

Teaching Ideas and Worksheets for use with ...

MY FATHER'S DYING WISH

LEGACIES OF WAR GUILT IN A JAPANESE FAMILY

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WITH A FOREWORD BY MASAAKI NODA



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Worksheets and Ideas for Classroom Activities: Terms of Use

This booklet contains classroom materials to accompany the use of *My Father's Dying Wish* as a set text for university courses covering issues of World War II history, memory and responsibility in Japan. The materials are produced by Philip Seaton (associate professor at Hokkaido University and the translator of *My Father's Dying Wish*). They were developed for use on the Hokkaido University Short Term Exchange Program (HUSTEP).

These materials are made publicly available via Hokkaido University Open Courseware and may be downloaded, printed out, copied and reproduced without restriction. The teaching ideas may also be edited and reproduced in a different format.

My Father's Dying Wish gives many important insights into the processes of remembering World War II in Japan and provides sobering lessons about the psychological consequences for the individuals who willingly or unwillingly participate in wars of aggression. It is my hope that through these teaching materials, Kurahashi's story will reach a wider audience.

Philip Seaton, Hokkaido University

To order copies of *My Father's Dying Wish*:

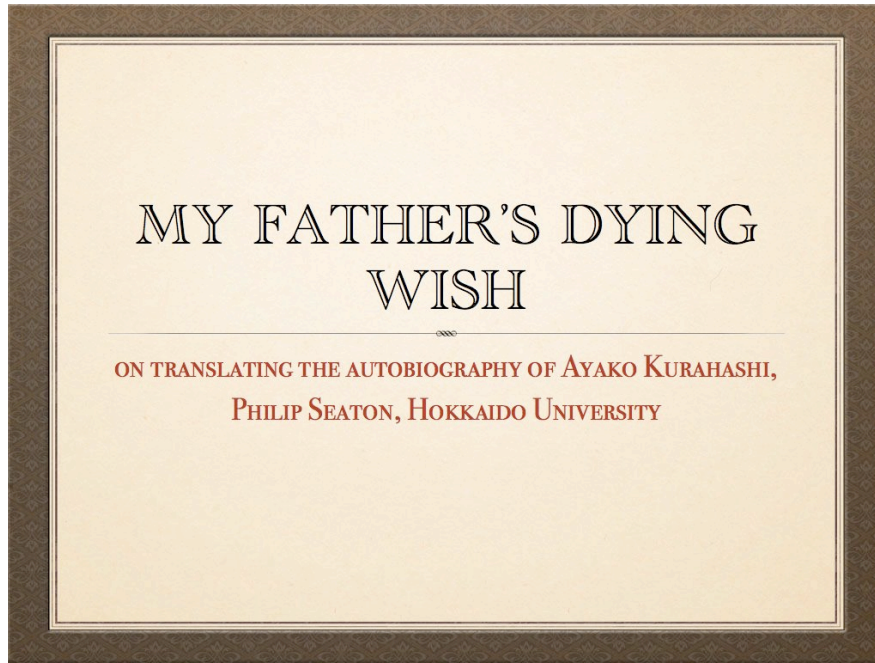
In Japan, contact Philip Seaton: seaton@imc.hokudai.ac.jp

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Introduction

Watch the video on Hokkaido University Open Courseware. It introduces *My Father's Dying Wish* and gives background to the translation project.



Points for Discussion:

My Father's Dying Wish is an autobiography. What are some of the advantages and disadvantages of using an autobiography to study war history?

Do you believe it is possible to understand Japan through English-language sources only, or is it necessary to read and understand Japanese sources, too?

Chapter 1: The Apology Memorial

Before you read:

Kurahashi's father was a military policeman who served in China during the war. He left a dying wish for an apology to the people of China to be written on his gravestone. What do you think his motivations might have been for making this request?

Has the Japanese government apologized for World War II? When, how?

Which Japanese media organizations have you heard of? What do you think they say about World War II history?

After you read. Points for discussion:

Was Kurahashi right to fulfill her father's dying wish?

What is the "appropriate" way for the Japanese people - as a nation and as individuals - to address war responsibility issues.

What are your own experiences in learning about World War II history via the news media (particularly newspapers, television and magazines)? Compare your experiences to those of Kurahashi.

Chapter 2: My Journey of Self-Discovery

Before you read:

How might the children of soldiers be affected by the war traumas of their parents?

What do you think “feminist therapy” might be? How might it differ from “[non-feminist] therapy”?

What role does literature and fiction play in our understanding of the past? Think of examples of fiction (whether novels, plays or films) that have affected your own understanding of the past.

After you read. Points for discussion:

What psychological issues did Kurahashi face as a result of her parents’ traumas?

“Writing an autobiography was the last stage of Kurahashi’s therapy.” Do you agree or disagree?

What role did Kurahashi’s authorship of fictional stories play in her understanding of her family’s experiences?

Chapter 3: Victims and Perpetrators

Before you read:

Who were the “comfort women”?

What do you think makes soldiers commit atrocities during war?

What kind of activist groups exist in Japanese civil society that are active on the war issue?

After you read. Points for discussion:

When reading the harrowing accounts of violence and atrocity in this chapter, how does gender affect our readings and interpretations? Discuss in mixed female/male groups.

Why do you think the Japanese soldiers in Chapter 3 have felt the need to tell their stories? What makes them different to the soldiers who have chosen to maintain silence about what they did during the war?

The chapter contains a number of references to nationalist groups who deny or downplay Japanese aggression during the war. What are the motivations for their activism, and how does it differ to the motivations of the progressive groups that Kurahashi belongs to?

Chapter 4: Journeying to China and to Apologize

Before you read:

How do you think Kurahashi's father's apology would be received in China?

What was the Nanjing Massacre?

What are the principal grievances of the Chinese people with the ways that war issues are dealt with in Japan?

After you read. Points for discussion:

Based on the comments by Chinese people in Chapter 4, what do you think Japanese people need to do in order to gain the trust of Chinese people regarding war issues?

How would you characterize the significance of Kurahashi's three trips to China in 2000 in the context of her personal process of confronting the legacies of the war in her family?

Chapter 5: The Challenges Facing the Postwar Generations

Before you read:

“It is the job of the war generation to apologize, not the postwar generations.” Do you agree or disagree with this statement?

What is Yasukuni Shrine, and why do visits there by Japanese politicians stir such controversy?

Is Japan likely to go to war again in the next decade or two?

After you read. Points for discussion:

How are social issues like poverty related to the war issue?

Are there elements of Japanese culture that encourage the war to be remembered in particular ways?

Which of Kurahashi’s hopes for the future are viable, and which are unrealistic?

Further reading: Open Access Internet Sources

On the Japanese government's official position:

There are many official Japanese government documents relating to war responsibility issues on the internet. They can be found via the “Historical Issues” link on the homepage of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs.



<http://www.mofa.go.jp/>

The Asia-Pacific Journal: Japan Focus

The online academic journal *The Asia-Pacific Journal: Japan Focus* has dozens of articles about all aspects of Japanese war history and memory. Visit their site here:

<http://www.japanfocus.org/>

Alternatively, here is an index of authors who have published war-related articles on *The Asia-Pacific Journal: Japan Focus*.

http://www.philipseaton.net/Home/War_History_Reading_List.html

Ideas for Classroom Activities 1: Class Debates

General Procedure:

Step 1: Assign preparatory reading of documents for homework or in class time.

Step 2: Divide the class into two groups, those “for the motion” and those “against the motion”. Work together in these groups to prepare arguments.

NB: Students debate according to the assigned position rather than their own personal views. This has two purposes: a) to allow heated classroom debate while preventing it from becoming personal and confrontational, and b) to encourage students to think about the rationales for opinions and positions with which they do not necessarily agree.

Step 3: Divide into small groups (or pairs) with equal numbers of those “for the motion” and “against the motion”. Debate according to the assigned position.

Step 4: Each group provides a summary of the key points of their discussion to the whole class.

Motion 1:

“It is the job of the war generation, not the postwar generation, to apologize and deal with issues of war responsibility. Kurahashi’s father was irresponsible to have left such a dying wish to his family.”

Reading Materials: *My Father’s Dying Wish*, Chapter 1

Motion 2:

“The Japanese government has fulfilled its legal obligations with regard to war responsibility issues stemming from the actions of the Imperial Japanese Army during World War II. Arguments that the Japanese government has ‘not done enough’ to address war responsibility issues, therefore, are merely academic.”

[“60 Years: The Path of a Nation Striving for Global Peace” Pamphlet](#)

[The 4 August 1993 Kono Statement on the “Comfort Women” Issue](#)

[9 June 1995, 50th Anniversary of the War End Diet Resolution](#)

[15 August 1995, Murayama statement](#)

[15 August 2005, Koizumi statement](#)

[MOFA Q & A on Historical Issues \(compensation issue etc.\)](#)

Ideas for Classroom Activities 2: Watching a War Film

In Chapter 1 of *My Father's Dying Wish*, Kurahashi discusses a number of films or works of fiction that were important in the early formation of her opinions about the war.

Watch a war film in which there is significant representation of the effects of the war on family members: for example, Hollywood films such as *Born on the Fourth of July*, *Saving Private Ryan*, or *Flags of Our Fathers*; or Japanese films such as *The Human Condition* (*Ningen no Joken*), *Rhapsody in August*, or *Grave of the Fireflies*.

Discuss the following issues:

In what ways is cinematic history different from academic or documentary history? What are some of the problems of gaining an understanding of historical issues via a (semi-)fictional medium such as cinema?

How were families and their traumas represented in the film? What similarities and differences are there with the experiences of people described in *My Father's Dying Wish*?

After reading the accounts of victimhood and atrocity described in Chapter 3 of *My Father's Dying Wish*, discuss how those experiences could be depicted in a mainstream film. What would be the problems of depicting such war violence in a) a mainstream Hollywood film and b) a mainstream film for the Japanese domestic cinema audience?

Ideas for Homework/Written Assignments

Book Review

Write a book review of *My Father's Dying Wish* in the style of a book review for an academic journal. Make sure that you include the following points:

- 1) A summary of the content of the book.
- 2) Key themes developed during the book.
- 3) Some of the strengths and weaknesses of the book.
- 4) Your overall evaluation.

Academic journals have strict word limits for articles. Make sure that your review is 600-800 words.

An Apology Tour: Thinking About War Responsibility in One's Own Country

In Chapter 4 of *My Father's Dying Wish*, Kurahashi described three trips to China to convey her father's apology.

Imagine that, like Kurahashi, a relative of yours has left a dying wish for an apology to be placed on his/her gravestone for crimes committed during a conflict (possible conflicts include World War II, a more recent conflict like Vietnam or the Iraq War, or an "internal" conflict such as Northern Ireland). Prepare an imaginary itinerary of your journey to that country/region to convey your relative's apology. Your relative's experiences may be fictionalized, but make sure you use an *actual example* of a war or conflict your nation has taken part in.

In class: Explain the tour itinerary to your classmates and discuss it in a small group. Through writing your own itinerary and listening to those of your classmates, what have you learned about how Kurahashi must have felt when she received the request from her father to make an apology to the people of China?

“[B]y searching for answers the reality of father’s war crimes finally sank in. I am now able to write without any hesitation that during his 10 years as a military policeman, he did many inexcusable things to Chinese people, and that while he was suffering with the memories of what he did, he was unable to speak about it. There is not much to smile about when I look back over the extremely hard journey that I had to go through in order to be able to write the previous sentence.”

Ayako Kurahashi, *My Father’s Dying Wish*, p. 86.