**The Pacific War: History and Memory**

World War II

From: Humanities Out There, Kate Merkel-Hess

**History Standards: 10.8.6**

Discuss the human costs of the war, with particular attention to the civilian and military losses in Russia, Germany, Britain, the United States, China, and Japan.

**CCSS Standards: Reading, Grades 9-10**1. Cite specific textual evidence to support analysis of primary and secondary sources, attending to such features as the date and origin of the

information.

3. Analyze in detail a series of events described in a text; determine whether earlier events caused later ones or simply preceded them.

10. By the end of grade 10, read and comprehend history/social studies texts in the grades 9–10 text complexity band independently and proficiently.

**Guiding Question:**How did the story of the Japanese role in World War II change over time?

**Overview of Lesson:**Students should be familiar with Japan’s role in World War II, the events in the Pacific Theater, and the attack on Hiroshima and Nagasaki.

It will help to introduce students, through a brief discussion, to the concept of history as an EVOLVING history, subject to interpretation. Refer to earlier work with primary sources, and ask what happens when those voices are no longer available. WHO gets to tell history when those who experienced it are quiet? Why does it matter?

Depending on the level of your class, it may be helpful to read the first section aloud, asking text-dependent questions and clarifying thoughts as you go. You may also want to answer the accompanying questions for the first section on an overhead, so that students can see what you expect in a full and complete answer.

After modeling, students may work in partners or independently to complete the readings and accompanying questions. The interviews at the end should begin with a partnership and then blend into groups of four, with the chance to share with the whole class if time allows.

**The Pacific War:**

History and Memory

**Part One: Remembering the Past**

The Storycorps Project

<http://storycorps.net/>



**“He really talked that night.”**

Retired Memphis sanitation worker Taylor Rogers and his wife Bessie remember Martin Luther King Jr.'s final speech.



**“I still see him in my dreams.”**

World War II veteran Joseph Robertson tells his son-in-law John Fish, Jr. about a soldier he killed in combat.



**“People ask me, ‘How come he’s not an American and he invent a hot dog vending machine?’”**

Slava Leykin and her husband Leon, Ukrainian immigrants, talk about their business.

**Part Two: The Japanese Textbook Controversy**

**New Words**

*omission*: to leave out, to omit

Prior to the end of World War II, the textbooks used in Japanese schools were compiled by the government. Japanese who lived through this period remember that the history textbooks of the pre-war period emphasized the superiority of the Japanese nation and the sacred role of the Japanese emperor and the high status of the Japanese military.

Immediately after the end of the World War II, when Japan was occupied by the United States forces, the occupation government ordered that scholars be allowed to write textbooks without government supervision, and that schools be allowed to choose whatever textbooks they wanted. However, by the mid-1950s, the Japanese government again began to oversee the writing and selection of high school history texts. The government discouraged any discussion that appeared positive toward Communism or Communist countries (like the Soviet Union or China) or labor unions, or readings that talked about the hardships of the poor in Japan.

In the 1980s, 1990s, and early 2000s, neighboring countries have, in particular, found fault with the new versions of high school history textbooks. China has protested the **omission** of discussions of the Rape of Nanjing or other atrocities committed against Chinese by Japanese soldiers. Korea has protested Japan’s denial of its use of young Korean women as “comfort women”; women who were forced into prostitution service to the Japanese military. In addition, many Japanese scholars and teachers have demanded that the government revise its textbooks to more accurately reflect the Japanese role in World War II.

For instance, compare these two accounts, both from Japanese junior high school textbooks, of the Rape of Nanjing, which you learned about several weeks ago:

I. The Japanese army occupied Northern China, then invaded Nanjing, and killed and destroyed the lives of many Chinese people. Footnote: The Japanese army that occupied Nanjing killed many Chinese people inside and outside the urban district within several weeks. The number of deaths was around 70-80,000 counting only civilians such as women and children. Including the deserted soldiers the number is estimated to be over 200,000. China estimates the number of the victims to be well over 300,000 including war deaths. Japan was condemned by other nations for this incident known as the Nanjing Massacre; however, the Japanese people then were not notified of the fact.[[1]](#endnote-1)

II. In August 1937, two Japanese soldiers, one an officer, were shot to death in Shanghai (the hub of foreign interests). After this incident, the hostilities between Japan and China escalated. Japanese military officials thought Chiang Kai-shek would surrender if they captured Nanking, the Nationalist capital; they occupied that city in December. \*But Chiang Kai-shek had moved his capital to the remote city of Chongqing. The conflict continued. Note \*At this time, many Chinese soldiers and civilians were killed or wounded by Japanese troops (the Nanking Incident). Documentary evidence has raised doubts about the actual number of victims claimed by the incident. The debate continues even today.[[2]](#endnote-2)

*Which of these excerpts, in your opinion, does a better job of discussing the events in Nanjing? Next, open your textbook to page 338. How does your textbook’s discussion of the invasion of Nanjing compare to the two above?*

The historian Ienaga Saburo wrote the textbook that includes the second excerpt. He has been fighting the government in court over its “editing” of his text to omit discussions critical of Japan. He says, “Approval of textbooks by the state prohibits the completion of the people’s development as human beings.”[[3]](#endnote-3) Here is why Ienaga says he has been fighting since 1965 to have high school history textbooks reflect the Japanese role in World War II:

“One has to learn from war, but I don’t necessarily think the majority learned much from that war or wants to assure that such things never happen again…We must enlarge the number of people actively involved. This is the nature of our work. As wartime memories fade, we must ensure that the truth about the Pacific War is taught to the next generation.”[[4]](#endnote-4)

*What do you think of Ienaga’s position that high school students must be taught about war? Has learning about the Pacific War changed your feelings about war? If so, how?*

Please select the best answer to the following questions:

1. The Japanese government is reticent to include negative images of Japan in its history textbooks because:
2. The Japanese people do not believe Japan has ever done anything bad.
3. Japanese government officials believe that history should serve the nation.
4. Truth isn’t important in Japan.
5. The following countries have most noticeably protested official Japanese memory of World War II:
6. The United States and Mexico
7. France and Italy
8. China and Korea
9. Historian Ienaga Saburo has been fighting since 1965 to be allowed to write a high school history textbook free of government censorship because:
10. He wants people to learn from the “mistakes” of previous generations.
11. He believes Japan has been unfairly criticized for its role in the Pacific War.
12. He wants to be famous.

**Part Three: What is Oral History?**

Before humans started writing things down—which began to happen reliably in some places about 5,000 years ago, but in some places is a much more recent phenomenon—the knowledge of important stories and events was passed down orally, through stories and poetry. Many of the texts that have fundamentally shaped human society, like the epic stories of Homer (the Iliad and the Odyssey) and the Old Testament of the Bible, were part of this oral tradition. These stories were remembered and retold from generation to generation until someone finally recorded them.

Passing down stories by word of mouth was not always reliable; over hundreds or thousands of years, the details of some stories changed. But people in pre-literate cultures were often much more skilled at remembering long stories than we are and, as a result, historians have discovered that many of these ancient tales do hold much historical truth.

However, it isn’t only pre-literate societies that tell stories and share information by talking to one another. Humans (and historians) continue to value the knowledge and information available through storytelling. For many historians, “oral history,” or the use of eyewitness accounts of events, is a valuable resource for historical research. For historians who are trying to understand recent events like the Pacific War, interviewing people who experienced those events is an important source of information.

Find a partner, interview them about an event (of their choosing) in their life, and record their oral history below.

Here are some questions to get you started. Choose just one or two questions, and record your interviewee’s answers.[[5]](#endnote-5)

* When and where were you born, and where did you grow up? What was it like?
* What traditions have been passed down in your family? What is your family like?
* What was the happiest moment of your life? The saddest?
* Who was/is the most important person in your life?
* What are the most important lessons you’ve learned in your life?
* What is your earliest memory?
* What are you proudest of in your life?
* When in your life have you felt most alone?
* How would you like to be remembered?
* Do you have any regrets?
* What does your future hold?
* Is there something I (and others in our class) don’t know about you that you’d like us to know?

My interviewee’s name:\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

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When you have finished, return to your groups and share your oral histories with each other. Do you think the stories you have recorded are “history”? How might they be of use to a historian? **Part Four: Reviewing the Pacific War as a Story of Everyday Life**

We have covered several aspects of the Pacific War. Through primary documents from the war, you have “met” people who lived through the war. Review the individuals and stories below and discuss the accompanying questions with your group.

Week 1: Japanese Militarism

For several years we had heard heroic words of parting spoken to us from the podium by one young teacher after another… No words followed…Like a child, Mr. Noguchi raised his arm to cover his eyes and wailed aloud. Sobbing with hiccups as a child does, he left the podium without a word.”

Why was Mr. Noguchi so upset?

How does the story of Mr. Noguchi contradict the Japanese government’s ideal of a noble and glorious war?

Week 2: The Rape of Nanking

In my heart, I begged his pardon, and—with my eyes shut and the lieutenant’s curses in my ears—I plunged the bayonet into the petrified Chinese. When I opened my eyes again, he had slumped down into the pit. “Murderer! Criminal!” I called myself.

In what situation did this soldier find himself? What is your impression of him after reading this excerpt?

How does including stories from regular soldiers complicate the story of war? How is the perspective of soldiers different from the perspective of military leaders or government leaders?

Week 3: Occupied Shanghai

In the spreading shade of dusk

we pull up the shining national flag.

It represents the unique holiness and purity

of our national uprightness.

Inside our eight hundred lives is hidden

the spirit of China.

We shall win one day.

How does this poem, written by Yi Guan, express the feelings of Chinese in occupied Shanghai?

What role or responsibility do you think art—literature, music, sculpture and so on—has in recording and teaching about history?

If we keep on dividing the food this way, we will die, first of all myself. We will have to leave the four children to their fates. They will have to try to find food for themselves. Both of us are still young and strong, and even if heaven should cause them to die, after this famine is over, if we are still alive, we can still give birth.

Week 4: Japan in Southeast Asia

Who said this and why?

How is this an example of “history from below”? Do you think the story of the Vuoc family is historically important? Why or why not?

1. From Kaitei Atarashii Sahaki Rekishi (junior high school history textbook). Tokyo: Tokyo Shoseki, February 10, 1984. Approved March 31, 1983. p. 277. Translation from Wikipedia website: <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Excerpts_from_government-approved_Japanese_history_textbooks>, accessed on February 24, 2006. [↑](#endnote-ref-1)
2. From The New History Textbook (junion high school history textbook). Published by Fusosha, 2005. p. 49. Translation from Wikipedia website: <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Excerpts_from_government-approved_Japanese_history_textbooks>, accessed on February 24, 2006. [↑](#endnote-ref-2)
3. “Teaching War,” from Japan at War: An Oral History, ed. Haruko Taya Cook and Theodore F. Cook. New York: The New Press, 1992. Excerpts from pp. 441. [↑](#endnote-ref-3)
4. Ibid. p. 447. [↑](#endnote-ref-4)
5. Questions taken from the Storycorps website. [↑](#endnote-ref-5)