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AP Language & Composition

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### Article Response – Summer Reading

Despite attempts by Chinese media censors to remove the Tiananmen Square tragedy from the country's memory, former Beijing bureau chief for *The Washington Post* Dan Southerland knows that there are people who want the truth to be known. In his editorial "Remembering the Tiananmen Square Massacre" he makes a powerful case for never forgetting history, no matter how difficult it may be to remember.

The event that Dan Southerland is referring to happened on June 4, 1989; Chinese troops opened fire on unarmed civilians who were demonstrating in the public square in Beijing. Southerland opens his editorial with an anecdote about a Chinese graduate student who he encountered in 2007 who had no idea what "6-4" meant. Writing in an American newspaper, Southerland knows our familiarity with a date used as shorthand for a tragic event. It brings to mind 9-11 and the horror of someone from the U.S. not being aware of what that date means. This was an effective way of making this issue personal for Americans. This made me realize how when we say "Nine-Eleven" in this country it is a kind of shorthand for the tragedy and everyone knows what it means. It is not like this for Chinese citizens because they are being denied their country's history when the people in power don't want them to know about it.

The writer's personal experiences of being in Beijing during the massacre makes the event come alive for his readers. In one particularly disturbing image, he describes the "bullet-riddled bodies on a cement floor" in a "makeshift morgue" (Southerland 1). This image really

stood out to me because it shows the human side to this tragedy. The writer paints a tragic picture, but it seems like the point of this article is to point out that the part that is the most tragic is the way the Chinese government has censored history. Although “Chinese youths are among the most web-savvy in the world” they live in a country where the government can block out news and ideas that are not in line with their opinions (Southerland 2). So as a result, many young Chinese people do not know what happened in Tiananmen Square. This made me angry because people should know the truth about their country’s history, whether it is something to be celebrated or to be shamed. Southerland points out that “censors hold online service providers and Internet café owners responsible for the content that users read and post” (2). Because of this, people who write blogs won’t risk losing their license when it comes to posts about sensitive topics. This made me consider the freedoms that perhaps we may take for granted, such as the freedom to write our opinions in a newspaper. This was a powerful way of making the audience feel compassion for the young people in China.

I agree with Southerland’s perspective that it is hard to believe the Chinese government has kept this secret from its citizens for so long. I hope that more people read this article and understand that history is sometimes difficult to learn but we should still know history so that we don’t repeat it. Southerland ends his editorial with the hopeful perspective that many of the Chinese broadcasters he works with were students in Beijing at the time of the Tiananmen Square uprising and they remind him – and us – that history cannot be forgotten. In this way, the writer implies that none of us should forget this tragic historical moment either.

## Works Cited

Southerland, Dan. "Remembering the Tiananmen Square Massacre". *The Washington Post*. 2 June 2009. 10 June 2012. <http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2009/06/01/AR2009060102490.html>