

**Guiding Question:** What was it like for Japanese Americans to live, work, and go to school in prison camps like Manzanar?

## Document Analysis

### “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. Read the essay and respond to the questions that follow.*

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...

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?

- left
- silent disbelief

**Time:** 45 minutes

### Instructions

**Goal/Intent:** Students closely read and analyze an essay written by a high school student while imprisoned at a Japanese American prison camp. Then, they engage more deeply with the emotional resonance of the student's experience by choosing and sharing phrases and sentences from the essay that they find impactful.

### Close Reading (30 mins)

Begin by reading the essay aloud with the students so that they have the opportunity to hear the text before working with it independently. Take a moment to respond to any initial questions students have about the text.

Preview the **Close Reading** questions that follow the text with the class, and then have them read the text a second time silently. As they read, they can annotate and highlight any information they recognize to be related to any of the Close Reading questions.

Next, students can work in pairs to respond to the **Close Reading** questions. (If time is short, you might choose a subset of the questions for students to work with.) Remind them that they should look for evidence for their answers to the questions directly in the text.

Briefly review the answers to the Close Reading questions to ensure students are comprehending the text.

### Response and Discussion (15 mins)

Ask students to go back into the text and highlight a phrase or sentence that they find to be particularly impactful. It could be that they highlight something because it provokes an emotion in them (e.g. anger, outrage, sadness), because the language is powerful, or because it captures Kubo's feelings and experiences in a memorable way.

After they have highlighted the phrase or sentence, they should jot down a few sentences

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• focus on my misery</li> <li>• for less money than they were worth</li> <li>• strange</li> <li>• foolish confidence</li> <li>• a ghost</li> <li>• heartbreakingly</li> <li>• someone forced from their home</li> <li>• housed</li> </ul>	<p>In the ensuing weeks I was spared little time to <u>brood</u> or to think. In the upheaval that followed, we lost our home. Our belongings were either discarded or at best sold <u>at pitiful losses</u>. Before my very eyes my world crumbled.</p> <p>From the instant I stepped into the barbed wire enclosures of our destination, I felt that <u>queer alienable</u> presence within me. All the <u>rash bravado</u> I had saved for this precise moment vanished like a <u>disembodied soul</u>. I suddenly felt incredibly small and alone. So this was imprisonment.</p> <p>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 <u>poignantly</u> clear in my mind the inescapable truth that I was a prisoner.</p> <p>Then my life as an <u>evacuee</u> began, with a government granted broom, a bucket, and a twelve by twenty foot room. We were <u>quartered</u> in converted horse stables... Men, women, and children shared these discomforts alike. I learned to eat with 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...</p> <p>Three years of a hard existence behind steel and armed guards, no matter what the conditions, cannot go without its ill effects... Life as a prisoner offers little incentive for progress; hence, people have lost their sense of purpose. I did too...but I overcame it, and now I am thinking more clearly..</p>
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in a notebook or the back of the text explaining why they chose their selection.

Next, following a simple “wraparound” procedure in which students speak in the order they are sitting in the classroom, have each student read aloud *only* the phrase or sentence they highlighted in the text. No one will comment or react until every student has shared in succession. (The teacher can participate too!) Assure students that it is okay if they repeat something another student has already shared. They will discuss any patterns that arise later.

After everyone has shared, debrief the activity beginning with the following questions:

- What did you notice about the lines the class chose to share?
- What patterns or repetition did you notice?
- What parts of Kaizo’s experience seemed to be most impactful on the class?
- Did hearing the essay quoted like this change how you are responding to Kaizo’s story, or what you are taking away from it?

**Extension**

You can take the “wraparound” sharing activity a step further by helping students organize their selections into a “lifted line” poem. The final poem will include all of the phrases or sentences that students chose, but the class must work together to figure out the order in which to put their lines for maximum impact.

For instance:

- Whose line would be the best opening line of the poem? Whose would be the best closing line?
- If multiple students chose the same phrase or sentence, how should the final poem handle that repetition? Should it be bunched together or spread throughout the poem?

Students can stand according to the order of the lines in the final poem, and then they can recite the poem, reading their lines one at a time.

<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• in this situation</li><li>• being forever angry</li><li>• learned</li><li>• learning experience</li></ul>	<p>Here is what I say: there is no need to be bitter. We are <u>situated thus</u> through no fault of our own, but there is nothing to gain by <u>eternally brooding</u> for things that might have been. I have <u>exacted</u> lessons from my past which I hope to put to advantage in my future.</p> <p>I shall be on my own. It will be no new experience for me. Evacuation was a <u>pioneering project</u>; 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.</p> <p>--Kaizo Kubo Honorable Mention</p> <p>Scholastic Literary Contest</p> <p><i>Language adapted for student readability.</i></p>
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**Close Reading Questions**

1. What do you think Kaizo means when he says the past three years “will no doubt leave their marks on me to the end of my days?”
2. What does Kaizo mean when he says he has been “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 does Kaizo believe Japanese Americans should cope with this situation? Why?
  
8. How was Kaizo ultimately affected by his situation in a Japanese American prison camp?