

# Lesson Three: Hibakusha and Art

Subjects: Art, Photography, History, Citizenship, and Primary Education (Art, History, SMSC)

## OVERVIEW

Students hear testimonies of atomic bomb survivors and learn about the 'Hibakusha' of Japan. They produce their own artwork in response to what they've heard, and compare their pieces to those by Hibakusha.

## MATERIALS

Oil pastels / Charcoal sticks / Paper or Sketchbooks / PowerPoint

## ROOM LAYOUT – N/A

## LEARNING OBJECTIVES

- All students will be able to **describe** the Hibakusha, the atomic bombings of Japan and the long-lasting impact of radiation (on people).
- Most students will be able to **articulate** the importance of art in representing different voices or experiences, or in activism, therapy and social change.
- Some students will **make connections** between Hibakusha artwork and other artists or techniques that they have studied.

Note: This lesson plan works with sensitive material regarding death, atomic bombings, and the impacts of radiation, which could cause distress. Teacher discretion is advised, especially where younger children, students with East Asian heritage, or students with experience of war are involved.

## INTRODUCTION AND STARTER (10 – 15 minutes)

Students listen to the testimony of Akihiro Takahashi, a survivor of the atomic bombing of Hiroshima. This can also be read aloud if a student volunteers. (Mr Takahashi's testimony, along with other sources, is provided in our supporting materials, see p.34) Allow 1 minute of reflection.

- Ask students to share any responses they have to the testimonies. Listen to the responses and write any key words and themes on the board or flipchart, focussing on 'big ideas/concepts'
- Using our PowerPoint to help: fill any gaps in the students' knowledge about the atomic bombings of Japan; introduce the term 'Hibakusha' and provide information about the lives of those affected.

Note: This can also be treated as a joint learning experience for the teacher and the students – it can be helpful to acknowledge that the subject matter is 'new', as this can encourage more honest responses to the stimuli. For more support, see p.36.

## MAIN ACTIVITY (35 – 40 minutes)

- Using charcoal and oil pastels, the students explore their own responses to the testimonies.
- They could focus on representing the specific experiences detailed in the texts, or the 'bigger' ideas such as 'disaster', 'victimhood', 'survival', 'hope' etc., which were written on the board during the Starter activity.
- During the activity, walk around the room and talk to students about what they are drawing and why. Make links between what they are doing, the testimonies they've already heard, and any ideas that emerged from the previous discussion. Testimony could be displayed via a projector or screen as a reminder to the students.

Note: This could also be done as a group study.

## PLENARY (10 mins or less)

The class reconvenes.

- Allow 1 minute of reflection. With the aid of our PowerPoint, show students actual examples of Hibakusha art. You can look more closely at the work of a particular artist(s) (e.g. Iri and Toshi Maruki and the Hiroshima Panels), by also disclosing their biography/-ies and the reception of their work (see our supporting material).
- The class reflects on the differences between their own work and that of the Hibakusha artwork, noting style, technique, and different cultural influences. Perhaps their work is under or over dramatized in contrast with the artworks they now see (why might this be?).
- Using the words written on the board or flipchart, ask the students to comment on how a certain concept or idea is represented in the class' artworks, in comparison to the Hibakusha artwork. This can be done in groups of 4 or 5.
- Ask: for a lot of Hibakusha, it took many years before they were able to produce art relating to their experiences, what might have influenced their silence? / their decision to begin making art?
- Ask: are the artworks political? If so, why? If not, why not?
- Ask: did you know about the atomic bombings before today's lesson? What is the role of artwork in remembering events/documenting social history? Can we learn new things about historic events through art? Why (not)?

### **EXTENSION (Homework or subsequent lesson ideas)**

- Students create a page in their sketchbooks that compares what they created in the lesson to a specific Hibakusha artwork (a comparative study).
- Alternatively, students compare the works of Aboriginal nuclear test survivors, with those of the Hibakusha (see: [www.blackmistburntcountry.com.au](http://www.blackmistburntcountry.com.au))
- Students undertake a close study of an Hibakusha artist or a set of paintings, in their sketchbook, including the recreating of a piece.
- Students research the work of Rauschenberg and/or Peter Kennard (Kennard is particularly apt for photography), to see how nuclear weapons inspired artists in very different ways, in part owing to different cultural contexts, and materials.
- Students could research 'art as therapy', and apply this understanding to Hibakusha art.
- Our teaching pack, Truman on Trial would complement this lesson. It investigates the bombings of Hiroshima and Nagasaki, featuring a 'mock trial' of President Truman, who chose to drop the atomic bombs. Available via our website.

### **ENRICHMENT**

- There are few permanent collections of Hibakusha art in the UK, however touring exhibitions have visited the UK in the past. Is there an exhibition of survivors' art, therapeutic art, or other political art in your area at the moment?
- Students research, sign and/or share the 'Appeal of the Hibakusha': <https://hibakusha-appeal.net/english/>

### **DIFFERENTIATION / PRIMARY EDUCATION**

This lesson is intended to be delivered for 60-minutes but could also fit into your own scheme of work, whether as a stimulus for students, as a creative exploration lasting several lessons, or for a thematic focus e.g. 'memory', 'trauma'.

We have provided a range of testimonies and stimuli to use in this lesson, and you might have concerns about using these with younger children. The format of the lesson plan itself can nonetheless be used with primary school classes. Both our supporting material, and primary-level PowerPoint can help teachers tackle this lesson.

### **DISPLAY SUGGESTIONS FOR PRIMARY SCHOOLS**

- Build a nuclear explosion or mushroom cloud in the centre of the display using coloured paper (black, white, red, orange and yellow). The paper could be cut into strips and pinned onto the wall so that it stands out from it. You can also experiment with scrunching the paper for a more 3-D effect in the mushroom cloud. Around the explosion, the students' artwork can be exhibited.
- A simpler and bolder option would be to source Japanese/East Asian patterns and use these as a background against which the students' artwork can be pinned.

## Testimonies:

Note: many Hibakusha testimonies directly reference bombings, suffering and death, which can be distressing to some pupils, particularly those with experience of war, trauma, or those of East Asian heritage. Teacher discretion is advised when using testimonies in the classroom.

### **Akihiro Takahashi, Former Director of Hiroshima Peace Memorial Museum, addressing 6th General Conference of Mayors for Peace, August 2005, Hiroshima.**

**"**On August 6th, 1945 at 8.15 am, the world's first atomic bomb exploded over Hiroshima. I was 14 years old then. I was in a playground about 1.4 kilometers away from the hypocenter when the bomb exploded. At the instant of the explosion, a fireball with a temperature of several million degrees Celsius rose into the sky. The center of the explosion – around the A-bomb dome – was filled with extremely high heat of 3,000 to 4,000 degrees Celsius.

A shock wave with the pressure of several hundred thousand atmospheres spread in all directions. Following the shockwave was an extremely strong wind. Its maximum instantaneous wind velocity peaked at [nearly 1,000 miles per hour].

The sky was clear in that morning. The B-29 airplane approached just above us leaving a beautiful vapor trail. Believing we were secure and safe, we looked up at the flying airplane while pointing at the sky. Then our teacher came out of the staff room and our class president called out, 'Gather around! Fall in!' At that particular instant, with an incredible noise, complete darkness covered my eyes for a second. They say there was a flash but I do not remember it. From what I have heard, it was a pale blue light bursting out in all directions, followed by a powerful booming blast. We were blown away without the least resistance.

After a while, I recovered consciousness when the smoke that had covered the playground disappeared. I had been blown about 10 meters away. I gazed into the distance but saw no houses – all had disappeared except for a few buildings. Oh, Hiroshima has disappeared, I thought for a moment. Then I looked at my own body. At the moment of the A-bomb flash in the sky, my uniform had spontaneously caught fire and burnt down to tatters. That blast peeled the skin right off the back of my head and down to my back, arms, hands, and legs. I could see my own red flesh exposed between tatters of skin burned by the heat ray.

Fleeing to a river at the time of an air raid was what I remember being told during evacuation drills by the teacher. I promptly left the playground to flee to the river. A great number of bombed people were fleeing in procession. Everyone held out their arms with tattered skin dangling from the fingertips. Some were almost naked – their skin had peeled off and red flesh was exposed, they were dragging their feet and staggering barefoot. The sight looked as if it were ghosts walking in procession. One was covered with broken glass pieces from the waist up – these glass pieces were window glass that had been broken into fragments and scattered by the blast.

I also saw a baby lying beside a woman who was apparently the baby's mother. Both were seriously burned – almost their entire skin had peeled off with red flesh exposed. The baby was shrieking. This entire scene was horrible. Words can never describe such a horrible sight.

I entered the river and soaked in the water. The cold water felt so good on my burning hot body that it was like a treasure. Thousands of people were soaking their bodies in the water like I was, and many of them drank river water, then, were carried away to their deaths.

Large black drops of rain began falling. Black rain is formed when the dust sent to the sky by the blast mixes with the rain. This black rain contains radiation. I later heard that my friend Tokujiro Hatta had died from acute radiation disorder on August 8th – two days after the bombing.

Although I have survived, since 1971 I have suffered from chronic hepatitis thought to have been caused by radiation. I have been hospitalized 14 times, and currently I receive injections three or four times a week. I also suffer from many other diseases.

Every day I'm anxious and painfully aware of my difficulties and the pains involved with living. In despair, I sometimes wonder why I have to continue to live while suffering this much. However, I encourage myself by saying that I have managed to survive so I should continue to live. Out of about 60 classmates of mine at the time, only 14 are still alive. I am one of the few survivors. Ever since the war, I have lived thus far pledging that I should never waste their deaths.

I have lived with the conviction that it is the duty and responsibility of those who survived to convey the unheard voices and will of the tremendous number of dead. I live and work on behalf of my dead friends. We must never forget to open our hearts to others. We will continue to appeal and act against wars and work towards the abolition of nuclear weapons up until our last breath.

About 350,000 people, including Korean workers brought in forcibly from the Korean Peninsula, U.S. POWs, and students from China and Southeast Asia, encountered the Hiroshima bombing. About 140,000 were dead by the end of 1945. The death toll increased to about 200,000 by the year 1950. As of the end of March 2004, a total of 273,918 atomic bomb survivors still live in Japan."

*Akihiro Takahashi died in November 2011, at the age of 80. Mr Takahashi's testimony has been edited for length and clarity.*



Illustration: Drawn by Mr. Goro Shikoku. Shikoku is a local amateur painter born in Hiroshima in 1924. He returned to Hiroshima in 1949, having been a Prisoner of War and found that many of his friends and relatives – including one of his brothers – had been killed by the atomic bomb. He was also shocked by the physical condition of A-bomb survivors and started painting. Over the next 50 years he continued painting, producing many anti-nuclear works. Mr. Shikoku died in March 2014 at the age of 89.

*Reproduced and updated from the Hiroshima Peace Institute. To access these illustrations see our downloadable PowerPoint at: [bit.ly/CNDCriticalMass](http://bit.ly/CNDCriticalMass)*

## **Extra resources**

### **East Asian Hibakusha**

- See '1945', a project by photographer Haruka Sakaguchi (2018), for additional portraits and testimonies gathered 'to honour a rapidly aging hibakusha community': [www.1945project.com](http://www.1945project.com)
- An illustrated and amended version of this testimony, from MIT's 'Visualizing Cultures' programme, is available at: <http://bit.ly/GroundZero1945>
- Visit the 'Survivor Testimonies' webpage of the Hiroshima Peace Memorial Museum to access other testimonies in both written and video form: <http://bit.ly/HPMMtestimonies>

### **Nuclear test survivors, Australia**

- Black Mist, Burnt Country exhibition – Aboriginal nuclear-test affectees create art about their experience: <https://blackmistburntcountry.com.au/>. See also: Lesson 5's guidance regarding the same topic.
- Testimonies: Karina Lester, Yankunytjatjara-Anangu woman from South Australia, spoke to the UN on behalf of 35 groups worldwide: <https://vimeo.com/221958618>
- Sue Coleman-Haseldine, sharing her experience of nuclear testing in Australia, at the UN: <http://www.icanw.org/campaign-news/australia/australian-nuclear-test-survivor-speaks-up-at-the-un-ban-negotiations/> (ft. video)

## Hibakusha and Art

### Who are the Hibakusha?

'Hibakusha' is an internationally-recognised name for survivors of the 1945 atomic bombings of Hiroshima and Nagasaki. The term means 'bomb-affected-people' in Japanese. While hundreds of thousands were killed immediately following the USA's atomic bombings, Hibakusha are witnesses to the lasting impacts of nuclear weapons on people's lives.

Due to a very limited knowledge of radioactivity at the time, survivors not only faced ill health and loss of friends and family, but also stigmatisation from other people who feared that they would be 'contaminated' themselves. Others saw the victims of the bombings as a reminder of a shameful military defeat. As a result of prejudice, Hibakusha were marginalised, often unable to marry and forbidden to return to their workplace.

Following over a decade of activism and pressure from Hibakusha, in 1956 the Japanese government agreed to offer medical and financial support for survivors who fall into one or more of the four recognised categories:

- People exposed directly to the explosion and its immediate aftermath,
- People exposed to the explosion within 2 kilometres radius within two weeks of the bombing,
- People exposed to radioactive fallout,
- Those born to mothers who belong(ed) to any of the above categories.

Later testimonies and activism also revealed a significant number of Korean Hibakusha who, at the time of the explosions, were living in Japan as forced labourers. It is estimated that around 10,000 survivors still live in South and North Korea, but only a proportion of them are certified Hibakusha.

### What have Hibakusha done?

#### ***Sadako Sasaki***

Perhaps the most famous Hibakusha is a young girl called Sadako Sasaki. She was only two years old when the atomic bomb was dropped on Hiroshima, and survived the explosion without any serious injuries. However, when Sadako was twelve, she developed leukaemia which was caused by radiation exposure and died on 25th October 1955. During her illness Sadako began to fold paper cranes, as a Japanese legend says that folding one thousand 'orizuru' (paper cranes) grants you a wish. Her story inspires the global peace movement and the origami paper crane has become a symbol of peace. For more lesson ideas using Sadako's story, see our teaching pack 'Sadako's Cranes for Peace' available via our website.

#### ***Setsuko Thurlow***

Many Hibakusha have dedicated their lives to speak out against the threat of nuclear weapons. Setsuko Thurlow is a Canadian-based activist who was born in Hiroshima and was 13 years old when the bomb exploded over her city. As a leading figure in the International Campaign to Abolish Nuclear Weapons (ICAN), Setsuko advocates that only a total elimination of nuclear weapons (including their production and testing) can ensure the end of human suffering. In her 2017 Nobel Peace Prize acceptance speech, Setsuko underlined the importance of Hibakusha activism: 'through our agony and the sheer struggle to survive – and to rebuild our lives from the ashes – we Hibakusha became convinced that we must warn the world about these apocalyptic weapons'.

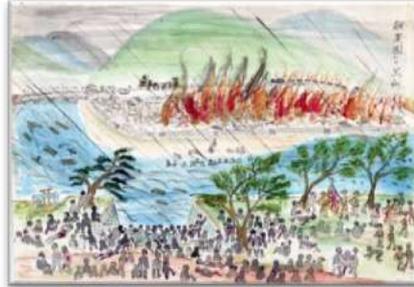
#### ***Akihiro Takahashi***

Akihiro Takahashi, another Hiroshima survivor, was a prominent Hibakusha, who survived the nuclear explosion as a 14 year-old boy. He spoke publicly about his struggles with mental and physical health following the explosion. He became Director of the Hiroshima Peace Memorial Museum, and believed that the atomic bombing of the Hiroshima and Nagasaki was to test nuclear weapon and demonstrate American military power.

## **The Hiroshima Panels**

The Hiroshima Panels are a series of fifteen painted folding panels, which depict the bombing and aftermath of the atomic bombings of Hiroshima and Nagasaki. They were painted by husband and wife, Iri and Toshi Maruki, and took 30 years to complete. The panels are artistically interesting as they show both traditional and contemporary/Western techniques: Iri was trained in suibokuga (ink-painting), whilst Toshi focused on illustrative painting. Both artists visited Hiroshima just three days after the bombing, though it took them three years to decide to begin painting what they had seen. Known as Genbaku no Zu in Japan, the panels also depict American Prisoners of War, Korean labourers, and other victims of atrocities in WWII, as well as the terror of nuclear war. Despite the seriousness of the paintings, Toshi Maruki said: "We do paint dark, cruel, painful scenes. But the question is, how should we portray people who face such realities? We want to paint them beautifully".

You can learn about and view the artworks via The Maruki Gallery for the Hiroshima Panels:  
<http://www.aya.or.jp/~marukimsn/english/indexE.htm>



This collection of Hibakusha artwork is available via our website as downloadable pdf slides, featuring the artists and dimensions of each piece. Reproduced with thanks to the Hiroshima Peace Memorial Museum.

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