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Dear Educators and Students:

Our young students live in a world of violence and dehumanization of others—and also openness to new understandings and unprecedented receptiveness to the visual image. Although war will shape the world they live in for the rest of their lives, they do not comprehend it. “9-11” is not part of their vivid personal experience. The Vietnam War lies in the distant past, and World War II is ancient history. Critical awareness of the contemporary uses and abuses of memories of history in general—and war and conflict in particular—is largely alien to them.

World War II in Asia can be a particularly powerful teaching and learning experience. We have not only the perspective of time—over a half century now—but also the element of hope: of ferocious hatreds dissipating once the killing stopped. In its day, the war between the United States and Japan was presented by both sides as a “clash of civilizations” pitting race against race, culture against culture. *Wings of Defeat* undermines such thinking. Hand in hand with a critique of the fanaticism of Japan’s leaders, beginning with the Emperor, this remarkable documentary indicts the madness of war itself.

Wings of Defeat succeeds brilliantly by going beyond the words of war leaders and propagandists to place viewers face to face with elderly Japanese who as young men in their late teens and early twenties—not much older than our students today—were prepared to die as Kamikaze “suicide pilots.” They survived by chance, and the personal stories they tell confound expectations and are profoundly humanizing.

During the Pacific War and for decades after, the Kamikaze were commonly presented as true believers who embraced death without qualm or question. Wartime Japanese propagandists pumped up this myth; present-day nationalists labor to perpetuate it; and most foreigners still take it at face value. *Wings of Defeat* punctures the myth. Take, for example, the haunting words of one of the pilots who survived: “I wanted to live. I didn’t want to die.” Or take, again, the on-camera reflections of now elderly American sailors who survived the Kamikaze attack that sank their warship in 1945. Had war fortunes been reversed and the Japanese enemy poised to invade the United States, they muse, Americans too might have offered their lives in like manner.

The human and moral dimensions of these subjects are best taught “in depth,” of course, and we have other recent visual materials that can be used to complement *Wings of Defeat*. Clint Eastwood’s *Flags of Our Fathers* and *Letters from Iwo Jima*, for example, depict the battle of Iwo Jima in early 1945 from the perspectives of American and Japanese fighting men on the ground. What might students make of the latter film when set against *Wings of Defeat*’s participant testimony and original film footage from that same horrific final year of the Pacific War? Expanding further, what deeper understandings emerge when written texts by Japanese as well as American participants are introduced—translated letters and accounts by other Kamikaze, for example, or searing recollections like E.B. Sledge’s *With the Old Breed: At Peleliu and Okinawa*, or fictionalized classics like Shohei Ooka’s *Fires on the Plain* and Norman Mailer’s *The Naked and the Dead*?

When Islamist suicide bombers destroyed the World Trade Center towers on September 11, 2001, the media was quick to make reference to “Kamikaze tactics.” Students are likely to bring up this resonance, and teachers must be prepared to point out the differences. The Kamikaze were “volunteers” only in a limited sense, and their targets were exclusively military. At the same time, however, in both cases we find self-sacrifice for a greater cause rationalized as noble—young men motivated in considerable part less by fanaticism than by commitment to protect homeland and family, and hopeful of attaining a kind of immortality by living on in memory as martyrs. In both cases, we encounter young recruits manipulated by others and socialized for death in a ghastly cause.

Obviously, teaching *Wings of Defeat* can be an extended exercise. The great challenge is to make clear this is not just an exercise in knowing the enemy. It is also an entrée into knowing ourselves, and the cultures and horrors of our modern wars.

Sincerely,

John Dower, Ph.D.

Ford International Professor of History, Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT)

Recipient of the Pulitzer Prize in Letters and Nonfiction for *Embracing Defeat: Japan in the Wake of World War II*

Questions to Consider

How does *Wings of Defeat* help us understand the human and moral dimensions of war?

How are contemporary terrorists or suicide bombers and Kamikaze similar and different?



Dear Educators and Students:

Wings of Defeat shares several fundamental goals with the two books I have written about the Kamikaze. First, each strives to present the Kamikaze (known in Japan as *Tokkotai*, meaning Special Attack Forces) for who they really were, challenging stereotypes of them as the unthinking patriotic zealots. Second, each project aims to spotlight the terrible human cost of war, encouraging audiences to imagine alternatives to violence in resolving conflicts.

Wings of Defeat also confirms the most significant conclusion I reached as I researched my books: the Kamikaze did not volunteer to commit suicide for the Emperor. The film and my books reveal that like so many soldiers in so many wars, the Kamikaze were drafted and sent off to battlefronts where death, often at a young age, was all too predictable. Many were highly educated students who agonized over how to carry out orders to take their own lives attacking American ships.

As I state in the film, of the approximately 4,000 Kamikaze who died, about 3,000 were so-called “boy pilots,” drawn from a pool of newly conscripted and enlisted soldiers and enrolled in a special pilot training program for teenage boys. The majority of the remaining 1,000 were “student soldiers,” university students whom the government graduated early in order to draft. Unfortunately, the “boy pilots” left almost no written records of their experiences but many student soldiers wrote letters and kept diaries. Their words provide invaluable insight into their struggle to sustain their humanity amid the wrenching conditions of war and to find some meaning in a death they felt they could not escape. Many of the student soldiers held liberal political beliefs. Some were self-professed Marxists and “radicals.” Whatever their personal beliefs, these young men were extraordinarily well-educated, thoughtful, and cosmopolitan. Well-versed in both the Japanese classics and the literatures and philosophies of Germany, France, and Russia, some were multi-lingual, able to read the international texts in their original language. Reviewing their diary entries today, we can only marvel at how they drew on their knowledge of philosophy and world history in their attempts to grapple with why they had been ordered to cut short their own lives.

Sincerely,

Emiko Ohnuki-Tierney, Ph.D.

William F. Vilas Professor of Anthropology, University of Madison, Wisconsin

Author of *Kamikaze*, *Cherry Blossoms*, and *Nationalisms: The Militarization of Aesthetics in Japanese History* and *Kamikaze Diaries: Reflections of Japanese Student Soldiers*

Questions to Consider

What are some alternatives to violence in resolving conflicts?

How can primary sources such as diary entries help us understand the situation of the Kamikaze?



Dear Educators and Students:

Between the establishment of Japan's Imperial military forces in 1867 and their defeat in 1945, Japan was constantly at war. However, when it was confronted with the prospect of crushing defeat in the Pacific War, it implemented a "suicidal tactic" unprecedented in military history, which systematically guaranteed the death of its own soldiers. They called it *Tokko* (an abbreviation of *Tokubetsu Kogekitai*, Special Attack Forces). It was a perverted, heretical military strategy stemming from a combination of Japan's Achilles heel—its lack of natural resources and its industrial underdevelopment—and Japan's peculiar metaphysical militarist ideology. Ultimately, the strategy only served to accelerate the exhaustion of its military power.

During the Pacific War there was a 1:12 ratio of GNP between Japan and its principal enemy, the United States. By the end of the war, the same ratio had deteriorated to 1:19. Within this context, even if the "suicidal tactic" had only been implemented as a temporary strategy with appreciable results, it was obvious that it would become a totally self-defeating tactic should it become permanent. Hobbled by its inability to sustain its own military capacity in war, it was apparent that it was only a matter of time before the country would run out of military options. The writing was on the wall. Drained of its military might, Japan would self-destruct.

Nevertheless, with the overall war effort mired in an abysmal state and defeat inevitable, the military commanders chose a heretical tactic, an appalling strategy reflecting the Japanese axiom that despair makes heroes out of cowards. Realizing that their strategy violated every convention and rule of war, the military commanders simply set reason aside, falling back on the power of national myth.

They called their tactic of crashing planes carrying bombs, pilot and all, directly into its targets, Kamikaze, meaning "divine wind." When typhoons obliterated the Mongolian armada, poised to invade Japan in 1281, they were dubbed divine wind, based on the supposition that "god's will" had whipped up the calamitous storms protecting their nation. Ever since, wishful thinking has co-existed with reality in Japan, giving rise to a mystical belief that a divine intervention will rescue the country from any crisis. The state reinforced its deception, buttressing the myth of the divine winds by asserting that those who sacrificed their lives to the war would become gods. But even after over four thousand Japanese youths were sacrificed to the seas as Kamikaze, no "divine winds" blew to save Japan.

The other lever used to buttress the Japanese power structure was the obfuscatory gap in military command created by the Imperial system.

After the premiere screening of *Wings of Defeat* in Tokyo, a former Kamikaze pilot featured in the film freely spoke words which would have been punishable by death during the war, profoundly moving this author, who also remembers that war as one of its Imperial soldiers. When the reports of the impressive results of the first Kamikaze attacks launched from the Philippines against an unsuspecting U.S. Navy reached the Emperor, he is quoted as saying, "Did they have to sacrifice so much?" But then he continued, "But they did a fine job." Referring to the Emperor's reaction, the former Kamikaze featured in the film said, "But the Emperor did not order the Kamikaze attacks to end." These words, spoken by an extremely rare Kamikaze who took off on a mission but miraculously made it home alive, clearly expressed a deeply-held conviction he had kept to himself for decades after the war. They were also a potent accusation. I reiterate that during the war, no Japanese could have dared utter those words. On the other hand, as long as the Emperor was the constitutional monarch, he was not in a position to give an order for the Kamikaze to stop their attacks, no matter how much he might have wished. Although the war was fought in his name, military orders could only be issued by the supreme military command, not by the Emperor. *Wings of Defeat*, and its heartbreaking reflections will engage Japanese history for many years to come.

Sincerely,

Tadao Morimoto, Ph.D.
Professor Emeritus, Ryukoku University, Kyoto

Questions to Consider

- What factors led to the establishment of the Kamikaze?
- What views did the Japanese Emperor have of the Kamikaze?



Dear Educators and Students,

Thank you for your interest in *Wings of Defeat* and the stories of four former Kamikaze. This journey began in the Spring of 2005. At a family gathering, my cousin told me that our uncle trained to be a Kamikaze. Born and raised in the United States, I assumed that the Kamikaze were crazy. After all, Kamikaze is an adjective describing something “wildly reckless or destructive.” My first reaction to my uncle training to be a Kamikaze was confusion and disappointment. How could that be? Our uncle was such a funny, kind, and gentle man. How could he be a crazy lunatic Kamikaze? But then, how could I, as an adult, still believe these one-dimensional stereotypes? Like many Westerners, I thought the Kamikaze were fanatics jumping at the chance to die for their Emperor. And like many Westerners, I was so wrong.

I began my research on the Internet, read books, watched films, and saw an opportunity to make a documentary that told the true story of the Kamikaze. I had to talk to those who experienced the war first-hand.

I bought a plane ticket to Japan, excited and anxious to discover the truth about my uncle's past. My uncle passed away in the mid-1980s so I looked to interview his immediate family members. Like so many other veterans, he died not telling a soul what happened to him during the war.

I was invited to a reunion of the Kamikaze corps who had sortied from Hyakuri in southern Japan. This is where I first met Ena-san and Ueshima-san. Ena-san was my tour guide as he patiently took me to places that hold great significance for the Kamikaze. Ena-san introduced me to ace pilot Hamazono-san. Once we returned to the States, producer Linda Hoaglund read a passage that gunner Nakajima-san wrote and realized he was another person whom we needed to interview. Many other interviewees didn't make it into the final film but made huge contributions to my research and overall understanding of the Kamikaze history. I am truly grateful for their generosity.

This film is not an attempt to be the ultimate comprehensive film on the Kamikaze. Rather, *Wings of Defeat* looks into the lives of four young Imperial Navy men who were forced to sacrifice their lives for their country, yet because of specific circumstances, they miraculously survived. Thus today, we are fortunate to have the opportunity to hear their stories first-hand. My hope is that viewers will become curious about other aspects of the Pacific War, the Kamikaze, and their own family history. I suspect others will find parallels between that war and wars that are fought today just as we did while creating the film.

Thank you Gary Mukai and SPICE for your dedication and support over the last year. I am deeply grateful to all those whom we interviewed for the film and all those who gave their time and energy to help create this story.

Thank you for watching.

Peace,

Risa Morimoto
Director/Producer
Wings of Defeat

Questions to Consider

What were some American and Japanese perceptions of one another during World War II?
What are some parallels between World War II and contemporary wars?



Dear Educators and Students:

I was born and raised in Japan, the daughter of American missionary parents. I learned about the atomic bombs dropped on Hiroshima and Nagasaki in my Japanese elementary school. I will never forget how the Japanese kids turned around to stare at me, the only American in the room, horrified by what my country had done.

Although my parents also taught me English and history at home, I mostly learned about the Pacific War from the Japanese. I heard about the terrible suffering from the atomic bombs, the firebombing of Japan's major cities and the severe shortages of food and materials. I also learned that the Kamikaze had been brave, innocent young men, who had willingly given their lives to their country. Like many Japanese, I became weepy when I heard the Kamikaze anthem that appears in our film.

When I came to the United States for college, I was dismayed to learn that many believed the United States had been right to drop the atomic bombs. Many more believed in our country's entitlement to thousands of nuclear weapons. Some Americans still jokingly called the Japanese "Japs" or "Nips." None of them knew about our B-29s firebombing Japan. I realized there was a huge gap underlying our contradictory understandings of the war. I was raised in Japan, the country that had lost. They were raised in United States, the country that had won. Wanting to learn what had really happened, I began to delve into the history of that war but wasn't satisfied with what I could find in books.

Then, I stumbled on *Nagasaki 11:02* (1966), Tomatsu Shomei's book of photographs and oral histories of Nagasaki survivors (*hibakusha*). His images of Nagasaki *hibakusha*, taken more than 15 years after the war, compel us to see them as humans, just like us. He also wrote down their stories of unimaginable pain and endless suffering. Wanting to convey the terrible wisdom of those who had seen the end of the world, I instinctively began translating them.

Several years later, I saw the documentary, *Japanese Devils*, a grim record of the Pacific War, told by low-ranking Japanese war criminals. The litany of crimes they confess to committing against Chinese civilians is relentless: torture, murder, arson, rape, and vivisection, even cannibalism. And yet once again, something moved me to translate their words. I promised the producer I would write English subtitles accurately reflecting the brutal, all too human, language of the Japanese men.

When Risa Morimoto approached me three years ago to help her make a film about Kamikaze pilots who survived the war, I readily agreed. By then I knew that translating the words of those who had lived through that war, whether as victim or perpetrator, or like the Kamikaze, would-be perpetrators who survived to reveal their victimization, is as close as I will come to understanding what really happened. As the writer of the film, I also finally had an opportunity to portray the Pacific War, balancing American and Japanese perspectives. Our goal is to challenge the conventional historical narratives of the war on both sides, through the testimony of a few Kamikaze who took off for death but bravely flew back to live.

Sincerely,

Linda Hoaglund
Producer/Writer
Wings of Defeat

Questions to Consider

How can first-hand accounts help us better understand or question conventional historical narratives of World War II?
How does *Wings of Defeat* challenge the conventional historical narratives of the war on both sides?

SYNOPSIS



Synopsis of *WINGS OF DEFEAT*
<http://www.wingsofdefeat.com>

Internationally, Kamikaze pilots remain a potent metaphor for fanaticism. In Japan, they are largely revered for their selfless sacrifice. Yet few outside Japan know that hundreds of Kamikaze pilots survived the war. By the spring of 1945, when all Japanese planes were reassigned to Kamikaze (*Tokkotai*) attacks, Japan could no longer defend its airspace and its naval fleet was demolished. Old airplanes and inadequate training resulted in many failed engines, leaving scores of pilots stranded. When Japan surrendered, hundreds of Kamikaze trainees were awaiting sortie orders that never arrived.

Through rare interviews with surviving Kamikaze pilots, we learn that the military demanded pilots to volunteer to give up their lives. Retracing their journeys from teenagers to doomed pilots, a complex history of brutal training and ambivalent sacrifice is revealed. As U.S. firebombs incinerated its major cities and the country ran out of weapons and fuel, Japan's military government refused to accept the reality that it could no longer fight. Instead they sent thousands of pilots off to targets nearly impossible to reach. Sixty years later, survivors in their eighties tell us about their training, their mindsets, their experiences in a Kamikaze cockpit and what it meant to survive when thousands of their fellow pilots had died. Their stories insist we set aside our preconceptions to relive their all too human experiences with them. Ultimately, they help us question what responsibilities a government at war has to its soldiers and to its people.

SUBJECTS, GRADE LEVELS, AND TERMINOLOGY

Wings of Defeat is recommended for use in world history and U.S. history classes. In particular, it is recommended for use during the teaching of World War II.

Wings of Defeat is highly recommended for college students. Many teachers have successfully used the film in high schools. However, teachers should preview the film before making a decision to use the film in high schools. There are many graphic scenes in the film and also use of terms such as “Jap.” Teachers should point out that the term, “Jap,” was commonly used by Americans and by the U.S. media during World War II to refer to the Japanese. The term is derogatory.

The information in the previous paragraph is also true for *Another Journey*, an optional film.

CONNECTIONS TO NATIONAL HISTORY STANDARDS

Wings of Defeat helps to address the following National History Standards.

STANDARD 4B: WORLD HISTORY

The student understands the global scope, outcome, and human costs of the war.

Grade Level: 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]

Grade Level: 9–12

Assess the consequences of World War II as a total war. [Formulate historical questions]

STANDARD 3: U.S. HISTORY

The causes and course of World War II, the character of the war at home and abroad, and its reshaping of the U.S. role in world affairs.

Standard 3A: The student understands the international background of World War II.

Standard 3B: The student understands World War II and how the Allies prevailed.

Grade Level: 5–12

Explain the major turning points of the war and contrast military campaigns in the European and Pacific theaters. [Draw upon data in historical maps]

Grade Level: 7–12

Evaluate the decision to employ nuclear weapons against Japan and assess later controversies over the decision. [Evaluate major debates among historians]

Grade Level: 5–12

Explain the financial, material, and human costs of the war and analyze its economic consequences for the Allies and the Axis powers. [Utilize visual and quantitative data]

ESSENTIAL QUESTIONS



The following essential questions for *Wings of Defeat* were developed based on the “Letters to Educators and Students.”

- How does *Wings of Defeat* help us understand the human and moral dimensions of war?
- How are contemporary terrorists or suicide bombers and Kamikaze similar and different?
- What are some alternatives to violence in resolving conflicts?
- How can primary sources such as diary entries help us understand the situation of the Kamikaze?
- What factors led to the establishment of the Kamikaze?
- What views did the Japanese Emperor have of the Kamikaze?
- What were some American and Japanese perceptions of one another during World War II?
- What are some parallels between World War II and contemporary wars?
- How can first-hand accounts help us better understand or question conventional historical narratives of World War II?
- How does *Wings of Defeat* challenge the conventional historical narratives of the war on both sides?

Other important essential questions for *Wings of Defeat* are:

- How do you define the word “enemy”?
- What is the role of the media during war?
- What is patriotism?
- What is nationalism?
- How do you decide just how far you are willing to go to prove your loyalty?
- What are the responsibilities of a government to its citizens and soldiers in time of war?

Essential questions for *Another Journey*:

- What is reconciliation?
- What are some ways to honor the memory of someone?
- What do religions teach their followers about forgiveness?
- What does it mean to forgive?
- What is hate?
- How are deceased soldiers honored?
- Have you ever overcome hate or anger toward someone?