

**Attention! This is not a drill**

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Early in May, my school, like many others, had the annual fire drill. Now, my idea of a fire drill originated in kindergarten (think dramatic escape plans orchestrated by convincing teachers) and developed during my university days, when the residence I stayed in had one obligatory fire drill every semester. Those drills were marred by juvenile disrespect for protocol. The 250 or so girls in my res, had the habit of mummifying themselves in toilet paper and leaving suspect items outside their rooms for the purpose of identification. The evacuation was usually messy and unorganized.

Considering the students at the middle school I teach at are at least 5 years younger than my peers at university, I thought the fire drill would be a welcome change to the rather quiet day I was having and, to be honest, I was looking forward to a little unruliness, also because I know the enchantment that something other than classes holds on school days.

I began to think I might just have been more excited about the drill than the students were when no-one seemed any different than usual. I didn't care – I had my camera ready to document every moment of the chaos I was quietly anticipating. I had found a nice spot where I could stand and film, and even when the siren went off and I saw the students walking out of the building, looking totally unperturbed, it couldn't dampen my overly excited spirits. They look like they aren't bothered about this, I thought, because they are supposed to keep calm during the evacuation. Just wait till they're outside, I said to myself, then they'll realize the extent of this exercise.

It was at about 12:35 that afternoon that I realized I had no clue as to what is considered serious business in Korea. What I had expected to be a mad occasion had turned out to be the kind of drill that would put university students in my home country to absolute shame. The students evacuated the building in an orderly fashion. They formed orderly rows and listened to two speeches without so much as peeping. My fellow teachers stood around, listened, and picked spring's first flowers. I chewed and swallowed. When the bell had gone 5 minutes

before, it had struck me: Korea might be the most poised nation I know. The people native to this country, know when to storm out of classrooms as if you are in grave danger, shouting and shoving others out of your way. That time isn't during a fire drill – we like to call it 'lunch'.

