

CONTEMPORARY LITERATURE

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**THE ATOMIC BOMB IN JAPANESE CHILDREN'S
AND YOUNG PEOPLE'S BOOKS**

During WWII, US forces dropped atomic bombs on Hiroshima and Nagasaki and many people lost their lives. Many children's and young people's books have been published to convey the fear of the atomic bomb and war. These books are nonfiction and written by the victims of the bombs or written from the general perspective of the Japanese. However, recently, there are books which give not only the Japanese perspective, but also give the perspective from other countries such as the United States. In this paper, we introduce 4 books. Two books are nonfiction and written from the perspective of Japanese people. The other two books are fiction and written from multiple perspectives. After introducing the books, we would like to consider the background of the appearance of such books.

The Atomic bomb depicted in contemporary Literature

Firstly, I will introduce two children's books '*Boku ha Manin Densha de Genbaku wo Abita*', in English, 'I was exposed to the atomic bomb on a crowded train' and '*Ishibumi*', in English, 'Monument.' These books were written by the victims of the atomic bombs or written about the Japanese victims.

'I was exposed to the atomic bomb on a crowded train' is written from the perspective of an 11 year old boy who experienced the bombing of Hiroshima. When the atomic bombs were dropped in Hiroshima, he was near the ground zero but for many unexplained reasons he was not exposed to high radiation and miraculously survived. In this book, the boy tells about the vivid damage of the atomic bomb and the fear of it he saw. The boy got out of the crowded train and headed to his grandmother's house with his mother right after the bombing. During the journey, he saw several scenes of hell. All parts of the story are very shocking, but I'd like to quote some of the most shocking parts.

"A person whose broken bone has broken through skin and muscle and is sticking out. A person with blood sticking to them. A person whose flesh is cracking and popping out like aspirations".

"The person did not have eyes. The part in which eyes should be placed became dark holes. ... The eyeballs popped out and hung at his cheeks."

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After that, his mother and sister, who seemed to be safe died from the effects of radiation. The main character, the boy, has lived more than 70 years but still, he is suffering from disease from the bomb.

“Monument” is also one of the representative young books which tell us the tragedy of the events soon after the atomic bombing. This book consists of records of the deaths of all the first-year boys at a certain middle school. The records are made from their parents’ testimonies and letters and describe the situation of each student in detail. By describing in them detail, the actions of each student after the bombing, how they died, and the time of their deaths, with full names and photos of the students’ faces, the book gives the reader a sense that each person who died in the atomic bombing was alive, and a sense of loss that conveys that everyone’s life ended in an instant. All the students who were able to see their families after the bombing were so badly burned that their faces were no longer recognizable, and even the longest-lived student died within a week of the bombing and the first-grade boys in the junior high school were wiped out entirely.

In this way, many books have been published that tell the tragedy of the atomic bomb. These books have something in common. One is that they are non-fiction, and the other is that they are drawn from the perspective of the Japanese who were bombed at that time. It can convey the horrific events that happened, but the perspective of capturing the atomic bomb is very one-sided, and it is impossible to know how the decision was made to drop the bomb. Also, as the books introduced peace education at Japanese schools, there is a tendency to emphasize the fact that the atomic bomb was dropped on Japan and the fact that so many people were killed, in addition to emphasizing the damage caused by the atomic bombs. There are few opportunities to think about the background of why the atomic bomb was dropped in the first place. Because of this kind of education and books, Japanese children often have negative thoughts about the dropping of the atomic bomb from an early age. However, decades after the war, the ability to see the war and the world from a broader perspective may change the way we see and think about the atomic bomb. There are people in the world who think that dropping an atomic bomb was a good decision. There are many different views on the atomic bombings. I know that it is important to know about how awful the atomic bomb was but is it enough to just *know* about it? Shouldn’t we also consider the background of the atomic bombings or think about the atomic bombing from different perspectives?

Youth Literature about the Atomic Bomb

I am going to introduce two books that have a different emphasis with ‘I was exposed to the atomic bomb on a crowded train’ and ‘Monument.’

The first book is ‘Panpukin!’ in English ‘Pumpkin!’ The author of this book is one of the famous juvenile writers in Japan, Hiroko Reijo. This book is written from the perspective of Hiroka. She is the main character in this book and is in the 5th grade in elementary school. The importance of the story is that the 49 “pumpkin bombs” were dropped on various parts of Japan during the final year of the war in 1945. Pumpkin bombs are known as dummy bombs of the atomic bomb, which was dropped in Nagasaki on August 9th, 1945, because the two bombs’ shapes are very similar. Hiroka decided to search about pumpkin bombs and

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put them together in one newspaper as independent research during the summer vacation. Through research about the reasons why pumpkin bombs were dropped and know the historical background, Hiroka noticed that there are a lot of facts that she did not know, and the more she investigated it, the more she could not figure out who in the world was at fault for dropping bombs and for WWII. In this book, we can see her struggle with the war. For example, when she learned that the US dropped pumpkin bombs to practice dropping an atomic bomb, and many people died because of the pumpkin bombs, she wondered if the US was to blame. However, once she researched why the US dropped atomic bombs on Japan, she found out that Japan did very awful things to the Asian countries, so the U.S. dropped atomic bombs. In this way, this book makes readers think about ‘What is war?’, ‘What are atomic bombs?’, ‘Who was at fault?’ through the perspective of Hiroka.

Next, I would like to introduce ‘*Aru Haretahi no Natsu no Sora*’, in English, ‘On A Bright Summer Morning.’ This book is another young book that also make readers think about dropping the atomic bombs on Japan during WWII. In this book, eight American high school students are divided into two groups: one pro-atomic bomb, and the other anti-atomic bomb, and they debate four times about the atomic bombs dropped on Hiroshima and Nagasaki. The eight debaters are from a variety of backgrounds, Chinese, Jewish, African, and the main character May, who is half Japanese and half Irish American. Through reading this book, readers can learn about the atomic bombing not only from the standpoint of Japanese people but also from the standpoint of the U.S. and minorities. Moreover, the contents make us think about the atomic bombing once again. This book, like “Pumpkin!”, does not force readers to have a positive or negative opinion about the atomic bombings, but rather makes them think about it.

What these two books have in common is that they make us think about the atomic bombings through learning about the background of the bombings from the perspective of today’s youth and the authors do not force their perspective about atomic bombings on the readers. ‘I was exposed to the atomic bomb on a crowded train’ and ‘Monument’ are written by the atomic bomb victims or written about the Japanese victims, so it is inevitable that readers have the idea that Japan is the victim of the atomic bombing. On the other hand, ‘Pumpkin!’ and ‘On A Bright Summer Morning’ makes you think about the atomic bombings from the standpoint of many countries: Japan, where the atomic bombs were dropped, and the United States, which dropped them and other countries. I think these books are trying to convey that it is important not only to know the fact that the atomic bombs were dropped, but also to know why the bombs were dropped, the historical background, and the thoughts of other countries. When I think about why these books came out, I think one of the reasons is the attitude of understanding each other’s position as globalization progresses. Today, in one country, so many people have different historical backgrounds, so they understand one historical event such as the atomic bombing in Japan differently. However, to live together in one country peacefully, it is necessary to understand the people who have a different opinion from us. It is important to make efforts to understand the background of why people have thought like that, so I think these books came out. What do you think about the atomic bombing in Japan in 1945?

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