

TEACHER'S GUIDE

Part 2: "Finding a Way"

Document-Based Activity

MISSION US: "Prisoner in My Homeland"

FOR REFERENCE:

https://digitalassets.lib.berkeley.edu/jarda/ucb/text/cubanc_35_1_00259305ta.pdf

p.62 - letter mentioning literary awards of high school students Kaizo Kubo and Ruth Tanaka

p.63 - poem "Saga of a People"

P.66 - essay "The Years Between"

Finding a Way | Student Reflections on Being a Prisoner

A NOTE TO THE EDUCATOR: This activity is best used after students have played Part 2 of the game.

Teenagers were able to express themselves through school assignments and personal diary entries. Schools were created in prison camps, but they were vastly different from schools outside of camps. They were in shoddy conditions with no heat and not enough furniture. Educational resources were limited and school was not consistently in session. Nevertheless, students had the opportunity to learn in these schools and even get their writing submitted to national contests. Two of the documents in Part 2 are pieces of literature written by high school students that were submitted into the Scholastic Magazine national contest and won awards.

This activity represents students' perspectives on the incarceration experience during World War II, which are exhibited through a variety of literary forms: an essay, poem, and diary entry. Through the eyes of these teenagers, students will understand how Japanese Americans were treated. They will also gain an understanding of how teenagers reacted and coped with being in prison camps.

Steps to Complete:

The following procedure is recommended for this activity and can be adapted based on your curricular goals and timing constraints:

1. Distribute primary source document(s) to students.
2. Have students work independently or in small groups to investigate the document(s) with the goal of learning how teenagers reflected on their experiences.'

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3. Assign students or student groups any or all of the guided questions that accompany each document.
4. Review the answers to the guided questions through a whole class discussion.
5. Instruct students to use the essay by Kaizo Kubo and the poem "Saga of a People" by Ruth Tanaka to complete the handout, "Youth Reflections on Mistreatment in Prison Camps."
6. Project or distribute the handout, "Create a Flyer for the Prison Camp Newspaper." Tell students to use all the documents they have analyzed through these steps to create the flyer.
7. Have students do a gallery walk to view their classmates' flyers. Conduct a class discussion to reflect on how helpful this may have been for incarcerated in the prison camps.

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Document 1 - Essay: "The Years Between" by Kaizo Kubo

Kaizo was a high school junior at Poston Incarceration Camp in Arizona and won honorable mention for this essay in a national contest sponsored by Scholastic Magazine in 1945. This was printed in the *Poston Chronicle*.

My name is Kaizo Kubo. I have a story to tell. It concerns three years of my past, years which will no doubt leave their marks on me to the end of my days. My name probably sounds strange, foreign; so will my story.

I am American, although for the last three long years I have been so in name only. I am writing these very words behind the shadows of barbed wire. I've done no wrong. My only crime is that my hair is black, my skin yellow, my eyes slant; because I am of Japanese ancestry. This is my personal account of prejudice and of human blindness. This is a plan for future justice and tolerance.

I was born in a small town in California not far from the Pacific Ocean. If not for an unfortunate quirk of fate, I would in all probability have never stirred from the scene of so many happy memories. That black day I read the news in the daily papers left me momentarily paralyzed. I stared in mute incredulity at the words emblazoned in bold print: GOVERNMENT ORDERS MASS REMOVAL OF ALL JAPANESE FROM COAST HOMES TO INLAND WAR CENTERS.

I took it hard. It meant leaving the only life I knew, parting with my boyhood friends. It spelled goodbye to life. Was this what I had believed in? Was this democracy?

In the ensuing weeks I was spared little time to brood or to think. In the upheaval that followed, we lost our home. Our belongings were either discarded or at best sold at pitiful losses. Before my very eyes my world crumbled.

From the instant I stepped into the barbed wire enclosures of our destination, I felt that queer alienable presence within me. All the rash bravado I had saved for this precise moment vanished like a disembodied soul. I suddenly felt incredibly small and alone. So this was imprisonment.

The oppressive silhouette of the guard towers looming cold and dark in the distance affected me in only one way. They seemed to threaten, to challenge me. I hated their ugly hugeness, the power they symbolized. I hold only contempt for that for which they stand. They kept poignantly clear in my mind the unescapable truth that I was a prisoner.

Then my life as an evacuee began, with a government granted broom, a bucket, and a twelve by twenty foot room. We were quartered in converted horse stables which fairly reeked with evidence of recent occupation. Men, women, and children shared these discomforts alike. I learned to eat with

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strangers, to wash and bathe side by side with unfamiliar faces, and I learned that to hear and not be heard was the best or at least the most healthful policy to follow.

At first I was inclined to think my imagination was provoking the well of silence that seemed to shroud my being, but it was real, as real as evacuation itself. An incomprehensible air of tension hung over the confines of the entire center. Twenty thousand souls brooding. It was not pleasant. The next abruptly discernable phase was a lifting of the silence and in a surprisingly short time, the atmosphere had changed to a noisy, equally unpredictable show of human emotions. Camp life is like that - uncertain.

Three years of a hard existence behind steel and armed guards, no matter what the conditions, cannot go without its ill effects. Our family, like most Japanese families prior to evacuation, was very alone. Today, after three years of communal living, I find myself stumbling over words as I make vain attempts to talk to my father. I don't understand him; he doesn't understand me. It is a strange feeling to find such a barrier between my father and myself.

The fixed routine existence offers little incentive for progress; homes, a gradual loss of individual enterprise and initiative is in evidence. I have undergone a similar period of lethargy myself. It is like living in a realm of forgotten people. It was a strange and disturbing malady developed under unusual circumstances, but I overcame it, and with the restoration I won back my faculty of logical and clear thinking.

Here is what I say: there is no need to be bitter. We are situated thus through no fault of our own, but there is nothing to gain by eternally brooding for things that might have been. I have exacted lessons from my past which I hope to put to advantage in my future.

I shall be on my own. It will be no new experience for me. Evacuation was a pioneering project; re-establishing myself into the American stream of life can be looked upon as another such enterprise. Now I stand on the threshold of freedom. I face the future unafraid, proud of my ancestry, but even prouder of my heritage as an American.

--Kaizo Kubo

Honorable Mention

Scholastic Literary Contest

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Guided Questions:

1. What marks do you think Kaizo is referring to when he says that "...years which will no doubt leave their marks on me to the end of my days?"
2. What does Kaizo mean by being "an American in name only"
3. What is the "crime" that Kaizo is saying he committed? Why does he think he "did no wrong?"
4. Why did Kaizo take the forced removal of Japanese Americans so hard?
5. What were his initial thoughts and experiences when he first arrived at the prison camp?
6. How did Kaizo adjust to life in the prison camp?
7. How did the incarceration affect Kaizo's relationship with his family?
8. What do you think Kaizo means by "living in a realm of forgotten people?"
9. How does Kaizo believe Japanese Americans should cope with this situation? Why?
10. How was Kaizo ultimately affected by his situation in a Japanese American prison camp?

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Document 2 - Poem: "Saga of a People" by Ruth Tanaka

Ruth was a high school junior at Poston Incarceration Camp in Arizona and won fourth prize for a national contest sponsored by Scholastic Magazine in 1945. This was printed in the *Poston Chronicle*.

Stanza 1

*They have sprung from a race as old as Time,
Their backs are bent, their hands are wrinkled and brown,
For they have toiled long years under a harsh master — Life;
Each passing year has left its mark
Upon their seemed and weathered faces
That show as other faces do,
A heart-deep yearning for a far-off land;
A land of frail houses, stunted trees, a sacred volcano
Sleeping under a blanket of snow.
Traces of half-forgotten customs
A love for the life-giving sun, the freshening rain, the deep brown soil,
Still lingers in their hearts.
Deep scars of pain and grief are etched on their worn faces
And yet their wise twinkling eyes
Have looked on life and found it good.*

Stanza 2

*They have come to a fabulous land,
While still dreaming the long thoughts of youth;
They have sowed their seeds, weeded furrows,
Hoed a sun-parched land, watered it and nursed it,
Harvested their plentiful crops, built a home
And borne their children.
Lest they forget the islands of their fathers,
They have brought their little treasures with them -
A miniature chest of drawers, lacquered dragon-red;
Two dainty fans gay with dancing girls;
A bamboo screen with a tiny arched bridge
A fragile lilies reflected in still water;
Little dolls in bright kimonos of hand-painted silk;*

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Delicate tea cups get on a polished tray.

Stanza 3

*The seeds they sowed took root and sprouted;
Grew tall and straight with bursting pods;
Giving rich promise of fulfillment.
So grew their black-haired children
Straight and tall, drawing nourishment from the free soil
Of this, their native land.
Their lives were like a deep, peaceful river
The old familiar customs of their ancestors
Mixing with the new bewildering ones of their foster country
And slowly giving way before them
Eating a breakfast of crisp bacon and scrambled eggs
Instead of the hot soup and rice they had eaten
In the home of their fathers;
Raising a huge paper carp on Boys' Day;
Awkwardly tying a silver star to the tip of the family Christmas tree;
Reluctantly going to a movie with the children,
Leaving behind a friendly game of Go
And a cup of steaming, green tea;
Driving to the beach and learning to roast hot dogs
Over a driftwood fire,
And eating them with seed-covered rice cakes;
Passing on to their children the ceremonious courtesies
That they had learned so long ago.
And so they lived out their lives
Guided by their sons and daughters
Through this strange new world,
Slowly changing their deep-rooted ways.*

Stanza 4

*They have come to a new home
Living in a single room
Behind barbed wire -
They know that peace has been shattered throughout the world
By heavily laden bombs of terror and destruction;*

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*But they who love the deeply tranquil soil
Are stunned, bewildered by it all,
By the cold wall which their American friends
Have built about them.*

Stanza 5

*Now they are standing on the beloved soil of their Western mother,
Their wizened bodies huddled together
Against the bitter cold.
Rising they look toward the sea
Vainly striving through the mists of the past
To live again the dreams of their youth,
Thinking of a pleasant land where cherry blossoms
Warmed their hearts in spring,
Where placid goldfish lazily swam in sunny ponds,
Where all the contented and peaceful;
They turn towards the red glow of a sinking sun
Seeing through the distant hills, seeing over all the land
The rolling hills and valleys of their western mother.
Then they turn towards each other with eyes full,
Unshamedly,
Understandingly;
For deep in their almond, brown eyes,
Deep in the innermost depths of their souls (?)
There shall always glow a hope,
A hope that peace shall come one day
A peace forging with understanding and friendship,
The islands of their long-lost youth
And the far stretching land of their children's birth.*

Guided Questions:

1. Who are the people that Ruth Tanaka are referring to?
2. What are they reminiscing about and longing for?
3. How were their lives like a "deep, peaceful river" mixing the old and the new?

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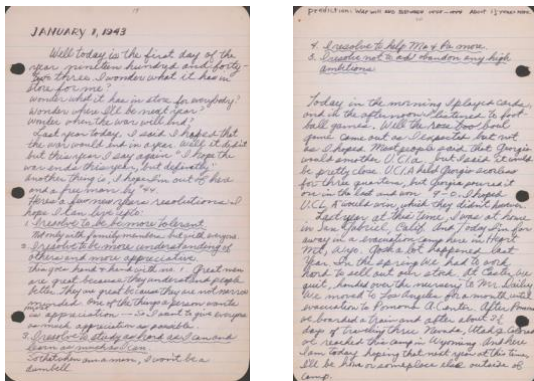
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4. How do the experiences and emotions conveyed in the poem relate specifically to Japanese immigrants? How may this relate to immigrants from other regions?
5. How does the "new home" described in Stanzas 4 and 5 compare to their lives before they were imprisoned as well as before they came to the U.S.?
6. Despite their imprisonment, the people of the poem hold on to a hope for the future. What may have helped the imprisoned Japanese Americans described in this poem to find hope?

Document 3 -Stanley Hiyami Diary Entry Analysis: "January 1, 1943"

Transcription of "January 1, 1943" Diary Entry:



<http://www.oac.cdlib.org/ark:/13030/tf338n99cz/?brand=oac4>
<http://www.oac.cdlib.org/ark:/13030/tf8h4nb342/?brand=oac4>

JANUARY 1, 1943

Well today is the first day of the year nineteen hundred and forty three. I wonder what it has in store for everybody? Wonder where I'll be next year? Wonder when the war will end?

Last year today, I said I hoped that the war would end in a year. Well it didn't but this year I say again "I hope the war ends this year, but definitely."

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Another thing is, I hope I'm out of here and a free man by '44.

Here's a few more New Years resolutions I hope I can live up to:

- 1. I resolve to be more tolerant.
Not only with family members but with everyone.*
- 2. I resolve to be more understanding of others and more appreciative.
This goes hand & hand with No.1. Great men are great because they understand people better. They are great because they are not narrow minded. One of the things a person wants most is appreciation - so I want to give everyone as much appreciation as possible.*
- 3. I resolve to study as hard as I can and learn as much as I can.
So that when [I] am a man, I won't be a dumbell.*
- 4. I resolve to help Ma & Pa more.*
- 5. I resolve not to abandon any high ambitions.*

Today in the morning I played cards and in the afternoon I listened to football games. Well the [R]ose [B]owl game came out as I expected but not as I hoped. Most people said that Georgia would smother UCLA but I said it would be pretty close. UCLA held Georgia scoreless for three quarters, but Georgia poured it on in the last and won 9-0. I hoped UCLA would win which they didn't however.

Last year at this time, I was at home in San Gabriel, Calif. And today I'm far away in an evacuation camp here in Heart Mt. Wyo. Gosh a lot happened last year. In the spring we had to work hard to sell out our stock. At Easter we quit, handed over the nursery to Mr. Dailey. We moved to Los Angeles for a month until evacuation to Pomona A. Center

Guided Questions:

- 1. Why do you think Stanley wonders about what is in store for everybody in the future? Why is he so concerned about wanting the war to end?*
- 2. Considering that Stanley is imprisoned with thousands of other Americans of Japanese descent in a confined space, why do you think he makes the resolutions listed above?*
- 3. How do you think Stanley's resolutions could make life in the prison camp more bearable?*

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Youth Reflections on Mistreatment in Prison Camps

Use the essay by Kaizo Kubo, the poem "Saga of a People" by Ruth Tanaka, and/or the diary entry of Stanley Hiyami to draw a scene that indicates how they felt about being imprisoned or their mistreatment in prison. Illustrate how they were coping with life in the prison camp.



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CREATE A FLYER for the Prison Camp Newsletter

Japanese Americans were allowed to have their own news media in incarceration camps like Manzanar. The camp newspapers and newsletters helped keep prisoners informed and occupied by providing reports about what was happening in other camps, listings of events and opportunities for their daily lives, as well as administrative announcements and orders.. Literature and art were also printed in newspapers.

Example: [cover of a booklet created by incarcerated for a newspaper](#)

Based on the essay by Kaizo Kubo, the poem "Saga of a People" by Ruth Tanaka, and/or the diary entry of Stanley Hiyamai, create a message showing how these teenagers may have motivated or encouraged others in the prison camps. Complete the following on a blank sheet of paper:

- Create a slogan that summarizes their message and write this in large lettering. Think about how people might be having a hard time with the changes they've had to endure ever since becoming prisoners.
- Write a short paragraph or make a list of what people can specifically do to cope with their situation.
- Draw a picture or symbol that summarizes this message.