# Art-stories as reflection: Learning from the Popoki Peace Project

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**Abstract**

This article addresses the ways people express their understandings, beliefs and feelings about feeling safe through art, stories, and art-stories. The purpose is to contribute to ongoing efforts to build a methodology for the analysis and understanding of art-stories about feeling safe, and to contribute to the conversation about reflective narrative, art and everyday security. It suggests that reflective art-stories can add an especially important, and often different, perspective to our understanding of what it means to feel safe. The article first provides a discussion of the meaning of stories, narrative and reflection, and discusses the importance of art-stories in reflecting everyday feelings of safety. Examples of four art-story making activities conducted by the Popoki Peace Project are introduced and analyzed, focusing on the different ways the use of drawing and storytelling promotes reflection and expression of everyday understandings and feelings of being safe.

**Key words: art-story, drawing, story, narrative, feeling safe, Popoki , everyday security**

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This article addresses the ways people express their understandings, beliefs and feelings about feeling safe through art, stories, and art-stories. The purpose is twofold. The first is to build on my ongoing efforts to build a methodology for the analysis and understanding of art-stories, stories created with or through art, that have to do with feeling safe (Alexander, 2021). The second is to contribute to the conversation about reflective narrative, art and everyday security (Nyman, 2021; Stanley and Jackson, 2016; Kinnvall and Mitzen, 2020) through a consideration of art-stories of feeling safe. It will be suggested that reflective art-stories can add an especially important, and often different, perspective to our understanding of what it means to feel safe.

The following pages will first provide a discussion of the understanding used here with reference to stories, narrative, reflection and the importance of art-stories in reflecting everyday feelings of safety. This will be followed by a description of the art-stories addressed here, including a brief discussion of the way they were produced and collected. Examples of four different types of art-stories used in Popoki Peace Project activities will be introduced and analyzed, focusing on the different ways the use of drawing and storytelling promotes reflection and expression of everyday understandings and feelings of being safe.

**Stories and Narrative**

Humans, and perhaps other creatures, use stories to connect with others and to share important ideas, events and beliefs. Our worlds, lives, histories and politics are filled with stories. These stories and the storyworlds we create are a way of explaining the world and our place in it. People are drawn to stories, often identifying with them or finding themselves and/or their beliefs reflected in them. Stories are important because they help us to understand ourselves and others, but not all stories are conveyed in words; some of the stories most important to us are those we do not, or cannot, discuss. Some of those stories can be shared through drawing. For example, Ward and King used drawing in their interviews and noted that the use of drawing enabled communication in visual and metaphorical ways about issues participants were not able or willing to articulate verbally (2020, 15). Similarly, Weber and Mitchell find that drawings allow for expression of “the ineffable, the

elusive, the not-yet-thought-through, the subconscious" (1995, 34. Also see Kearney and Hyle, 2004). Unlike the stories and art-stories in this article, the foregoing statements refer to the use of drawing in the context of interviews and/or teaching situations. However, experience and observation have shown that similar conclusions are possible in the context of the art-stories here made through Popoki Peace Project workshops and other activities.

People are not necessarily always aware that they are engaging with stories or that there might be multiple stories having different perspectives on the same subject. For example, stories of identity are often considered to be "natural" or "common sense," making it unnecessary to think about, or question, them. Such stories underlie, and help to construct, our understandings of culture, norms and customs. They are used to establish and to give legitimacy to our identities as members of particular groups, but in so doing, they also draw boundaries between those who are part of that group, and those who are not. In providing only two choices for who does and who does not belong, these binary distinctions make invisible those who might lie on the borders, falling partially into one or both groups, or not belong to either one. [1]

There are of course people who resist or who do not comply with such categorizations, and many who offer equally powerful counter-narratives of their own. What is of most importance here is that stories of identity and affiliation are not only personal stories, reflecting personal values and ways of thinking, but also social stories, reflecting values and understandings of the societies in which they are constructed and maintained. Stories serve to link personal beliefs and experiences with social norms and institutions, adding credence to dominant ideas and attitudes (Bell, 2003, 4; van Dijk, 1993, 125). In other words, stories, particularly those based on binary understandings, can be used in positive ways to enhance culture, but can also be used in negative ways to legitimize exclusion and prejudice. [2]

Stories do not exist in isolation; the audience is part of the story. A story might be part of a larger group of stories, or may be a private story meant only for its author, or something in between. But stories, regardless of how or to whom they are presented, involve an audience. When people tell their stories, they do so for a purpose, consciously or perhaps unconsciously directing their words to a

particular audience. Story tellers might have a single purpose in telling their story, or many. They might, for example, want to position themselves in a discussion, or to persuade someone about something. Similarly, their purpose might be to entertain, or to trick their audience, or to encourage the audience to think about something new or different. Often storytellers believe that audiences are passive, that is, that the audience will passively accept and understand the story as it is presented. In fact, while the overall message of the story may be shared among the members of the audience, the details of that story are different for each person. When we hear stories, we imagine not only how the characters might look, but also such details as their emotions, the tones of their voices, or the textures of their hair. We also create environments that are based on, but go beyond the descriptions we are given. We, as an audience of one or of a million, interpret and situate the words we hear, creating epistemological and emotional worlds called storyworlds.[3] Storyworlds serve to link the world of the story with the real world, deepening our understanding (Herman, 2005, 2009; Rimmon-Kenan, 2002). Each member of the audience is thus an active participant who, through linking the story to her/his realworld experience, creates, replicates and often re-creates dominant social relations (Ewick & Silbey, 1995; van Djik, 1999; Bell, 2003).

Perhaps the simplest definition of a story is that it is a description of an event, or a series of events, but of course it is much more complex than that. Most stories can stand independently. They generally have a plot, form and flow, and often are told chronologically describing the past, present and future. While stories can be independent or be used independently, most stories are also part of a larger flow or collection of stories that comprise the narrative of particular occurrences or events. Narratives are thus composed of a multiplicity of stories. As the component stories are told, re-told, and shared, they come to form social understandings of, and attitudes toward particular events. In this way, often without our conscious knowledge, these narratives come to underlie the epistemologies and understandings on which we rely when we hear stories and create storyworlds.

Because stories and narrative are such powerful tools for communication, they have garnered increasing attention in recent years in a wide variety of disciplines and professions. Following Shenhav (2015) and Rimmon-Kennan (2002), I take a

minimalist definition of narrative, the telling or representation of events, which then allows for a comprehensive understanding of what narrative might involve and/or represent. Shenhav defines narrative as "the narration of a succession of events," adopting the three established elements of narrative - story (what happened to whom), text (mode of expression of the story) and narration (the process of expressing the story) – and adding a fourth, multiplicity (process of repetition and reproduction of the story) in order to better analyze social narratives (2015, 19).

Scholars play an important role in constructing and maintaining social narratives. Like others, they engage in storytelling in their personal lives but they also do it professionally through their teaching, writing and research. As professionals, they might use stories or a form of storytelling to share information about particular events, the process of how something came to be what it is, how it might change in the future, or what it was in the past. Some stories are fiction, but others are presented as non-fiction or fact; some stories express current beliefs or perceptions of reality in a wide variety of fields, often being accepted as the only possible version of that story. In addition, as language is so dominant in our methodologies for the transmission of knowledge, scholars help to maintain the privileging of language over other forms of communication. While stories often contain illustrations, stories themselves are generally understood as being based on linguistic understandings and discourses and transmitted orally or through writing. Most would agree that scholarly tomes are considered to be much higher in the ranks of hierarchies of knowledge production than, for example, picture books for children.

Simply reading or hearing a story might increase one's store of information, but it does not necessarily lead to new understandings of oneself and/or one's world. In order for that to happen, it is necessary to engage in reflection. For John Dewey (1910, 1933), reflection describes how we think and occurs spontaneously, as when we see clouds forming and conclude that it will soon rain. Building on Dewey, Schön (1983) understood reflection as a way of knowing, something that can be achieved in the process of, or as a result of, our professional actions. Moon (1999, 2004), Lyons (2010), Mezirow (1990) and others engage with reflection or reflective inquiry as a tool for educators and practitioners to gain new knowledge and perspectives. For example, Mezirow (1990, 1) suggests that critical reflection engages us in a critique

of the assumptions upon which our beliefs have been built, and allows for new understandings and correction of errors. Moon discusses how reflective writing and stories incorporate different points of view, understandings and practices to create new knowledge, and suggests that the content of reflective writing is different from that of speech or drawing (Moon 2004, 80). Paulo Freire (1970) emphasizes reflective inquiry in his work on education and learning, viewing it as a form of critical interrogation of political and social contexts.

Stories can be a site for reflection or reflective inquiry and can be used as a way to engage in critical interrogation and to create new understandings. Reflective writing might take the form of a story, and sharing stories can be a form of reflective inquiry even though not all stories are reflective or used for reflection. Here I am interested in the ways that drawing can be used to create reflective stories. By this I mean that the story itself, either in its creation, telling, or even perhaps in the process of sharing, leads to the creation of new and/or different perspectives and knowledge. [4] Here I am most interested in stories that originate in, or are based on and told with/through art, or what I have termed "art-stories" (Alexander, 2021). Art-stories involve both verbal and non-verbal communication, and can be sites for critical reflection on the part of not only the artist, but also the audience – those who view them and interpret them - as well.

In that art-stories pay attention to more than language, they provide numerous and perhaps different kinds of opportunities for critical reflection. Citing Samuels (1993), Kearney and Hyle (2004, 362) discuss ways imagery and drawing can bridge the private and subjective and the social and political. Art-stories can allow for expressions of ideas and connections that might not surface in those that depend solely on language. Stories and storytelling engage many different modes of input; they are simultaneously sensory, bodily and intellectual. Weber and Mitchell (1995, 34) explain that, "Drawings offer a different kind of glimpse into human sensemaking than written or spoken texts do, because they can express that which is not easily put into words: the ineffable, the elusive, the not-yet-thought-through, the subconscious." Here it is proposed that art-stories provide opportunities for reflection that can lead to the expression of concerns, emotions, perspectives and ideas.

My interest in stories began in the form of peace education and activism with the

establishment of the Popoki Peace Project in 2006.[5] Stories became an integral part of my scholarly work as a result of the ongoing Popoki Friendship Story project, a drawing project begun in northeast Japan after the 2011 earthquake, tsunami and nuclear explosions. My work with Popoki and with art led me to question the meaning of security in terms of how people feel about their own safety and what makes them feel safe.[6] Being and feeling safe invoke a kind of security, but it is not necessarily the same as security said to be insured by armed guards and not always about protection from outside threats, be they hackers, terrorists, armies or even pandemics and disasters. These stories about feeling safe, or my use and understanding of them, refer to a version of security that is larger than the individual person; the purpose is not therapy or healing so much as learning about a different kind of "safe" through art.[7]

**Stories about feeling safe and everyday stories**

Work in disaster areas and with people who have experienced disaster, violence or other kinds of trauma has underscored for me two truths: that being safe and feeling safe are not necessarily the same, although they might overlap, and that people do not necessarily understand security policies as making them safer. While human security, ontological security and everyday security have expanded the scope of security studies to include more than weapons, the energy and focus of most scholars of security studies and related fields has focused almost entirely on physical and material security, rather than on more ephemeral and abstract feelings of safety. But in fact, security has many faces.

Traditionally the focus of security studies has been on policy, generally within the context of national security. Because national security is supposed to ensure the protection of the lives and livelihoods of those belonging to, or perhaps living within the borders of particular states, it is afforded a position of special importance within governance decision-making. Often, rules about transparency are different when it comes to issues pertaining to security; secrets and false information are not unusual. Security and processes of securitization invoke stories and narratives to prioritize particular notions of citizenship and legitimacy. As mentioned earlier, many of these stories convey and reinforce binary understandings of belonging and are understood

to be self-evident, natural and inherently correct.

Due to their importance and urgency, security discourses are built on assumptions of rationality, logic and scientific thinking, mixed with a good dose of traditional and often hyper-masculinities, resulting in what Stanley and Jackson (2016) criticize as "methodological elitism". [8] Such methodological elitism, they claim, presents three main problems: inability to see how policies are viewed on the receiving end; insensitivity to ways power is embedded in everyday life; and a fundamental bias toward recreating itself and the status quo on which it is built (Stanley and Jackson, 2016, 7). Such methodological elitism privileges language over other forms of expression and understandings of security outlined with such methodologies show a preference for rationality and logic over the intangible, artistic and perhaps chaotic views of people in their everyday life. Yet, as Susanne Langer (1971) so aptly describes, ideas conveyed through artistic expression are equally important as those presented through language:

> Art objectifies the sentient and desire, self-consciousness and world consciousness, emotions and moods that are generally regarded as irrational because words cannot give us clear ideas of them. But the premise tacitly assumed in such a judgment—namely, that anything language cannot express is formless and irrational—seems to be an error (91).

There are, of course, numerous stories about security, national and otherwise. Many focus on weapons and military activities and all the human activities that make militarism and wars possible. Other stories of security deal with more mundane activities, those that might belong to what Nyman (2021) calls everyday security, security that is situated and reproduced in spaces outside of formal politics (spatial everyday), routine practices (temporal everyday) and lived experiences (affective everyday). [9] Strategies for national security have traditionally focused on military threats, garnering support for military security through, among other things, stories invoking fear. At the apex of such stories are those about military threats and the necessity of nuclear weapons for protection. These stories about weapons, threats and war can be very effective but they do not exist in isolation; they are all situated

in particular storyworlds. They may be personal stories, but they are built around, and help to construct, metanarratives of security, development, prosperity and peace. These are the understandings of security that methodological elitism reinforce. Acknowledging the legitimacy of stories about feelings of safety and of stories using non-verbal modes of expression such as drawing, can help to counteract the reproductions of conventional security discourses and as well as to construct new ones that take into account different, and perhaps generally unheard, voices.

**The Popoki Peace Project and art-stories of feeling safe**

Popoki is a cat and features in all of the activities of the Popoki Peace Project as our symbol character. But Popoki is more than a symbol; he is whoever, and whatever, you believe or want him to be. One of the reasons that Popoki is important in our work is that he is not human, and so is not subject to the rules and restrictions of human relationships. In my work with Popoki I have discovered that because he is a cat, people tell different stories to him than they do to other humans; telling your story to Popoki is somehow different than telling it to a person. As a cat, Popoki has no understanding of human ideas of peace, security or safety, but his gentle questions encourage not only critical thinking but also critical expression and reflection. As a scholar, I have come to understand that gendered, militarized, security policies manipulate not only our understandings of what it is to be secure but also our feelings of safety. If we want to create societies that are truly secure, we need to not only acknowledge the danger of weapons of mass destruction and military security, but also recognize and legitimize our own everyday feelings of unsafety. Popoki is important because he provides ways for people to express those feelings of everyday safety and unsafety without having to rely solely on words.

Since its inception in 2006, the activities of the Popoki Peace Project have always involved and placed great emphasis on drawing, stories and creative work. After the March 2011 disaster in northeast Japan, more and more of the work has focused on feeling safe and art-stories. Many of the activities have been held in places where there have been major disasters, or with groups of people who have experienced disaster. Of those, most have been in places in Iwate Prefecture that suffered serious damage from the 2011 tsunami, but drawing workshops and

activities have been held in different places around the world. Some, but by no means all, of the artists are people who have directly experienced disaster or trauma. We believe that although not everyone can express what they think or feel in words, everyone has on some level an understanding of what makes them physically safe and unsafe, as well as what makes them feel safe and unsafe. It is important to point out, however, that those understandings can and do change, depending on a person's situation, experiences, mood and perhaps other factors as well.

Popoki initiates many different types of art-story making activities, but here I will introduce four different types, all having to do with feeling safe. These are (1) *Kamishibai* story-making, (2) Popoki Friendship Story activities; (3) Activities with *Popoki, can you draw feeling safe?* and (4) Popoki's mask gallery. All of these drawing and story-making activities involve some form of reflection and express the everyday places, practices and feelings that make the artist(s) feel safe. In the following pages I will introduce each of these activities in turn.

**(1) *Kamishibai* story-making**

*Kamishibai* is a form of Japanese storytelling that uses large illustrations. Traditionally, storytellers had special frames for their illustrated cards, something like a small theater. The audience would gather around the "theater" to watch and listen to the story. The story itself would be written on the backs of the cards, visible only to the storyteller who stood behind the "theater" frame. Modern-day *kamishibai* still uses the cards with the story on the back, but the frames are seldom used and the storytellers are usually visible, and often a part of the story.

For Popoki, *kamishibai* art-stories are made by groups participating in workshops. Participants are asked to make a collective 5-page story about feeling safe. The group members discuss the theme together, generally coming up with a simple story and then making the illustrations. At the end of the workshop, each group presents their story and the participants discuss the presentations and the stories they have seen. Often, the discussion about feeling safe continues after the workshop is over.

The first time we tried a *kamishibai* workshop in Otsuchi-cho, a small town completely destroyed by the 2011 tsunami, was about a year after the disaster. We

were with a group of women who we knew and with whom we felt comfortable enough to ask them to make a story about feeling safe. We did not specify anything about disaster, only that it should involve feeling safe and Popoki should play a role in the story. Each group discussed what they would do, and then made their story. There were three groups, and two of them made stories about how to be safe in case of a tsunami. In the stories, Popoki and his friends ran up a hill and were safe. The third group made a story about crossing the street safely. They showed how, before the tsunami, people in the town always greeted each other. When a person was crossing the street, the person crossing, children included, and the drivers knew one another, and they were not worried about safety. But now, many people who lived in the town have left, and many of those who lost their homes but stayed are living in different places and do not necessarily know their neighbors. On top of that, with lots of cars and trucks from other places coming for reconstruction and recovery work, crossing the street does not feel safe anymore. The safe ending to this story is that the town is slowly being rebuilt and workers are installing traffic lights. It is not the same as knowing everyone, but it helps to ensure that everyone stays safe. Discussion among the group members during the creation of their stories and also afterward focused on the frightening experience of the tsunami and nostalgia for their former life. The need to illustrate the stories prompted discussion of what to draw, which in turn brought back memories and encouraged sharing of stories and discussion about not only what had happened, but also about how to ensure that even if another tsunami were to occur, fewer lives would be lost. The sharing of stories and production of new perspectives and knowledge are an indication that the workshop also encouraged individual and group reflection.

A second workshop held a few years later with some of the same participants brought a new collection of stories. These all dealt with how various aspects of recovery were making people feel safe – having electricity and seeing lights on in windows in the evening, gravesites being repaired, colors replacing the ubiquitous gray of the landscape in spite of the huge mounds of dirt piled everywhere for use as landfill to raise the height of the town. These stories were quite different from the earlier ones, most particularly in that rather than focusing on escape from disaster, they addressed a more abstract level of feeling safe. Like the first set of stories,

discussion during and after the workshop was reflective; participants shared stories and emotions, some for the first time. Evidence of the importance of art in these reflective stories can be seen, for example, in discussion about conflicts that had arisen in the course of reconstruction. The bright yellow color of a flower shop, for example, was encouraging for some residents and too exuberant and happy for others. One person shared a story for what she said was the first time – her inability to greet people she did not see regularly with verbal greetings. The reason, she said, was that since she did not know what kind of loss they had suffered, she could not be sure what tone of voice would be most appropriate.

Brief mention of a third workshop of this sort is illustrative of the power of art-stories of this kind. Participants were divided into groups and each group asked to randomly select five cards from a basket. Each card had a word or phrase relating to disaster and recovery. They had to make a story of feeling safe that involved Popoki and used the words they had selected. Participants included Otsuchi-cho residents who had experienced the disaster, volunteers and international students who had come with Popoki to provide support. The discussion of what story to make involved the stories of not only those who had experienced the tsunami, but those of participants who had experienced other disasters in different places, including earthquakes in Indonesia. Reflection in the sense of sharing experiences and comparing them was part of the story-making process. In addition, the drawing of everyday things such as places to eat, sleep or toilets, provided chances for gaining new perspectives and knowledge. In this workshop, what was of particular interest to me as an observer was that the words on the cards and the need to draw prompted discussions about, for example, toilets or dealing with the bodies of people who had been killed in a disaster. These are topics that people would not ordinarily have chosen to discuss, particularly with people they did not know well.

The *kamishibai* stories produced at these workshops are reflective art-stories because in order to make them, the artists had to look into their own hearts and those of others to discover, and then illustrate, sources of their own *anshin* and/or anxiety. In the process, they discovered new aspects and gained new perspectives. The reflective conversations that followed the workshops are not in themselves art-stories, but they illustrate how the story-making exercise not only encouraged

reflection, but allowed for the sharing of stories people had not spoken about before. In this way, art-stories can be useful for collecting different perspectives and aspects of everyday feelings of being safe, or *anshin*. In the examples here, we can identify mundane practices such as crossing the street, ordinary spaces in terms of knowing about hills and high ground where one can be safe in a tsunami, or lived experiences such as how to greet a friend. Interestingly, these correspond with the three dimensions of everyday security outlined in Nyman (2021).

**(2) Popoki Friendship Story activities**

Popoki Friendship Story activities entail drawing on a long, banner-like cloth (500cm x 45cm) with Popoki on one end. The cloths were taken into evacuation centers and other places after the 2011 disaster and people were invited to draw. They were also taken to many other places, including, for example, the University of the South Pacific where students from around the Pacific shared *anshin* and anxiety in relation to the threat of climate change or destruction of culture, University of Pittsburgh where students shared *anshin* and the scent of peace or Kobe where young people shared *anshin* from their everyday lives. As I have written elsewhere, each of these art-stories has a story (Alexander 2018). Some have been accompanied by words and discussion between the artist and Popoki's volunteers, others have

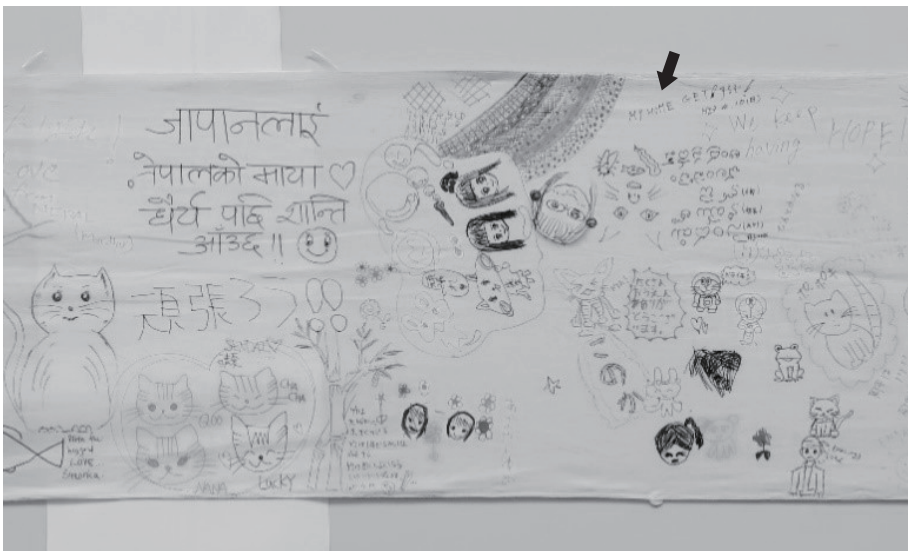



*Photo 1: Part of Popoki's Friendship Story Cloth # 1, 2011.4-5. Saito Masashi 2019*

been drawn in silence. I have suggested that the stories can be divided into separate, although often overlapping categories according to the relationship between the story and the drawing. These are art-based stories where the story begins with the drawing, story-directed art where the art depicts a story known to, or invented by, the artist, and reflective story-art in which the drawing and stories are produced as a result of engaging in reflection (Alexander 2021).

Take, for example, a drawing done very soon after the tsunami at an evacuation center. The artist, an older woman, drew a house. Then, after looking at other drawings and thinking for a while, she came back to ask if she could add something. Having been told she was welcome to do so, she added the words, "My home get!" saying that she absolutely was going to build a new house and create a home for her displaced family（See Photo 1）. While there is of course room for other interpretations, I understand this to mean that her immediate concern was to find a new place for her family to resettle and create a home. As such it is an example of story-directed art; the drawing of a house comes from the destruction of their home and her desire to create a new one. I would suggest that the reflection in which she engaged while looking at other drawings prompted her to declare to the world, and perhaps especially to herself, that she would indeed get a new home. In fact, she was able to accomplish that goal. The presence of her drawing and statement on the cloth became part of the entirety of the picture, emphasizing the importance of having a home and perhaps encouraging others in positions similar to hers to make sure they were able to get a home, too. After a major disaster, housing is an extremely political issue, as is the question of housing safety. Housing, and the creation of homes, is a site where everyday security might confront other ideas and attitudes about what is safe.

In the context of this article, there are three aspects of these stories that are of particular importance. The first is that because the cloth is very long, each new drawing is to some degree influenced by what has come before. In this sense, each artist engages in some sort of reflection in choosing what to draw, or how to draw it, or what colors to use, and so on, even if s/he is not directly aware of doing so. The second is that while each drawing is separate and can stand alone, the entire cloth becomes a canvas that connects all of the drawings into one picture. Reflection

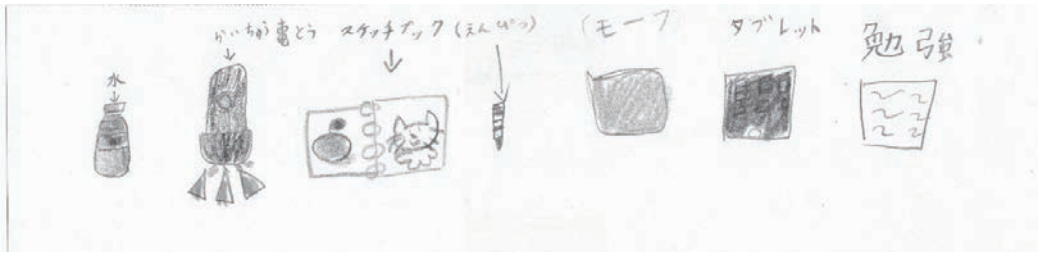
is present in the individual feelings of connection that come out of being part of the entirety of the cloth picture, and the new perspectives, understandings and/or ideas that come from recognizing oneself as being part of something larger than just one's own drawing. The third aspect is in the portrayal of the everyday on the cloth. Expression of *anshin*, desire, peace or well-being take different forms: homes, foods, favorite characters from books or manga, friends, feelings and more. These are expressions of what is important to people to feel safe in their everyday lives, an expression perhaps of aspects of security that everyday security seeks to illustrate.

**(3) Activities with *Popoki, can you draw feeling safe?***

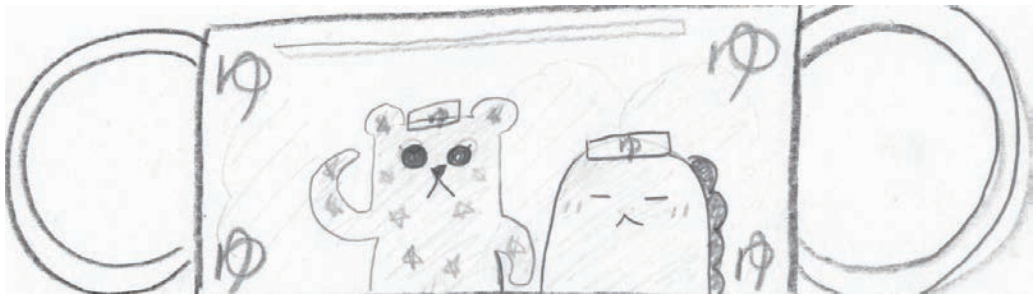
*Popoki, can you draw feeling safe?* is a story that was written for use in workshops using art to think about the meaning of feeling safe after disaster. The story is simple: Popoki loves to draw but today he cannot because a warning siren has gone off and he is scared and crying. Popoki thinks about what he can put in his emergency kit to make himself feel better, what places make him feel safe, what sorts of masks might make him feel safe and be fun to wear, and what feeling safe looks like. The story has blank pages where the reader can draw her/his version of feeling safe in each of the different circumstances.[10]

Most of the stories gathered through this endeavor are entirely without words, as they were made in response to questions within the Popoki story. One class of grade three students (about age 9 or 10) also sent written comments. Some adults added words to their drawings, or sent letters accompanying the drawings. I understand them to be art-stories because they are drawings that were created in the context of a Popoki story. Many of them are story-directed, meaning that they reflect experiences of the artist. Some are story-based art, where the story depicted comes with the drawing. For example, many of the drawings show Popoki engaging in different activities: wearing a mask, hiding in a box, etc. Some of these appear to be drawings that come out of, or are based on, the Popoki story. Others seem to be stories about Popoki inspired by the original story. Similarly, some children drew pictures of their own pets or imagined animals. At least some of these are story-based art, and are depictions of stories that precede the reading of the Popoki story; others are stories that came out of the act of drawing.

For the content of their emergency kit, children drew food, sweets, favorite toys, devices, and many other things (Photo 2). Like Popoki in the story, some included untenable items such as ice cream or pets. For the places they feel safe, many children showed their beds or futon, homes, families, friends or schools. Many of the drawings of "feeling safe" had similar themes, perhaps including more with other people than other drawings. Drawings of masks portrayed favorite manga characters or logos, animals, human and/or animal faces most of which were smiling, favorite foods, flowers, and other things (Photo 3). A few were plain, white medical masks.




*Above: Photo 2: Items in my emergency kit to make me feel genki (water, flashlight, sketch book, pencil, blanket, tablet, study materials); Below: Photo 3: A fun mask to make me feel safe. Ofunato Kita Elementary School, Grade 3 students, March 2021.*



The short essays by the children that accompanied the drawings are also interesting. Some say that they especially liked being able to share, compare and talk about their drawings with their classmates. Some of those children express surprise that the drawings are both similar and different. Some of the children talk about feeling safe at school because it allows them to be with their friends. One child expressed surprise at the fact that Popoki feels safe in cramped places like cardboard boxes, and says that the place he feels safe is in the refrigerator. The refrigerator also appeared in his drawing of places he feels safe, although in the

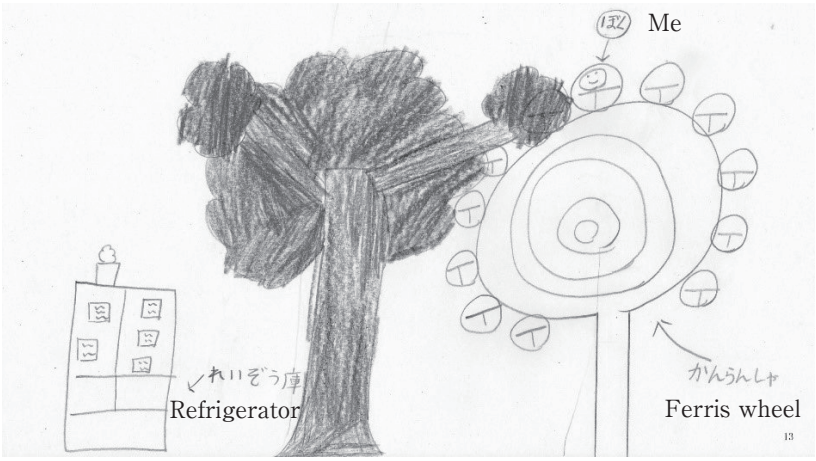



*Photo 4: Where I feel safe; Ofunato Kita Elementary School, Grade 3 student, March 2021.*

drawing he placed himself in a car at the top of a ferris wheel (Photo 4). One of the essays had a drawing of Popoki, and many said that Popoki was cute and they enjoyed reading about him. One child was worried that Popoki might still be crying; others said that thinking about what to add to their emergency kit made them feel safer.

In that these stories all began with the Popoki story and then branched out into a series of other stories, I would consider them all to be reflective stories. The essays back this up, particularly those indicating the importance of sharing and talking together. The children were able to not only think about their own feelings of safety, but also to think about themselves relative to others, giving them an opportunity to gain new perspectives and new knowledge.

I believe that while the Popoki story might have been effective in helping the children to think more deeply about what makes them feel safe, asking them to draw deepened their understanding of both themselves and, through sharing, of others. Drawing gave them more freedom to express things that might be difficult for them to express only in words and also removed the restrictions caused by being limited to words. On the one hand, drawing allowed them to engage more fully in the multi-modality of storytelling and creating. On the other, asking them to design a mask or to create a safe place for themselves is engaging them in the act of design, giving them a chance to not only think about masks or safe places in the abstract, but also

to concretely portray what it is they are considering. In this sense, too, they are encouraged to engage in critical reflection, and then to portray their solutions to the question posed in ways that might be new or different from how they had thought about them earlier.

In addition to the school children in Ofunato City, I have shared Popoki's story with a number of adults, and have received some drawings in return. The photo below is from an adult friend of Popoki's. Receiving his story gave her an opportunity to reflect on her life and present situation. The drawing and the words that accompany it are an example of reflective story-art that portrays the artist's lived experience of the uncertainty of aging and the promise of spirituality and faith.

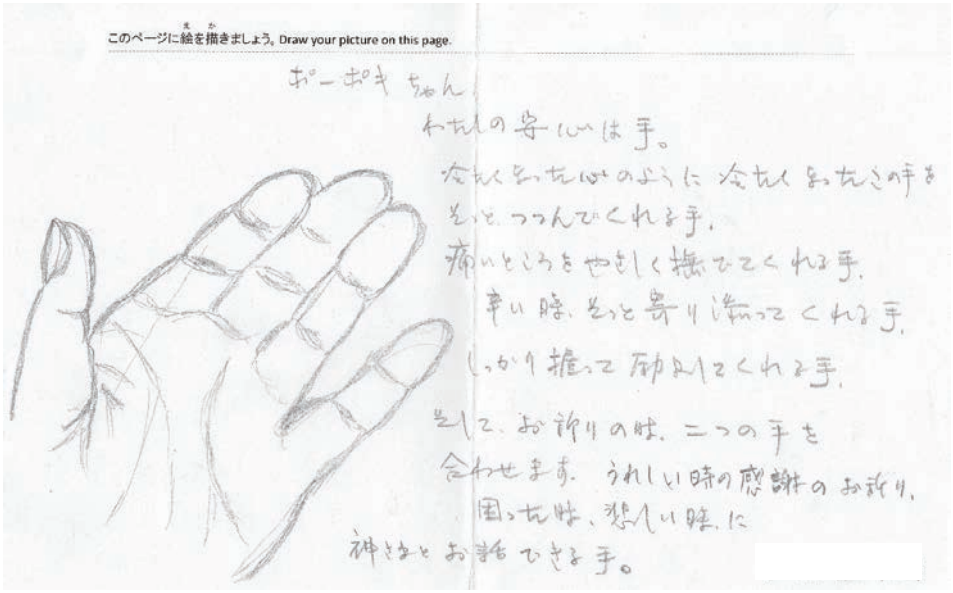



*Photo 5: Drawing of feeling safe, W.K.(87), Hiroshima, March, 2021*

This drawing, Photo 5, was done by an 87-year-old woman, living in a senior home, at the height of the COVID-19 pandemic. She has drawn her hand and writes: "Dear Popoki-chan, My *anshin* is a hand. The hand that gently grasps my hand that has grown chilly, just like my heart. The hand that gently holds mine when I feel pain. The hand that gently stands with me when I feel distressed. The hand that grips mine firmly and encourages me. And when I pray, I join two hands together. The hands that express my thanks through prayer when I am happy. The hands that allow me to

talk with God when I am troubled or sad."

The above story is a poignant story of *anshin*. That children reacted differently is to be expected. But taking a wider view, we can say that while some children drew fantasy creatures some of the time, they also drew everyday items from their everyday lives. When thinking about this story from the perspective of everyday security, it is clear that the drawings reflect views of what it is to be safe from a personal, ordinary, mundane perspective. But in fact, the story itself replicates Nyman's (2021, 317) three dimensions of everyday security: mundane spaces (the spatial everyday), routine practices (the temporal everyday) and lived experiences (the affective everyday). The children's drawings revealed mundane spaces of beds and kitchens, routine practices of going to school or eating meals, and lived experiences of playing video games, seeing friends, being home with family. In this sense, the art-stories made in response to Popoki's story are an indication of places outside of formal politics or governance where security is constructed and performed. They are different from the *kamishibai* stories and Popoki friendship story drawings because they were not created in a situation where immediate discussion of the drawings was possible. But the setting of the story and the responses of the children indicate both that drawing is effective for expressing *anshin* and that while everyday *anshin* is different for each individual, their stories of feeling safe create an alternative narrative of what it means to feel safe.

**(4) Popoki's mask gallery**

In March 2020, as the COVID-19 pandemic was beginning and everyday lives in Japan and around the world were changing dramatically, Popoki began wearing a mask. Every evening, I would draw Popoki with a mask, a different one every day, and post the drawing on Facebook with a short comment (See Photo 6 below). This was at a time when masks and other necessities were disappearing from the shelves of stores and supplies of personal protective equipment were running short at hospitals and other places bearing the brunt of the infection. I sensed that masks would remain a symbol of this COVID-19 era, and it seemed interesting and appropriate for Popoki to start a conversation about the presence and meaning of masks. I wanted to show that even in this extra-ordinary time, the ordinary is present

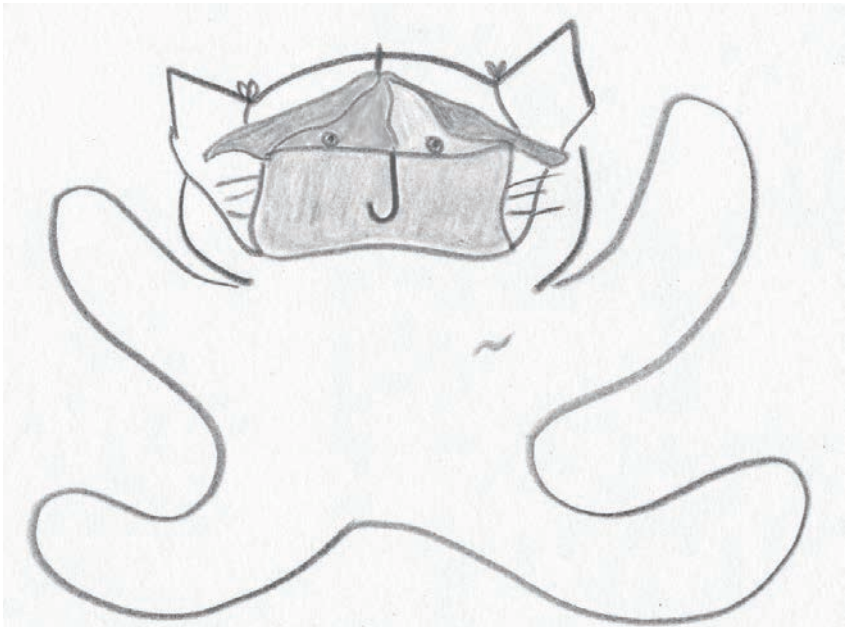


*Photo 6: Popoki's mask gallery, 2020.3.27. If you have an umbrella, rainy days are fun, too.*
*(Alexander, Forthcoming, 2022)*

in the small activities of our everyday lives and those of the world around us, human and otherwise. I also want to contribute a moment of *anshin* – tiny space for smiles or relief or recognition that the world is more than what we see and experience and feel every day; a way to suggest that even if you are feeling alone, Popoki is with you and sharing what you are experiencing, or that the fear and anger and confusion and exhaustion or anything else you are feeling at this moment is a part of an everyday that is larger than any of us.

Like most everyone I know, COVID-19 changed the rhythms of my life, and as I progressed through each day, I would think about what I would select as the theme for that evening's mask. The masks portrayed everyday things – food, flowers, games, feelings of joy or sadness or frustration. Some people would look and respond to my post every day; others look but do not react. I know about them because sometimes they tell me in other contexts, or very occasionally they give a response. As days turned into weeks and months, I found myself only thinking about the theme on my way home from work in the evening, or sometimes not at all. Often, as I take up my colored pencils to draw, I find myself creating a mask with a drawing that is

entirely different from the one I had been thinking of originally.

The masks are driven by the drawing rather than the words. Sometimes it takes a long time to think of words, but most of the time they come soon after the drawing is completed. A few of the masks are similar, but each is unique. People ask, and I ask myself occasionally, how it is that I am able to continue. Every time I use the last sheet of paper in my sketch pad, I think about stopping. Once, Popoki's mask was a survey: Stop or Continue? I continued. It does not take very long to draw Popoki with a mask and post him, but that time has become an important part of my everyday – a time for reflection and sharing, often of things that I would not otherwise say or draw.

Popoki's mask gallery is a reflection of my life during the pandemic, as such, it is reflective story-art. Until beginning Popoki's mask gallery, I was the audience to the art-stories of others. Popoki's mask gallery is my own story; it is very personal. At the same time, social media has enabled it to become a collection of stories, similar in some ways to the collections of stories on each cloth that comprise the entirety of Popoki's Friendship Story. If, as Spry (2001) suggests, autoethnography is "a self-narrative that critiques the situatedness of self with others in social contexts" (710), then Popoki's mask gallery can been seen as a form of auto-ethnography that is largely, but not entirely, dependent on art. It is a personal story but meant to be a form of social communication and critique; if it were my own private diary, it would likely be very different.

In the course of the eighteen months that I have been creating and sharing Popoki's mask gallery, I have used it in many different situations.[11] The ways in which the drawings encourage others to reflect, to look back on the pandemic and look critically at themselves and to share their discoveries, speaks to the importance of reflective art-stories as a way to identify the aspects of the everyday – the ordinary, usual, mundane experiences of being alive and living day to day - that make people feel safe.

**Conclusion**

This article has discussed the importance of stories, particularly art-stories, for expressing and sharing what makes people feel safe. Security studies, and other

fields, have focused on material security, often from the perspective of policy and states. While some address issues other than military security, most invoke binary understandings of identity and the need for protection. Stories about feeling safe or *anshin* illustrate a different version of security that is situated in everyday lives and practices. It is possible to collect verbal and/or written stories of feeling safe, but it was suggested here that the use of drawing results in stories that are different from those based on language. Some art-stories reveal things that are not, or cannot be put into words. Some of the most powerful and effective art-stories are those that also include a process of reflection on the part of the artist, audience or both. These reflective stories provide glimpses into the material, temporal and affective worlds of artist and audience, allowing us to gain new perspectives, information and understandings, and perhaps to re-position ourselves in our own worlds, and in the societies in which we live.

The art-stories and methodologies addressed here might be useful for art therapy, but the purpose here is to contribute a new and different dimension to social narratives about feeling safe during ordinary times and during/after emergencies, disaster and the like. The stories introduced in these pages are just a few of the many art-stories about feeling safe and *anshin* that Popoki has gathered in the years since the Great East Japan earthquake. It is no surprise that the act of drawing prompts reflection, nor that reflection based on art is an effective way to gain new information and understandings. The drawings and activities introduced in these pages suggest that the reflective understandings that contribute to the art-stories, and also perhaps the communication that art-stories encourages, are different from those based solely on words. Art-stories are undoubtedly useful for those who do not have sufficient words to communicate their feelings with language, but their value is not limited to use with small children or people with language disabilities. I believe them to be important because they create a narrative of everyday feelings of being safe that may well be different from other safety narratives. These stories enhance and might even change our understandings of everyday security and of what might be necessary to help people feel safer in their everyday lives. This is particularly true at times like the current pandemic, where people must continue to carry out the ordinary, mundane activities of their lives even though the circumstances in which

they are living might be far from ordinary or mundane. We live in an unsafe world. Recognizing art-stories as a full-fledged participant in the conversation about security can help to make it a little bit safer.

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## Notes

1 For example, "women" as a group are frequently targeted as vulnerable, but some women are clearly more vulnerable than others and binary understandings of women as people who are not men ignore and/or make invisible people who are non-binary or non-conforming.

2 Parpart and Parashar (2019) explore the importance of silence. There are different forms of, and reasons for, silence, of which one is fear. Because drawing can help people share stories that they do not or cannot articulate, it suggests that art can be a way for people who might otherwise be silent to share their stories.

3 Herman (2009, 72-73) defines storyworlds as, "… global mental representations enabling interpreters to frame inferences about the situations, characters, and occurrences either explicitly mentioned in or implied by a narrative text or discourse. As such, storyworlds are mental models of the situations and events being recounted — of who did what to and with whom, when, where, why, and in what manner. Reciprocally, narrative artifacts (texts, films, etc.) provide blueprints for the creation and modification of such mentally configured story worlds."

4 Here reflection involves reviewing events, ideas and actions and one's involvement in, and attitudes toward, them. Du Preez (2008, 510) defines it as a "process of looking back, as it were, on the ways one's assumptions and actions influence the way one behaves or practices." Moon (2004, 82) adds the stipulation that it is usually about something complicated for which there is no obvious solution, and is based not so much new knowledge as "further processing of knowledge and understanding we already possess." Like Doloughan (2002), Schön (1983), and Moon (2004), I believe that while thought and language are important elements of the reflective process, there is not necessarily a split between thinking about drawing and the act of drawing.

5 Popoki is the mascot character of the Popoki Peace Project, a community-based initiative that focuses on building and expanding our capacity for critical imagination, rooted in the belief that creating peace requires using not only our intellectual abilities and understanding but also our sensory and bodily knowledge and capacities (See for example Alexander and Katsuragi, 2020; Alexander, 2018). Shortly after the March 2011 disaster in northeastern Japan, Popoki and his friends went to the disaster area with a long 500cm x 45cm cotton cloth and marking pens. This was the beginning of what would become known as the Popoki Friendship Story project. In the context of this project, local residents shared stories of the tsunami and said that a proposed 14.4-meter sea wall to replace the 6-meter one that had been destroyed might physically protect them, but would not them feel safe because it would prevent them from being able to see changes in the ocean and would give them a false sense of security. For more about the drawing project, see Alexander, 2021.

6 In Japanese, there is a division between physical and material safety (anzen) and feelings of being safe (anshin). *Anshin* combines elements of relief, serenity, security, and calmness for which there is no equivalent in English. Here I use *anshin* when I want to stress the sense of being something more than feeling safe.

7 People have no control over nature or natural disasters, but when expressing the experience through art, the artist has total control over both the content and the way that content is portrayed. The artist can select what to express, in the way she/he/they want to express it. Art can therefore be one way to help to heal the trauma of the experience (Blanch, et al., 2012). The above refers in particular to how art can be used to help individuals to recover from trauma. This thinking is important in art therapy (Ahmed and Siddiqi, 2006; Spaniol, 2004).

8 "'Methodological elitism' is a way of capturing the way in which these approaches typically conceptualise the role of the audience or non-elites, but have difficulty incorporating concrete methodological strategies that can fully cash-out this conceptual and theoretical work and incorporate these non-elite actors analytically." (Stanley and Jackson, 2016, 4).

9 Nyman (2021) points out that these dimensions are not distinct, but rather are overlapping. They are useful for helping to clarify what in fact scholars mean by "everyday" and to illustrate that "the everyday life of security is political" (321).

10 The current version of the story was made for use in a workshop with school children in Ofunato City, Iwate Prefecture in March, 2020. The workshop was cancelled due to COVID-19, but the story was sent to schools and the children were encouraged to read the story, draw pictures and then send the pictures back to me to contribute to my research project. Copies of the story have also been distributed to adults and many have sent me their pictures.

11 I made a bilingual video called "Popoki's mask gallery ~ Living the Pandemic" for a poster presentation at the International Conference of Museums for Peace, 2020. It can be viewed at: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=BjT1ZjVUsm8&list=PLTjkE7Rhg8KXO6OUtYRxQg2ZqurSGF3A5&index=4. I also used it in a poster at the International Studies Association Annual Conference 2021. Please also see Alexander, Forthcoming 2022.