

Senior Division, Non-Fiction

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**The Letter (an excerpt)**

When the air raid siren started blaring, as per routine, my classmates and I took out our home-made masks, two pieces of cotton rectangles lined inside with gauze, that we always carried in the outer compartment of our school bags. After we secured the straps around our ears, we sat under our desk with our heads down and arms wrapped around our knees. Sitting under my desk on the hard floor that made my bottom cold, I contemplated how likely my desk would protect me. If the ceiling, which was also the floor of classrooms with the higher grades collapsed under the bombing, the older students would rain down from above with chunks of concrete. Even if my desk did not break, what would happen if the bombs were filled with poisonous gas? Then the lethal gas would snake around looking for children sitting under unbelievably well-built desks. I hugged my knees tighter and tried to guess what Mom had packed for me in my bento box for lunch, always visually pleasing and delicious.

When the air raid drill was over, as usual, we climbed out from under the desk stretching, giggling nervously and talking as we went back to sitting in our chairs.

A loud snap.

We stiffened in our chairs and looked toward the blackboard. Mr. Park, our teacher, had just hit the blackboard so hard, the yard stick had broken in half.