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Evading history: Grammar changes in textbook inspire Whitcomb prize winner（图）

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[作者] University of Kansas
[单位] University of Kansas

[摘要] May 16, 2007, LAWRENCE — An essay examining the use of grammar in Japanese high school textbooks to shape accounts of World War II atrocities has won the 2007 Whitcomb Essay Prize at the University of Kansas.

[关键词] grammar;textbooks

May 16, 2007, LAWRENCE —

An essay examining the use of grammar in Japanese high school textbooks to shape accounts of World War II atrocities has won the 2007 Whitcomb Essay Prize at the University of Kansas.

Anne Isabel McEvoon, Lawrence senior graduating with degrees in classical languages and English, wins a $500 cash award for her essay exploring the shift of meaning through a controversial grammatical change in textbooks regarding the role of the Japanese Imperial Army in a mass suicide of Okinawa natives in advance of the U.S. invasion during World War II.

Her essay, "The Passive/Aggressive Voice: Teaching the Grammar of Evasion," focused on the use of the passive voice.

"By saying, 'Many people were forced to commit suicide,' but not saying who was using force, the grammar is evasive," McEvoon said.

In recent years, the Japanese Ministry of Education had been more open in reference to the army's role in the Okinawa suicides in 1945. The revision is a reversion to an old way of treating unpleasant historical events, McEvoon notes.

McEvoon said when she read a New York Times story about the textbook changes, she recalled grammar lessons of her Southwest Junior High School teacher, Lynne Benick, who viewed learning the rules of grammar and applying them in writing, and of David Bergeron, KU professor of English, who viewed the power of grammar. McEvoon wove those grammar lessons into her essay.

One contest judge noted, "Anne McEvoon writes with grace and precision, she moves easily between the concrete and the more general —

and between the personal and the political. In terms of content, she represents with stunning sharpness links between a feature of language or language use (viz., use of the passive voice) and the acceptance or evasion of agency and responsibility."

Another judge added that McEvoon's essay ably argues that "clear, forceful writing (in the active voice) is central to self-

understanding and to citizenship in modern democracies."

She is the daughter of Bruce McEvoon and Michelle Tsuduzumi and is a Lawrence Free State High School graduate. She will pursue a master's degree in clinics at the University of Bristol in England. McEvoon recently received a national Phi Kappa Phi fellowship and will be the banner carrier for the College of Liberal Arts and Sciences in the May 20 pre-ceremonial for KU's 135th commencement ceremony.

The prize includes a book and the inscription of the winner's name on the Whitcomb plaque in the Nunemaker Center at KU.

The contest honors Philip W. Whitcomb (1891-

1986), who earned a doctorate in philosophy at age 89 at KU in 1981. A journalist by trade, Whitcomb received a bachelor's degree in 1910 from Wesleyan University and was a Rhodes scholar at Oxford University from 1911 to 1914. His career as a European journalist spanned 64 years and 17 countries. As an Associated Press correspondent, he covered the first and second world wars. He also was a correspondent for the Christian Science Monitor, Baltimore Sun, New York Tribune and Boston D

Whitcomb's dissertation was titled "Essence and Existence in the Thought of Thomas Aquinas, Giles of Rome and Francisco Suarez." For part of his time at KU, he was a graduate teaching assistant in the Western civilization program. He died in Paris in 1986 at age 94.

The Philip W. Whitcomb Memorial Essay Contest has taken place annually since 1988. It is open to any undergraduate at KU, and past winners have come from engineering, English, philosophy, architectural engineering, anthropology, mathematics and other subject areas.

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