

Boys and girls,

I would like to talk about two things at the end of the second trimester, 2017.

First,

many things have concerned or interested me since last speaking to you, especially the coming change in the imperial era. Since last year, when His Imperial Majesty Emperor Akihito alluded in a video message to his wish to abdicate, many of us have been deeply concerned about his age and health. He still has to carry out his duties as Emperor, with his wife, Her Majesty Empress Michiko, even though he will turn 84 years old tomorrow.

In the Heisei era, many natural disasters have occurred in various parts of Japan, such as the Unzen volcanic eruption that took more than 40 lives with its stream of hot rocks and volcanic ash, the Hanshin-Awaji earthquake, which left more than 6,000 dead, and the Higashi-Nihon earthquake and tsunami, which deprived more than 20,000 people of their lives. His Majesty 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 also visited many former enemy nations and prayed for those who had died for their countries. I think this is because he has been looking back on our history and has felt sorrow about the Pacific War. While it is more than 70 years since the war ended, some people continue to harbor deep resentments about what was done in their countries. His Majesty thinks that we have to build and maintain good relationships between those countries and Japan, with an honest view of our history. Unfortunately, it takes only a moment to destroy a good relationship, and it takes very long time to reconcile with one another.

Many of us have been wondering what the new imperial era name will be. We realize that we will soon witness the end of the Heisei era of Emperor Akihito's reign. He will become a *Jōkō*, a retired Emperor. This will be the first time in 200 years that we have had a *Jōkō*, since Emperor Kōkaku abdicated in the Edo period. There has never before been an Imperial abdication in Japan under a constitutional government.

It is thought that the new era will start on May 1st, 2019, in less than two years.

Crown Prince Naruhito is to become the 126th Emperor.

I do hope the new era will be peaceful and prosperous.

Second, and last,

to twelfth graders, there are just 22 days to go before the Center Examination, and

you need to concentrate on your studies more than ever. Do what you can do today for the sake of your own futures. After the Center Examination, your focus will shift to the secondary examinations for individual universities. You will have plenty of time, almost forty days, before taking them. Don't be afraid to set high goals for yourselves. I am sure that you will be able to make it. Be ambitious, boys and girls. I do hope each of you will live up to your own personal potential. Believe in yourselves. The possibilities for you are infinite.

Now, to everyone,

you may at times feel in low spirits. There will surely be hardships and, perhaps, bitter experiences. When it is hard striving to solve your problems all by yourselves, please don't hesitate to talk to your teachers, or the School Counselor, or to me.

Don't let the word principal scare you.

And I hope all of you are gentle, kind to one another, not ignoring your friends, not speaking ill of them. Every student deserves respect. Don't come down so hard on your friends. As I told you, it takes only a moment to destroy a good relationship, and it takes very long time to reconcile with one another.

In closing, I would like to wish you all a very Merry Christmas and Happy New Year. I do hope the year 2018 will be a more peaceful one for people all over the world. Thank you very much.