
Journey to Topaz

by Yoshika Uchida

Key Ideas and Details, Craft and Structure, and Integration of Knowledge and Ideas



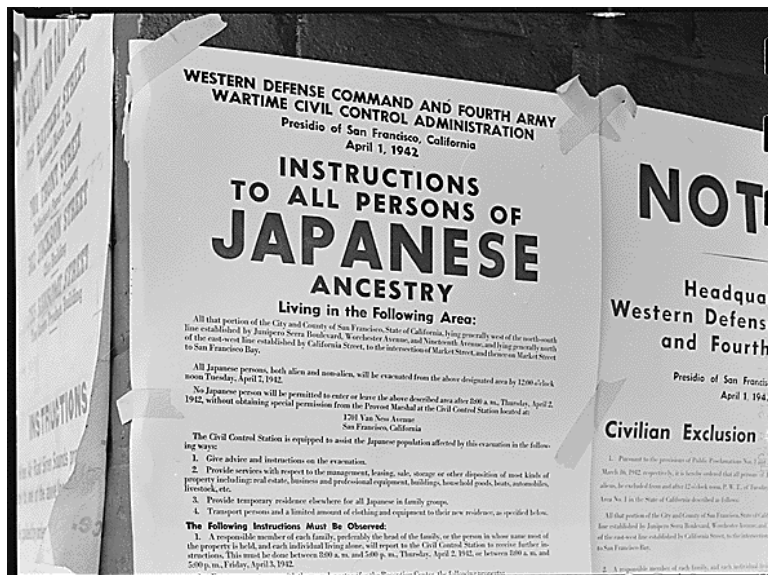
Children pledge allegiance to the flag in San Francisco, California, National Archives.Gov

Please note that many suggestions in this guide have been offered from Novelinks, a website created by English teachers for English teachers. They have provided many more complete thoughts about the analysis of this work on their website: <http://novelinks.org/pmwiki.php?n=Main.HomePage>. In addition, they offer Reading Strategies and Reading Activities to be considered when your class is reading this book.

This “Reading Guide” is an attempt to condense some of the main points relating to the Common Core State Standards for the teacher before reading of this book with the class. These key details, craft and structure and integration of ideas are just some that fall under the main anchor standards to aid in discussion and journal writing.

Summary of Plot

Yuki, an eleven-year old female protagonist, tells this story through third-person narration about life in a Japanese internment camp. Yuki, a Japanese American, has plans for Christmas in 1941. Those plans are abruptly altered as Japanese living on the West Coast are labeled enemy aliens and her father is arrested by the FBI. Yuki, her mother, and her older brother are incarcerated - first in a horse stall and then in a barbed-wire enclosed camp in the



Utah desert.

This historical fiction is recommended literature for the Common Core State Standards by the California Department of Education and lists grade level spans from third through eighth grade. The reading is not difficult, but has themes that are very deep and can be reached according to the developmental level of your students. The novel is of high interest

to students due to their sense of fairness. In addition, the story, based on an important time in our history, provides the backdrop for a project-based unit of study which includes multiple disciplines in an authentic manner. The entire unit, as described in the unit plan, offers the opportunity for study of primary documents and argumentative writing through student's active engagement in a moot trial and a short drama. This can be a simple production in the classroom, and/or be used as a presentation piece at school, or with arrangements, performed in court.

Key Ideas and Details

As you guide students into the reading through small and large group discussions, partner reads, and or read aloud sessions, be sure to draw them to the inferences in the text, specifically from the dialogue. As students empathize with the characters, they do not have a difficult time drawing conclusions to the emotions of the setting. One of the principal themes is the destructive nature of **fear**. Japan's surprise and deadly bombing of Pearl Harbor scared the American government, and they reacted by violating the principle of justice and liberty for all citizens by forcing the internment. In the novel there are plenty of rich opportunities to discuss and journal-write from prompts that analyze how and why individuals in the story interact the way they do over the course of the text. For example, Yuki's mother continues to care for others even though she is forced to leave the majority of her belongings and create a new life within the internment camp. She is an innocent victim of self destruction and fear, and she combats this with **love and understanding for others**. She explains, "Fear has made this country do something that she will one day regret, Mr. Kurihara, but we cannot let this terrible mistake poison our hearts. If we do, then we will be the one to destroy ourselves and our children as well." (Concept Analysis, novelinks.org)

Key supporting details continue to reinforce the enduring theme of diversity and focus on **how destructive fear and hatred can be to human lives**. The author, Yoshika Uchida is able to concentrate on the devastating effects of the the governments behavior and empower the novel to convey a moral. This is evident through a strong second theme: **similarities amongst people should triumph over discrimination**. The book shows the family as typical citizens at the beginning: sports, movies, pizza and hamburgers ~ there is the sense of connected community. When the ethnic background is weaved in by mentioning chopsticks, rice bowls and the small Japanese church they attend, the foundation is set for the theme of the text. It is only after the bombing of Pearl Harbor that the book accentuates differences.

Craft and Structure

There are rich opportunities to reinforce the interpretation of words and phrases and to discern meaning and tone. These word choices made by the author illustrate the strength of the themes of **fear, racism, diversity and discrimination** that are prevalent in the book.

Loneliness, caring and understanding are general topics that repeat within the story.

Students can be asked to analyze and evaluate the point of view of the government, Yuki's different family members, neighbors they are leaving behind, the general public, and fellow internees. A serious discussion on **justice and upholding the constitution** and the founding principles of this nation is included ~ perfect for the integration with history / social science.

The use of **metaphor and simile** takes place within the book and taking notice of this with students will enrich their understanding of the themes. For example, Ken compares a lady to a vulture on page 39 because she figuratively swoops in on a wounded prey to get what she wants; she acts as a vulture by taking advantage of the Japanese plight to get their father's prize gladiolas, since they are forced to evacuate.

Important vocabulary:

- Seminary (6), "Chapel" (6)
- Caucasian (15)
- The negative connotation of "Jap" (20)
- Bonsai (38)
- Issei (26) first generation Japanese living in the United States
- Nisei (20) Japanese Americans - born in the United States
- evacuation (24)
- internment, aliens, refugees, fleet (5)
- barracks (49)
- War Bonds (35)
- bayonets (45)
- euphemism (64)
- sanitorium, Tuberculosis (108)
- Executive Order 9066 - authorizing internment by President F.D. Roosevelt (29)

Integration of Knowledge and Ideas

Through the reading, analysis of primary sources, and discussions of the themes and details in the book, students have the opportunity to analyze what happened in this era, and how "justice" was served. Through discussion, writing and critical thinking, students can be

brought to understand the tension that took place during the story, and the consequences thereof. During the reading of the book, it is recommended that students reflect in writing for each chapter - an additional modality of response to the literature. Through and/or following the reading of the book, students will be able to further “actualize” the story through their own research, dramatic play and mock trial, poetry and opinion and/or argumentative writing. By including the Essential Questions in written reflection prompts and oral discussions, This study will lead them to the Big Idea: **Democracy calls for equal justice under the law.**

Essential Questions

- What is justice?
- Is civil disobedience ever justified? Explain.
- Are the processes in place in democracy designed to “level” individual bias in the court system effective? Why or why not?
- In what ways do people react to race and differences between one another?
- Do citizens have responsibilities as well as rights? If so, do they have a responsibility to speak up about injustice? Explain

*** Additional vocabulary and leading questions to a greater understanding of above:**

Chapters 1-2

murky (1), contemplate (2), sanctuary (3), frantically (9)

charred (11), haughty (13), clamoring (18)

1. What happened to father? Why?
2. Why does mother offer the police tea and cake?

Chapters 3-4

ominously (19), Nisei (20), stunned (23), sabotage (25) rucksack (34), smuggle (36),
evacuation (36), vulture (39)

1. What happens to Yuki’s father?
2. How does Mother prepare for the evacuation?

Chapters 5-6

conscientious (41), suitable (42), deprived (43), encircled (46) contraband (49), cluster (50), barrack (51), savoring (56)

1. Why do you think Yuki, “felt numb and strange, as though she were inside someone else’s body?”

2. Give details that describe their new apartment.

Chapters 7-8

partition (59), bean curd (62), grandstand (64) tinted (69), anxious (71), Issei (71)

1. What do you know about Yuki’s new friend? 2. What do you think Ken should do?

Why?

Chapters 9-10

recruited (76), reluctant (76), affidavits (77), thrusting (82) scrunched (83), harsh (86), bulging (87), murmur (88)

1. What is Ken’s decision? What is his reason? 2. What do you think is bothering Ken? Ken?

Chapters 11-12

engulf (96), sprawling (96), dazzling (100)

bewildered (104), forlorn (104), barren (104), nourishing (109)

1. What happened to Emi?

2. Select three phrases that you think best describe the dust storm.

Chapters 13-14

sullen (114), giddy (115) harsh (117), distraught (119)

1. What happened to Mr. Kurihara? Why? 2. How did Ken help Mrs. Kurihara?

Chapters 15-16

rumpled (123), sheepishly (126), sliver (127), tinge (129)

bewildered (133), turbulent (134), dignity (136)

1. What stories did Father tell about Montana?

2. Do you think that Ken made a wise decision? Why or why not?

Chapter 17

ragged (139), weary (140), blacklist (145), dismantle (146)

1. Name some of the reasons why people were leaving the camp. 2. How does the story end? Did you like the ending?

* http://libwww.freelibrary.org/onebook/obop13/docs/journey_to_topaz_full_curriculum.pdf