

THE FIREBOMBING OF TOKYO

Note to Teacher: This lesson is recommended as a supplement to standard textbook coverage of World War II as it is not intended as a comprehensive overview of Japan's experience before, during, and after the war.

Organizing Questions

- What was the firebombing of Tokyo?
- What were the effects of the firebombing on Tokyo and its people?
- Why was Tokyo a target for firebombing near the end of World War II?
- Is it important that the firebombing of Tokyo be remembered?

Introduction

This lesson familiarizes students with the largely unknown events that took place in Tokyo near the end of World War II. Students read about the firebombing of Tokyo and learn about its significance in history. Students then watch a report on Emperor Hirohito's announcement of surrender on August 15, 1945 and consider the impact it had on the Japanese people and the future of Japan. Students also become familiar with the story of a Japanese-American gunner in the U.S. Army Air Forces who participated in air raids over Tokyo. The lesson concludes with students reading a personal account of a non-combatant's experience of the Tokyo firebombing and writing their own personal responses to his story. Throughout this lesson, students consider multiple perspectives of those impacted by the war.

Objectives

In this lesson, students will

- understand what was happening in Tokyo near the end of World War II and why;
- become familiar with multiple perspectives of those involved in the war and the bombing of Tokyo specifically; and
- consider the experiences of a non-combatant of the Tokyo firebombing in a personal written response.

Connections to Curriculum Standards

This lesson has been designed to meet certain national history, social studies, geography, and common core standards as defined by the National Center for History in the Schools, the National Council for the Social Studies, the National Council for Geographic Education, and the Common Core State Standards Initiative. The standards for the lesson are listed here.

National History Standards (from the National Center for History in the Schools)

World History

Era 8, Standard 4B: The student understands the global scope, outcome, and human costs of the war.

- Grades 5–12: Explain the major turning points of the war, and describe the principal theaters of conflict in Western Europe, Eastern Europe, the Soviet Union, North Africa, Asia, and the Pacific. [Interrogate historical data]

Era 8, Standard 5A: The student understands major global trends from 1900 to the end of World War II.

- Grades 5–12: Explain how new technologies and scientific breakthroughs both benefited and imperiled humankind. [Formulate historical questions]
- Grades 7–12: Assess the relative importance of such factors as world war, depression, nationalist ideology, labor organizations, communism, and liberal democratic ideals in the emergence of movements for national self-rule or sovereignty in Africa and Asia. [Formulate historical questions]
- Grades 7–12: Identify patterns of social and cultural continuity in various societies, and analyze ways in which peoples maintained traditions, sustained basic loyalties, and resisted external challenges in this era of recurrent world crises. [Explain historical continuity and change]

World History Across the Eras, Standard 1: Long-term changes and recurring patterns in world history

- Grades 5–12: Analyze ways in which human action has contributed to long-term changes in the natural environment in particular regions or worldwide.

National Social Studies Standards (from the National Council for the Social Studies)

- Culture; Thematic Strand I: Social studies programs should include experiences that provide for the study of culture and cultural diversity.
- Time, Continuity, and Change; Thematic Strand II: Social studies programs should include experiences that provide for the study of the past and its legacy.
- People, Places, and Environments; Thematic Strand III: Social studies programs should include experiences that provide for the study of people, places, and environments.
- Individuals, Groups, and Institutions; Thematic Strand V: Social studies programs should include experiences that provide for the study of interactions among individuals, groups, and institutions.

- Power, Authority, and Governance; Thematic Strand VI: Social studies programs should include experiences that provide for the study of how people create, interact with, and change structures of power, authority, and governance.
- Science, Technology, and Society; Thematic Strand VIII: Social studies programs should include experiences that provide for the study of relationships among science, technology, and society.
- Global Connections; Thematic Strand IX: Social studies programs should include experiences that provide for the study of global connections and interdependence.

National Geography Standards (from the National Council for Geographic Education)

- Standard 4: The physical and human characteristics of places [Essential Element II: Places and Regions]
- Standard 14: How human actions modify the physical environment [Essential Element V: Environment and Society]
- Standard 17: How to apply geography to interpret the past [Essential Element VI: The Uses of Geography]

Reading Standards for Literacy in History/Social Studies (from the Common Core State Standards Initiative)

- Standard 1, Grades 9–10: Cite specific textual evidence to support analysis of primary and secondary sources, attending to such features as the date and origin of the information.
- Standard 2, Grades 11–12: Determine the central ideas or information of a primary or secondary source; provide an accurate summary that makes clear the relationships among the key details and ideas.
- Standard 3, Grades 9–10: Analyze in detail a series of events described in a text; determine whether earlier events caused later ones or simply preceded them.
- Standard 4, Grades 9–10: Determine the meaning of words and phrases as they are used in a text, including vocabulary describing political, social, or economic aspects of history / social science.
- Standard 7, Grades 11–12: Integrate and evaluate multiple sources of information presented in diverse formats and media (e.g., visually, quantitatively, as well as in words) in order to address a question or solve a problem.
- Standard 9, Grades 11–12: Integrate information from diverse sources, both primary and secondary, into a coherent understanding of an idea or event, noting discrepancies among sources.

Writing Standards for Literacy in History/Social Studies, Science, and Technical Subjects (from the Common Core State Standards Initiative)

- Standard 4, Grades 6–12: Produce clear and coherent writing in which the development, organization, and style are appropriate to task, purpose, and audience.
- Standard 7, Grades 9–12: Conduct short as well as more sustained research projects to answer a question (including a self-generated question) or solve a problem; narrow or broaden the inquiry when appropriate; synthesize multiple sources on the subject, demonstrating understanding of the subject under investigation.
- Standard 9, Grades 6–12: Draw evidence from informational texts to support analysis, reflection, and research.

Materials Handout 1, *Tokyo at War*, 30 copies
Handout 2, *Eyewitness Account*, 30 copies
Answer Key, *Tokyo at War*

Equipment Computer with Internet access
Computer projector and screen
Computer speakers
15 computers with Internet access, for student use

Teacher Preparation Instructions and materials are based on a class size of 30 students. Adjust accordingly for different class sizes.

1. Make the appropriate number of copies of handouts.
2. Become familiar with the content of the handouts and answer key.
3. Visit “The Center of the Tokyo Raids and War Damage” website and become familiar with the information and items displayed at the center. The website can be found at http://www.tokyo-sensai.net/english_page/.
4. Locate a video about Emperor Hirohito’s surrender and prepare to play it for the students.
5. Set up and test computer, projector, speakers, and video about Emperor Hirohito’s surrender. Confirm that you are able to play the video and project sound audibly to students.
6. Locate an article about Ben Kuroki, a Japanese-American gunner in the U.S. Army Air Forces during World War II, to share with the class.

Time Two 50-minute class periods

Procedures
Day One

1. Ask a few student volunteers to share what they know about the atomic bombings of Hiroshima and Nagasaki in Japan at the end of World War II.
2. Ask a few student volunteers to share what they know about the firebombing of Tokyo at the end of World War II. (Students will most likely be unfamiliar with the Tokyo firebombing.)
3. Explain that while the atomic bombings of Hiroshima and Nagasaki are well-known events of World War II, the firebombing of Tokyo is hardly known even though many consider it to be the deadliest conventional air raid in history. Much attention has been given to the bombings of Hiroshima and Nagasaki in the media, textbooks, and the arts, while the firebombing of Tokyo has largely been ignored. Students will learn about the firebombing of Tokyo at the end of World War II and its significance.
4. Distribute one copy of Handout 1, *Tokyo at War*, to each student and instruct them to read the handout and answer the questions at the end. Collect student responses for assessment. Then, discuss their responses as a class.
5. Explain to the class that when Emperor Hirohito announced Japan's surrender to the nation, it was the first time he had ever addressed his people over the radio. In fact, it was the first time the Japanese people had heard Emperor Hirohito's voice.
6. Ask students to imagine the significance of the surrender announcement to Japanese citizens—not only hearing the news of Japan accepting defeat and surrendering (although Hirohito did not use those words in his announcement) but also hearing their emperor's voice for the first time.
7. Inform students that they will watch a report about Japan's surrender in 1945. View the video you previously selected about Hirohito's surrender on August 15, 1945.
8. Lead a class discussion about Japan's surrender, using the following prompts as a guide.
 - News of Japan's surrender elicited celebrations in the Allied nations. How do you think the Japanese people felt upon hearing Emperor Hirohito's announcement of surrender?
 - The Japanese mentality had been, up until then, to fight to the death. The Japanese military and civilians had been taught that surrender was prohibited; they were told that committing suicide was better than surrendering, if captured by the Allied Forces. Consider the magnitude of Hirohito's surrender in light of this national mentality. Share your thoughts on this drastic shift and the impact it may have had on the emperor, the military, and the Japanese people.
 - Emperor Hirohito asked his people to "refrain from emotional outburst" and focus on the future, to "endure the unendurable and suffer what is not sufferable" and to advocate for peace. Why do you think he made this request of the Japanese people?

- Compare the emperor’s surrender announcement to how governments communicate with their citizens and how news is distributed today.
9. Explain that students will now consider the perspective of an American gunner in the U.S. Army Air Forces who participated in air raids over Tokyo. This gunner was not a typical crew member in the U.S. Army Air Forces, as he was a Japanese American at a time when Japanese Americans were banned from enlisting in the Air Force.
 10. Read the article you located about Ben Kuroki, or ask student volunteers to read it aloud to the class.
 11. Optional: As an extension, students could watch the PBS documentary *Most Honorable Son*, a documentary about Ben Kuroki’s experience. More information can be found at <http://www.pbs.org/mosthonorableson/forteachers.html>.
 12. Lead a class discussion using the following questions as a guide.
 - Why is Ben Kuroki’s experience unique? Explain.
 - Mr. Kuroki faced racial discrimination while trying to fight for his country. Does discrimination exist in the military today? If so, what groups of people have faced discrimination? Why?
 - Do you think banning certain groups of people from serving in the military is justified? Why or why not?
 13. For homework, instruct students to locate relatives, friends, or neighbors who were alive in 1945 and ask them what they remember about the months leading up to the end of World War II. Ask them if they knew about the firebombing of Tokyo. Take notes and bring them to the following class period to be shared and collected.

Day Two

1. Ask several students to share their conversations and findings from the homework assignment. Collect student notes for assessment.
2. Inform students that they will get a sense of the experiences and perspectives of Japanese victims of the Tokyo firebombing by reading an eyewitness account and taking a virtual tour of a museum in Tokyo. The eyewitness account was written by a Japanese survivor by the name of Saotome Katsumoto who was 12 years old at the time of the Tokyo firebombing. Saotome Katsumoto also founded the museum and resource center that students will visit online.
3. Distribute one copy of Handout 2, *Eyewitness Account*, to each student. Warn students that because this is an account of a deadly and catastrophic event, it contains disturbing and graphic information. Instruct students to read the handout and write their personal responses following the prompts at the end of the handout.
4. Briefly discuss student reactions to Katsumoto’s experience. Collect handouts and personal responses for assessment.

5. Explain that the class will take a virtual tour of The Center of the Tokyo Raids and War Damage online. Read the following information about the mission and purpose of the Center.

The Center of the Tokyo Raids and War Damage is a small, privately funded center founded by Japanese author and survivor, Saotome Katsumoto. There is no government-funded resource center about the Tokyo Air Raids and government records are limited, so Katsumoto secured private funding and opened the Center, which is dedicated to promoting peace and raising public awareness about the massive destruction on Tokyo and its citizens. Katsumoto collected stories and relics from survivors to be displayed in the Center as well as included in books he has written. The Center has 5,000 pieces of memorabilia on display, including photographs, documents, drawings, videos of eyewitness accounts, and a life-sized replica of an M-69 bomb. Exhibits demonstrate the pain and devastation caused by the firebombing as well as the chaos and contradictions of the war. One such exhibit juxtaposes American leaflets that warn civilians living near factories to evacuate with Japanese newspaper articles that minimize the threat to civilians.

6. Make computers available for student use. Divide the class into pairs and instruct them to visit the Center's website at http://www.tokyo-sensai.net/english_page/. Instruct students to read the information on the home page and view all the items on display in the museum. Encourage students to discuss what they see and their reactions with their partner.

Note: A brochure with all the information provided on the website is also available to download from the Center's website.

7. Lead a debriefing discussion with the class, using the following prompts.
 - Masahiko Yamabe, the chief researcher at The Center of the Tokyo Air Raids and War Damage, stated, "Even in Japan, most people are not aware of the extent of the devastation. But it's important that people remember this..." Do you think it is important that the Tokyo firebombing be remembered? Why or why not?
 - Have you visited a memorial or museum like this before? What is the goal of this Center and others like it?

The purpose is to promote knowledge and peace and ensure that future generations learn from and do not forget significant historical events.
 - Many victims of the Tokyo firebombing remained quiet and anonymous until the 1970s; many did not even talk to their own family members about what they endured. During the 1970s, prompted by the 25th anniversary of World War II, the renewal of the U.S.-Japan Security Treaty, and the U.S. military's air raid campaigns against the North Vietnamese in the Vietnam War, some survivors felt compelled to share their stories. In the last several

decades, more Japanese survivors have shared their experiences to educate the younger generations in the hope of promoting peace.

Imagine what it would be like to relive horrific memories and share them publicly after keeping them a secret even from your family for more than 25 years. Share your thoughts on how this might affect these survivors and their families.

8. Conclude the lesson with a debriefing discussion, using the following prompts:
 - What topics of this lesson did you find most interesting? Most disturbing? Most inspiring?
 - What questions do you still have?
 - What issues or topics would you like to learn more about?
 - Did you gain an understanding of the Tokyo firebombing in this lesson? Why or why not?
9. Optional: Students could choose a topic related to the Tokyo firebombing to research further and share with the class.

Assessment The following are suggestions for assessing student work in this lesson:

1. Assess student responses to questions from Handout 1, *Tokyo at War*, using Answer Key, *Tokyo at War*, as a guide.
2. Informally evaluate student notes from the homework assignment on Day One.
3. Assess students' personal essays in response to Handout 2, *Eyewitness Account*, based on students' ability to
 - clearly state their opinions;
 - use proper grammar and syntax;
 - craft important questions;
 - exhibit sensitivity toward different cultures and ideas;
 - respect and acknowledge diverse perspectives; and
 - write succinctly.
4. Assess student participation in group and class discussions, evaluating students' ability to
 - clearly state their opinions, questions, and/or answers;
 - provide thoughtful answers;
 - exhibit sensitivity toward different cultures and ideas;
 - respect and acknowledge other students' comments; and
 - ask relevant and insightful questions.

TOKYO AT WAR

BY DR. PETER DUUS

Pearl Harbor—a harbor near Honolulu, Oahu in Hawaii where a surprise attack by Japan on the U.S. naval base and other military installations occurred on December 7, 1941

squadron—an operational unit in an air force consisting of two or more flights of aircraft and the personnel required to fly them

aerial bombardment—an air strike; air attack on a ground or naval target

Doolittle Raid—also known as the Tokyo Raid; an air raid by the United States on Tokyo and other places on Honshu island on April 18, 1942, during World War II; the first air raid to strike the Japanese mainland

Imperial Palace—the primary residence of the Emperor of Japan

non-combatant—a person who is not engaged in fighting during a war, especially a civilian, chaplain, or medical practitioner

ratify—to approve and sanction formally

belligerent country—a country engaging in war

unprecedented—never done or known before

doctrine—a particular principle, position, or policy taught or advocated, as of a religion or government

Mariana Islands—group of islands in the West Pacific Ocean. The United States gained possession of the islands in the Battle of Saipan; U.S. commanders wanted to capture the main Mariana Islands (Saipan,

In April 1942, less than five months after the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor, a small squadron of American bombers launched from an American aircraft carrier made an aerial bombardment on Tokyo. The Doolittle Raid, named after its commander, did little damage to the city but it demonstrated that the Japanese homeland was not beyond the reach of American air power. This was a great propaganda victory, bolstering American morale and alarming the Japanese military leadership. Tokyo was not only the nation's capital, and the site of the Imperial Palace, it was also a major national industrial and financial center.

The possibility that aerial bombing might inflict harm on innocent civilians disturbed many national leaders at the end of World War I. In 1922 six countries, including Japan and the United States, signed a draft treaty prohibiting bombing of non-combatants and limiting urban bombing to military targets. It was never ratified by any government. Aerial attacks were too useful for military operations to be defined as war crimes.

The Japanese launched regular air attacks on the Chinese capital in Chongqing after war broke out with China in 1937, and the Germans bombed cities in Great Britain, France, Norway, and elsewhere when war began in Europe in 1939. The British and their allies, including the Americans, struck back in retaliation. Non-combatant civilians in all the belligerent countries, except the United States, suffered unprecedented civilian death tolls. By 1944 the U.S. Army Air Forces had adopted the aerial bombing of enemy cities as basic strategic doctrine.

The capture of the Mariana Islands in July 1944 put the Japanese archipelago within range of new American B-29 long-range heavy bombers, and in early November air attacks began. The first raids were high-altitude precision strikes during daylight hours that pinpointed military targets like munitions factories, air fields, railroad lines, bridges, docks, and port facilities. Owing to high-altitude wind and weather conditions, the raids proved less effective than expected so the air force command decided on a new approach: nighttime attacks at low altitudes using incendiary bombs designed to burn large sections of civilian residential areas. The Germans had pioneered the tactic, known as “carpet bombing” or sometimes as “obliteration bombing,” during its invasion of Holland. The goal was to break the morale of the home-front population by terrorizing them with overwhelming force, destroying their neighborhoods and disrupting their daily lives.

The war in Europe was winding down, and the American government wanted to speed the surrender of Japan. The Americans knew that Tokyo was a flammable city. Housing was built with wood siding and wooden shingles not with brick, mortar, and tile roofs. The worst damage suffered during the 1923 Tokyo earthquake had resulted from fire rather than the quake itself. The crowded Shitamachi district, site of many small

Tinian, and Guam) to weaken Japan's defenses and to establish air bases from which to advance on the Japanese mainland and Tokyo in particular. Saipan was the closest island to Japan, just 1,100 miles off the coast of Tokyo. The islands had been under Japanese rule since 1920 and were protected by about 30,000 Japanese troops.

archipelago—a group of islands

munitions—military weapons, ammunition, equipment, and stores

incendiary—a bomb or other device designed to cause fires

1923 Tokyo earthquake—also called the Great Kanto Earthquake; a 7.9 quake that struck Yokohama and Tokyo just before noon on September 1, 1923. The initial quake was immediately followed by a 40-foot tsunami and then massive fires, destroying two of Japan's largest cities and taking the lives of about 140,000 people. At the time it was considered the worst natural disaster ever to strike Japan.

Shitamachi—literally, "under city"; downtown area of Tokyo; originally an area of Edo where the common people lived

cluster bomb—a canister of small individual bombs that is dropped from an aircraft and that releases a number of projectiles on impact to injure or damage personnel and vehicles

asphyxiate—to kill (someone) by depriving them of air

incinerate—to burn or reduce to ashes; cremate

workshops and factories that supplied munition factories, had been the worst hit. Since the new bombing campaign was intended to disrupt military production, the area was an ideal target.

The most devastating raid took place on the night of March 9–10, 1945. An attacking force of 339 B-29s, stripped of guns to make room for the maximum amount of explosive power, carried 1,665 tons of bombs. Most were cluster bombs that released small incendiary napalm bomblets at low altitude to scatter over a wide area. The first wave of B-29s laid down an X-shaped pattern of bombs to light the way for the waves to come. As the planes flew over working-class neighborhoods in the northeast section of the city, fierce ground winds turned small fires into big ones. Massive pillars of fire shot thousands of feet high, igniting everything they touched and sucking oxygen from the air so that victims were asphyxiated before they were incinerated. The red glow in the city sky could be seen from miles away.

In response to earlier raids 1,700,000 people, including many elementary school students, had been evacuated from the city. For those who remained, it was a night of fear and horror. The city's defenses were weak. Radar systems did not function, anti-aircraft guns could not hit the American planes at high altitudes, and Japanese fighter planes were overwhelmed by the size and strength of the attacking force. Worst of all, only about two percent of the population had access to air raid shelters. The rest could seek safety only in shallow trenches. The streets were filled with desperate inhabitants, running in every direction, slowly engulfed by walls of flame. There seemed nowhere to escape. The following morning the streets were piled with charred corpses, some unrecognizable as human beings, and waterways were filled with victims who had tried to escape from the inferno.

The March 9–10 raid has been called the deadliest conventional aerial bombardment in history. At least 105,000 people, many of them women, children, or elderly people, perished. Perhaps a million were injured, and another million were rendered homeless. A quarter of the city (16 square miles) lay in ruins, fire stations and medical facilities were destroyed, and city infrastructure suffered heavy damage. But the bombing did not end. A raid on May 25 dropped another 3,200 tons of incendiaries and destroyed 19 square miles of the city. The city population was exhausted, sleepless, and fearful of what was to come. Although it was clear to many that defeat was inevitable, the country's military and civilian leaders, reluctant to admit that, chose to fight on.

At the war's end central Tokyo had been reduced to block after block of rubble punctuated by a few concrete buildings here and there. Half of the prewar city was gone. Only well-to-do neighborhoods and suburban areas escaped the worst punishment. In 1945–46 the Japanese government allotted 26.6 percent of its reconstruction budget to the city, but the amount was soon cut. Sixty-five of the nation's other cities levelled by aerial bombing had to be rebuilt too. And no financial aid was offered to civilian non-combatants who were injured or lost family members in

air raids. Compensation went only to army and navy veterans, students and others drafted to work in military factories, and members of the civil defense forces.

In 2007 a civic group representing civilian victims of the air raids sued the Japanese government. They demanded an apology from the government and 1.2 billion yen in compensation for its failure to end the war sooner or to provide compensation for civilian victims of the bombing. The suit was dismissed in 2009, and an appeal was rejected by the Supreme Court in 2013. Nor has the national government ever erected a museum commemorating the Tokyo raids. The only museum built was financed by private citizens living in the neighborhoods hardest hit by them.

End of the War

The culmination of the U.S. air raids on Japan were the atomic bombings of Hiroshima and Nagasaki on August 6 and 9, respectively. The uranium bomb dropped on Hiroshima killed about 80,000 immediately (radiation exposure later killed tens of thousands more) and destroyed 90 percent of the city. The final U.S. air strike against Japan dropped a plutonium bomb on Nagasaki and immediately claimed another 40,000 lives (radiation exposure later killed tens of thousands more).

Emperor Hirohito publicly announced Japan's surrender at noon on August 15, 1945. This shocked the country and completely changed its course. Hirohito's announcement of unconditional surrender marked the end of the Pacific War and the beginning of a new Japan. In his speech Hirohito asked his people to embrace peace, accept the terms of the surrender, and dispel the imperialist attitude that he and his government had ingrained in the minds of the Japanese people for the previous two decades. Japan would now stand for the complete opposite ideals—democracy, peace, and humility—and “to strive for the common prosperity and happiness of all nations, as well as the security and wellbeing of our subjects...”

News of the Japanese surrender spread quickly. The United States and other Allied countries celebrated victory and the end of war. On September 2, 1945 the formal agreement was signed by Japan and the Allied nations—the United States, China, Britain, the USSR, Australia, Canada, France, the Netherlands, and New Zealand—aboard the U.S. battleship *Missouri* in Tokyo Bay. General Douglas MacArthur, appointed by U.S. President Harry Truman as the Supreme Commander of the Allied Powers, stated, “It is my earnest hope and indeed the hope of all mankind that from this solemn occasion a better world shall emerge out of the blood and carnage of the past.”

Questions

Answer the following questions on a separate sheet of paper.

1. Were you aware of the firebombing of Tokyo before reading this handout? What is your initial response to it?
2. While much attention has been given to the atomic bombings of Hiroshima and Nagasaki in the media, textbooks, and the arts, the firebombing of Tokyo has largely been ignored. Why do you think this is the case?
3. Was the United States the first country to use aerial bombing? Explain.
4. How did the U.S. Army Air Forces change its strategy for the March 9–10, 1945 air strikes? Why?
5. Why was the capture of the Mariana Islands in 1944 a significant victory for the Allied Forces?
6. List at least two reasons Tokyo was targeted for firebombing.
7. Describe the effect the firebombing had on Tokyo and its people.
8. Why did the Americans continue bombing Japan even after the massive destruction incurred on March 9–10, 1945?
9. Why do you think victims sought compensation from the government?
10. Why do you think the Japanese Supreme Court dismissed the case?

EYEWITNESS ACCOUNT

Excerpts taken from Saotome Katsumoto and Richard Sams, “Saotome Katsumoto and the Firebombing of Tokyo: Introducing the Great Tokyo Air Raid,” *Asia-Pacific Journal*, Vol. 13, Issue 10, No. 1, 16 March 2015. Reprinted with permission.

The Ticking Clocks

Testimony of Saotome Katsumoto

“Katsumoto! Get up!”

At the sound of my father’s voice, I jumped out of bed. The same instant, a ray of light that made my eyes swim streaked across the south window, followed by an eerie roar that seemed to pierce the earth. I remember the shock of that moment as if it happened last night. Grabbing the first-aid and emergency bags by my pillow, my air-raid hood, and my only treasure, a cloth pouch containing old coins, I rushed down the stairs...

air-raid hood—made by putting two *zabuton*, or flat floor cushions, together to create a hood to protect the head and neck from falling objects; could be soaked in water to protect from fire and heat as well; used in Japan at the end of World War II and reintroduced in the 1970s as protection in the event of earthquakes and fires

There was a reason for my quick response. It was March 10, Army Day. It had been rumored that the enemy was planning a huge air raid to coincide with this special day. As if to confirm those fears, a fierce northwesterly wind had been blowing since the previous evening. The flames reflected in the glass of the window and the deafening roars and explosions were enough for even a child to realize it was serious.

I went outside to look. In every direction—east, west, south, and north—the dark sky was scorched with crimson flames. The steady roar of the B-29s’ engines overhead was punctuated by piercing screeches followed by cascading sounds like sudden showers. With each explosion, a flash of light darted behind my eyelids. The ground shook. Flames appeared one after another. As our neighbors looked outside their air raid shelters defiantly holding their bamboo fire brooms, they cursed when they saw how fiercely the fires were burning. They were helpless against the raging flames. Fire trucks, sirens wailing, were already speeding toward the fires, but what could they do in this gusting wind and intensive bombardment? Even in the eyes of a child, the situation seemed hopeless. ...

In the crimson sky, black smoke was gathering in a dense fog and sparks were swirling about. It was a blizzard of sparks. Circling serenely above the pillar of flames, the B-29 bombers continued to pour down their incendiaries. First a bright blue flash shone in the sky, then countless trails of light fell and were absorbed in the black rooftops, from which new flames rose up. “My, how beautiful!” exclaimed my sister. Strangely I still remember that incongruous remark. At that moment, as if to suppress my sister’s admiration, a metallic explosion rang out. Suddenly I saw the huge form of a B-29 flying very low above the rooftops. Its belly opened wide and several black objects fell screeching to the ground. I instinctively covered my face. When I looked up again flames were rising all over the

neighborhood. Then I heard my father's voice from below: "Katsumoto, what are you doing?" Bring down the futons from upstairs and put them on the cart!"

This was how I first encountered the Great Tokyo Air Raid of March 10. At that time, a 12-year-old boy such as myself should not have been in Tokyo. Most schoolchildren in the capital city had been evacuated to the countryside. But because I was born in the first three months of the year, I had been moved up to the senior class after graduating from national elementary school and became what is now called a junior high school student. As a result I avoided evacuation and was placed in the youngest class of mobilized students. Together with most of my friends, I was busy working every day making hand grenades to be thrown by Japanese soldiers in their suicide attacks. But what use could a runny-nosed schoolboy be at a military ironworks? War is so cruel.

For a poor working family like mine, residing in Mukojima ward in the Shitamachi district, there was nowhere to escape to and no time to get away when the air raid struck. All we could do was cower in a corner of this low-lying region of the imperial capital. It was my fate to directly experience the horrors of the Great Tokyo Air Raid. ...

Most of us already knew the war was going badly. Japanese troops had been decimated in suicide attacks on Attu Island, the southern island of Guadalcanal had fallen, and the Mariana Islands of Saipan, Guam, and Tinian had all become U.S. frontline bases by the end of 1944. The U.S. armed forces were relentlessly closing in on the Japanese mainland. On the day of the U.S. army landing on the southern coast of Iwo Jima on February 19, 1945, the Japanese defenders were bombarded with as many as 8,000 shells in one day and driven to the north of the island. If Iwo Jima fell and the Americans reached Okinawa, an invasion of the Japanese mainland would be imminent. To camouflage the retreats, the Imperial Headquarters used the expression "change in course," while the slogan "fight to the death" was replaced by "let them cut your flesh so that you can sever their bones." For the B-29s, it was now a 1,500-mile flight to Tokyo from the air base in Saipan. They arrived in waves, their bellies filled with explosive and incendiary bombs.

Up to March 10, the B-29s bombing Tokyo had flown at a height of at least 10,000 meters and, although they had dropped large quantities of explosive and incendiary bombs, these had been aimed primarily at military targets in the city. The Great Tokyo Air Raid in the low-lying Shitamachi district was the first time the U.S. air force moved from targeting the main industrial districts that were the basis of Japan's military capability to low-altitude indiscriminate incendiary bombing that targeted civilians.

Tragically, there was also a very strong wind that day. From around noon on March 9, a northwesterly wind blew under overcast skies, becoming even fiercer from the evening into the night. Snow that had fallen two or three days earlier still remained on the ground in places, and the sudden gusts of wind in the streets cut through you like a knife. ...

mobilize—to prepare and organize (troops) for active service

suicide attack—a violent attack in which the attacker intends to kill other people and/or destroy property and expects to (or is certain to) die in the process

imperial capital—i.e., Tokyo

Attu Island—an island of southwest Alaska, the westernmost of the Aleutians; occupied by Japan for a short time (1942–43) during World War II

Iwo Jima—an island in the West Pacific Ocean about 700 miles off the coast of Japan. The Battle of Iwo Jima (February 19–March 26, 1945) was a major battle in which the U.S. Marines landed on and eventually captured the island of Iwo Jima from the Japanese Imperial Army during World War II.

imminent—about to happen

Imperial Headquarters—officially named the Imperial General Headquarters and part of the Supreme War Council. It was established in 1893 to coordinate efforts between the Japanese Army and Navy during wartime. In terms of function, it was approximately equivalent to the United States Joint Chiefs of Staff and the British Chiefs of Staff Committee.

indiscriminate—random; without careful distinction

Boso Peninsula—a peninsula near Tokyo that forms the eastern edge of Tokyo Bay, separating it from the Pacific Ocean

firefighter groups—near the end of World War II, groups of Japanese civilians who voluntarily organized in their neighborhoods in an attempt to fight fires caused by bombings. The groups lacked proper equipment, techniques, and training.

... At 10:30 p.m. on March 9, an air-raid standby alert was issued...

According to this information from the Eastern Army-controlled zone, B-29s circling the Boso Peninsula had entered the air space of Tokyo from the south of the peninsula and, without incurring any damage, had changed direction and were now flying far out over the ocean. As the radio announcer repeated the message, I breathed a sigh of relief.

A moment later, my father, dressed in his black uniform, suddenly came in and muttered, "It's over."

"Isn't it Army Day tomorrow, dad?" I asked.

"Yes, but I don't think they'll be doing anything special," replied my father. As he said this, I vaguely remember him putting down his bamboo water gun and heavy-looking steel helmet next to his pillow. It might seem strange for a grown man to have a water gun, but this type was one meter long with a diameter of ten centimeters and was issued only to the heads of firefighter groups. It had the imperial chrysanthemum crest branded on it at the end of the barrel. My father took his water gun with him on firefighting drills. When all the participants had gathered, they would hang a red cloth from the roof of a two-story house to represent the fire. Then they aimed the water gun, shouted out in unison, and shot a jet of water at the cloth. It was all right when they hit the target but when they missed, the cloth just hung there limply and they had to try again until they got it right. Until the night of March 10, everyone had been led to believe that they could defy incendiary bomb attacks with water guns, bucket relays, and fighting spirit.

Feeling relieved that it was a false alarm, my parents, two older sisters, and I had gone to bed. During that brief respite, the massive indiscriminate firebombing raid scheduled for Army Day began.

We loaded our most important belongings onto a handcart and made our way down the Mito-kaido road, then turned left and headed south. ... The road was overflowing with people escaping with their various belongings, all of them heading south. We would have needed great conviction to go toward the wind in the opposite direction from that advancing wave of people. There were raging fires in the Asakusa district to the north and we could see fires burning in every direction. The only place that still seemed relatively dark was the Azuma-cho area in the southeast. My father held the handles at the front of the cart, my mother and I pushed it from behind, and my two sisters ran at the sides as we made for that dark place. ...

One incendiary bomb skimmed past the shoulder of a woman near me, lodged itself in a telegraph pole, scattered sparks, and turned into a pillar of fire. Roofs of houses spewed flames, wooden fences and telegraph poles burned, and even the brick-and-mortar warehouses of factories were engulfed in the inferno. Located between the Nakagawa and Kitajukken canals, Azuma-cho contained many factories. It seemed that these were being targeted because all around us pillars of flame were

shooting up into the dark sky. Desperately trying to escape the smoke and flames, we ran through the maze of back alleys, only to emerge in the same place we had started. ... “We’re surrounded by fires.” At that moment the roof of a house collapsed in front of us with a tremendous rumbling sound and a hot wind roared over us as if blown by bellows. Carried by the north wind, black smoke and flames swept over the road devouring everything in their path. ...

“Is everyone all right?” yelled my father as we ran. “We’re okay!” I shouted back, sweeping away the smoke in front of me with my cotton work gloves. My judo robe, which I had soaked with water just a few moments earlier, was already bone dry. I was fighting for breath, could only see about five meters ahead, and no longer knew who was running where. Then, just in front of me, I saw flames flickering. Someone’s back was on fire. “Mum, your backpack!” I screamed. Without replying, my mother threw her burning backpack down on the ground. It turned into a ball of fire and was sucked downwind.

After we had run under several signals along the railway track and over an iron bridge across a drainage channel, we saw that the fires around us were dying down. Many people were sitting or lying exhausted on the tracks. The flames had not yet reached that area and I could see the shining black roofs of the nearby houses. Finally realizing that we had somehow escaped death, my strength suddenly ebbed away and I felt like I was being sucked into the ground. My father said we were still in danger, so we went down Meiji Street past the Terajima Crossroads, making straight for the Sumida River. Like everyone else, we instinctively headed for water. Countless people perished in rivers and canals that night.

ebb—(of an emotion or quality) to gradually lessen or reduce

Making our way through burning buildings that looked like they might collapse at any moment, we eventually reached a small park near Shirahige Bridge. By now we had no strength left, but then we noticed that the night sky was turning white and dawn was breaking. Our faces were black with soot. The fingers of my gloves were burned off and only the cloth on the backs of my hands remained. The handcart my father had been pulling and our luggage had vanished. Gone too was the pouch of old coins I had tied to my belt. Shocked that I had lost my only treasure, I wanted to retrace my steps to look for it but my father stopped me. ...

The fires started to die down at about five o’clock in the morning. Dawn broke at six. The fierce wind had finally abated a few hours earlier. Like a clot of blood the sun rose unsteadily in the east, yet the sky remained strangely dark.

My parents, sisters, and I had managed to escape to a corner of a park near Shirahige Bridge. After my mother treated the burns on my hands with the ointment from my emergency bag, I went on my own to the foot of the bridge just a couple of minutes away. The Kubota Ironworks, where I had been working just the day before, was near the bridge facing the Sumida River. What had become of the factory and my classmates and teachers who worked there?

... It was deathly quiet, except for the sound of a sheet of paper attached to the gate fluttering in the breeze. I read the handwritten message.

To All Factory Staff

Don't be discouraged by a little thing like this!

Let's rebuild our factory right away.

Keep fighting! The enemy is desperate too!

Child though I was, I felt a kind of emptiness as I gazed at those words. Was the enemy really as desperate as we were? I continued walking to the bridge. From the river I heard men's voices shouting "One, two, three, heave!" When I got to the quay of the Sumida River, I could only stare in horror. On the stone wall of the smoldering quay were several civil defense corpsmen in khaki uniforms with cloths wrapped over their heads and tied under their chins. From a gap where the wall had collapsed they made their way backward and forward over the logs on the water's surface. Shouting instructions to each other, they were pulling dead bodies out of the water. Looking down, I saw that the river was full of burned and drowned corpses. The men were reeling in the bodies with hooked poles. They bound the stiff corpses with ropes, hauled them up onto the quay, and laid them down in rows like tuna at a fish market. Then I noticed that my father was standing behind me. "Take a good look, Katsumoto," he said. "Look and never forget. This is what war is." I clearly remember the way he spoke, muttering the words under his breath. Exhausted by his struggles and privations, he died shortly after the war ended. The frightful scene we witnessed in the Sumida River and my father's despairing voice have always stayed with me. ...

privation—a state in which things that are essential for human well-being such as food and warmth are scarce or lacking

The whole area was pervaded by such a sickening stench that we had to open our mouths and breathe in gasps. The ruins were crowded with victims like us. With scorched faces and bloodshot eyes, many of them could hardly see. There was an endless stream of refugees from the fires—people using their leggings as bandages, people with burned cheeks, split lips, and mouths hanging open, people with handcarts and bicycle carts carrying burned futons and clothes soaked in water. We too were part of this procession of ghosts. ...

We turned into a side street and walked through Mukojima-Hyakkaen Gardens. This was a scenic spot well known in Tokyo for its flowers blooming all year round, but now the branches of the trees were all burned black and covered with futons and clothes. When we reached the Terajima crossroads, we saw something quite unexpected. Only the buildings at the corner where we lived were still standing. What a stroke of luck! The schools, factories, cinema, and fire station were all gone. All around us were burned out ruins and reddish brown scorched earth. Just one row of buildings including our house had been left untouched. "Look, there's our house!" cried my mother, and we all ran towards it. When we opened the front door, we heard the feeble meowing of Tomi, our tortoise-shell cat, who ran up to us and snuggled against our legs.

But our neighbors Mrs. Torii and her son would never return. We had encountered them during our escape with futons wrapped around them and wooden clogs hanging from their waists ... What had become of them? The watchmaker's store where they lived had also been undamaged by the fires. From outside we could hear the ticking of the wall clock and cuckoo clock, keeping the time like living beings. Thinking they might have returned, I peered into the store. At the sight of the pendulums swinging back and forth, I suddenly felt afraid and returned to our house. Although they had the foresight to take all those clogs with them so that they could walk back over the scorched ground, Mrs. Torii and her son Iwao had perished in the inferno.

Write a Personal Response

After reading Katsumoto's eyewitness account, write your personal response to his story on a separate sheet of paper. In two to three paragraphs, explain your thoughts and feelings about what you just read, what questions you have, his words and/or imagery that was particularly powerful for you, etc. Support your response by including at least two quotes and/or examples from his account.

Your written response will be evaluated based on your ability to:

- clearly state your opinions;
- use proper grammar and syntax;
- craft important questions;
- exhibit sensitivity toward different cultures and ideas;
- respect and acknowledge diverse perspectives; and
- write succinctly.

TOKYO AT WAR

1. Were you aware of the firebombing of Tokyo before reading this handout? What is your initial response to it?
Student responses will vary.
2. While much attention has been given to the atomic bombings of Hiroshima and Nagasaki in the media, textbooks, and the arts, the firebombing of Tokyo has largely been ignored. Why do you think this is the case?
Student responses will vary. Students may mention that perhaps the firebombing of Tokyo was overshadowed by the atomic bombings of Hiroshima and Nagasaki because they were the first use of atomic bombs and they are more closely associated with the end of the war.
3. Was the United States the first country to use aerial bombing? Explain.
No, the United States was not the first to use aerial bombing. Japan had used air strikes against China in 1937, and Germany had bombed Great Britain, France, Norway, and others in 1939.
4. How did the U.S. Army Air Forces change its strategy for the March 9–10, 1945 air strikes? Why?
The B-29 bombers flew at a low altitude, at night, and targeted civilian residential areas. The B-29s were emptied of their guns to make room for the maximum amount of bombs in every plane. They changed their strategy to ensure the most destruction.
5. Why was the capture of the Mariana Islands in 1944 a significant victory for the Allied Forces?
Capturing the Mariana Islands gave the U.S. Army Air Forces an air base within close range of the Japanese mainland.
6. List at least two reasons Tokyo was targeted for firebombing.
Students should mention at least two of the following reasons.
 - *Tokyo was flammable because its buildings were constructed of wood.*
 - *Tokyo was a strategic target as Japan's capital and financial center.*
 - *Tokyo was in close proximity to the U.S. air base in the Mariana Islands.*
 - *The city's defenses were weak.*
 - *Tokyo was densely populated.*
7. Describe the effect the firebombing had on Tokyo and its people.
The city was engulfed in flames; 16 square miles (about half) of the city was reduced to rubble; at least 105,000 people died; perhaps as many as one million people were injured, and perhaps as many as one million people were left homeless.
8. Why did the Americans continue bombing Japan even after the massive destruction incurred on March 9–10, 1945?
The Japanese government did not surrender, so the Americans continued bombing.
9. Why do you think victims sought compensation from the government?
Student responses will vary.
10. Why do you think the Japanese Supreme Court dismissed the case?
Student responses will vary.

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