

TEACHER'S GUIDE
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MISSION US: "Prisoner in My Homeland"

Fumiko Hayashida Advocates for the Bainbridge Island Japanese American Memorial

In 2006, Fumiko Hayashida was the oldest living Bainbridge Islander who had been forcibly relocated to the Manzanar internment camp. In the following excerpt, Hayashida testifies to the U.S. House of Representatives Subcommittee on National Parks in favor of erecting a memorial to those forcibly removed from the island. The bill passed the following year, and the Bainbridge Island Japanese American Exclusion Memorial officially opened in 2011. Hashida passed away in 2014 at the age of 103.

...When the war finally ended and we were freed from Minidoka, no one wanted to talk about our painful years in internment camps. We buried our pain, suffering and shame, choosing to try to forget the past, persevere and for the sake of the children move forward with our lives.

We returned to Bainbridge Island to find that we lost everything. Our farm and strawberries were not well maintained and we had to start from scratch. We tried to make a go of it, but having three young and growing children, we had to find a more stable income. After a year my husband got a job at Boeing in Seattle, but the long ferry and bus commute from Bainbridge Island became too taxing. We decided to leave Bainbridge Island and buy a home in Seattle, where I have lived to this very day.

The years we experienced in Minidoka and Manzanar changed not only our lives, but the years of internment during World War II changed the lives of all 120,000 Japanese Americans who were forcibly exiled by the United States government.

I am grateful that Presidents Ronald Reagan, Gerald Ford, George H.W. Bush and Bill Clinton have apologized for this shameful period in American history, and that the US Congress passed the Civil Liberties Act of 1988 and the modest reparations that followed. These are powerful statements from our nation of healing and honor.

As the very first place where the World War II internment story literally began, the passage of H.R. 5817, the Bainbridge Island Japanese American Monument Act of 2006 would be another powerful statement by the United States of America that we must learn and never forget the lessons from this unfortunate chapter in American history.

Only a small fraction of the Japanese Americans who experienced the internment are still alive. My husband died in 1983. We never celebrated our golden anniversary. Only my youngest sister and two of my children are alive today from my immediate family.

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I am an old woman in the 95th year of my life. I hope to live long enough to see the Bainbridge Island Japanese American Memorial earn the honor and recognition from our federal government and become a unit of the National Parks Service. I urge you to please urgently pass this measure so that all Americans can learn from and take to heart the spirit of the memorial's name: "Nidoto Nai Yoni – Let it not happen again."

Source: Fumiko Hayashia, *Testimony Before the Committee on Resources, Subcommittee on National Parks, United States House of Representatives*. Congressional Records, Hearing on H.R. 5817: The Bainbridge Island Japanese American Monument Act of 2006. September 28, 2006.