

Farewell to Manzanar, Jeanne Wakatsuki Houston and James D. Houston. New York: Bantam Books, 1973.

Story Summary: Jeanne Wakatsuki Houston retells the moving story of her time spent in the Manzanar internment camp from 1942 to 1945. Jeanne and her family, along with ten thousand other Japanese-Americans, were forced from their home by the U.S. government into the desolate desert of California. There, surrounded by guard towers, armed soldiers, and barbed wire, American citizens survived humiliating conditions and the indignities of being held against their will. Jeanne recalls the arrest of her father, her mother's struggle to set up house in hastily constructed barracks, and her day to day activities in confinement. Despite the lack of civil liberties and freedoms the prisoners of the camp worked together to make life as "normal" as possible. People planted gardens, held dances, and attended cultural events, but this could not prevent the deterioration of families. Because of the lack of space, the Wakatsukis' were unable to eat as a family. Meals had been the cornerstone of the family unit and without this unifying factor Jeanne's parents were unable to hold their large family together. The once strong family that nearly filled a bus when entering the camp was now scattered throughout Manzanar. As WWII drew to a close and the United States defeated Japanese forces, the Japanese-Americans being held against their will received more freedoms. Many prisoners moved back to their former cities, and relocated to the East Coast, including many of the Wakatsuki family. Upon her family's release, Jeanne is faced with confronting the prejudices she was shielded from while living in the camp. This book allows students the opportunity to be introduced to the American government's response to the threat of espionage and war within its boundaries. It is a harsh reality that U.S. history rarely examines. This autobiographical account presents the concepts of government policies, the effects of imprisonment, and prejudices facing teens.

Objectives: Students should be able to:

- identify Manzanar on a map;
- analyze the motivations of the U.S. government regarding Japanese Americans during WWII;
- understand government policies such as Alien Land Bill, 1924 Immigration Act, and Executive Order 9066;
- identify the actions leading up to the internment of Japanese Americans;
- give examples of the effects of imprisonment on people confined against their will;
- explain the effects of internment on families; and
- recognize forms of discrimination throughout the book.

Suggested Topics for Discussion:

Introductory

- Had you ever heard of the internment of Japanese-Americans during WWII prior to reading this book? If yes, explain what you know about the topic.
- Tell why you think so few people know about the event.
- How does discrimination affect your life? How are your experiences similar or different from Jeanne's?
- What was the government's rationale for internment? What do you think of the government's decision?

Content Specific

- Explain why you think Jeanne's mother broke the family's dishes when she was offered such a low price to sell them.
- In what ways did different people in the camp deal with internment?
- The dinner table was important in keeping the family together. When there was no dinner table for the Wakatsuki's to meet at, the cohesiveness of the family broke down. Think of your own family. Do you have any objects or events that keep your family together?
- Explain why Jeanne tried so hard to become Catholic while she was in the camp.
- What do you think was keeping Jeanne's father from leaving the camp with his family when it was opened and they were free to go?
- With all the financial difficulties they were going to be facing, why would he buy a car?
- What was the significance of the car to Mr. Wakatsuki?
- Though Japanese-Americans were considered a threat to national security, why were they drafted into the military? Was this a double standard? Though Japanese Americans were not trusted by their own government, many young men enlisted, risked their lives, and fought so courageously for the U.S. What do you think motivated their service? If you had been in a similar situation, do you think you would have acted in the same way?
- Why was Jeanne so passive when her friend told her they were trying to prevent her from becoming carnival queen? Explain.
- What made Jeanne want to return to Manzanar years later? What do you think she was hoping to discover or find?
- Tell why do you think the book was titled *Farewell to Manzanar*? What is the significance of saying goodbye?

General

- What ways could the government apologize or make up for the internment of U.S. citizens?
- Do you think internment camps could be used again against citizens? Explain the reason for your answer.
- Can you recall any other times in history when groups in the U.S. were singled out and/or persecuted for their culture or race? What form did it take?
- How much control should be given to the government? Should national security be maintained at all cost?
- Can any parallels be drawn between the imprisonment of Jews in Germany and the internment of Japanese in the United States? What are they?
- Explain why you think the Japanese-Americans were singled out as a threat to national security and German-Americans were not?

Suggested Activities:

Journaling:

- Students can use a shared dialogue through their journals. This form allows students to reflect on their own reading, share ideas with classmates, and give peer responses in a non-threatening manner. Students use two adjacent pages in a notebook that have been each divided into two columns vertically for a total of four entry columns. In column #1 the owner of the journal records passages, notes, and asks questions about the reading. In the next column the same student responds to what he or she has written in column #1. Students may include personal comments or reflections about the notes, quotations, and questions. In the third column a partner comments on the first two columns. They can add a new point of view, give his or her own opinion, disagree, agree or give suggestions about questions or notes. In column #4 the owner of the journal replies to what has been written by the partner.
- Ask students to keep a symbol or image journal. Students are to identify important objects

throughout the book and record them in their journal. Then for each object ask them to explain the importance of the object on a material level as well as what symbolic meaning the object holds. Explain that objects may have several different interpretations.

Pre-reading:

- Define the terms “internment” and “imprisonment” and discuss their differences and similarities.
- Research the bombing of Pearl Harbor and the public’s reaction to the attack.
- Locate Manzanar on a map of California and then research the climate and condition of the region.
- Research and trace the emigration of the Japanese to America during the 1800’s and 1900’s. Present your findings in a research paper.
- Read pages 334-336 in *Can It Happen Again?* (provided in the trunk). What would your immediate reaction be if you were a Japanese-American reading this for the first time? What actions would you take first to prepare for this order?

Post-reading:

- Create a diorama of a scene from the book. It should be a visual representation of a memorable scene using a shoebox as a stage. Include a written description of the scene and its significance to the story.
- Develop a dictionary of terms using paraphrased definitions. Then create a short story or poem related to the topic of internment, correctly using as many of the terms as possible.
- Make a memorabilia bag. Fill it with items or objects that are representative of the story. Number the items and provide a brief explanation for each.
- Locate and record annotations for newspaper, journal, or magazine articles that relate to the events in *Farewell to Manzanar*.
- Research the 442nd Combat Regiment and their contributions to WWII. Share your findings with the class.
- Read the children’s book, *So Far From the Sea*. Then have students write about the effects of forced moves and internment on family members.
- Examine the Supreme Court decision which upheld the internment action and debate the decision and its implications. *Kiyoshi Hirabayashi v. United States* is available on pages 337-340 in *Can It Happen Again?*
- Write a paper examining the symbolism of one or all of the following objects: Mr. Wakatsuki’s cane, the dining room table, the still, and the automobile.
- Pair with middle school students who have read *Journey to Topaz* by Yoshiko Uchida. Write letters back and forth to each other discussing the similarities and differences in the two books.
*Teacher’s note: Copies of the book are available through the Euclid Resource Center and middle school teachers currently using teaching trunks can be found through the museum.
- Research the Alien Land Bill, the 1924 Immigration Act, and Executive Order 9066.
- Create a newspaper for a day in the camp. Write articles, editorials, cartoons, and advertisements which you feel would be representative of a day in the camp. They may also want to include obituaries, national news from the time period, and photos or drawings. It should be based on historical accuracy and events from the book.
- Read James Baldwin’s essay, “Stranger in the Village.” Write a paper that compares and contrasts Baldwin’s remarks with Jeanne Wakatsuki Houston’s life.

Related Materials:

- Chin, S. (1993). *When Justice Failed: The Fred Korematsu Story*. New York: Steck-Vaughn.
 - *The Color of Honor: Japanese American Soldiers in WWII*. Video
 - Harry, K. PhD. (1994). *Japanese Americans & Internment*. Paramus, NJ: Globe Fearon.
 - Hersey, J. (1946). *Hiroshima*. New York: Alfred A. Knopf.
 - Irwin, H. (1987). *Kim/Kimi*. New York: Macmillan.
 - Levoy, M. (1990). *Alan and Naomi*. New York: Harper & Row.
 - Miklowitz, G.D. (1990). *The War Between the Classes*. New York: Dell Laurel-Leaf.
 - Tunnell, M. and G. Chilcoat. (1996). *The Children of Topaz: The Story of a Japanese American Internment Camp*.
 - Uchida, Y. (1977). *Journey to Topaz*. New York: Charles Scribner's Sons.
- Unfinished Business: The Japanese American Internment Cases*. Video