

A-21

Should Hiroshi be grateful he goes to School?

Hey Hiroshi! what's up? I asked my friend. "Urgh... my mom is going to kill me.....I got 42% in social studies oh...no. Why do I need to go to school? It's a waste of time."

Whoah, wait up Hiroshi, let's first look at a little history, I said. Even though some children in the past went to *terakoya*, which were temple-based schools to learn reading, writing, and arithmetic during the Edo Period, most people still worked on farms or in shops, and formal education was not for everyone. It wasn't until the Meiji era, in 1872, that the Japanese government made school education official and available to all children. The idea was that if everyone learned similar basic knowledge and morals, Japan could become a strong and modern country. There was no reaction from Hiroshi.

But, I understood how Hiroshi and many other students felt and feel. I looked into the three most disliked subjects in junior high school in Japan and found some reasons why.

In third place was science. Students said; "Element symbols, plant names, human body structure, chemical reactions, there're too many to remember!"

Number two was...*English*. A student complained; "Vocabulary, grammar, pronunciation...the sentence order is so confusing. Why do I need this?"

In first place was Math! Many students moaned that: "The pace of the lessons is too fast!!!" or: "Even when I study really hard, I never get a good score." One 3rd grader said: "When will I ever need simultaneous equations?" and a first grader worried: "I'm scared that if I make just one mistake, everything will be ruined!"

I saw Hiroshi nodding. Then I asked him if he knew how many children there were in the world? He had no idea. There are currently about 2.1 billion children in the world of 15 years old or younger. But 16% can't go to school even if they want to. That's two hundred and fifty one million children that can't go to school because of; poverty, conflict, disaster, and discrimination. I asked Hiroshi if he thought he was lucky. He let out a long sigh.

I tried another angle. I told him and I'll tell you, school in Japan isn't just about subjects. Once a month, we focus on greetings and manners through "*aisatsu*" day. Cleaning the school ourselves teaches time management, shared responsibility, and independence. Serving lunch to classmates builds etiquette and care for others. Student council and committees promote democratic values and sometimes influence school policy. Moral education fosters empathy and civic duty, while homeroom teachers support both learning and emotional growth. It may be the best time ever to be a student.

Parents and educators abroad are often amazed by what students in Japanese junior high schools do, especially cleaning! and would love their kids to grow in a similar environment. Japan became that strong and modern country that the post-Edo period leaders dreamed of.

The name Hiroshi could be the name of any classmate I have tried to cheer up or motivate after a perceived failure. Mistakes help us start again more intelligently. I think all Hiroshis should be grateful they can go to school