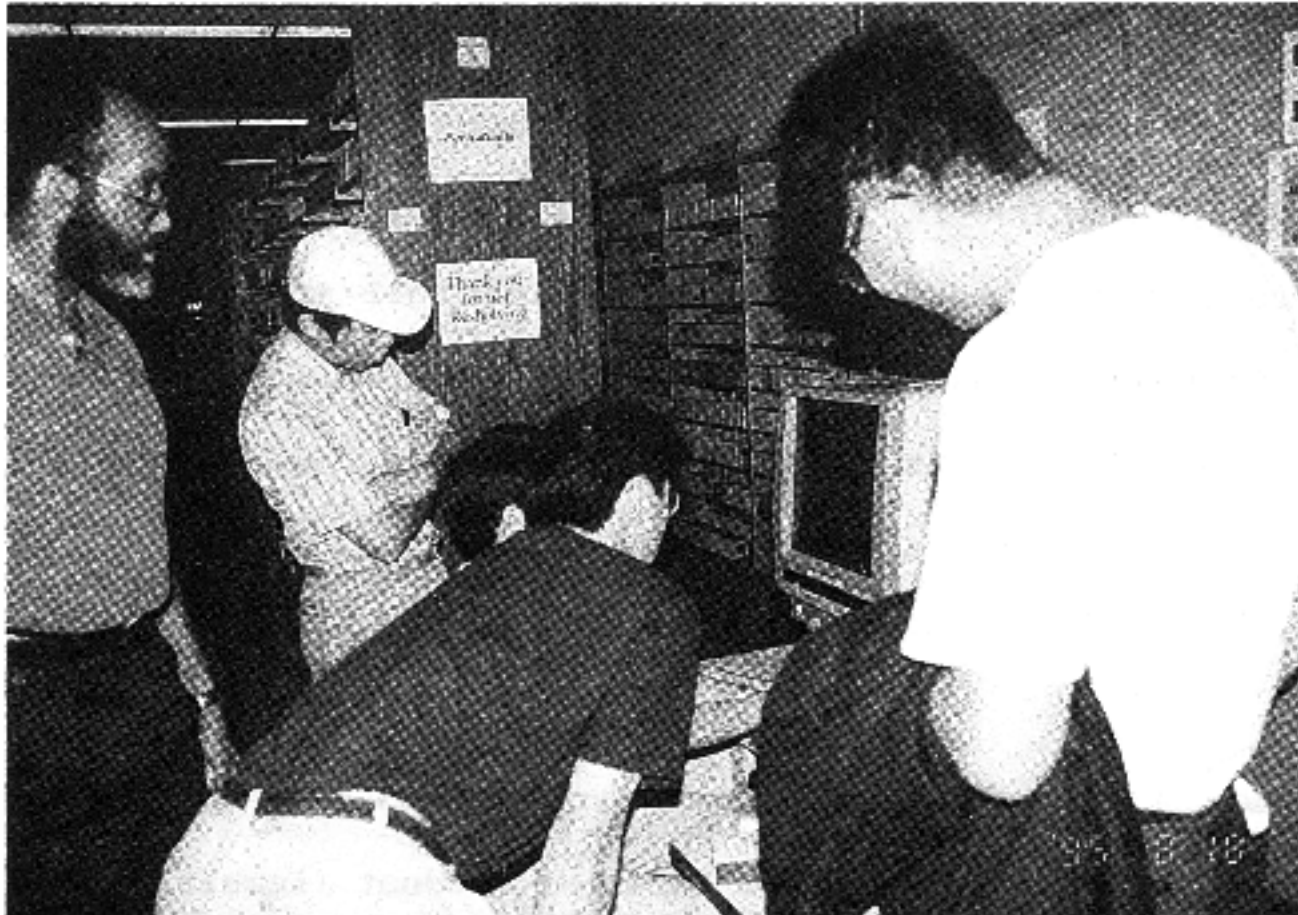
I hope all the people live in peace. We are all equal. But the real world is not equal. Some people are rich and some are poor. Some are healthy and some are sick. I think rich people should help poor people and healthy people should help sick people. But rich people are often interested in only their own profit. I feel it is strange. I think it is natural that people help each other because we are living on the same planet. That all the people in the world live in peace means real world peace. But this is a too big job for us. Our job is that in the class room, in the community, we should help each other and make our friends happy.

Essay 1 is by Rashmi Bisen, an American student (Female, 14) and essay 2 is by Fumi Kameyama, a Japanese student (Female, 14). In general, the words, 'different culture,' appear often in the American students' essays, but not in the Japanese students' essays. This is a big difference.

We found some differences like that but we found that both groups of students wish for a world in which we could support each other and live in peace.

We thought that we could find better ways to develop international understanding by focusing similarities between Japanese and Americans. Dr. Bell agreed with us and advised us to survey similarities between how American and Japanese people viewed their enemies during wartime. During World War II, Japanese used an expression, 'Kichiku Bei-Ei,' which means, 'Americans and Europeans are beasts' (German and Italian were excluded from this classification). Were there any slogans like this in the USA during wartime? We hurried to the library to try to find out.

We are at the library. What could we look at to search for racist or dehumanizing wartime propaganda?



There is a microfilm library in the E.C.U. Library which includes a large number of microfilms of old newspapers. You can look at the microfilms and photocopy what you need. We were very surprised that libraries in the USA had huge amount of information and that students could make use of it any time.

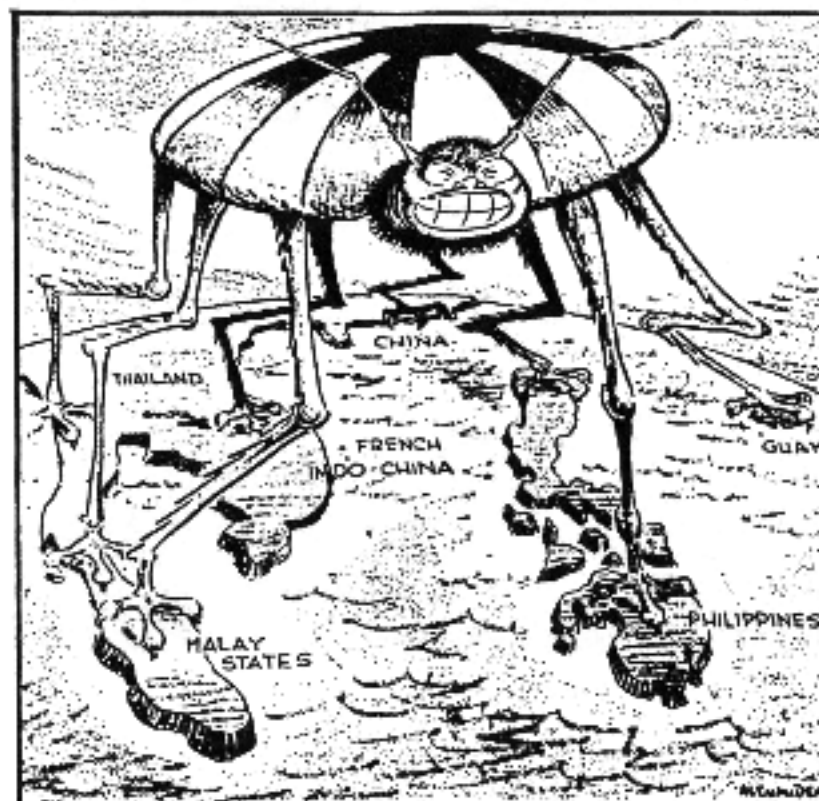
We surveyed the Washington Post and New York Times from 1941 to 1945, and Time and Life, magazines from the same period, We found several cartoons in these publications.

Do you know what these cartoons show?

Cartoon from Washington Post (February 24, 1942)



Cartoon from Time (January 12, 1942)



Do you see some similarities between these two cartoons?

Both cartoons dehumanized Japanese (or German and Italian). These kinds of images were spread all over America following the Japanese attack of Pearl Harbor Attack.

Were the same kinds of cartoons disseminated in Japan?

We looked for the same kinds of cartoons after coming back to Japan but we couldn't find any about to Americans. However, we did find an advertisement which dehumanized British soldiers. These were disseminated to people in Myanmar.



Are there any similarities between American and Japanese cartoons?

Yes, both the Japanese and American cartoons dehumanized the enemy. The feelings of hatred can remain for a long time, as in the cases of Mr. Simmer and Mr. Wagner. Here we recalled the question raised by Ms. Simmer.

Can only a few people really change their minds and hating others?

We knew it would be difficult for people who experienced the war to change their minds. But how about younger generations? They all seem to want to live in a peaceful world.

What do we teachers have to do to help realize their dream?

We asked Mr. Bell for advice about this task. He suggested that we interview American teachers and ask them to offer suggestions. Dr. Bell introduced us to three high school teachers of J. H. Rose High School in Greenville. We visited them and conducted interviews.

First, we asked them to read the American and Japanese students' essays. Next, we asked one question: "What do you hope to impart to young Americans and Japanese?" They answered as follows:

There are many things that I would like to say to Japanese students concerning peace, but I will only mention the three ideas I consider the most significant.

1) "Wars are started by only old men but fought by young men." This quote is important because it tells young people who will be expected

to bear the brunt of a war and that it is necessary to choose your leaders wisely and to question their decisions and not just accept them blindly. This quote is also a good one to remember because today's young people become tomorrow's "old" leaders.

2) World peace starts at home. History shows us that countries that condone violence tend to spread their violence to other countries. If people will treat each other with kindness, then kindness will spread to other people.

3) While it would be nice if everyone were peaceful, it is very unlikely that this will happen. While countries should foster peace between themselves and the rest of the world, they should be ever vigilant against leaders who are bent on spreading destruction and these individuals should be dealt with firmly and swiftly. War should be avoided, but at times force quickly used is better than appeasement which can lead to much worse suffering. (Mr. Jay Jester)

Today, we have many students who would not fight for this country because they do not have respect for being an American citizen. They do not feel ownership of America. They feel that they just exist. I wish our students felt they would not fight for this country because they felt war would not solve the problems.

John F. Kennedy said, "Ask not what this country can do for you, but what you can do for your country."

I wish I could communicate better with our guests. I wish to share many differences our students have within our school building. It is time for American students to think more of their responsibilities to themselves, so that after their schooling is over, they will move into a healthy adulthood and share their knowledge with those who

will follow them.

Love, understanding, and caring for the well-being of all cultures is the most important item that a student could learn. With this information, wars are seen as pointless. We should talk and listen to each other, and come to know who we are and respect each other's way of life.

(Ms. Vickie Anderson)

I am very pleased to learn that many of you are aware that peace in the world will only come with communication and respect for all other human beings. I agree.

I feel that only by studying other cultures and understanding why they are like they are we can appreciate the differences we all have. Peace will come when each person is respected as an individual with the right to their own opinion.

We are all different - not right or wrong - just different. Do not discriminate because someone is different - appreciate the difference and learn from it.

We all need to work hard to achieve peace in the world.

(Ms. Phyllis Wooten)

What do you think of the opinions of these three teachers?

America is a multiracial nation, and there are students who are from different races and have different cultural backgrounds. Therefore, we thought that it would be very important to discuss with teachers the idea of

respecting other cultures and the differences between individuals or groups.

Ms. Anderson told us about the daily life of her students.

American students do not think about a war being fought on our homeland. Most of the wars that they relate to were fought in other countries. For this reason, they feel that there will not be a war here in our country. Our students are not really aware of what a war would be like, if fought in the United States. Our students are aware of the wars that are fought here at home. These wars of poverty, drugs, divorce, murders, and other things are what our students can relate to.

We have many students who come to school in the morning and have not had a meal since they left school the day before. School is a safe environment for them. We have students who see crimes in their neighborhoods ranging from shootings to drug deals. Sometimes, our students are involved in these crimes so that they can survive among their people.

We were very shocked to hear that American students were involved in serious crimes.

And Ms. Wooten said to us as follows:

It is very difficult to develop mutual understanding among students with different backgrounds. For example, there are many Christians in this school. When we accept that they celebrate a holiday for the reason of religion, we also have to accept that students

with different religions celebrate their holidays.

We are trying to demonstrate respect for the diversity of the students in class.

Mr. Jester, a social study teacher, had this to say about his classroom efforts to promote cross-cultural understanding:

In the study of world history there are many opportunities to develop these attitudes in our students. It is important to destroy ethnocentric attitudes. This can be done by teaching about other cultures in a respectful, dignified way. It is important for students to learn that to be different is not stupid. If students see that other cultures have accomplished great things and have faced the same problems as us, it will help develop the value that all people are equal and that it is necessary to understand different cultures. The lessons of history also provide many opportunities to develop these values. The Holocaust, the dropping of the atomic bombs, the horror of industrialized war during World War I, the impact of western imperialism, and the wars of the Protestant reformation, if taught from a facial and a human perspective, will serve as springboards for lessons on human values.

I focus on discussion to get the students to realize the value of learning history. First, students read paragraphs written about historical facts or ideas of people at that time and grasp what the paragraph means. Next, they discuss how the historical facts are related to our daily life. I think that in this way students can know the meaning of learning.

We now understood that to be different is natural, and people can understand each other through accepting the goodness of being different.

We know that we are all different from each other. However, it is very difficult to recognize that to be different is wonderful or that we are all wonderful beings.

What do we have to do in our daily lives?

This is a very big question related to our way of thinking and to how we are going to live. I began wondering how my life had been and how my life would be. What shall I expect students to do? I want to tell them about my experience in the USA. I want to ask these questions to my students. How would they answer?

The final day in Greenville came. We went to Dr. Bell's office to say thank you. He was always calm and never forced his opinion on us. Finally, he left us with these words:

Knowledge leads to respect; respect leads to tolerance; tolerance is the path to peace.

Do you know what he means?

He explained it like this: Peace is created only when people in various situations can understand each other. To realize this we need three things. First, we have to know about different cultures. Second, we should respect these cultures. And third, we should try to accept them with our hearts. In addition, we also have to respect our own culture, and we must gain as much of the knowledge about it as possible.

When I got back to the hotel after our last day of interviews in Greenville, I found I had received a letter from Ms. Simmer in Minneapolis.

It was her message to the Japanese junior high school students who had written their opinions about peace.

The world we live in is becoming smaller and smaller. I can reach Japan in only 12 hours by plane. You can travel to Australia in a very short time.

For this reason, I think peace in our world is very important. I depend on you for something and your country depends on China. China depends on Russia and so on. Our world is like a circle. If we fight or break the circle, it will not be complete. What can we do?

You can do volunteer work to help older people or handicapped people or clean up the beach or park or somewhere. It is nice to become a "pen-pal" with someone from another country or another part of Japan, or to become a nature pen-pal by sending a nature package to another part of Japan so you can appreciate nature more. You should read about Bosnia and other countries now at war, and teach it to your friends and family. Usually there are many opinions. Finally, try to send something to war victims.

Elizabeth Simmer

《 The End of The Trip 》

I have learned so many things through this fieldwork. I think that each experience has changed my ideas about international understanding. So far I have tried to think of other countries and nations with the point of view that we are so different. But, through the opinions written by the junior high school students in America and Japan, I found that this is not enough. Contrary to my expectations, I discovered that students in both countries have similar ideas about peace and about international understanding.

Surely, Japan and America have many differences. But to know the differences is not enough. I think that we have to accept our differences and pay attention to the importance of talking together and thinking together to create a peaceful world. I have made up my mind to live my life with this idea in mind.

This is what I have come to think about peace. Let's all try to think about peace!

[Supplement]

This is one of the teaching plans we made for junior high school students.

《 The 1st Stage 》

1. Listen to John Lennon's song 'Imagine.'
2. Get students to state feelings or impressions.
3. Write essays about peace.

《 The 2nd Stage 》

1. Read the statements of victims of the atomic bombs and state their feelings.
2. Discuss the similarities between the cartoons from American newspapers and the advertisement that the Japanese Army distributed.
3. Read essays of the veterans who experienced the war and discuss them.
4. Think what to do to build a nation which would never have wars and have students write their opinions.

《 The 3rd Stage 》

1. Share the essays written in the previous class (see 2nd stage, step 4) and discuss them.
2. Read the essays of American and Japanese students and discuss them.

《 The 3rd Stage 》

1. Discuss what we should do to develop international understanding.