

EAST of The ROCKIES

HIGH SCHOOL LEARNING KIT

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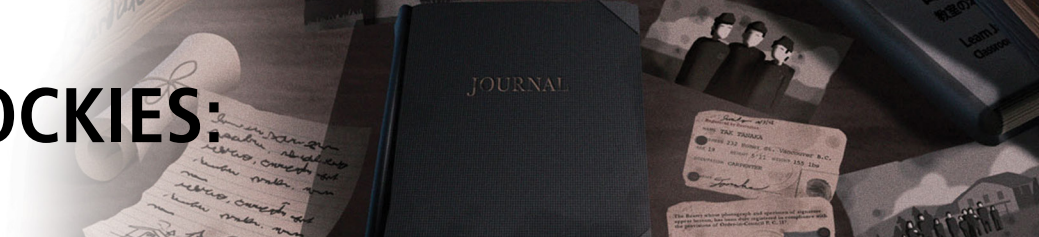


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SYNOPSIS

East of the Rockies is an interactive narrative augmented-reality experience written by acclaimed Canadian author Joy Kogawa and told from the perspective of Yuki, a 17-year-old girl forced from her home and made to live in British Columbia's Slocan Japanese Internment Camp during the Second World War. As Yuki and her family adjust to their new reality inside the camp, they struggle to make life as normal as possible.

Users follow the story by tapping, swiping, inspecting and zooming in on key elements within each scene. Every interaction activates a piece of scripted narrative spoken by Joy's own granddaughter, Anne. Spoken in the first person, each line illuminates a different aspect of life in the camp, as documented in Yuki's journal.

RECOMMENDED AGE

12–17 years

RECOMMENDED SUBJECTS

Civics/Citizenship – Human Rights
History and Civil Rights Education
Civil Rights and Freedoms
Social Studies – Social Policies and Programs

Overarching inquiry question:

How does institutional racism affect a group that has been targeted as enemy aliens?

HISTORICAL CONTEXT

When the Japanese attacked Pearl Harbor, Hawaii, on December 7, 1941, the Canadian government declared war on Japan. Regardless of birthplace, all Japanese-Canadians were classified as Enemy Aliens as a matter of national security and would be interned. Prior to the internment, racial tensions in British Columbia were already running high. Before the war, residents resented the competition posed by Japanese-Canadian fishermen, and suspicions grew about the motivations as well as allegiances of Japanese-Canadians as the possibility of war grew. Racism, fear and resentment of their Japanese-Canadian neighbours led to campaigns for their removal. Prime Minister Mackenzie King signed the order to intern Japanese-Canadians. The Custodian of Enemy Property had been tasked with holding the homes, farms, businesses and family possessions of enemy aliens, but everything was sold well below market value and without consent to finance the cost of internment. After the war, no evidence was ever found that indicated any Japanese-Canadian had committed any act of espionage or treason against Canada during this period of history.

PEARL HARBOR ATTACK

The surprise attack on Pearl Harbor by Japanese forces increased pre-existing anti-Japanese sentiment and racism in B.C. Japanese-Canadians, already the frequent target of racially motivated harassment and violence, were perceived as a threat to national security. On February 25, 1942, the federal cabinet enacted the War Measures Act, which ordered the removal of all Japanese-Canadians who lived within 160 kilometres of the Pacific Coast. Both Canada's senior military and the RCMP opposed this order, stating that the Japanese-Canadians posed no threat to the country's security. However, racially motivated pressures from politicians overrode expert opinion.

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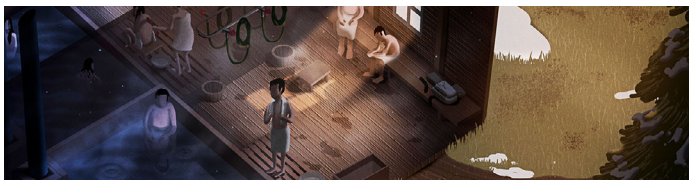
RELOCATION

STUDENT ACTIVITY

Rank: From 1942 and for the duration of the war, Japanese-Canadians were detained in camps. Adults were limited to what they could carry: two suitcases or 150 lbs (68 kg). Children were allowed 75 lbs (34 kg). Yuki's father advises his family to only "take what you cannot part with." Put yourself in a situation where you must leave your home and are **limited to one suitcase** of personal belongings. What would you take?

Rank the following in order of importance for you:

- Family photos
- Heirlooms (give an example)
- Clothing
- Books
- Music (e.g., such as a harmonica)
- Other (must fit in a suitcase)



LIFE IN THE CAMPS

Have students identify a point in *East of the Rockies* that shows the hardships of living as interned Japanese-Canadians (e.g., setting, conditions, experiences, etc.).

STUDENT ACTIVITY

Open question: How did life in the internment camps affect the daily lives of Japanese-Canadians?

CONTEXT

The separation of families was common, as was the sharing of accommodations between different families. Living conditions were poor—the intent was to segregate internees from white communities, but this often meant that they were housed in shelters intended for keeping livestock. Schooling for students was interrupted, and faith groups stepped in to provide education for interned children. The traditional family dynamic of Japanese families was shifted—children often had to act as language interpreters between their parents and camp officials. The men were often separated from their wives and children. Many of them worked labour-intensive jobs with deplorable living conditions. Food shortages in internment camps resulted in food deliveries from the Red Cross.

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STUDENT ACTIVITY

Choose ONE answer: Despite the lack of proof that Japanese-Canadians were a threat to national security, they were removed from their homes and sent to the interior of B.C. to live in isolated camps. Which of these factors addresses the strongest reason as to why they were subject to such human-rights abuses? Be prepared to defend your choice.

Rank the following in order of importance for you:

- Pre-existing anti-Japanese and anti-Asian sentiment that predated World War II
- Resentment regarding competition from Japanese fishermen and business owners
- Xenophobia and nationalism
- Greed (i.e., sale of their property meant others could get a deal on homes, farms and possessions)
- The fear of another surprise attack like the one on Pearl Harbor undermined people's sense of safety
- An opportunity presented itself to permanently remove Japanese-Canadians

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CONTEXT

“East of the Rockies” refers to the camps established in the interior regions of British Columbia. The pressure to relocate and confine Japanese-Canadians was a movement initiated by their Canadian neighbours, as well as by the federal government and politicians like Howard Green, through campaigns such as Keep B.C. White. The language used to describe the relocation of Japanese-Canadians is intriguing. “Evacuation,” a word typically associated with taking people to safety, actually meant loss of homes, businesses, property and civil rights.

STUDENT ACTIVITY

Watch this 16-minute clip from the film *Force of Nature: The David Suzuki Story*, in which he talks about his experience in the Slocan Japanese Internment Camp.

nfb.ca/m/playlists/4e360519240d4b60ad6af441b1efe0f7/playback/#1

Revisit: Go back to the previous question—“Which of these factors addresses the strongest reason as to why they were subject to such human-rights abuses?”—and see if your answer is different based on David Suzuki’s testimony.

REPATRIATION

STUDENT ACTIVITY

Choose ONE answer: This activity addresses how Japanese-Canadians would perceive the possibility of repatriation post-WWII. Place each of the following choices on a separate wall of the classroom to allow for students to discuss their choice as a small group and then with the entire class:

- Fear of losing Canadian citizenship or any birthrights if they left Canada
- Hope that they would eventually be able to return to their original homes
- Anger, since internees were Canadian citizens, not Japanese nationals
- Uncertainty about their future in Japan due to lack of resources or skills needed to live there



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CONTEXT

Once the war ended, internees could either move east to Ontario or Manitoba or choose repatriation (voluntary deportation) to Japan. Repatriation to postwar Japan was highly problematic. Of those interned in the camps, 75 percent were Canadian citizens, and many had either not lived in Japan for decades or would face barriers because of a lack of practical skills or language skills. For many who chose repatriation, life in Japan presented a different type of discrimination because Japanese nationals perceived these émigrés as a burden and a source of shame. They had no means to restart their lives, since all their property and possessions had been confiscated prior to internment.

IMPACT ON FUTURE GENERATIONS

STUDENT ACTIVITY

Open question:

- How did the experiences of living in an internment camp affect Japanese-Canadians and subsequent generations?

Extension question:

- How have the experiences of interned Japanese-Canadians shaped Canada's approach toward democracy, inclusion and citizenship today?



CONTEXT

One of the impacts of internment was cultural detachment. The internment of Japanese-Canadians destroyed the communities that existed, since the dispersal meant that family, friends and neighbours would never live in the same place again. Descendants of the Nisei (people born in North America whose parents were Japanese immigrants) speak English as their first language and are completely acculturated, identifying with North American values, norms and expectations. One of the consequences of internment is not just the loss of Japanese communities, but also the loss of pride and comfort in identifying as Japanese-Canadians through culture and tradition. In later years, the Redress movement resulted in former internees seeking compensation for the sale of land and properties, and acknowledgement that the government had suspended their rights as citizens. The government had also reneged on its promise to not sell items or land without consent, and instead sold everything at below prewar market value. In 1988, Prime Minister Brian Mulroney apologized to former internees and a compensation package was established, finally allowing people to grieve the past and build for the future.

STUDENT ACTIVITY

Primary Source Document Analysis

Select and analyze one image of life in an internment camp that presents a particular opinion, hypothesis or point of view. Describe what appears in the image (e.g., physical setting, people, clothing, objects, etc.). What can be learned from the photograph? Note down all questions you may have about what is depicted in the photo before you begin the analysis. Make connections between the image and specific scenes in **EOTR**. What do these images reveal about the historical context of the times? Analyze additional images from the collection to see what new questions and answers can be found. If groups are working on different images, connect findings made in this exercise.

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Suggestions for primary source documents that include the following and which teachers can use with students to complete an analysis of a historical document/artifact:

Removal of Japanese from Vancouver

DOWNLOAD FILE



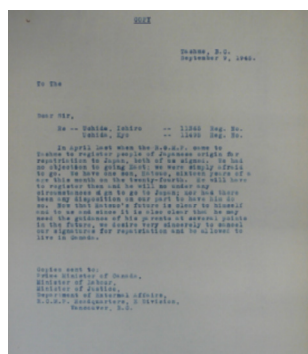
Living conditions for interned families

DOWNLOAD FILE



Letter from Japanese-Canadians protesting deportation order

DOWNLOAD FILE



News about Pearl Harbor attack

DOWNLOAD FILE



News story regarding sale of property

DOWNLOAD FILE



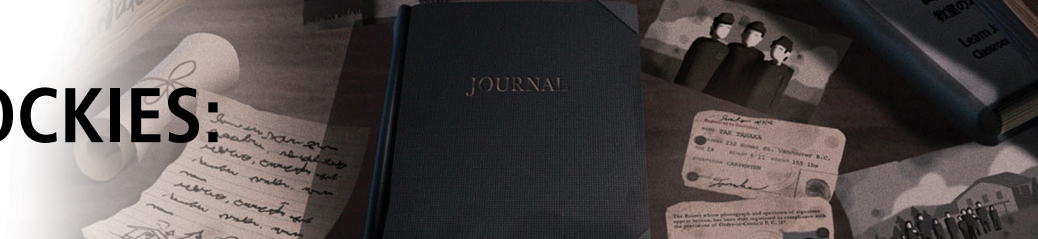
Japanese National Registration card

DOWNLOAD FILE



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RELATED NFB TITLES FOR ADDITIONAL EXPLORATION

[*Minoru: Memory of Exile*](#)

[*Enemy Alien*](#)

[*Sleeping Tigers: The Asahi Baseball Story*](#)

[*Force of Nature: The David Suzuki Movie*](#)

CREDITS

This study guide was written by Jse-Che Lam and produced and prepared by Anne Koizumi.

Jse-Che Lam is a Toronto-based high school teacher who has taught English, history, politics, civics and various social science courses. Her interests include stories about migration, urban issues and all matters that concern Canadian-produced film, literature and politics.

Anne Koizumi is a Learning Program Manager in Educational Programs at the NFB. She is a passionate media-arts educator who has taught animation and documentary workshops across Canada.