



North Korean Human Rights  
Abuses Awareness Week

# Essay Competition 2022

Awarded essay

Towards the Immediate Rescue of All Abductees!

Hosted by the Headquarters for the Abduction Issue, the Government of Japan. Supported by the Ministry of Justice, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, and the Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology.



## Junior High School Category 1st Prize

Wishing to Hear Your Voice Saying "I'm Home!"

YOSHIDA Kiara

7th grade, Narashino Municipal 5th Junior High School

"I'm going to school now. Be back soon!" These were the last words from YOKOTA Megumi. It was about 45 years ago, November 15th, 1977, when a 13-year-old girl became missing on her way home from school. The animated film "Megumi" and a theatrical company (Yasokai)'s play "The Pledge to Megumi" gave me a chance to ponder about the North Korean abduction issue. After I learned that she was abducted at my age and the shocking reality of the abduction issue, I could no longer ignore it, as if it were someone else's problem. My heart ached from thinking about it. Megumi's happy life with her family and friends was suddenly stolen from her, and she was forced to live in North Korea. It was heartbreaking, and in the meantime I realized how I was privileged to be living a life with lots of happiness. The happiness of going to school every day, the happiness of eating warm food, and the happiness of wearing clothes of my choice. The happiness of being granted to do these things. My life is filled with freedom and happiness. I realized how all the little happiness that I have is actually stupendously valuable. I cherish my ordinary life. This may be what I can do as a junior high school student.

What else can we do, so that the issue of abduction won't fade away from people's minds? In order to pass the issue on to future generations, schools should give their chance to students to watch the animation film on DVD at school. Take advantage of the Internet and disseminate the information on the issue throughout the world to let people learn about the issue. Also, continue to hold this essay competition, so that future generations of Japan, like mine, will write essays and learn about the reality of the issue. Moreover, we will pass what we learned to the next generation. I can do these things.

Human rights violations are not limited to the abduction issue. Sadly, many people in the world experience them. Recently, I heard about prejudice and segregation against people with coronavirus infections. Verbal abuse is also a human rights violation, and is so common. Any form of human rights violation should not be allowed. Thus, I decided to watch myself and not to throw any harsh words at my friends, peers, or family.

In the film "Megumi," I found words that made a strong impression on me. Those were Megumi's mother, YOKOTA Sakie's words. "We don't resent or hate the ordinary people living in North Korea. We only hope to bring back our daughter who is still held captive there."

I was impressed by her being able to stay strong and say this while experiencing a very sad and unbearable situation.

Megumi's father, YOKOTA Shigeru, passed away 2 years ago, without seeing Megumi again. What Megumi's family and people in Japan want to hear right now is the cheerful voice of Megumi, saying "I'm home!" We are all truly waiting for that bright future to come.

## Junior High School Category 2nd Prize

### Putting Myself in the Victims Situations

KAWAKATSU Rise

9th grade, Nantan Municipal Sonobe Junior High School

“Mom, Dad, Help me... I'm here...”

Over 45 years ago, in autumn, a girl who lived in Niigata prefecture was abducted on the way home after her extracurricular activities. She was smuggled in a boat, and when she got off the boat, she was in North Korea. She couldn't see her family or friends and was threatened to be killed if she didn't cooperate. She dreamed of going home to Japan every day but tried hard to live in a country where no family or friends lived. In one day, her happy days ground to a halt, and she was alone standing in an unknown place. She was not sure if she could be alive tomorrow.

“If I were Megumi...”

In a social science class, we watched “The Pledge to Megumi,” a movie about the abduction of YOKOTA Megumi. She was just like me, a junior high school student living with her parents and brothers ... All of a sudden, she was a victim of abduction. She cried out for help in a boat being tossed by strong waves until her voice became hoarse. This heartbreaking scene is still deep in my heart. I felt Megumi's pain as if I were in the movie. She must have experienced an unbelievable level of fear and insecurity. Also, Megumi's parents must've felt inexpressible difficulty losing their daughter in one day and having been told she had run away.

I knew about the issue. Now, I look back. I had many chances to learn about this human rights violation. But...

“Right. That's a problem.”

I was definitely thinking the issue was irrelevant, that it was someone else's problem. In the class, a discussion I had with my classmates reminded me how I was thinking before. I was uninterested, and that was terrible. This abduction issue has not been resolved, even today, which may be due to so many people, who are also Japanese, avoiding and facing the true meaning of the issue like me.

In the class discussion, we had a theme, “know the true history and think about it yourself.” I feel that this is what we, today's junior high school students, are required to do.

The most critical point is that this issue has hit a wall and has been in the doldrums for a long time. As a result, the effort to bring back the abductees is at a crucial point. The victims and their families are growing older and losing energy to continue their campaigns, and the public is losing interest.

We should put ourselves in the shoes of the victims and their families. Instead of giving up because it is an issue between governments, we should raise our antennas high up to be involved. I may realize how helpless and insignificant I am as a junior high school student, but I will continue to learn the history and become a member of a society who is involved in the campaign, working to resolve the issue as soon as possible.

## Junior High School Category 2nd Prize

If I Were a Victim – the North Korean Abduction Issue

UEDA Karin

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I am an ordinary junior high school student. When Ms. YOKOTA Megumi was abducted by North Korea, she was my age and in the same grade. I could not imagine what it would be like to be abducted just when I started my junior high school life, getting used to the new routine, having new friends, and enjoying my school life. It's just impossible for this to happen to me, leaving home for school saying "I'll be home soon" for the last time.

Against my will, if some stranger takes me to a country I do not know, without telling me anything, if I were to be taken away from my beloved family, it would be tremendously difficult. I may become psychotic because my precious daily life had been destroyed.

I researched why North Korea abducted Japanese people like Megumi. It was thought that they planned to make the abductees into spies who could falsely identify themselves as Japanese and to optimize their skills by providing educators. Is that a good reason to destroy someone's life? Not at all.

Everyone in the world is granted human rights when they are born. That is, to have rights to live their own lives. This is stated in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights in 1948. These rights, however, have been violated and deprived from not only the abductees but also their families. Of course, the lives and safety of abductees are important. But, we should know abductees' families have been deprived of freedom as well.

Most people at my age know very little about the North Korean abduction issue. Like how I was before, most of their awareness is limited to something like, "some people were abducted by North Korea." It is someone else's problem, not ours, because it is at the national level. I was given a chance to watch the animated film "Megumi" through this event and realized I may be able to do three things to help resolve the issue. The first is to participate in a petition and talk about the issue with friends. Since I watched the film on YouTube, I could easily watch it with my friends during recess, which can be done soon, too.

The second, I will try to avoid false information and learn more about the issue and apply what I learn in my daily life. I live in a country that grants basic human rights, which makes the human rights issue all the more important for me to learn. This act may direct me away from segregating or stereotyping people in North Korea because they may be victims of human rights violations as well.

The third, I will continue to wish for the resolution of the abduction issue and for the families' smiles.

A junior high school student like me may only do so much, but I want to continue to do these things as I grow up, and when I become a mother, I will tell my children about the issue of abducted Japanese.

## High School Category 1st Prize

### Everyone Has Human Rights

MATSUMOTO Yūmi

12th grade, Kansai Soka Senior High School

The YOKOTAs were a happy family until North Korea suddenly took away their ordinary lives. Their time has stopped since then.

Abduction is definitely unacceptable, and when such has happened, the abductee must have been astonishingly scared and helpless. I have thought this way all the time, and when I thought about the families who were left behind, I also thought that it's totally reasonable for them to hope for their families' immediate return. On the other hand, I had a question. While the abductees spend many years in North Korea, they form new relationships with North Koreans. Would the abductees really hope to come back to Japan?

After I learned more about the issue, my thoughts gradually changed. As I watched an animated film and read documents on the issue, I felt ashamed of myself for how little I knew about the issue. I was particularly shocked by the fact that the abductees were forced to educate North Korean spies. How sad were the families in Japan learning that their loved ones were forced to help out in some criminal act. In an interview article of HASUIKE's, he said, "The only freedom I could have in North Korea was to think in my head. In order to protect myself, I said only what was safe for me to say and held my tongue otherwise. I realized that North Korea was a country without individual human rights. As I learned these facts, I understood more, and my opinion had changed. The families of abductees must've longed for their families' return, and the abductees must've longed to come back to Japan, where everyone is granted human rights."

I feel that many people are like me in thinking they know all about the issue. Actually, they have only scratched the surface of the issue and only know that "some Japanese had been abducted by North Korea and their families are working hard to bring their loved ones home." Knowing some of the facts is definitely important because nothing will start if you have no idea. But that is not enough to solve the problem. People should know that North Korea has committed state crimes, and their victims are from many countries. Each one of the abductees have suddenly lost their precious livelihood in their own countries and are forced to live in North Korea, where no human rights are granted. We ought to understand this threat to human rights, an essential aspect of people's lives, as an international problem. In a few decades, the abductees and their families will not be here. North Korea's human rights violations definitely should not be regarded as something from the past and forgiven, even when all of them are gone. The abductees and their families' solitude, sorrow, agony, anger, and hope should be taken over by us, and society should take actions to protect human rights for everyone.

## High School Category 2nd Prize

“Never Forget About the Victims”

SATO Hiyori

12th grade, Fukushima Prefectural Fukushima Meisei High School

This terrible incidence occurred suddenly. The fact that Megumi must've only hoped to live an ordinary high school life was taken away. She must've felt devastated with lots of anger, sadness, and pain. After watching the animated film, “Megumi,” I still hear Megumi's voice calling, “Mom!” and feel her pain, as if it left a strong impression on me. If I were taken away from my family, if I could not see my loved ones, would I have a reason to live in the world? Just by thinking these thoughts, my head aches, and chest tightens.

We all have at least one very precious person in the world. You may not realize this, but someone is supporting you. Abduction is in no way a reasonable thing, no matter who the person abducted is in this world.

I became more aware of the responsibilities as a part of society. Before I took the class on “the North Korean Abduction Issue,” I only had a vague idea about the issue. After that, I learned why it happened and what happened between the 2 countries in the Korean peninsula and Japan. Since I became a high school student, many things made more sense in the film I watched in the class. I feel that, as time goes on, more and more young people don't know about the issue, even though they have heard Megumi's name at some point. In my case, my parents knew about the issue very well, but my sisters (they are 1-year-younger and 7-years-younger than me) knew very little. Thus, we, high school students, have an important role to summarize the issue in an easy-to-understand format for younger kids and disseminate it through our various school events.

For this, we should acquire a deeper understanding of the issue, connect with as many people as possible through the film, and take actions to raise public awareness. On the Internet, I have found possibilities such as the Blue Ribbon movement for abduction victims, in addition to regular petitions. As a member of the student counsel, I am a part of the “Citrus Ribbon Movement,” which aims to stop harmful rumors about the prefecture caused by the Great East Japan Earthquake from spreading. I wear the ribbon every time I participate in an interschool event. Students from other schools give comments to me, “Cute ribbon. What does it mean?” In return of my explanation of the ribbon, the other students advocate our activity and show interest in trying it out for themselves. In addition to the Citrus Ribbon Movement, I will work for the Blue Ribbon movement to give a chance to students in my neighborhood elementary, junior, and senior high schools to learn about the North Korean abductions. My hope is that various people will join the movement, which may become more powerful and influential and that it reaches North Korea someday.

## High School Category 2nd Prize

The First Step is to Heighten Your Awareness

NAKAGAWA Akari

10th grade, Kanagawa Prefectural Atsugi Higashi Senior High School

What is the North Korean abduction issue? News frequently picks up this issue, but I haven't really paid attention. I was not born yet when it happened, and it didn't interest me. It was someone else's business, not mine, until I watched an animated film, "Megumi."

After I watched the film, I was scared and felt heartache, imagining if that happened to me. Forty-five years ago, YOKOTA Megumi was abducted by North Korea. She was only 13 at the time. In the midst of her teenage years, she was deprived of freedom and taken away from her family. Megumi was taken to North Korea by boat. Her voice crying out for her father and mother filled the entire boat. This scene left a strong impression on me. The whole story was the heartbreaking truth, and I wished it were a fictional story. She was suddenly taken away from her beloved family by a total stranger to be taken away to an unknown place. She must've been scared to death. Her family of course must've been desperate. I learned how ignorant I was from this. In one day, a beloved daughter had disappeared. Probably, her parents wished it wasn't true, and it must've been unbearable since they had no idea what had happened to their daughter at the time. Even after they learned of the possibility of abduction, they must've felt helpless since they were not allowed to go rescue Megumi. I imagine that they were ready to do whatever they could to bring Megumi home.

I read a comic book "When My Mother was Kidnapped, I was Only a Year Old" by IIZUKA Koichiro. His experience was a bit different from the family in the animated film. The victim in this comic book was also abducted by North Korea, like Megumi, but became an educator for North Koreans who were involved in crimes. When IIZUKA learned of his mother's abduction, he had already grown up. He must've had conflicting thoughts after learning of this. Although Megumi's family reached out to society for support, he couldn't do so easily, which probably made him regretful.

After I read the comic and watched the animated film, a question came to me. Why is this issue still not resolved? Is North Korea that hard to deal with?

To tell you the truth, I have no good ideas on how to resolve the issue, which seems so unattainable. But, I will start by learning about it, which is important. If everyone heightens their awareness on the issue, something may happen. Moreover, to not let this issue fade away from people's minds, while the families of abductees grow older, the issue should be passed on to the next generations.

## English Essay Category 1st Prize

What we should do now?

TAKEUCHI Mayu

11th grade, Saijo High School

Remember a happy birthday party you've enjoyed with your family. Now, imagine that you'll never see your family again the day after that. This is exactly what Yokota Megumi's family experienced. 45 years have passed since she was abducted by North Korean agents. According to a public opinion poll carried out by the Cabinet Office in 2017, 85.3% of people in their sixties remained interested in the abduction issue, compared to only 64.9% of young people. What should we teenagers do to solve the international issue? I believe we should do two things: develop our knowledge of the issue and take action.

First, we must improve our knowledge. When I initially learned about the abduction issue in junior high school, I realized what a gross violation of human rights Megumi's family had suffered. It opened my eyes to the injustice. Since then, I've always asked myself what I can do to resolve this issue. Before writing this essay, I watched the Japanese animation MEGUMI. There was a scene that left a deep impression on me. Shigeru, Megumi's father was given a comb as a birthday present by Megumi on the day before the incident. For 42 years, Shigeru had always carried the gift in his breast pocket. At his funeral, Sakie, Megumi's mother, did not put the comb in Shigeru's coffin. Instead, Sakie decided she would keep hold of it, so if they were ever reunited, Megumi could see that her father had always been thinking of her. I feel strongly that we young people should inherit the determination of Mr. and Mrs. Yokota. We need more opportunities to learn about these struggles.

Second, we must take actions ourselves. So far, I have always shared what I learned in class with my family. My mother says that she remembers our talk about the abduction issue. It's so important to share our opinions with those around us and get them interested in human rights issues. Currently I'm a member of a committee on human rights education. I hope to hold activities to educate the public during North Korean Human Rights Abuses Awareness Week. I want to tell all the students at school about some events, which are available on YouTube. Fortunately, after reading my ideas, my teacher promoted my action and introduced the anime of MEGUMI in the school newsletter for students and parents. I'm sure that expressing our opinions will inspire others to take action, too.

In conclusion, this essay outlines two steps all young people can take: develop our knowledge of the issue and take action. The most important thing in learning about human right issues is to never give up. I want to increase opportunities for young people to learn by continuing to enlighten them. Moreover, I hope they themselves will spread the knowledge they have learned. For this reason, I want to be a leader who can constantly push myself to learn more. I'll continue to research the abduction issue and strive for a resolution.



## English Essay Category 2nd Prize

### Familiar Problems

SHIRAHAMA Masaaki

9th grade, Anan Municipal Fukui Junior High School

After I watched the Megumi video, I was curious why North Korea was abducting people and what was happening to the people who were not returning. Thus, I researched it.

It turns out that the abductions conducted by North Korea were for the purpose of using Japanese people to train operatives and subjugate South Korea to the North's view of "unity" in the Korean Peninsula.

The video had an impressive scene featuring a figure of a person walking over a leaflet without even paying attention to it. It was shocking to those who sincerely hoped for Megumi return to Japan and believed in their campaign. However, not only had their papers been carelessly trampled, but it was as if their own hearts had been crushed as well. It felt as though Japan was not even interested in the abduction issue taking place ... and that was a huge problem. In order to solve important human rights issue, there must be general interest and concern regarding those matters.

When I was in elementary school, I read a book written by Dr. King from the United States. He confronted racism not with violence, but with protest. He appealed to many about the absurdities of discrimination. Perhaps no better phrase captures his perspective than this particular one: "We remember the silence of our friends, not the words of our enemies." It is a reminder that those who remain silent and overlook the suffering of others quietly stand with those who discriminate. I think that it's very easy to avoid personal responsibility in situations like these because the problems often seem so large. It's simple to just assure ourselves that we are completely powerless. However, this mindset only further torments victims and their families, as well as hinders any real progress towards ending such heinous abduction crimes.

In order to resolve the abduction issue, we must first be willing acknowledge the reality of its existence. We can't solve a problem if we simply keep stepping over it. Additionally, we must also be able to imagine what kind of days Megumi, her parents, other victims, and their families have faced. We must work together and make great efforts to resolve this heartbreaking issue as soon as possible.

## English Essay Category 2nd Prize

Now, it is our turn

MURAYAMA Kaho

10th grade, Takeda Junior & Senior High School

“Mom! Mom!” In the pitch-dark, cold boat, Megumi Yokota cried and screamed for 40 hours, scratching here and there in doorways and walls, and when she arrived in North Korea, her fingernails were almost peeled off and she was covered in blood.

From the day she disappeared, her family’s life changed forever. At night, her father cried in the bath and her mother cried alone away from the family.

Could you bear it if your happiness is suddenly destroyed?  
Could you bear it if your loved one suddenly disappear in this way?

I want you to take some time to think about this. If your sibling disappears without any trace, no one had contact with you for ransom. You can’t anything but wait for your sibling will come back. If I were in the situation, I wouldn’t know what to do. And I would feel hopeless to live.

Such as inhumane incident actually happened in Japan.

17 Japanese people, including Yokota Megumi, were abducted by North Korea. They abducted people not only from Japan but also from several other countries and regions of the world. My heart ache this unforgivable state- sponsored incident.

The purposes of the abduction were both the spy-training and the Japanese instruction for the agents. North Korea acknowledged the abduction at the first Japan-North Korea summit and it was even after 25 years later after Megumi’s abduction had occurred. It took so many years that this tragedy was shown to the public.

The incident has not yet been resolved, and unfortunately due to aging, some family members have passed away without ever seeing their abductees. What can we do achieve this? Japanese school should dedicate a time to think about this abduction issue. Actually there is a special week “North Korean Human Rights Abuses Awareness Week” in Japan, but in reality few people, especially younger generation know this week. How about providing a study time on the abduction issue at each school once a year, such as peace studies? We should start with learning the background of North Korea why they had abducted, including history. We also must ask the Japanese government to share the latest information.

The abduction issue must never happen again, and we younger generation, must not give up and stand up for a solution.