

Three years have passed since you began your studies at this highly selective and historically important Metropolitan high school. There must be countless things that have concerned and interested you during these years.

Three years ago, all of you were still junior high school students. And now you are already soon-to-be adults who have to some extent gained intellectual strength, judgment, and powers of expression. That makes me very happy.

Some of you may have to live in different places. You may feel depressed to discover that people you meet are better than you in certain fields. It may take you a long time to accept living in friendly rivalry with others. That, however, will help you mature and make you stronger and wiser. Others may motivate you to work harder and to learn more, so as to become more like them. Don't envy others for being better than you in any field.

There were many things that seemed especially noteworthy during these past three years.

In November of 2015, simultaneous terrorist attacks occurred in Paris and its suburbs. They were preceded in January by an attack on a newspaper office in Paris, as well as the murder of two Japanese hostages in the Middle East. In July, the United States and Cuba started restoring diplomatic relations. It had been more than fifty years since the Cuban missile crisis of 1962, during the presidency of John F. Kennedy.

And in 2016, huge earthquakes hit Kumamoto, resulting in 50 deaths, injuries to more than 2,000 people, and damage to a large number of buildings, including such important cultural properties as Kumamoto Castle. In May, Barack Obama visited Hiroshima for the first time as President of the United States. In his remarks, he said, "Those who died — they do not want more war. They would rather that the wonders of science be focused on improving life, and not eliminating it." As President Obama suggested, we should choose a future in which Hiroshima and Nagasaki are known not as the dawn of atomic warfare, but as the start of our own moral awakening. In October, Yoshinori Ohsumi was awarded the Nobel Prize in Physiology or Medicine for his discoveries of the mechanisms for autophagy. On the basis of his research, other Japanese scientists have found new medicines for treating such degenerative diseases as Alzheimer's and Parkinson's.

Last year, 2017, not a few of you had a chance to vote in the Metropolitan Assembly election in July and in the Parliamentary election in October. In Northern European countries, it is said that the voting rate of youth is more than

80%. I hope many of you take an interest in political issues we face in our society and go to the polls. And last month, the Winter Olympic Games were held in Pyeong Chang. Japan won 13 medals in all. There were a lot of wonderful performances, close games, and exciting races, and they moved us profoundly. What most impressed me was the women's 500-meter speed skating event. After her victory, Nao Kodaira, responding to cheers from the stands, joined with Lee in raising the Japanese and Korean flags together. "Sports can make the world one ... It's simple," Kodaira told reporters, and she said she told Lee that "I still respect you—and a lot." We feel proud of these athletes not only because they won medals but also because they are honest and respect one another.

Looking back on the Heisei era, many terrorist attacks have occurred in various parts of the world, which have made us terribly sad, such as 911 in the City of New York. There have also been the war in Iraq, the war between the Islamic State and many other nations and organizations, and terrorist attacks on ordinary people in Europe. It seems that we live in a politically chaotic world.

During the Heisei era, many natural disasters have occurred in various parts of Japan, such as the Unzen volcanic eruption, the Hanshin-Awaji earthquake, and the Higashi-Nihon earthquake and tsunami. His Imperial Majesty Emperor Akihito visited each of these places after its disaster, talked to local people, and showed his concern for them. His Majesty is the very first Emperor to perform his role in this way. I think he has wanted to change the significance of the Emperor as a symbol of our state under the Constitution.

His Majesty turned 84 years old last December and many of us have been deeply concerned about his age and health since, in a video message in the summer of 2016, he alluded to his wish to abdicate. We realize that we will soon witness the end of the Heisei era of Emperor Akihito's reign. It appears that the new era will start on May 1st, 2019, in less than fourteen months. The new era is around the corner.

In this age of uncertainty, don't take a dark view of life. You should rather think there are many more chances to leave your marks, achievements that will change our society for the better. Fortunately, we have witnessed new discoveries and reconciliations during the Heisei era, too, which have made us happy and which have given us a new hope for the future.

What do you want to do for society? Learning should be not only for yourselves but also for making our society better. In this age of uncertainty, we

have to keep on learning. Learning is the best thing we can do during such times. Japan has little in the way of natural resources. Our nation's greatest treasure is its citizenry. You, boys and girls, are part of that great treasure. Each of you is irreplaceable.