

Unit 86 Continuing Education: Reading Discussion—The Literature of the Japanese American Incarceration—Thursday, October 16 at 10:00-Noon, Tateuchi Community Room, Seattle Japanese Garden

Dear Seattle Japanese Garden friends:

The next SJG Reading Group Discussion will focus on **The Literature of the Japanese American Incarceration**, edited by Frank Abe and Floyd Cheung. This Penguin Classics book was released in 2024.

Facilitators: Catherine Lenox and Wayne Suyenaga

10:00 Gather in the Tateuchi Community Room

10:10 Convene discussion

10:45 Break for refreshments

11:00 Continue Discussion

12:00 End of discussion

About the Editors – short presentation

Discussion

This book contains 68 contributions (from 64 authors or groups), a mix of memoirs, poetry, fiction and statements and petitions. Aside from a brief intro section before the war and concluding sections on political action after the war, most of the book takes place during the few years between the round-up of Japanese Americans after Pearl Harbor and within the isolated confines of the incarceration sites.

With so many items, it may be best to jump right in. Any additional reading would probably be more confusing and can be left till later.

General questions

- Would you have preferred fewer but more substantial (longer) items?
- Were there any items that you wished could have continued?
- What items were particularly moving?
- Who was the most interesting author?
- What was the most surprising thing you learned?

Critique/reflection

Envision a novel or screenplay based on this book.

- The first three items (Arrival and Community) describe the background of the Japanese immigrant group (issei). What behavior did they show that contributed to their incarceration and their response to it?
- What items would you use to describe the conditions of the camps? What items would you use to describe the reaction of the participants?
- As time passed there arose three conflicting groups within the camps: Those favoring volunteering for the military, those protesting for restoration of rights before considering volunteering (no-no group), and those wanting repatriation to Japan. How would you handle this conflict? Even handed presentation of viewpoints or a sympathetic edge to one side?
- In the section After Camp, how would you present items 53-59 in the Resettlement and Reconnection section?
- Repeating history. What would be the overall message that this episode of history teaches us?

Suggested additional reading and reference

There is by now so much that has been written and filmed. This book's section Suggestions for Further Exploration is a good place to start. Also, Densho ([*Home - Densho: Japanese American Incarceration and Japanese Internment*](#)) is an online resource that has recorded many oral histories of camp participants ([*Oral History - Densho: Japanese American Incarceration and Japanese Internment*](#)). Its encyclopedia is especially valuable ([*Home | Densho Encyclopedia*](#)). For example: a list of videos ([*Documentary films/videos on incarceration | Densho Encyclopedia*](#)).

[*Farewell to Manzanar*](#) is a memoir by Jeanne Wakatsuki Houston first published in 1973. It is worth a read because 1) it was one of the first and definitely the most popular first-person description of the experience in the camps, 2) its popularity enhanced the knowledge of the incarceration in the general public and 3) it is well written with emotional accounts of the events in the author's family and in the camps. For more see [*Farewell to Manzanar \(book\) | Densho Encyclopedia*](#) SPL and KCLS have multiple copies