

Farewell to Manzanar



INTRODUCTION

BRIEF BIOGRAPHY OF JEANNE WAKATSUKI HOUSTON

Jeanne Wakatsuki was born to Japanese-American parents in Inglewood, California, the youngest of ten children. As described in *Farewell to Manzanar*, she was interned with her family in the Manzanar camp from 1942-1945. After World War II ended and her family returned to California, Jeanne graduated from Long Beach Polytechnic High School and studied sociology and journalism at San Jose State College where she met her husband, James Houston. Her husband's encouragement helped Wakatsuki Houston discuss her experiences during internment for the first time, and she eventually co-wrote her memoir with him. *Farewell to Manzanar* propelled Wakatsuki Houston to success and acclaim, and she has written other books since, including *Don't Cry, It's Only Thunder*, about the Vietnam War, and *Beyond Manzanar*, a collection of essays. Wakatsuki Houston lives in Santa Cruz, California.

HISTORICAL CONTEXT

Shortly after the Japanese bombing of Pearl Harbor on December 7, 1941, President Franklin Delano Roosevelt signed Executive Order 9066, which allowed the military to "exclude" Japanese-Americans from the West Coast and confine them in government-operated concentration camps. About 120,000 Japanese-Americans were affected, most of whom were American citizens. Most prominent newspapers and many Caucasian trade unions who saw the Japanese as competition supported internment and stoked fears of Japanese espionage. Most interned families suffered serious economic and material losses as they had to sell possessions and land at a loss, and what they left behind was often stolen. In the 1960s, a younger generation of Japanese-Americans began a campaign for public acknowledgement of the internment process; they achieved success in 1976, when President Gerald Ford publicly apologized for internment on behalf of the U.S. government, and in 1988, when President Ronald Regan signed a bill ordering reparations for each surviving internee.

RELATED LITERARY WORKS

While wartime internment of Japanese-Americans was considered a taboo topic in the years after it occurred, fiction and non-fiction explorations of the catastrophe have emerged in recent decades. John Okada's novel [No-No Boy](#), written in 1956, is widely considered the first Japanese-American classic

and is one of the first works to address conflicted Japanese-American sentiment during World War II. David Guterson's 1994 novel *Snow Falling on Cedars* does not take place entirely during WWII, but centers around the relationships between two people sent to an internment camp. Joy Kogawa wrote about the Japanese-Canadian internment experience in *Obasan* (1981), which is similar to *Farewell to Manzanar* in that both books are widely used in high school curricula. Compelling photographic documentation of life at Manzanar can be found in Ansel Adams's collection *Manzanar* (collected 1943, published 1988). Photographer Dorothea Lange also documented the internment experience in her collection *Impounded*, which was initially censored by the U.S. Army and eventually published in 2006.

KEY FACTS

- **Full Title:** Farewell to Manzanar
- **When Written:** 1973
- **Where Written:** USA
- **When Published:** 1973
- **Literary Period:** Modern
- **Genre:** Memoir
- **Setting:** The Manzanar internment camp in southern California
- **Climax:** The end of internment
- **Antagonist:** Racism
- **Point of View:** First person limited

EXTRA CREDIT

Textbook Case. *Farewell to Manzanar* is now widely used in middle and high schools throughout the U.S. to teach students both about Japanese-American internment and the broader perils of prejudice and racism.

High Achiever. Besides writing the memoir together, Jeanne Wakatsuki and James Houston adapted the story into a screenplay that eventually won the Humanitas Prize, the highest award for television writing.



PLOT SUMMARY

Jeanne Wakatsuki's memoir begins on December 7th, 1941. She is a seven-year-old standing with Mama at the Long Beach harbor, watching Papa's fishing boat head out to sea, when news of the Pearl Harbor bombing arrives over the radio. The family hurries home and listens to the news with anxiety, not

sure what the new war with Japan will mean for their Japanese-American family.

Soon enough, the anti-Asian hysteria that has been brewing in the buildup to the war takes concrete forms. Along with many other Issei, or first-generation Japanese immigrants, Papa is arrested by the FBI and taken to a detention center at Fort Lincoln, where the family receives no news from him. Meanwhile, Mama moves her family to Terminal Island to live near her grown son, Woody, in a larger community of Japanese-Americans. Soon, the government forces all Japanese-Americans to leave coastal towns, where they might be able to commit espionage. The Wakatsukis move to Los Angeles but only stay there for a few months before the government orders them to move to an internment camp in Manzanar, a remote inland town.

By careful planning, Jeanne's brothers make arrangements so that Mama, the ten Wakatsuki siblings, and their spouses and children are all assigned to the same camp. Jeanne isn't fazed by the move, since she's surrounded by family and too young to understand exactly what's going on. However, when the bus pulls into a [barbed-wire](#) enclosure and the family sees the windswept camp and poorly-constructed barracks in which they're expected to live indefinitely, Mama is overwhelmed. It's only Woody who can provide the emotional and material support the family needs; he comforts Mama, puts the kids to work cleaning the barracks, and comes up with inventive ways to windproof the family's cramped unit using the little scrap lumber available at Manzanar.

In the next weeks, Mama gets a job as a dietician, making sure pregnant women and babies get the right meals and vitamins; she also becomes reluctantly accustomed to eating mushy food at the mess halls, using a public latrine, and wearing army surplus clothes to ward off the cold. During this time, Jeanne grows much more independent – Mama is too stressed and worried to provide the emotional support she craves, and due to the communal living style and cramped quarters, she's spending more time running around with kids than with her own family.

Jeanne's growing distance from her family becomes even more pronounced when Papa returns home from Fort Lincoln. The physical hardships he endured there and the shame of being suspected of disloyalty to his chosen country have stripped away Papa's dignity and sunk him into despair. He's become an alcoholic and refuses to leave the family's tiny unit, brewing disgusting-smelling moonshine in an improvised still. He picks escalating fights with Mama; once he even threatens to kill her before Kiyō, only a few years older than Jeanne, jumps out of bed and punches him. Everyone in the family is perplexed and disturbed by his behavior, and Jeanne feels she can no longer rely on Papa as the head of the family.

Soon after Papa's return, Manzanar is rocked by the arrival of the Loyalty Oath, a series of questions that every adult is

required to answer, either affirming or denying their exclusive loyalty to the U.S. and willingness to serve in the army. Generally, most of the internees do feel loyal to America, but they feel it's unjust for the government to require them to renounce Japan and serve in the U.S. military after treating them so badly. Civic groups form to encourage and sometimes pressure people into answering "No" to the questions in the Loyalty Oath; Papa, who thinks it's wiser to answer "Yes," gets in a fistfight during a tense community meeting. The tensions caused by the Loyalty Oath, combined with resentment over the living conditions at Manzanar, finally explode in the December Riot, when bands of male internees briefly take over the camp and furiously hunt down members of the Caucasian administration, as well as internees believed to have collaborated with it. Eventually, the police shoot two of the rioters, and this puts an end to the demonstration.

After the December Riot, a new camp director is appointed who promises to make life better for refugees. The Wakatsukis move to a slightly more spacious unit, a formal and well-supplied school is established for children like Jeanne, and life takes on a more normal and bearable quality. Resolving to make the best of a bad situation, internees focus on building a community at Manzanar. Soon it's like a small American town, complete with a dentist's office, football league, vegetable gardens, and country and dance bands. People decorate their lawns with [rock gardens](#) and men build a large public park. High school students publish a yearbook put on a play about a "typical American family."

This is period of continued independence and self-exploration for Jeanne. Many people are offering lessons in skills they learned before internment, and Jeanne flirts with traditional Japanese deportment and ballet before becoming enthralled by Catholicism and studying catechism with two Japanese nuns. Only Papa's stubborn refusal prevents her from formally converting. With a youth group led by a young Quaker volunteer, Lois, Jeanne takes camping trips outside the barbed-wire fence and hikes in the Sierras. She's thrilled to see the outside world, but she has become so accustomed to Manzanar that she's reluctant to leave its familiar atmosphere on any more permanent basis.

As the war is drawing to an end, the Supreme Court eventually rules that internment is unconstitutional. The government lets many internees relocate out of the camp, and several of Jeanne's older siblings jump at this chance to restart their lives. For older people like Mama and Papa, who have lost their careers and possessions and who fear the anti-Japanese prejudice that has heightened during the war, leaving camp is a more daunting prospect. The Wakatsukis leave camp only after the war has formally ended and Manzanar is scheduled to shut down. Clinging to his tattered dignity, Papa buys a broken-down car so the family doesn't have to travel back to Long Beach via public bus.

The Wakatsukis return to the town where they'd once lived, but instead of their old house they have to live in a derelict housing project, Cabrillo Homes. Mama gets a grueling job in a cannery to support the family, while Papa relapses into alcoholism. The next fall, Jeanne starts middle school. She hopes this is the opportunity to enjoy the "normal" American childhood she's always dreamed of, but many of her classmates are openly surprised to see she speaks English. While she's a strong student, she can't join the Girl Scouts and many friends' parents won't invite her over because of her race.

Jeanne becomes close with Radine, a white girl who also lives in Cabrillo Homes. She teaches Radine to baton twirl, a skill she learned at Manzanar, and the two girls become majorettes for a Boy Scout marching band. Jeanne learns that she can use her dance skills and long legs to gain some limited acceptance in male-dominated spheres. However, when they go to high school Radine is quickly accepted by the social circles that exclude Jeanne, and the two girls drift apart.

In Jeanne's senior year of high school, Papa moves the family to San Jose, where he works farming strawberries. She makes more friends at her high school and even wins the annual carnival queen contest by campaigning in a suggestive and "exotic" sarong. Papa becomes outraged when she announces this to him, saying that she's not fulfilling traditional Japanese ideals of maidenly modesty and deportment, but Jeanne eventually argues him down and she and Mama pick out a modest and elegant dress for the "coronation" ceremony. Although Jeanne imagines this will be the high point of her high school career, when the day actually arrives she feels overwhelmed by the catty girls who make fun of her dress and the conviction that all of the spectators are judging her by her race, not her character. As she walks towards her pretend throne, she realizes that not only will she never be able to fit in among her high school peers, she no longer wants to.

For many years, Jeanne is too ashamed and hurt to speak about the experience of internment, even among her family. It's only after she graduates from college, develops her own career, and gets married that she's able to grapple with the effects—both positive and negative—that it has had on her life and family. Eventually, she takes her husband and three children on a road trip to visit the ruins of Manzanar. Walking among the dusty foundations, she feels an intense personal connection to Manzanar and realizes that while the camp destroyed Papa, it's been a "birthplace" for her. As she's finally walking back to the car, she remembers a moment just before the family departed Manzanar, when Papa impetuously purchased the car and took the entire family for a wild joyride. Even though many troubles awaited the family after leaving camp, Jeanne still treasures the memory and the feeling of renewed confidence and security she felt while riding in the back of the car.



CHARACTERS

MAJOR CHARACTERS

Jeanne – The memoir's writer and protagonist, a Japanese-American girl who is interned with her family at the Manzanar camp at age seven. Jeanne narrates the details of life at Manzanar in a simple and brisk style, underscoring her curious and unsentimental nature, as well as her extreme youth during the experience. Jeanne's feelings of deep love for her family contrast with her increasing inability to depend on them as the crisis of internment distracts their attention and depletes their emotional strength. Over the course of the memoir, Jeanne comes of age, developing from an adventurous and inquisitive child to a driven student trying to find her niche in a postwar society still permeated by prejudice against Asian Americans. During her teenage years, Jeanne feels that the best way to fit in and feel "American" is to distance herself from her Japanese roots; it's only at the end of high school, when she has achieved grudging acceptance from her peers, that Jeanne realizes fitting in isn't enough to satisfy her. From then on, she starts to respect and explore her complex identity as a Japanese-Americans—a process that culminates in the writing of her memoir.

Mama – Riku Wakatsuiki, Jeanne's mother. Reserved and demure, Mama fulfills the ideal of traditional Japanese womanhood in many ways: she runs an efficient household, gives birth to many children, and supports her husband's wild schemes and career changes. However, Mama also knows her own mind. Her decision to elope with Papa rather than marry a wealthy farmer shows her independence, and rather than sell her precious china to an unscrupulous secondhand dealer, Mama smashes it all on the street. During internment, Mama's adherence to traditional norms becomes a sign of her strength. It allows her to maintain her dignity when circumstances seem designed to strip it away. At Manzanar, Mama wears a homemade sunhat as she trudges to and from work, and upon returning to California, she dresses carefully and wears make-up to her menial job at a cannery. These rituals are both a mechanism for maintaining her own dignity and something that steadies the rest of the family, especially Jeanne. However, Mama's resolute acceptance of whatever happens to the family prevents her from discussing, or helping Jeanne to understand, the traumatic experience of internment. By eventually writing a memoir, Jeanne both valorizes her mother's behavior and rejects her methods for coping with suffering.

Papa – Ko Wakatsuki, Jeanne's father. Headstrong and impetuous, Papa immigrated from Japan determined to make his fortune, but he never quite became economically successful in America, constantly changing his career plans and shifting his family from place to place. Papa is a deeply flawed character. He's vain and quick to anger, he's "absurdly proud," and when the experience of internment drives him to despair, he

expresses his feelings by showering abuse on his family. However, Papa's dynamic personality makes him the vibrant and exciting center of family life, especially before internment—Jeanne recalls that during her early childhood, he always knew how to throw a party, even when the family had little money. While Papa holds the family together before the war, his breakdown during internment is the strongest manifestation of the family's dissolution; it also shows his inability to maintain his personal dignity in the face of public stigma and suspicion. For many years, Jeanne shares Papa's deep sense of personal shame, while feeling anger at his eccentric and volatile behavior. Papa dies twelve years after internment, and while his death isn't directly connected to the experience, Jeanne says that his life "ended" there.

Woody – Jeanne's oldest brother. After Papa is arrested and taken to Fort Lincoln, Woody becomes the informal head of the family. Having inherited Papa's resourcefulness and personal flair, he takes to this role well. He's able to comfort Mama and cheer up his younger siblings, making the drudgery of life at Manzanar seem exciting, and he can come up with a plan to solve any difficulty. For Jeanne, Woody is a beacon of tranquility and hope in the midst of a bewildering experience. Once Papa returns Woody expects to relinquish this role, but as Papa has succumbed to alcoholism and despair, Woody unhappily continues to be in charge of the family. His role comes to represent both the family's determination to stick together and the impossibility of preserving traditional family structures throughout internment.

Radine – Jeanne's first friend when she returns to middle school after internment, a Caucasian girl from Texas. Despite Radine's lack of cultural sensitivity (she's initially surprised to see that Jeanne can speak English), the two girls become close because they are both from poor, uneducated families and feel out of place in their affluent school. While Jeanne is a better and more involved student than Radine, she sees that her friend is generally popular and allowed to join clubs like the Girl Scouts, while she is barred from these activities due to her race. As they progress through high school, the gap between what Radine can do and what Jeanne can widens and causes them to drift apart. Their friendship comes to represent the unacknowledged prejudice that dominates Jeanne's life and education after internment.

Kiyo – Jeanne's older brother, the closest sibling to her in age. Kiyo's internment experience is most similar to Jeanne's, and they share many experiences, such as attending the same hostile schools after internment. However, because they both feel subliminally ashamed of the racism they suffer, they don't discuss their shared experiences for many years.

Eleanor – one of Jeanne's older sisters. Eleanor gives birth at Manzanar and undergoes a long and harrowing labor, especially since the Manzanar medical staff lack the supplies and training to save her should something go wrong. While the birth of

Eleanor's child marks a moment of family celebration and cohesion, her labor is a reminder of the dangers underlying life at Manzanar.

MINOR CHARACTERS

Bill – Jeanne's second oldest brother. By the end of the novel, Bill and his wife, Tomi, move to the East Coast in search of better jobs and a less prejudiced climate. Their move contributes to the breakup of the family.

May – one of Jeanne's older sisters.

Lillian – one of Jeanne's older sisters.

Ray – one of Jeanne's older brothers.

Chizu – Woody's wife, Jeanne's sister-in-law.

Tomi – Bill's wife, Jeanne's sister-in-law.

Granny – Mama's mother and Jeanne's grandmother. Blind and unable to speak English, she lives with the family both before and during internment.

Sister Mary Suzanne – a Japanese Catholic nun with whom Jeanne studies catechism at Manzanar.

Sister Mary Bernadette – a Japanese Catholic nun with whom Jeanne studies catechism at Manzanar.

Fred Tayama – an internee at Manzanar who collaborates with the camp administration and becomes a scapegoat during the December Riot.

Joe Kurihara – an internee who leads the rebellious forces during the December riot.

Kaz – Martha's husband one of Jeanne's brothers-in-law.

Lois – a Quaker volunteer who leads youth programs at Manzanar.

Shig – Eleanor's husband, Jeanne's brother-in-law.

Frances – one of Jeanne's older sisters.

Martha – one of Jeanne's older sisters.

Aunt Toyo – Papa's favorite aunt, who loans him the money to buy his ticket to the U.S., and later shows Woody around the family compound when he's deployed to Japan as a soldier.

Leonard Rodriguez – Jeanne's high school classmate, who prevents the teachers from rigging the carnival queen election against her.

Lois Carson – Jeanne's high school classmate, a wealthy and catty girl whom the teachers favor during the carnival queen elections, although she's not well-liked among students.

Officer A man who questions Papa about whether he is loyal to the US or Japan, and seems not to understand or care about Papa's answers.

Charlie One of Mama's brothers.

TERMS

Issei – First-generation Japanese-Americans, who immigrated to the United States from Japan. Generally, they are less acclimated to Anglo-American culture than their children and place a high importance on preserving their Japanese heritage.

Papa is an *issei*, and while **Mama** was born in America, she possesses many of characteristics of the *issei* generation.

Nisei – children who are born in the United States to Japanese parents. They are legally American citizens, they speak English fluently, and they are more assimilated to Anglo-American culture than their parents. **Jeanne** and her siblings are *Nisei*.

Inu – a Japanese insult, usually applied to people suspected of collaborating with the U.S. military during internment.

isn't considered normal in California. However, despite wishing to maintain a Japanese cultural identity, he is firm in his commitment to America. After Pearl Harbor, Papa immediately burns his Japanese flag in a futile attempt to avoid accusations of disloyalty. During his imprisonment in Fort Lincoln, he is questioned about his loyalties. His interrogators are distrustful of his refusal to repudiate Japan completely, but he explains his feelings by saying that "when your mother and your father are having a fight, do you want them to kill each other? Or do you just want them to stop fighting?" For Papa, his Japanese identity is as essential to his character as loyalty to a beloved parent; however, this doesn't prevent him from being a committed American citizen.

Moreover, Papa points out that he has been living in America since before the interrogator was born. Through this remark, he argues that he's had more time to think about what it means to be a citizen, and to commit himself to America. The refusal of American society to recognize or trust this commitment, simply because of his origins, contributes to Papa's ultimate breakdown during internment.

Jeanne's generation (children born in America, known as *Nisei*) have only ever seen themselves as American and often feel alienated by Japanese culture. In order to cultivate a sense of belonging, they go to great lengths to perform their American identity, re-creating "normal" American culture even within the internment camp. However, even though they are more assimilated than their parents, they still face many of the same prejudices upon reentry to mainstream society. From the beginning of her narrative, Jeanne emphasizes her uneasiness with her Japanese identity. She recalls being terrified at Papa's threat that he will "sell her to the Chinaman" if she is bad, and is frightened when she moves to a Japanese neighborhood and goes to a majority-Asian school for the first time.

Later, the memoir dwells on the yearbook produced by high school students at Manzanar, peppered with images of "normal" American adolescence and visions of a "typical American home;" Jeanne's nostalgia for the "normal" American experience portrayed in the yearbook contrasts with her perturbation when she visits an old geisha giving lessons in traditional deportment. She and the other youngsters around her clearly aspire to live out the American tropes they observed before internment, and even though Jeannie is touched by her parents' observance of traditional culture, she crafts her own American identity by moving away from it.

Ironically, it's only within the camp—where the government has exiled them for not being sufficiently "American"—that the teenagers can enjoy this unqualified American experience. With each other, they don't have to prove their loyalty or fight for their right to participate in the American society they've created. Jeanne's initial sense of delight and fulfillment at Manzanar when she takes up baton-twirling (a "thoroughly, unmistakably American" activity) contrasts starkly to the



THEMES

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BELONGING IN AMERICA

Farewell to Manzanar's protagonist, Jeanne Wakatsuki, chronicles the internment of her Japanese-American family as a result of anti-

Japanese hysteria during WWII. Exiled from mainstream American society and viewed with suspicion, Jeanne has to consider what it means to be an American, and she meditates on the different ways that people of her parents' generations and children of her own generation cultivate a sense of belonging in their chosen country while maintaining their Japanese identity. Showing the commitment to Japanese cultural mores that exists alongside heartfelt American patriotism, Jeanne evokes the richness and complexity of blended cultural identities. One of the major tragedies about internment—and the widespread prejudice and xenophobia it represents—is that it refuses to let these two identities coexist.

Known as the *Issei*, Jeanne's parents' generation of immigrants who came from Japan to make a better life in America maintain Japanese culture rather than assimilating to Anglo-American culture. Yet, having made a conscious choice to throw in their lot with America, they often know more about commitment and loyalty than native-born citizens whose patriotism is never questioned. Papa's English is imperfect and he determinedly sticks to Japanese norms, like celebrating his wedding anniversary with a traditional ceremony. When Jeanne wins a prize in high school, she's furious with him for making a traditional bow at the ceremony rather than realizing that this

obstacles she encounters after internment when trying to become her high school's first Asian majorette. Even though she's the most qualified student, the teachers aren't sure if they want "an Asian to represent the high school in such a visible way." By the time Jeannie finally obtains the role, she has realized that she has to "try twice as hard" as the students around her to enjoy the same privileges; the experience makes her feel alienated from, rather than accepted in, American society.

Jeanne's parents hope to maintain their Japanese cultural identity while becoming committed American citizens, but her own generation is willing to move away from traditional culture in order to achieve social acceptance and a sense of belonging. The tragedy of internment and its aftermath is the collective discovery that, in the eyes of Anglo-American society, neither of these strategies are sufficient. Just as Papa discovers that his protestations of loyalty to America can't overcome his imperfect English and immigrant origins, Jeanne's excellence at school and fulfillment of quintessential American tropes don't make the students or teachers around her see her as the fully American citizen she knows she is.



INTERMENT AND FAMILY LIFE

Farewell to Manzanar chronicles the effects of wartime internment on the structure of one Japanese-American family, the Wakatsukis.

Especially because they are immigrants in a strange land, family cohesion is an important priority to the Wakatsukis and integral to Jeanne's conception of her family. In some ways, internment increases the family's commitment to each other: living in close quarters with scarce resources, the family has to make an extra effort to take care of each other. At the same time, life within the [barbed-wire fence](#) shows the limits of Mama and Papa's ability to protect the family and even to navigate American society, and as time goes on their children must take on new roles of independence and leadership. By the end of the memoir, while Jeanne is learning to make decisions and govern her own life, she also feels that the uncomplicated family life she enjoyed before internment is fractured beyond repair.

At first, the pressures of internment cause the family to redouble its commitment to cohesion. Mama and Woody (Jeanne's oldest brother) manage to get the entire family (with the exception of Papa, who has been sequestered with other adult men at Fort Lincoln) placed in the same camp. With ten children, some of whom have spouses and babies, this is no mean feat. Jeanne, the youngest child, derives a sense of security by the knowledge that most of the people on her bus to Manzanar are related to her. Arriving at camp, Mama is overwhelmed by the prospect of living in primitive shacks, which leave their occupants vulnerable to cold and dust storms. However, Woody lifts everyone's spirits by fixing up the shack

himself and mobilizing the younger children to perform small chores. He uses family unity to preserve a sense of normalcy and safety even in these trying circumstances.

As the Wakatsukis become more accustomed to camp life, Jeanne records some poignant scenes of love between family members. When Mama worries about their future, Papa (by this time returned from Fort Lincoln and reunited with the family) massages her shoulders with a special technique. When Jeanne's sister Eleanor suffers a dangerous childbirth in the primitive camp hospital, everyone in the family gathers to support her, and her plethora of relatives means she's never unattended. However, internment also irrevocably breaks down the Wakatsukis' traditional family structure—especially once Papa returns to Manzanar from Fort Lincoln. While Papa used to be a confident and dynamic patriarch, making decisions and upholding the family's dignity, he's broken down by the physical and psychological stress of imprisonment and has slipped into alcoholism. Depressed and unable to work, shouting abuse at Mama and even pushing Granny around, he forfeits his leadership of the family and makes the family into a source of stress, rather than comfort. Paradoxically, at this time Manzanar's close quarters actually drive the family farther apart. Jeanne remarks that under normal circumstances marital stress and quarrels can play out and diffuse privately, but the lack of privacy here causes every dispute to escalate and fester. The turbulent atmosphere at home causes Jeanne and her siblings to spend more time outside, finding entertainment and friendships elsewhere rather than cleaving to each other.

When the war ends, Jeanne and her siblings cultivate a new and liberating independence; even so, Jeanne mourns the extent to which internment has forever changed her family's structure. Before internment, Jeanne and her siblings unquestioningly obeyed their parents, even when they didn't want to. However, Jeanne's high school years are marked by open arguments with Papa, and she often flouts his wishes. Her new independence is crucial to her later life: she remarks with pride that she's the first of her family to finish college, and the first to marry someone who is not Japanese. However, she also finds it frightening to lose confidence in her parents. She often contrasts Papa's current alcoholism and aimlessness to his past competence, and she treasures moments when he reverts to his former self, such as when he spontaneously purchases a car in which to drive away from Manzanar.

Jeanne's siblings seem to have similar experiences. Woody, the eldest, becomes the informal head of the family after Papa is incapacitated. Although this new role helps him develop into a confident and responsible man, he seems to yearn for his old role as an obedient son. For example, even as he announces his intention to join the army contrary to Papa's wishes, he deferentially listens to Papa's arguments against this decision, just as he would have before the war. After internment, several

of Jeanne's older siblings head to the East Coast in search of better jobs, while Papa and Mama are too exhausted to begin life in a new place. While this choice will probably improve the siblings' quality of life, it signifies the disintegration of the larger family unit and Mama and Papa's loss of their central position within it.

Familial change is inevitable and even necessary as children grow up. However, because of internment, the Wakatsukis suffer these changes before they would have normally and under highly stressful circumstances. Permeating the end of the memoir, Jeanne's nostalgia for her lost family life argues that even devoted families with the best intentions cannot combat the psychological trauma of unjust imprisonment.



SHAME AND PRIDE

In *Farewell to Manzanar*, the Wakatsukis cope with the material and psychological effects of internment during World War II. In Jeanne's opinion, dignity is one of the most important aspects of Japanese culture, and one of the things she most appreciates in her parents is their commitment to maintaining family pride under even the most dire circumstances. However, this emphasis on pride makes everyone in the family vulnerable to debilitating feelings of shame. Both during and after internment, everyone in the family feels the stigma of imprisonment deeply, and they often behave as if this crisis is their fault. As Jeanne grows older, she realizes she must reject both her parents' methods of maintaining pride and coping with shame. It's only by refusing to consider internment as a mark of shame that she cultivates a sense of personal pride that is valuable and sustaining.

The charismatic and sometimes volatile patriarch, Papa is the most prideful, and thus the most strongly affected by the shame of internment. In Jeanne's opinion, all his past successes and failures are driven by his sometimes overwhelming sense of personal dignity: he leaves Japan because he doesn't want to preside over the decline of his once-wealthy family, and he never completes law school in America because he feels that doing so would entail suffering humiliating prejudice. His pride makes him liable to yell at his family and spend too much money on clothes. However, it's also this quality that makes him a dynamic and exciting person, always able to reassure his family when things go wrong, or throw a party when people need to be cheered up. In times of crisis, Jeanne often remembers the dignified way that he carved meat and portioned out food at family dinners.

Papa's character makes internment especially difficult for him. First he suffers the shame of being deemed disloyal by American society without cause. Then, when he manages to be released early from Fort Lincoln, he's called an inu, or traitor, by suspicious internees at Manzanar. These public disgraces lead him to lose pride even in his own eyes. At Manzanar, he quickly

descends into alcoholism, and his loss of dignity, manifested in his abusive behavior towards the family, is a traumatic experience for his wife and children to behold. Jeanne notes that even after returning to California and becoming sober, Papa is never able to regain his lost pride. The shame of internment persists through the rest of his life, and possibly contributes to his early death.

Unlike Papa, Mama responds to the shame of internment by maintaining normal conventions as best she can. This makes her a beacon of strength for the family, but ultimately leads her to place too much emphasis on appearances and acceptance. Mama maintains her personal dignity—and that of the family—by preserving conventions even among dismal circumstances. She always wears a hat to protect her skin from the Manzanar sun, and she uses the latrine in the middle of the night in order to avoid the “humiliation” of sharing it with others. Later, when she's forced to take a menial job at the cannery, Jeanne poignantly describes the neat makeup and clothes she wears in order to keep up her children's spirits and her own.

Even Mama's outbursts are measured and dignified. As internment approaches, Mama is forced to sell the treasured possessions she brought from Japan, and she's further shamed because an opportunistic white dealer offers her a pitifully low price for her valuable tableware. Rather than submit to the humiliation of being cheated, she smashes each dish in front of him, maintaining her dignity even at material cost. Mama's quiet perseverance helps the family make it through the day-to-day hardships of internment. However, it doesn't help Jeanne grapple with the lasting shame she suffers after the experience. When Jeanne is shamed for her origins by other students in her high school, Mama encourages her to try harder to win acceptance, rather than to openly combat their prejudice or resolve her feelings on her own.

After internment, Jeanne's feelings of repressed shame cause her to try extremely hard to fit into mainstream society, but these feelings also make her unable to advocate for herself in the face of prejudice. Only as an adult revisiting Manzanar is she finally able to realize that internment wasn't her fault, and thus jettison the shame that lasted long after the experience. Even though Japanese-Americans have technically been cleared of disloyalty charges by the end of the war, the taint of internment lingers in Jeanne's life through friends whose parents won't invite her to their home, boys who flirt with her but won't take her on dates, and teachers who don't want her to occupy prominent roles in extracurricular organizations. Instead of becoming angry at these slights, Jeanne feels ashamed of herself and tries even harder to court acceptance and goodwill. She feels guilty that she is “imposing a burden” on friends whose parents don't approve of her and feels grateful when, after long deliberation, her high school allows her to become its first Asian marjorette.

Long after high school, shame plays a role in Jeanne's adult unwillingness to talk about Manzanar. Even when she encounters a reporter who visited and photographed the camp, she feels unable to admit that she was interned there. After Jeanne has married and has kids, she visits the ruins of Manzanar with her family. Returning to the camp, she remembers not the indignities of internment, but the ways in which her parents maintained their pride, like Papa's impetuous decision to buy a car so that the family doesn't have to leave camp in a public bus. Considering the experience on her own intimate terms, rather than through the lens of shame and prejudice that mainstream society applies to it, she's able to see the past as a testament not to shame but to her family's ability to persevere through many obstacles.

In its portrayal of causeless shame that internment imposes on the Wakatsukis, *Farewell to Manzanar* is heart-wrenching and tragic. However, the fact of the memoir's existence—Jeanne's ability to vindicate her family and their willingness to discuss her experience publicly—are a firm refutation of these feelings. By writing the memoir, Jeanne is able to process the shame she's repressed for so many years and recover some of her family's lost pride.



RACISM AND PREJUDICE

Farewell to Manzanar portrays a Japanese-American family who are interned during World War II as a result of the US government's racist assumption

that Japanese immigrants cannot possibly be loyal to their adopted country. Although Jeanne spends much of her childhood in circumstances directly caused by racism, she doesn't encounter overt prejudice until she returns to California to attend middle school and high school. Focusing on implicit prejudice rather than open insults, the memoir shows how quietly-expressed racism shapes and mars Jeanne's school days. Later, as an adult, Jeanne reflects that anti-Japanese hysteria and internment reflected class insecurities and latent greed more than a concern with disloyalty. In this way, she connects her own experience to that of all marginalized groups, and makes it into a warning about the extent to which fear and xenophobia can warp society.

At Manzanar, Jeanne is largely insulated from the prejudice that forced her family there. Since Jeanne is only seven when her family leaves home for Manzanar, she can't truly understand prejudice against Japanese people or comprehend the frightening injustice of forced internment. Moreover, since everyone at Manzanar is Japanese and the camp is largely administered by inmates, she never experiences racism there. For example, the schoolteachers understand and appreciate the students' multifaceted racial identities and make sure they have a rigorous education despite the dismal circumstances.

Despite this, prejudice does crop up in internees' relationships with each other. For example, when he returns early from Fort

Lincoln, Papa is smeared as an "inu," or a collaborator with their jailers. Suspicion over collaboration and disloyalty turns inmates against each other and even leads to a riot (the only incidence of overt chaos at Manzanar). In this way, the memoir suggests that tribalism within any society—whether it's the small world of Manzanar or the United States at large—is highly pernicious and easily leads to violence.

Jeanne's first personal experiences of racism occur when she has to attend majority-white schools after the war ends. At some moments, she faces overt hostility: once, she and her brother Kiyō are waiting at a bus stop when an old woman spits at them and says, "Why don't all you dirty Japs go back to Japan!" Besides the obvious injustice of the comments, the spectacle of an elderly person showering abuse on children shows how xenophobia erodes society's most basic norms of decency.

At Manzanar, Jeanne craves a typical American childhood, constantly dreaming about the good things life "outside" will bring. However, although after internment she grows up alongside this blissful American experience, she never quite achieves it. Her middle and high school years are marred by racist slights: her exclusion from Girl Scouts and high school sororities, friends whose parents refuse to invite her home, and a feeling of social exclusion despite the fact that she's one of the best and most involved students at her school. Generally, Jeanne expresses her experience of racism not through what people do, but what they *don't* do. Her exploration of these tacit biases illuminates the extent to which racism can warp a society even when it isn't clearly visible or when its perpetrators don't seem overtly hostile.

Although the memoir grapples with racism mostly through Jeanne's personal experience as a student, it occasionally zooms out to show how white society benefits from stripping Japanese-Americans of their rights. While never rich, before the war the Wakatsuki family had many possessions: they owned a house, Papa had two boats and was paying off a car, and Mama owned many valuable furnishings from Japan. Although Mama pays to store her possessions in a warehouse during internment, they've all mysteriously disappeared by the time she returns for them. Similarly, no records remain of Papa's boats or car when he tries to find them; their old house is occupied by other people and they live in a derelict public housing complex. Essentially, they have to begin life over again. Moreover, when internment ends, Mama and Papa are especially worried about the transition to mainstream society because they know that farmers' unions have been stirring up anti-Japanese sentiment, saying that internees will take low-paying jobs away from white people. By acquiescing to internment and racial prejudice, Anglo-Americans are able to profit materially and find an outlet for economic anxieties.

While Jeanne's compelling evocation of her own experience makes the effects of racism tangible and hard to ignore, her

larger analysis of the racial climate, which both precedes and outlasts internment, links her own plight to that of all marginalized groups. The memoir argues that racism is not about the qualities of a particular group, but is rather inextricably linked to greed, economic anxiety, and competition over jobs and resources. In an afterword to the memoir, Wakatsuki compares racism against Japanese to the Islamophobia that rapidly sprang up after the September 11th attacks. Reminding readers that “the readiness to react along ethnic lines” is always present, the author argues that without vigilance against this sort of racism, injustices like Manzanar can easily occur again.



GROWING UP

Farewell to Manzanar is primarily about the experience of internment, but it's also a coming-of-age memoir, spanning from Jeanne's prewar

childhood to her postwar graduation from high school. Although internment is a travesty, for Jeanne personally the experience fosters her natural curiosity and independence. As she describes camp life, she contrasts the growing complexity of her own character with Papa's psychological decline. After internment ends, Jeanne both seeks independence from her parents and courts social acceptance by trying to become a quintessential American schoolgirl. However, just as she learns that her peers won't let her inhabit this role due to her race, she also realizes that living out conventional tropes isn't satisfying to her. By the end of the memoir, Jeanne abandons the quest to fit into molds proposed by either her parents or her friends in favor of embracing her own complex identity.

With its unstructured pattern, camp life helps Jeanne grow up even as it pushes Papa into an early old age. With Papa absent and Mama preoccupied, Jeanne has a lot of time to herself. Especially in the camp's early days, school is haphazard, and in her free time Jeanne experiments with different activities in order to find her niche: she tries out and rejects Japanese deportment and ballet lessons before she's drawn to catechism classes offered by two nuns. Jeanne becomes entranced by Catholicism because of the stories the nuns tell, in which female saints persevere and overcome injustice through their faith and bravery. Although Papa ultimately refuses to allow her to be baptized, Jeanne has already begun to cultivate her own independence by exploring different spiritualities and different modes of womanhood on her own.

Because camp life liberates Jeanne from the normal routines of childhood and gives her access to new ideas, she describes it as a “birthplace.” The complexity of Jeanne's feelings toward Manzanar stem from her knowledge that, although it fractured her family and “ended” Papa's life, it has positively shaped her own. When she finally revisits the camp in order to say “farewell,” her gentle salutation reflects both her desire to leave

its detrimental effects behind and her recognition of its role in her own development.

After returning to school outside Manzanar, Jeanne continues to experiment with new identities, which she hopes will distance her from her family's dysfunction and win acceptance at school. The family's new poverty when they return to California, and Papa's continuing alcoholism and depression, is more troubling to Jeanne than camp life. In response to these stresses—and to Papa's insistence that she cultivate a demure and traditionally Japanese persona—she tries to become as conventionally successful as possible as a high school student.

Soon, Jeanne realizes that as a Japanese girl she'll never gain the social acceptance she craves, but she can play on her sexuality to gain approval, if only from men and boys. She becomes a majorette at football games and Boy Scout rallies, baton-twirling in a short skirt; this both distances her further from Papa's idea of how a girl should act, and purchases her a feeling of fitting in. Continuing in this pattern, in high school Jeanne gets elected “carnival queen” by campaigning in an “exotic” sarong, garnering “howls and whistles” from the boys. As the winner, she participates in a school-wide pageant that she imagines will be the high point of her high school life. However, on the night of the pageant, the other girls make fun of her dress and Jeanne feels disoriented and sick as she parades around the gym. She realizes that just as her position as “queen” walking across a “make-believe carpet” is fake, so is the stereotypically American identity she's always craved.

This revelation is an enormous disappointment to Jeanne when she experiences it, yet it's ultimately liberating. The woman she's become by the end of the memoir—both an author and a mother, deeply rooted in America yet educating the world about Japanese culture and identity—is much richer and more complex than the cookie-cutter roles she tries to fulfill during high school. Jeanne's childhood during internment and her education afterwards are rarely pleasant and at times traumatic. However, they both help her develop an independent and strong character, and figure out the role she wants to inhabit as an adult.



SYMBOLS

Symbols appear in [blue text](#) throughout the Summary and Analysis sections of this LitChart.



STONES

Both in Japanese culture and within the context of Manzanar life, stones symbolize endurance. After fighting publicly with an internee over his decision to sign the Loyalty Oath, Papa returns to the barracks and quietly sings the Japanese national anthem, crying as he does so. The anthem compares the country to a “tiny stone” that grows into a

“massive rock” covered in moss. Singing the anthem, Papa communicates his own resolve to stand firm, like the stone, rather than succumbing to the pressures posed by internment. Later, as life in Manzanar becomes more settled, groups of internees create public parks adorned with beautiful rock gardens, and Papa collects stones on his walk and creates a rock garden outside his family’s barracks. Through the stones, the internees make Manzanar a livable place and create moments of beauty in an experience of degradation and shame, helping them endure internment.

Stones also show the melding of Japanese and American identities. Papa sings the national anthem after he defends his decision to declare loyalty to the U.S.—he turns to a symbol of Japanese patriotism to give himself strength as he commits himself to his adopted country. Moreover, rock gardens are so popular at Manzanar because they are a common feature of Japanese houses. As Manzanar develops, Jeanne says that the rock gardens give an “Asian character” to what is otherwise “a totally equipped American small town.” The U.S. government wants Japanese-Americans to renounce their heritage through tests like the Loyalty Oath; but it’s by preserving their culture that internees are able to endure and thrive, both within Manzanar and later as free American citizens.



BARBED WIRE

When Jeanne and her family first arrive at Manzanar, they are appalled to see the barbed wire that surrounds the camp’s grim enclosure. The fence demonstrates that they aren’t just in “government custody,” they’re in prison. In the early and chaotic days of Manzanar, barbed wire signifies the complete exclusion of Japanese Americans from society, and the drastic actions which prejudice can spur.

However, as internees respond to internment by creating their own functional society, barbed wire becomes less important to Jeanne—and it even sometimes becomes a sign of comfort. Jeanne describes a picture from the Manzanar high school yearbook in which a woman walks on a path towards the edge of the camp, but the barbed wire fence is out of focus and invisible. As Manzanar society becomes more functional, it’s easier to forget that the fence exists at all. Jeanne enjoys going on camping trips outside the fence with her class, but she reflects that if she had the option to leave the fence forever, she would run straight home to the barracks. By this point, life at Manzanar is all Jeanne knows, and the fence is a comforting boundary, rather than a limit. Jeanne’s parents also come to see the fence as protective. By the time the war ends, they’re accustomed to life at Manzanar, and the anti-Asian hysteria that has persisted through the war means that Japanese-American families will face hostility and violence when they return to their homes. Even when they are officially free, the

Wakatsukis are among the last families to leave the camp. For them, isolation behind the fence signifies safety—however, it’s important to remember that this safety is informed by the racism awaiting them on the other side. Whether the barbed wire symbolizes imprisonment and exclusion or comfort and safety, it’s a reflection of the prejudice which has made Japanese-Americans unsafe in mainstream society.



QUOTES

Note: all page numbers for the quotes below refer to the Houghton Mifflin edition of *Farewell to Manzanar* published in 1973.

Chapter 2: Shikata Ga Nai Quotes

●● Mama took out another dinner plate and hurled it at the floor, then another and another, never moving, never opening her mouth, just quivering and glaring at the retreating dealer, with tears streaming down her cheeks.

Related Characters: Jeanne (speaker), Mama, Papa

Related Themes: 

Page Number: 13

Explanation and Analysis

After Papa’s arrest, Mama has to prepare the remainder of the family for its second government-mandated move. She’s already stressed and cognizant of the unjust treatment they’re receiving, and on top of everything unscrupulous secondhand dealers have descended on the neighborhood knowing that families who can’t take possessions with them will sell them cheaply. Mama is prepared to part with her beloved tableware in order to have extra money for her family, but she’s not willing to take the humiliatingly low price she’s offered—instead, she smashes all her plates on the ground. While this may seem like a gesture of impractical rage, it prevents the shame and desperation she would suffer by selling to this man. Smashing the tableware marks the end of Mama’s tranquil life as a relatively prosperous housewife; however, it also shows that no matter what crises come her way, she will find a way to maintain her personal dignity.

Chapter 4: A Common Master Plan Quotes

☝☝ [Mama] would quickly subordinate her own desires to those of the family or those of the community, because she knew cooperation was the only way to survive. At the same time she placed a premium on personal privacy, respected it in others and insisted upon it for herself. Almost everyone at Manzanar had inherited this pair of traits from the generations before them who had learned to live in a small, crowded country like Japan. Because of the first they were able to take a desolate stretch of wasteland and gradually make it livable. But the entire situation there, especially in the beginning ... was an open insult to that other, private self, a slap in the face you were powerless to challenge.

Related Characters: Jeanne (speaker), Mama, Papa

Related Themes:  

Page Number: 30

Explanation and Analysis

After retelling her first experience with the messy open latrines on Manzanar, Jeanne reflects on the way that older women like Mama learned to handle the indignities of camp life. She traces their commitment to the community and their desire for privacy to their Japanese heritage, showing how much that culture continues to influence them even after they've made lives in America. In fact, it's their Japanese heritage that enables the internees to survive the challenges they face as immigrants in a racist American society; their sense of community drives them to build schools, public services, and parks in Manzanar, which ensures that life at camp for children like Jeanne is tolerable and even pleasant. At the same time, aspects of Japanese culture also make it harder for Jeanne's parents to recover from the experience of internment. While Mama is most bothered by the lack of privacy, this episode foreshadows the feelings of shame and embitterment that Papa will never overcome, and which will make him an alcoholic for most of the rest of his life.

Chapter 5: Almost a Family Quotes

☝☝ My own family, after three years of mess hall living, collapsed as an integrated unit. Whatever dignity or feeling of filial strength we may have known before December 1941 was lost, and we did not recover it until many years after the war ...

Related Characters: Jeanne (speaker), Mama, Papa

Related Themes: 

Page Number: 33

Explanation and Analysis

As internment looms, the Wakatsukis draw closer together, affirming their close bond by managing to be sent to the same camp, Manzanar, and working together to improve their shoddy barracks. However, the strange circumstances of camp life quickly drive the family apart. Jeanne soon learns to eat with her friends instead of her family unit, and because the barracks are crowded and cold, she has no stable home to retreat to. Meanwhile, Mama is too anxious to provide the care and attention that Jeanne needs. Thus, although internment keeps family members in close physical proximity, it widens the emotional distances between them. This passage occurs before Papa's return from Fort Lincoln, but it foreshadows the ways in which his arrival—and the alcoholism and despair he brings with him—will further undermine family unity and make it harder for Jeanne to rely on her parents for guidance.

Chapter 6: Whatever He Did Had Flourish Quotes

☝☝ [Papa] didn't die there, but things finished for him there, whereas for me it was like a birthplace. The camp was where our lifelines intersected.

Related Characters: Jeanne (speaker), Papa

Related Themes:  

Page Number: 42

Explanation and Analysis

Throughout the memoir, Papa and Jeanne emerge as remarkably similar characters. Both are independent and strong-willed—in fact, it's this similarity that often puts them in conflict with each other. However, the major difference between them is that while Papa never recovers from internment, the experience actually helps Jeanne develop into a wise and mature young woman. As Jeanne grows accustomed to camp life she begins to love Manzanar and is eventually sad to leave it; as an adult writer she's even nostalgic for it, remembering happy moments there and paging through the high school yearbook. Jeanne's knowledge that her coming-of-age and the development of her own identity is linked to Manzanar is complicated by her knowledge that Manzanar broke Papa; sometimes it even seems to her that her coming-of-age was not only coincidental with, but contingent on Papa's decline. At the

same time, by choosing to say that they “intersected” at Manzanar, in this passage she focuses on the way internment brought her and Papa together, rather than how it drove them apart.

☝ But as badly as he wanted us to believe it, he never did finish law school. Who knows why? He was terribly proud, sometimes absurdly proud, and he refused to defer to any man. Maybe ... he saw ahead of him prejudices he refused to swallow, humiliations he refused to bear.

Related Characters: Jeanne (speaker), Mama, Papa

Related Themes: 

Page Number: 49

Explanation and Analysis

As Jeanne reconstructs the story of Papa’s youth, she says that while he always brags about having gone to university, he never actually finished; contrary to his original hopes, he hasn’t become a lawyer. For Papa, even economic success and stability isn’t worth the possibility of encountering humiliation; his emphasis on personal pride is one of the reasons internment takes such a toll on him. This characteristic sets him in contrast to Mama, who generally puts practical concerns above all else. For example, she wants Jeanne to be accepted in her high school even though she doesn’t quite approve of the “carnival queen” contest. Jeanne often looks to Papa’s ability to maintain his dignity as a source of strength in tough situations; however, passages like this show that this trait doesn’t always help him provide for his family.

☝ He was not a great man. He wasn’t even a very successful man. He was a poser, a braggart, and a tyrant. But he had held onto his self-respect, he dreamed grand dreams, and he could work well at any task he turned his hand to ...

Related Characters: Jeanne (speaker), Mama, Papa

Related Themes:  

Page Number: 52

Explanation and Analysis

Jeanne devotes much of her memoir to evoking Papa’s complex character, and her complex relationship to him.

Jeanne rarely expresses unqualified affection for Papa; she’s often frustrated with his destructive and abusive behavior, and unlike Mama or even Woody she openly defies him and flouts his wishes. However, the qualities that set her in opposition to him—her independent spirit and determination to get her own way—are the very things she’s inherited from him. By parsing Papa’s flaws, she’s able to come to terms with her own character and embrace it.

In straightforward descriptions like this one, Papa’s faults loom large, but in anecdotes (like the episode where he spontaneously buys a car in which to leave Manzanar) he’s a beacon of hope and dignity, and a personal inspiration to Jeanne. In contrast, while Mama is objectively a more considerate and practical person, she rarely gets this sort of attention or recognition; while Jeanne respects her mother’s strength of character, she doesn’t relate to her as she does to Papa.

Chapter 7: Fort Lincoln: An Interview Quotes

☝ When your mother and your father are having a fight, do you want them to kill each other? Or do you just want them to stop fighting?

Related Characters: Papa (speaker)

Related Themes:  

Page Number: 58

Explanation and Analysis

When Papa first arrives at Fort Lincoln, a young soldier questions him about his connections to Japan and loyalties to the United States. Even though Papa knows things will be easier if he says what the soldier wants to hear—that he doesn’t like Japan and only feels loyal to America—he says that Japan is still his country, and that he feels sorry for it. Papa says that his divided loyalties are like feelings for two beloved parents in conflict with each other; it’s impossible for him to declare complete allegiance to either one, and easier to hope for reconciliation.

By trying to elicit declarations of loyalty to the U.S., and imprisoning men like father until they make them, the government denies the validity of complex cultural identities that all Japanese-Americans possess. By making his intake interview into a philosophical argument, Papa insists on his right to love his heritage even as he makes a life in a new land; in this way, he’s preserving some dignity in an experience generally characterized by shame.

Chapter 8: Inu Quotes

☞ There had always been doors to keep some moments private. Here there were no doors. Nothing was private. And tonight [Papa] was far too serious—he seemed to have reached some final limit.

Related Characters: Jeanne (speaker), Mama, Papa, Kiyo

Related Themes: 

Page Number: 63

Explanation and Analysis

After Papa arrives at Manzanar, family life quickly becomes volatile and stressful. Imprisonment at Fort Lincoln has plunged him into depression and alcoholism, and he vents his feelings by drinking to excess and abusing Mama. Jeanne notes that, under normal circumstance, marital strife or personal crises might be resolved without the dramatic fights that occur here; lack of privacy at Manzanar is not just an inconvenience but something that seriously contributes to the breakdown of family life, by denying them any individual privacy.

It's notable that this scene ends with Kiyo punching Papa in the nose, a further step in the family's dissolution. Scenes like this show that changes in the Wakatsukis' relationships to each other are not simply the result of changing interpersonal dynamics but rather are inextricably linked to the unique challenges of internment.

☞ I was proud of Kiyo and afraid for what would happen to him; but deeper than that, I felt the miserable sense of loss that comes when the center has collapsed and everything seems to be flying apart around you.

Related Characters: Jeanne (speaker), Mama, Papa, Kiyo

Related Themes:  

Page Number: 64

Explanation and Analysis

In an alcohol-fueled rage, Papa threatens to kill Mama, and Mama seems unable and unwilling to resist him. This crisis only ends when Kiyo jumps out of bed and punches Papa in the nose. Before internment, Papa was a strong patriarch who always took responsibility for his family. Now, not only has it fallen to his son to protect Mama's physical safety, but Kiyo also has to defy and fight his father to do so. Kiyo's action is a major turning point marking Papa's fall from his

previous role. Although the family dynamic will soften eventually, Papa will never return to the role of material provider and emotional bulwark that he once occupied.

This episode is also notable as a coming-of-age moment for Kiyo; for the first time, he's taking care of someone else and acting as an adult, rather than a child. Such developments are inevitable and, as Jeanne says, even a cause for pride. However, the uncertainty and dread that she and Kiyo both feel emphasizes the memoir's greater argument that growing up means becoming independent from one's parents in ways that can be confusing and frightening.

Chapter 9: The Mess Hall Bells Quotes

☞ For a man raised in Japan, there was no greater disgrace. And it was the humiliation. It brought him face to face with his own vulnerability, his own powerlessness. He had no rights, no home, no control over his own life.

Related Characters: Jeanne (speaker), Papa

Related Themes:   

Page Number: 65

Explanation and Analysis

Analyzing Papa's descent into despair and alcoholism, Jeanne ascribes these developments not to personal failure but a culturally ingrained response to the crisis of internment. Ironically, it's Papa's Japanese heritage that makes him offended and hurt by charges of disloyalty in his adopted country. Here, Jeanne hints that Papa's understanding of the importance of loyalty, which he cultivated in Japan, makes him a better, not a worse, citizen in his adopted country. Moreover, she extrapolates from Papa's condition to describe the feelings of all the Japanese-American men at Manzanar. In the "The Mess Hall Bells," Jeanne goes on to describe the December Riot, one of the only well-known and violent events to occur at Manzanar. While she gives a factual and clinical account of the riot, her intimate evocation of Papa's psychological condition helps the reader understand this event not just in political terms but personal and emotional ones as well.

Chapter 11: Yes Yes No No Quotes

☞ It is a patriotic song that can also be read as a proverb, as a personal credo for endurance. The stone can be the kingdom or it can be a man's life. The moss is the greenery that, in time, will spring even from a rock.

Related Characters: Jeanne (speaker), Papa

Related Themes: 

Related Symbols: 

Page Number: 81

Explanation and Analysis

Papa attends a tense community meeting to debate the Loyalty Oath, a government document requiring internees to swear complete allegiance to the U.S. and commit to serving in the military. Although he's enraged over internment, Papa argues that people should sign the oath, and he gets in a fistfight when a man accuses him of being a traitor. Returning to the barracks, Papa and a friend quietly sing the Japanese national anthem. The song is of special significance because it addresses personal and national endurance through the metaphor of stones.

It's notable that Papa turns to his native culture for strength and inspiration even as he commits himself even further to his adopted country by signing the Loyalty Oath; this is one of many examples of Japanese culture sustaining and enriching the Wakatsukis' lives as American citizens. Moreover, stones will become symbolically significant throughout the rest of the memoir as internees create rock gardens in Manzanar—just as they do in the anthem, they represent the internees' abilities to endure and even create beauty within tough situations.

Chapter 12: Manzanar, U.S.A. Quotes

☝☝ The fact that America had accused us, or excluded us, or imprisoned us, or whatever it might be called, did not change the kind of world we wanted. Most of us were born in this country; we had no other models. Those parks and gardens lent it an Asian character, but in most ways it was a totally equipped American small town ...

Related Characters: Jeanne (speaker)

Related Themes:  

Page Number: 89

Explanation and Analysis

After the December Riot, life at Manzanar quiets down and even starts to feel normal. The Wakatsukis move to a larger unit, Jeanne begins to attend school, and internees improve infrastructure by building parks and decorating their lawns with vegetable plots and rock gardens. While Manzanar

becomes like any other “American small town,” it also retains elements of its inhabitants’ Japanese heritage. In other words, it becomes a physical manifestation of the immigrant experience, expressing both the desire to belong in America and nostalgia for the country left behind.

Sadly, only at Manzanar is Jeanne able to experience this harmonious confluence of Japanese and American culture. Within the confines of camp, she learns to take her complex cultural identity for granted, but once she returns to middle school in Long Branch, she will quickly find that her peers refuse to see her as American. Even though the Wakatsukis are exiled to Manzanar for not being “American enough,” it's here that Jeanne has the quintessential “American” experience she's unable to find elsewhere

Chapter 13: Outings, Explorations Quotes

☝☝ By that time I was desperate to be “accepted,” and baton twirling was one trick I could perform that was thoroughly, unmistakably American—putting on the boots and a dress crisscrossed with braid, spinning the silver stick and tossing it high to the tune of a John Philip Sousa march.

Related Characters: Jeanne (speaker)

Related Themes:  

Page Number: 97

Explanation and Analysis

As Jeanne matures at Manzanar, she experiments with a variety of different extracurricular activities. This is a way to cultivate an individual persona and distinguish herself from her family—in other words, an integral part of the process of growing up. It's also an attempt to find a sense of belonging in America even as she's been exiled from mainstream American society.

It's important that the activity upon which Jeanne eventually settles is the most stereotypically “American” thing available to her at Manzanar: baton-twirling. Throughout her adolescence, Jeanne will derive both personal satisfaction and social acceptance by mastering this skill. At the same time, her description of it here as a “trick” shows her recognition that the American identity she crafts as a baton-twirler is essentially a lie, a bid for social acceptance that ignores her complex cultural identity and the ways in which internment has shaped her.

☝ It was all a mystery ... and this woman was so old, even her dialect was foreign to me. She seemed an occult figure, more spirit than human. When she bowed to me from her knees at the end of the hour, I rushed out of there, back to more familiar surroundings.

Related Characters: Jeanne (speaker)

Related Themes:  

Page Number: 98

Explanation and Analysis

On one of her free afternoons at Manzanar, Jeanne hears that an old geisha is offering lessons in traditional Japanese deportment and goes to her barracks to investigate. She's surprised to feel alienated and even frightened by the lesson, so much so that she runs away. Describing the woman as "foreign," Jeanne echoes the very phrases that Anglo-Americans use about Japanese-Americans, and with which they justify internment.

Jeanne's experience with the geisha also sets the stage for her later trials at high school. Her peers see her as essentially foreign and un-American and refuse to accept her; yet Jeanne herself often feels essentially un-Japanese. Her inability to fit unequivocally into either culture eventually causes her to develop into a mature and complex woman. During her teenager years, however, it leads to feelings of profound alienation and discomfort.

Chapter 16: Free to Go Quotes

☝ Three years of wartime propaganda—racist headlines, atrocity movies, hate slogans, and fright-mask posters—had turned the Japanese face into something despicable and grotesque. Mama and Papa knew this. They had been reading the papers. Even I knew this, although it was not until many years later that I realized how bad things actually were.

Related Characters: Jeanne (speaker), Mama, Papa

Related Themes:  

Page Number: 115

Explanation and Analysis

As the war draws to a close, the Supreme Court declares internment unconstitutional and the government decides it's pointless to imprison citizens who have shown no real signs of disloyalty. However, by this time Manzanar has become a safe refuge from the racism and xenophobia

which has gripped popular imagination and been encouraged by public institutions and official propaganda. Paradoxically, as Manzanar grows tolerable and pleasant to Jeanne, the outside world grows more frightening. Through this shift, the novel shows that internment's most major effect is fanning the flames of racism and creating a hostile climate towards Japanese-Americans that will take years to fade.

It's also important that Jeanne describes her ethnicity here as "the Japanese face"; this phrase prefigures her experience in high school, when she feels that no matter what she does and how much she excels, people only see her face and the foreignness it represents. Thus, these large-scale racist campaigns have tangible effects on Jeanne's personal life.

☝ The physical violence didn't trouble me. Somehow I didn't quite believe that, or didn't want to believe such things could happen to us. It was the humiliation. That continuous, unnamed ache I had been living with was precise and definable now. Call it the foretaste of being hated ... At ten I saw that coming, like a judge's sentence, and I would have stayed inside the camp forever rather than step outside and face such a moment.

Related Characters: Jeanne (speaker), Mama, Papa

Related Themes:   

Related Symbols: 

Page Number: 115

Explanation and Analysis

By the time Jeanne leaves Manzanar, she doesn't even know what the outside world will be like— she's lived here so long most of her memories take place within the barbed wire fence. However, her parents' anxious discussions have given her a hint of the prejudice she'll suffer as she resumes life in California. It's interesting that, just as Papa foregoes law school because of the possibility of humiliation, Jeanne doesn't think the re-entering mainstream society is worth the prospect of being shamed. Her reaction to leaving Manzanar is one of many moments showing her similarity to Papa, although she will ultimately mimic Mama's mechanisms for coping with shame. Still, while Papa can never completely overcome the humiliation and shame he feels as a result of internment, Jeanne will transcend the

racism that surrounds her, both by finishing high school and college and by articulating her side of the story in a memoir.

Chapter 19: Re-Entry Quotes

☝☝ One of the amazing things about America is the way it can both undermine you and keep you believing in your own possibilities, pumping you with hope.

Related Characters: Jeanne (speaker), Papa

Related Themes: 

Page Number: 139

Explanation and Analysis

As the Wakatsukis return to Long Beach, where they lived before internment, they feel overwhelmed by the prospect of starting life anew without the jobs, house, or possessions they had before the war. America has “undermined” them not only by interning them but by economically hindering for decades to come, essentially failing to provide the justice and equality its national myth promises. However, in the midst of this crisis Papa starts planning a Japanese-American housing cooperative; his drive to pursue this far-fetched idea is an embrace of stereotypical American “can-do” spirit, one of the things Papa likes best about his adopted country. Episodes like this show that even as America rejects the Wakatsukis, Jeanne’s life is in many ways a highly “American” experience; by writing about it in her memoir, she encourages the reader to broaden his ideas of what experiences and what people emblemize this nation.

Chapter 20: A Double Impulse Quotes

☝☝ I smiled and sat down, suddenly aware of what being of Japanese ancestry was going to be like. I wouldn’t be faced with physical attack, or with overt shows of hatred. Rather, I would be seen as someone foreign, or as someone other than American, or perhaps not be seen at all.

Related Characters: Jeanne (speaker), Radine

Related Themes:  

Page Number: 142

Explanation and Analysis

On Jeanne’s first day of sixth grade, she’s proud to read a passage out loud without any mistakes; school at Manzanar has prepared her well for re-entry. However, after she finishes the girl in front of her (who later becomes her good friend Radine) expresses surprise that she knows how to speak English. Firstly, it’s notable that Radine feels comfortable expressing this sentiment aloud; it shows the extent to which, because they are not committing “overt shows of hatred,” Jeanne’s peers are unable to acknowledge or even understand their own racism. Episodes like this broaden the reader’s understanding of what a racist action is.

Moreover, for Jeanne this basic fact of her American identity has never been in doubt. Seeing someone disbelieve that she can speak the language of the country where she was born shows her how hard it will be to convince people to perceive her as American—as it turns out, this endeavor will consume Jeanne’s high school years before she decides it’s not worth it.

☝☝ I couldn’t understand why [Papa] was home all day, when Mama had to go out working. I was ashamed of him for that and, in a deeper way, for being what had led to our imprisonment, that is, for being so unalterably Japanese. I would not bring my friends home for fear of what he would say or do.

Related Characters: Jeanne (speaker), Mama, Papa

Related Themes:  

Page Number: 149

Explanation and Analysis

As the Wakatsukis struggle to adapt to life after internment, Jeanne becomes more and more frustrated with Papa’s eccentricities. Besides wanting him to return to the comforting and paternal role he held before the war, she wants him to conform to a rigid conception of how an American man should act—just as she herself tries to act exactly the way an American teenager “should.” In a way, she’s projecting her own desires for acceptance, and her fear that such acceptance is unattainable, onto Papa. As such, her anger reflects her own fear rather than an actual grievance. It’s easier for Jeanne to see their mutual plights as a sign of personal failure than to realize that they are the victims of a structurally unjust and racist social system.

☝ He was unforgivably a foreigner then, foreign to them, foreign to me, foreign to everyone but Mama, who sat next to him smiling with pleased modesty. Twelve years old at the time, I wanted to scream. I wanted to slide out of sight under the table and dissolve.

Related Characters: Jeanne (speaker), Mama, Papa

Related Themes:  

Page Number: 151

Explanation and Analysis

At the end of Jeanne's time at middle school, she's excited to participate in a dinner honoring the most excellent students. While Papa refuses to watch her perform as a majorette, he is truly proud of her academic achievements. Jeanne hopes that this moment will mark both acceptance at school, where she finally seems valued, and reconciliation at home, where she feels increasingly alienated from her parents. Papa's action unwittingly ruins both of these hopes. He points out Jeanne's Japanese heritage to her schoolmates, while she's been trying as hard as possible to fit into Anglo-American society. He also reminds Jeanne of the vast cultural differences that separate her from her un-assimilated father. At the end of night, Jeanne feels even more alone and out of place than she did before.

Chapter 21: The Girl of My Dreams Quotes

☝ To this day I have a recurring dream, which fills me each time with a terrible sense of loss and desolation. I see a young, beautifully blond and blue-eyed high school girl moving through a room full of others her own age, much admired by everyone, men and women both, myself included, as I watch through a window.

Related Characters: Jeanne (speaker)

Related Themes:  

Page Number: 154

Explanation and Analysis

Throughout high school, Jeanne is excluded from various extracurricular activities and fails to form meaningful friendships because of her race. This experience gives rise to lifelong anxieties about acceptance embodied in this dream. The girl walking through the crowd represents the ideal "American" teenager that Jeanne hopes she become through excelling at school, being a majorette, or winning

the carnival queen contest. However, she understands that any acceptance she achieves will be halfhearted; her position outside the window shows her conception of herself as a consummate outsider, not even able to admire the girl with the rest of the group.

It's interesting that Jeanne recounts this dream just before she becomes carnival queen; as she walks in the pageant's final procession, she becomes a version of this very girl, but she also realizes that not only is it futile to seek acceptance by embodying American stereotypes, but also that the attempt to do so stifles her complex and rich identity.

☝ I wanted the carnival to end so I could go somewhere private, climb out of my stuffy dress, and cool off. But all eyes were on me. It was too late now not to follow this make-believe carpet to its plywood finale, and I did not yet know of any truer destination.

Related Characters: Jeanne (speaker)

Related Themes:   

Page Number: 164

Explanation and Analysis

Jeanne was initially thrilled to be nominated as carnival queen and thought that winning the contest would be the zenith of her high school career, showing her ability to fit in despite her race. However, although she wins the contest, at several points she's reminded that she's embodying a stereotype even she doesn't believe in. First, the teachers try to stuff the ballot box in order to prevent her from becoming queen; after a friend averts this disaster, one of her classmates, Lois, leads other girls in making catty comments about the dress she chooses. Finally, while walking down the carpet Jeanne herself feels alienated from her identity as "carnival queen"—she feels at home neither in the sexy sarong she wore to the contest nor in the "respectable" but "stuffy" ball gown she's wearing now.

Her description of the carpet as "make-believe" demonstrates her growing awareness that the typical "American" teenager she's always aspired to be is in fact just a bland stereotype, no more desirable than it is attainable. Eventually, this realization will be liberating, allowing Jeanne to cultivate a much more complex identity. However, at this moment it's incredibly disorienting to suddenly lose faith in the goal towards which she's strived for so long.

Chapter 22: Ten Thousand Voices Quotes

☞☞ These rock gardens had outlived the barracks and the towers and would surely outlive the asphalt road and rusted pipes and shattered slabs of concrete. Each stone was a mouth, speaking for a family, for some man who had beautified his doorstep.

Related Characters: Jeanne (speaker), Papa

Related Themes:   

Related Symbols:  

Page Number: 172

Explanation and Analysis

As an adult writer with a husband and children, Jeanne finally visits the ruins of Manzanar. Not much is left of the

camp—the fences, guard towers, and barracks are all gone, and it's hard to envision the town that once flourished there. However, eventually Jeanne uncovers rock gardens like the one Papa built, perfectly intact. While barbed-wire has symbolized the injustice of internment, stones have represented the internees' ability to transcend the experience through endurance, so it's notable that the rock gardens have survived longest; it shows the Japanese-American community's ultimate victory over persecution.

At the same time, it reflects Jeanne's final reconciliation with her experience at Manzanar. For a long time, internment has been a source of shame and manifestation of her inability to fit into American society; however, since she's grown past her desire to fit in, she's able to see Manzanar in terms of the community she formed there, rather than the racism that led her there.



SUMMARY AND ANALYSIS

The color-coded icons under each analysis entry make it easy to track where the themes occur most prominently throughout the work. Each icon corresponds to one of the themes explained in the Themes section of this LitChart.

CHAPTER 1: WHAT IS PEARL HARBOR

On the first weekend of December 1941, Jeanne Wakatsuki has just turned seven. She's with her Mama and her sisters at the wharf near her house, watching the fishing boats get ready to leave. The water and sky are clean and blue, and there's a lot of exciting yelling, especially in Papa's boat—he likes to “give orders.” Jeanne's oldest brothers, Bill and Woody, are Papa's crew, and when everything is ready they sail away from the wharf. Papa has two boats, in which he has invested a lot of money and from which he takes a lot of pride. When he goes fishing, he wears tall boots and a turtleneck Mama has made for him.

Papa works hard as a fisherman, especially since he is still paying off a loan from one of the local canneries, which he used to buy his boats. Many of the Japanese families in the area work as independent fishermen, and although they're technically competing with each other they always set sail together and share their nets. Standing at the harbor, Mama, Billy and Woody's wives, and Jeanne wave goodbye. They don't know exactly when the men will return, as the length of the trip depends on the location of the fish.

Jeanne is used to seeing the boats disappear beyond the horizon, but this time they stop when they're still in sight and soon start returning to shore. Chizu, Woody's wife, wonders aloud what's wrong. While the boats are still sailing in, a cannery worker runs down to the dock and shouts that the Japanese have just bombed Pearl Harbor. Neither Chizu nor Mama know what Pearl Harbor is, but the employee is running down the docks “like Paul Revere,” and doesn't have time to explain.

That night Papa burns his Japanese flag, which he brought when he emigrated from Hiroshima. He also burns any papers which demonstrate his connection to Japan. However, this effort proves futile; he's not a U.S. citizen and he's a fisherman, making him a suspicious person in the eyes of the FBI.

The opening passage of the novel emphasizes the Wakatsuki family's unity—even though the men are only leaving on a routine fishing trip, everyone has gathered to mark the occasion. It also shows their rootedness in America—Papa has shown his sense of belonging and security in his adopted country by cultivating a business and investing in things for his family, like the two boats.



Papa's dedication to hard work and independence—he doesn't want to be under a debt for his boat, even though such loans are routine—show that while he's not vain or afraid of hard work, he is very proud, concerned with maintaining his own dignity—and by extension, that of his family.



In describing the arrival of the Pearl Harbor news, Jeanne compares the messenger to Paul Revere, a figure of American patriotic myth. Her rhetoric shows a deep sense of herself as American, which is ironic given that the memoir will address her attempts to gain acceptance in a society that doesn't believe she's American enough.



Even though Papa is often reluctant to abandon Japanese culture in order to assimilate into Anglo-American society, when it comes to loyalty and patriotism, he's very clear about his priorities.



Two weeks later, Papa is arrested while the family is staying over at Woody's house in Terminal Island. The FBI has been questioning all the Japanese families in the area and "ransacking" houses for any sign of treason—even owning a radio can be evidence of disloyalty. One morning they come to Woody's house and take Papa away. Papa doesn't struggle; he's resigned to being "a man without a country." By immigrating to America, he's severed his ties to Japan; but he's also prevented by law from becoming an American citizen, so he has virtually no rights.

What Papa does have is his "tremendous dignity." He's tall and in good shape from his hard work. He doesn't want to be dragged out of the house, so he "leads" the policemen himself.

For days, the family can't get any news of Papa. They don't even know what he's been charged with, until one day an article appears in the local paper accusing him of delivering oil to Japanese submarines with his boat. The accusation makes Mama burst into tears and Jeanne hugs her legs, not understanding what's going on.

CHAPTER 2: SHIKATA GA NAI

Over the years, the family has moved a lot due to Papa's different jobs. Jeanne was born on a farm in Inglewood, but she grew up near the water in Ocean Park, in a neighborhood with no other Japanese families. Papa chose to live there so that he couldn't be "labeled or grouped" by his race. However, after Papa's arrest Mama moves the family to Terminal Island; Woody and one of Jeanne's older sisters already live there, and it's comforting to be among other Japanese families in similar predicaments. However, Terminal Island feels "foreign" to Jeanne, as it's the first time she's gone to school with other children of her own race. She's "terrified all the time."

When Jeanne was little, Papa often threatened to "sell [her] to the Chinaman" if she behaved badly. This, coupled with the fact that she grew up among white children, gave her a "fear of Asian faces" that lasts until she moves to Terminal Island. Populated almost exclusively by Japanese family, the town is a "ghetto" controlled by the canneries. The men go fishing, and when they return all the women run to the cannery to process the catch, even if it's the middle of the night. Mama and Chizu start working in the cannery in order to provide for the family in Papa's absence.

The fact that ownership of ordinary items like radios now signifies disloyalty hints at the extent of anti-Japanese hysteria that gripped the country after the Pearl Harbor attacks. It's this fear and new sense of insecurity on the part of Caucasians—not any substantiated concerns about the Japanese-American community—that lead them to deny immigrants and citizens their rights, thus subverting ideals of American democracy even as they purport to defend them.



In a time of crisis, Papa always acts with one eye to his dignity—although this sometimes leads him to impractical choices, it fills Jeanne with confidence and strength.



Papa's arrest is one of the most frightening and starkly unjust events of the novel—it reminds the family that no matter how much they feel committed to America, they don't enjoy the rights of native-born Caucasian Americans.



It's interesting that Papa doesn't want to associate only with people of his own race—even though he and Jeanne will later clash over her failure to behave like a traditional Japanese girl, her desire to assimilate into American society is in some ways an extension of Papa's own refusal to be judged by his race. It's the characteristics that Jeanne and her father share that cause conflict between them.



Papa's use of a stereotypical—even insulting—threat shows his desire for his children to feel American, even if it means leaving behind part of his own culture. Accordingly, Jeanne feels more ill-at-ease among Japanese-Americans than Caucasians. Unfortunately, while America purports to promote diversity and melded communities, the experience of internment will teach Jeanne that it's safer and more comfortable to be among people of her own race.



In Terminal Island, the family lives in a glorified shack, “the cheapest kind of migrant workers’ housing.” The people around them are hardworking and proud to be considered “roughnecks”; they speak a slangy dialect of Japanese that Jeanne doesn’t understand, and because of this the other kids in her class despise her. Every day after school she and her brother Kiyo run all the way home, afraid of being attacked.

After two months, the navy decides to push all the Japanese out of Terminal Island, as it seems “dangerous” to allow Asians to live so near the water and the nearby naval base. Mama knows something like this is coming, but she can’t prepare because she doesn’t know where else to get work and she has to support her young children and her mother, Granny, who is blind and speaks no English. When the official order comes, the family has forty-eight hours to move.

Immediately, opportunistic secondhand dealers prowl the neighborhood, offering ridiculously low prices for goods that the families can’t carry with them. Mama has brought only her most valuable things to Terminal Island: pottery, treasured tableware, and kimonos that Granny brought from Japan. When they pack up Woody’s car to leave, Mama’s beautiful china just won’t fit, and she reluctantly decides to sell it. A dealer offers her just fifteen dollars—a humiliating price. Worn out and stressed from packing and calming her family, Mama smashes a dinner plate on the ground. The dealer starts shouting at her, but Mama smashes every piece of china, even after he runs away.

With help from the American Friends Service, the family finds a house in a “minority ghetto” in Los Angeles. The whole family is gripped with uncertainty, as there are rumors going around about forcibly moving the entire Japanese population inland. Jeanne’s brothers constantly speculate on how to keep the family together if such a thing does happen; they don’t want to be separated again, as Papa was. Mama has finally received a letter from him telling her that he’s been imprisoned as an enemy alien in Fort Lincoln, North Dakota.

With Papa, the patriarch, gone, Jeanne’s brothers are anxious to take care of the family but not exactly sure how to do it. However, it seems like there’s not much for them to do but wait for government decisions. In these situations, the Japanese use the phrase “shikata ga nai”—“it cannot be helped,” or “it must be done.”

*Throughout the novel *Caucasian society* lumps all Japanese-Americans together, but Jeanne strives to make the reader aware of the many cultural and class distinctions that characterize the Japanese-American community, making her feel more different from other Japanese kids than Caucasian ones.*



While the government narrative emphasizes the dangerous potential of Japanese-Americans, Jeanne emphasizes the vulnerability of her family. Especially now that Papa is gone, Mama is unconcerned with politics and must focus on providing for the many people who depend on her.



This episode is one of the novel’s most poignant moments, and the only time when Mama loses her cool. Jeanne frequently stresses Mama loves her household possessions not because she’s materialistic but because they are a link to the country and family she’s left behind as an immigrant. However, for Mama it’s more important to preserve her inherited dignity than her inherited possessions. Smashing the china seems to alienate her from her culture even more, but it allows her to keep her pride.



This is Jeanne’s third move in less than a year; the family’s repeated upheavals contrast starkly with the sense of rootedness they exuded in the first chapter, while watching Papa’s boats sail out to sea. It’s additionally sobering to learn that Papa has been actually imprisoned on a totally fabricated charge.



Jeanne’s brothers’ anxiety to take over Papa’s role signifies the centrality of the family unit in their worldviews. Although all the Wakatsukis see keeping the family together as superlatively important, they are unable to keep the pressures of internment from weakening their bonds.



Mama and Woody go to work packing celery, while Jeanne and her siblings Kiyoko and May go to school. Jeanne is confused and hurt that her teacher “would have nothing to do with me”—this is the first time she’s felt “outright hostility” from a white person. She doesn’t understand that anti-Asian feelings, always present on the West Coast, have come to a head since the U.S. went to war with Japan.

A month later, the family is ordered to evacuate Los Angeles to Manzanar, a town they’ve never heard of. In some ways, the family is relieved; they’ve heard stories of overt violence against Japanese-Americans and feel this might be safer to be in government protection, away from the frontlines of naval operations. Proud to be wearing a new coat, Jeanne reports to a pickup point with her family and boards a Greyhound bus headed inland. It’s her first bus ride.

Jeanne is very excited about the trip, and she feels safe on the bus. Half the passengers are related to her, and the adults are all playing cards or reading as they do at home. Mama and her brothers have strategized to make sure everyone in the family is evacuated to the same camp; other families, less lucky, spent months in separation while they waited for transfers.

By late afternoon, the bus reaches Manzanar. Jeanne sees a red, dusty landscape; dust swirls around the bus and pelts the windows. The bus drives through a [barbed-wire fence](#) and Jeanne can see some tents, behind which lie long rows of barracks. The adults on the bus are silent and apprehensive at this sight. But Jeanne leans out the window and yells, “Hey! This whole bus is full of Wakatsukis!” Her outburst breaks the tension, and everyone starts laughing.

The Wakatsukis have arrived just in time for dinner, which takes place in a half-completed mess hall. The new arrivals eat overcooked food out of army mess kits. The Caucasian kitchen staff serves rice with fruit for dessert; this is a disgusting combination for the internees, as Japanese never eat rice with sweet foods. However, no one protests; when Jeanne opens her mouth Mama pokes her, warning her not to be impolite.

After dinner, the family is taken to Block 16, which has just been finished the day before. The barracks are just shacks covered with tarpaper. Shoddy construction means that dust and wind come easily inside. The Wakatsukis get two tiny units, furnished with army cots, even though there are twelve members of the family, including Woody’s baby daughter. They try to partition the units with blankets in order to maintain some privacy.

It’s both irrational and heartless that an educator would take out her fear and anger over the war on an obviously innocent child. Episodes like this show the fundamental illogic of racial prejudice, and the extent to which it is rooted in fear.



Jeanne’s blithe obliviousness often contrasts with her elders’ worry. Although her youth makes internment confusing to her, it also insulates her from fear and despair. By the end of the novel, Jeanne will conclude that life in Manzanar helped her grow up and develop into a woman, rather than hindering her.



Throughout her time at Manzanar, Jeanne will be surrounded by her ten siblings; however, the family will soon learn that physical proximity doesn’t guarantee closeness or unity, especially under the harsh circumstances of camp life.



Jeanne’s feeling of security is touching and emphasizes how much confidence her family gives her. At the same time, her insouciance contrasts notably with the barbed wire, a physical manifestation of the family’s unjust imprisonment and causeless exclusion from American society.



Even though the family is suffering from a major miscarriage of justice, Mama refuses to allow Jeanne to be impolite. Mama’s determination to maintain the conventions of normal life, while sometimes a quixotic endeavor, maintains her personal dignity and often gives the family the strength to go on with life in Manzanar.



The dismal conditions at Manzanar are indicative of the hasty and ill-thought nature of the internment project. Not only is this a material hardship for the family, it’s deeply insulting that they’re expected to live in such inhumane conditions.



In fact, the Wakatsukis are lucky to be living only with family members. Jeanne's oldest sister and her husband live in a unit with strangers who constantly argue about domestic arrangements and noise at night. Eventually, Jeanne's sister leaves Manzanar to harvest beets in Idaho; even though the work is grueling, she and her husband can have a cabin to themselves.

As the youngest child, Jeanne gets to sleep next to Mama. She's happy about this and continues to sleep next to her mother every night until Papa returns.

The lack of privacy at Manzanar is often an issue. Not only is it inconvenient, it contributes to family dissolution and strips away the internees' personal dignity.



Although Jeanne will quickly become very independent at Manzanar, her nighttime clinging to Mama reminds the reader how young she really is.



CHAPTER 3: A DIFFERENT KIND OF SAND

Because it's so cold at night, Mama has unpacked all the clothes and spread them over the children. In the morning, all their possessions are coated with dust that has floated inside. Even their eyebrows are gray. Jeanne and Kiyō find this funny, but Mama is scanning the surroundings with a mask-like face.

Before Mama gets overwhelmed by the dismal shack, Woody arrives with a hammer and a box of tin can lids he's found. As the oldest son, Woody is now the leader of the family. He orders Ray and Kiyō to cover up all the holes in the floor and walls with tin can lids. He makes the chore seem fun, so the boys go eagerly to work. Then he puts an arm around Mama and asks if she's OK. She just continues to fold clothes and asks if there's some way to cover the cracks, too. Woody staunchly tells her that he's going to find some scrap lumber today. Mama's eyes "blaze," and she tells Woody that only "animals live like this."

Woody assures Mama that he will make things better. Suddenly, his baby daughter starts to cry. He announces he's going to the kitchen to find a pot for heating bottles. He tells the others that he's heard breakfast is rice with syrup and butter.

Internment seems like a game to the younger children, but Mama knows how hard it will be to provide for her family when they don't even have weatherproof housing.



Woody is taking over Papa's role in the family—he's taking care of their material needs, and he's preventing them from falling into despair. Throughout the novel, Woody's ingenuity and calm will be a beacon of strength for Jeanne. But he will also contrast with Mama and Papa's increasing inability to face the events around them.



The dismal food options at Manzanar provide some comic relief when Woody describes them, but in fact they are evidence of the family's new inability to make even the most trivial of decisions—what to eat for breakfast—for itself.



CHAPTER 4: A COMMON MASTER PLAN

That morning, Jeanne and her family wait half an hour in freezing wind to get breakfast. They bring it back to the unit and eat huddled around the stove. Woody is hard at work fixing up the shack, but there are almost no materials to work with in the camp. Months pass before conditions in the shack truly improve. In the meantime, the family lives with the bare floors and bare bulbs, as well as the open ceilings that allow young children to climb up the rafters and spy on other people's homes.

At this point, all the internees realize that they really weren't prepared for the grim reality of camp life. At least the Wakatsukis brought coats; some men came in short-sleeved shirts and hats and had to wait for coats to arrive. The War Department, in charge of all the camps, sends old military surplus uniforms. Eventually, seamstresses among the internees form factories to turn old camps into usable clothes, but for now everyone makes do. Jeanne laughs when she sees Mama wearing old trousers much too big for her, but the important thing is to stay warm.

At the beginning, Jeanne is constantly plagued with stomach cramps and diarrhea, caused by typhoid vaccinations, spoiled food, and the close quarters. To make things worse, latrines are crowded and often out of order.

The first time Jeanne and Mama visit the latrine on Block 16, they find it covered in excrement and all the toilets overflowing. A woman directs them to Block 12, where they join a long line. The toilets here work, but there are no partitions. As do most Japanese people, Mama prizes modesty and it's "agony" for her to use the bathroom among strangers. One old woman has solved this issue by surrounding herself with a cardboard screen. When she struggles to fold it, Mama assists her; they politely bow to each other, and the other woman offers to lend her the screen.

Eventually, the internees build partitions in the latrines, one by one. Mama and Jeanne's sisters walk all the way across camp to use bathrooms with private toilets. Many women wait until the middle of the night to use the toilets, with the ironic result that midnight is "the most crowded time at all."

The family privacy both among itself and in relation to other families. This is a deep hardship for the Japanese-American community, which is very insular but also very independent. The families crowded into barracks are a notable contrast to the fishing fleet in the first chapter, where the men cooperated but each sailed their own independent vessel.



Even though Mama cares a lot about her personal dignity, she also knows when to prioritize practical concerns—this ability to balance her priorities will help her lead the family more effectively than Papa, who is forever crippled by the injustice of internment.



Sickness like this shows that conditions at Manzanar aren't just materially inconvenient— they're also a public health hazard.



Mama and the old woman are able to maintain their dignity and formal conventions of politeness even in the middle of this squalid situation. Although Mama is a demure and self-abnegating character, gestures like this demonstrate her strength and resilience.



The determination to preserve the customs of their old life is what drives internees to improve Manzanar and cultivate a real society there— but it's also what makes the first months so difficult.



Mama never becomes accustomed to the “humiliation” of the latrines, but she learns to endure it, telling herself “shikata ga nai.” Even though she cares so much about personal privacy, she knows she has to concentrate on the problems of her family in order to survive. The desire for privacy and the willingness to subordinate oneself to the community are two typical Japanese traits, which the issei, or first-generation immigrants, have inherited from their parents and transmit to their children. It’s these traits that all the internees to “take a desolate stretch of wasteland and gradually make it livable.” However, the conditions to which they arrived are such “an open insult to that other, private self” that most people find it hard to overcome.

The novel often focuses on how Japanese culture helps characters survive and thrive in an American environment. This is one way of elevating and valorizing Japanese culture at a moment when mainstream society is maligning it fiercely. However, there’s an implicit tragedy in the knowledge that the traits that most support the Wakatsukis and the Japanese-American community are also most under attack from the outside world.



CHAPTER 5: ALMOST A FAMILY

Jeanne is too young to be humiliated by the camp as Mama is, but life at Manzanar changes her in other ways. For example, mealtime was always “the center of our family scene” before Manzanar; the family had a beautiful wooden table large enough to seat everyone and served fresh fish and home-grown vegetables. Papa sat at the head of the table and served everyone according to age.

Jeanne frequently reminisces about meals she shared with her family before internment. Mealtime is an easy way to show the dissolution of family life at Manzanar, since it’s a concrete, daily even that changes in specific ways during internment.



In the mess hall at Manzanar, the Wakatsukis quickly stop eating as a family. May has to bring food to Granny in the barracks, and Jeanne’s older siblings quickly start eating with their friends. Various family members trek across the camp to other blocks with better food; as the camp evolves, different chefs take over different kitchens and revel in the competition.

Although the family has resolved to stay together at all costs, the lack of privacy and familial independence at Manzanar encourages the various children to branch out on their own. Internment keeps everyone together physically, but it forces them apart emotionally.



Although they have to stay near Mama, Jeanne and Kiyō eat with groups of other kids; they enjoy the independence. After a few years, sociologists visit camps to study family life; on their recommendations, the camp mandates that families start eating together again. This edict is highly unpopular, because by then everyone has grown accustomed to eating with friends.

The sociologists’ verdict shows concretely that camp life is destructive to family cohesion—and that quick fixes, like forcing families to eat together, won’t fix the problem Manzanar has created.



Jeanne says that after years of life at Manzanar, her family “collapsed as an integrated unit.” Camp destroyed “whatever dignity or feeling of filial strength” they had before 1941, and it took them years to cultivate it again. Even after the camps close, the sense of estrangement continues; Papa has no money and can’t get work, so the family lives in a tiny housing project where there isn’t enough room to share a meal. By that point, many of Jeanne’s older siblings have moved to the East Coasts for better jobs.

Again, Jeanne uses mealtime to show that the wounds of internment far outlast Manzanar. Family dissolution starts with the chaotic and unstructured life at Manzanar, but it’s exacerbated by the economic and material distress the family suffers after they re-enter society with no jobs or savings.



After she's released from Manzanar, Jeanne writes a paper for her middle-school journalism camps, describing a family tradition of night fishing at Ocean Park Beach. After Papa and her older brothers catch the fish, they run back to the house where Mama fries them for everyone to eat. Jeanne concludes the paper by saying she wants to remember this activity "because I know we'll never be able to do it again." Jeanne acknowledges that the disintegration of a large family is in some ways inevitable. However, for the Wakatsukis, "internment accelerated the process."

Soon after arriving at Manzanar, Mama gets a job. Anyone with any special skills is asked to work, driven by "community spirit" or "outright patriotism." Jeanne's brothers work as carpenters, construction workers, and reservoir operations. Mama had been a dietician before she had children, and her skills help cooks navigate the special needs of diabetics, new mothers, and infants. Mama is especially motivated to work because she needs to make money to pay the fees at the warehouse where she's stored most of the family's possessions.

Moreover, Mama is constantly worried about Papa. Letters arrive twice a month, in which half the writing is censored; for the first time in Jeanne's memory, he addresses his wife as "sweetheart." Jeanne constantly craves her attention, grabbing her legs to get it; but Mama is always distracted. Only lying in bed at night does she hug Jeanne and truly notice her presence.

Unable to depend on Mama, Jeanne seeks attention elsewhere, taking her "first steps" into the world outside her parents' realm. She's able to observe and interact with lots of people, since due to crowded living conditions everyone spends their time outside and only goes home at night. Jeanne remembers an elegant woman who always wears a headscarf; later, she realizes this woman is actually half-black, hiding her hair and passing as Japanese in order to stay with her husband and daughter. Another woman powders her face with rice flour every morning; by Japanese standards, this is a mark of beauty, but Jeanne childishly believes she is "diseased."

In some ways, Jeanne's essay foreshadows her eventual writing of her memoir. In both cases, she lovingly evokes her family's way of life and show how internment damaged it. For Jeanne, an important part of growing up is grappling with and learning to express the effects of internment on her childhood.



It's notable—and contradictory to allegations of Japanese disloyalty—that even the injustice of internment hasn't dimmed the internees' commitment to America and determination to build a society wherever they land. Mama's determination to work is rooted in a practical desire to save the family's possessions, and also the emotional desire to maintain the connection to her old life that those possessions represent.



Although Mama is good at meeting the family's material needs, she's too stressed out to be the supportive and attentive parent Jeanne needs right now. The psychological stress Mama endures is one of the reasons Jeanne cultivates her independence and becomes distanced from her family.



The new instability in her family is confusing to Jeanne, but it also makes her observant and attentive—qualities that will help her as she grows into a writer and tries to recollect her time at Manzanar. It's also interesting that she views the made-up woman as unnatural or diseased. Her thoughts show how alienated she is from traditional Japanese culture, and how rooted she is in Anglo-American norms.



Jeanne also gets to know Sister Mary Suzanne and Sister Mary Bernadette, two Japanese nuns who have lived as Catholic missionaries in California for years, running an orphanage for Japanese-American children. At Manzanar, they have to care for all their orphans in one barracks, but they've also created a chapel and many programs for internee children. Eventually, Jeanne herself wants to convert to Catholicism but Papa, by this time returned from Fort Lincoln, forbids her. The Wakatsukis are nominally Buddhist and keep a small shrine in the house, but they rarely say prayers and Jeanne has never heard about religion until she meets the nuns.

With no school to attend and no real home, Jeanne begins to study catechism with the nuns. She's attracted not just by the candy they give out but by stories of female saints who die in brutal but honorable episodes. She's fascinated by their stories, and while walking the mile back to her block she pretends that she too is a saint, "sweating and grimy, yet selflessly carrying my load." One day, she fulfills her wish to suffer for her beliefs by passing out with sunstroke during the walk. After this, several months pass before she starts catechism again. Around this time, Papa returns from Fort Lincoln, and his arrival creates an enormous shift in family life.

Papa arrives at Manzanar in a Greyhound bus. Everyone goes to meet him except Chizu, who has just given birth. Jeanne will never forget Papa's cane, which emerges from the bus before he does. Father has only been gone nine months, but he's "aged ten years"; he's underweight and has a new limp. Seeing him, everyone is astonished, and no one knows what to do or say. Only Jeanne, who hadn't "thought of him much at all" during his absence, runs up to hug him without thinking. She knows she should be laughing, but for some reason she starts to cry instead. By this time, everyone else in the family is crying as well.

CHAPTER 6: WHATEVER HE DID HAD FLOURISH

In fact, Papa has made his cane himself in Fort Lincoln. He continues to use it even after his limp disappears—it becomes a dignifying accessory, and Jeanne calls it a "sad, homemade version" of the samurai swords his ancestors wielded in Japan. Understanding Papa's Japanese heritage helps Jeanne understand "how Papa's life could end at a place like Manzanar." Although he doesn't die during internment, he never recovers from the experience, whereas for Jeanne the camp is "like a birthplace."

Converting to Christianity is one of Jeanne's first attempts to find a sense of belonging outside of her family, and to fit into what she sees as "normal" American society. As in later episodes, it's Papa who intervenes to prevent it, and who insists that she maintain her allegiance to Japanese customs—even if he enforces these customs, like the Buddhist prayers, only nominally.



Imagining herself as a saint is one way of glorifying the mundane hardships she experiences and giving meaning to them. It's also a way to see herself not as part of a distrusted minority group but in the company of respected heroes. This foreshadows Jeanne's high school attempts to escape the stigma of being Asian by reinventing herself as a "normal" American baton twirler. However, the unglamorous end to this fantasy hints at the limits of these reinventions.



Even though Jeanne doesn't intellectually understand the details and injustice of Papa's imprisonment, she's emotionally attuned enough to sense that something is wrong. Her lack of social inhibitions helps the rest of the family express its emotions through tears and react to Papa's obvious debilitation.



Papa is born the oldest son in a samurai family. Once powerful and landed, by the time he comes of age Japan is rapidly industrializing and feudal clans are falling from power. As a teenager, Papa goes to military school but suddenly he drops out, borrows some money from his favorite aunt, and sets off for Hawaii. He's a "headstrong idealist" and doesn't want to preside over the decline of his family.

Papa arrives in Honolulu in 1904. Walking through town, he sees a "Workers Wanted" sign on a building; thrilled that he can read the English, he decides to apply and buys a stylish new suit in preparation for his interview. When he returns to the building, he finds a group of Chinese and Japanese field hands waiting to work in the sugarcane fields. They laugh at his outfit and he rushes away, humiliated.

A few weeks later, Papa meets a lawyer from Idaho who offers to buy his passage to the states and put him up in exchange for three years' work as a houseboy. Papa accepts, in order to avoid working in the fields like other Asian immigrants. In Idaho he works as a valet, cook, chauffer, and handyman; his employer helps him get into the University of Idaho, and he hopes to get a law degree.

However, in the meantime Papa meets Mama. She was born in Hawaii, where her father was a fieldworker. Her parents eventually settled in eastern Washington; they have high hopes that their daughter, because Japanese women are so rare in the mainland U.S., will marry very advantageously. Mama's parents promise her to the son of a wealthy Japanese farmer.

Mama meets Papa at a wholesale market where her parents are selling produce and Papa is unloading vegetables; she is seventeen, and he is a dapper twenty-five-year-old. Mama's parents dislike him because he lives a "fast" life and often borrows money. Mama sometimes says that Papa asked her to borrow money from Granny. Granny gave Mama a five-dollar bill, which was all she had; but when Mama gave it to Papa, he stalked furiously into the kitchen, threw the money in the fire, and said, "if that's all you've got, I'd rather have nothing!"

Mama attempts to run away with Papa, but her brothers eventually find her, take her home, and lock her in her bedroom. However, Mama is so despairing that her brother Charlie takes pity on her and lets her out. She and Papa elope and move to Oregon, where Papa works in a restaurant and she finds a job as a dietician. Mama soon gives birth to Woody and has a child about every two years, all while moving around for Papa's various jobs.

Papa's impetuous behavior as a young man—his obsession with his own pride and the disregard for practical concerns he shows by impulsively setting out to America—prefigure his behavior as an adult man, and his influence over Jeanne as a parent.



Papa always dreams of financial success and considers himself more suited to professional than manual employment. However, despite being somewhat vain, his strong character motivates him to work hard and gives dignity to the difficult jobs he holds for most of his life.



Papa's acceptance of this unusual job, rather than pursuing paths usually followed by Asian immigrants, shows his reluctance to act as part of a bloc or to be stereotyped by his race. This is a trait he passes onto Jeanne, even though he becomes more and more dependent on Japanese culture as he grows older.



Mamma isn't technically an Issei, but because she's born in the same generation of many immigrants—and because during her youth Japanese communities were largely segregated—she is closer to them in character than to second-generation Japanese-Americans like Jeanne.



The stories of Papa's youth don't cast him as especially responsible or even likable. However, in Jeanne's eyes Papa's strong character and idealism matter more than likability. Paradoxically, these traits will provide emotional support to the family throughout internment even as they keep Papa from being as practical provider as Mama is.



Mama's ability to keep house and raise so many children in the midst of such uncertain circumstances is a testament to her strength of character, even if that character isn't as dominant as Papa's. In some ways, her early married life probably prepares her for the challenges of Manzanar.



Papa believes deeply in the importance of education and often brags that he attended law school, but he never actually finished university. Jeanne doesn't know why he dropped out, but she surmises that because he was "absurdly proud" he couldn't stomach the enormous prejudice he'd be facing if he pursued a professional career. On the other hand, Papa has a pattern of starting projects and leaving them unfinished. That's why he goes through so many jobs: he's a lumberjack, dentist, and farmer.

Eventually, Papa settles the family in northern California where he raises fruit, but when the Depression strikes he loses his land and has to work as a migrant laborer while supporting Mama and eight children. Just before Jeanne is born, he becomes a fisherman, doing well enough to buy his two boats and even make a down payment on a new car, two weeks before the Pearl Harbor bombing.

Jeanne acknowledges that even without internment, Papa could have lost his business or wrecked a boat—being a fisherman is hardly without risk. However, Pearl Harbor "snipped off" the life he was building for his family in California.

For Jeanne, the prewar years are represented by Papa and Mama's silver anniversary celebration in 1940: Papa wore a new suit and Mama an elegant dress. Jeanne always remembers them standing around the dining room table, which was piled with silver gifts brought by friends and family; a huge buffet was spread in the kitchen, and relatives and fishing buddies had congregated to celebrate. When it was time to carve the pig, Papa theatrically chopped off the head in two strokes, to everyone's delight. After he finished carving, he imperiously told his children to bring plates and distribute food to the guests.

Father is "not a great man"—he's never economically successful, he brags a lot, and he yells at his family. But he always maintains his "self-respect," and he works well at whatever profession he undertakes. He does everything with "flourish," and even his fellow inmates at Fort Lincoln remember him because he each morning he translated the English newspapers into Japanese, altering his voice and making the news into an oration.

Papa's approach to education directly contrasts with Jeanne's. He rejects university altogether because it might expose him to racism; on the other hand, in high school Jeanne will endure cruel and tacit slights in the hope of gaining acceptance. As a young adult, Papa lacks the deep sense of shame and guilt that internment instills in Jeanne.



In some ways, Jeanne's birth marks a new era of stability and even middle-class prosperity for the Wakatsukis. Given these circumstances, it's ironic and tragic that she comes of age in Manzanar, at the nadir of the family fortunes.



While Papa's life was always full of uncertainty, internment ends the sense of hopeful optimism he always maintained beforehand. The injustice of internment is much more crushing than economic hardship in prewar life.



The silver wedding anniversary marks a high point of family togetherness, which contrasts with the dissolution that internment causes. Moreover, while Mama's steadfast and practical character remains largely unchanged, Papa is a different person when he returns from Fort Lincoln. His confident brandishing of the knife contrasts with his air of vulnerability and dependence on his cane as an internee.



As an adult, Jeanne is able to reconcile Papa's character flaws with his ability to support and inspire those around him. However, a long time will pass before she reaches this state of equanimity and overcomes her feelings that Papa has failed her. Being able to compassionately analyze Papa's character shows her own development.



At Fort Lincoln, Papa worked as an interviewer, helping the Justice Department interview other men who couldn't speak English. He became addicted to the rice wine the men made in their barracks. Both his feet got frostbite, in an incident that he always refused to discuss.

Hardship at Fort Lincoln is even greater than at Manzanar. Moreover, because there are only men and not families among the internees there's less impetus to maintain communal norms and more serious manifestations of despair, like Papa's incipient alcoholism.



CHAPTER 7: FORT LINCOLN: AN INTERVIEW

Jeanne takes on Papa's perspective, imagining his intake interview at Fort Lincoln. Papa tells the officer his name and the story of his early life in Japan. He affirms that he's never returned to Japan and hasn't been in contact with his family there. He says he has ten children but can't remember all their names because "ten is too many to remember."

Papa's glib answers to the questions shows his refusal to consider himself a prisoner or spy. Even though he's not making himself seem more trustworthy, he's maintaining his dignity and conception of himself as an honorable man.



Papa laughs off the accusations that he's delivered oil to Japanese submarines. The large drums he carries on his boats, he explains, contain fish guts that he uses as bait.

The fact that Papa's quotidian fishing supplies are interpreted as evidence of espionage shows how unsubstantiated allegations of Japanese-American disloyalty are.



The officer asks Papa what he thinks about the Pearl Harbor bombing, and Papa says that he feels "sad for both countries." He says that he would not want his sons to serve in the army, because the military always wants to go to war, even when it's not necessary. He says that he believes America will win the war due to superior resources, and that he "weeps" for his country.

It's brave of Papa to admit his positive feelings for Japan, rather than just professing loyalty to America. While the government demands that Japanese-Americans turn their backs on their native country and heritage, Papa insists on his right to a complex identity and complex loyalties.



The officer asks Papa if Japan is still his country, and if he is loyal to the Emperor. In response, Papa asks how old the officer is. The officer is twenty-nine, which means that Papa has been living in the U.S. nine years longer than he has been alive; yet, he points out, he's forbidden from becoming a citizen or owning land, and he has no rights preventing him from being separated from his family.

Papa is pointing out the logical fallacy in arguments for internment. The government believes that Japanese citizens are disloyal because they haven't been in America long enough—yet Papa has lived in America, and demonstrated his commitment to the country, longer than many young soldiers whose loyalty is never questioned.



The officer resumes his questions about Papa's loyalty to Japan. Papa sighs and poses the question, "When your mother and your father are having a fight, do you want them to kill each other," or stop fighting?"

By referring to America and Japan as equal parents, Papa refutes the government's argument that complex loyalties aren't valuable or trustworthy.



CHAPTER 8: INU

Now that Papa has returned, the family's shack is almost overflowing—not so much due to lack of space but because of his “dark, bitter, brooding presence.” He rarely goes outside and makes Mama bring him food from the mess hall, saving up the fruit syrup to brew moonshine that smells so bad Mama is ashamed when people visit them. Everyday he drinks his homemade liquor until he passes out, waking up in the morning to vomit and start again. When Mama remonstrates with him, he yells threats at her.

Jeanne, who has just turned eight, explains Papa's behavior by concluding that Papa thinks he is better than other people, and that the neighbors gossip about him because he's brewing moonshine in the barracks. Jeanne and Mama hear some women in the latrine calling Papa an “inu”—a Japanese insult that means “dog.”

Years later, Jeanne learns that inu was used specifically to refer to collaborators, anyone suspected of helping the government carry out the internment process or cooperating with camp authorities. The women in the latrine probably resented that Papa was released from Fort Lincoln earlier than most of his companions. This additional stigma adds to Papa's feelings of shame and drives him to drink more.

When Mama tells a drunken Papa what the women in the latrine had been saying, he starts yelling at her, accusing her of everything from not bringing enough food to lying about where she had been. Mama falls on a mattress and Jeanne crawls under a bunk. If she were at home, she could go into another room while her parents fought, but in the barracks there's no escape and she has to watch Mama crying and Papa pacing.

Papa threatens to kill Mama, and she tells him to “go ahead, if that will make you happy.” He stands over her, brandishing his cane. Jeanne has witnessed many angry scenes since Papa's return, but tonight it seems more serious than usual—Papa seems to really want to hurt Mama, and she seems willing to allow it.

Papa's behavior now contrasts starkly with the dignity and pride that Jeanne had always associated with him before the war. Because the society around him has ceased to treat him with dignity, he's become personally overwhelmed by shame and unable to function. He's a notable foil to Mama, who copes with feelings of shame by clinging to her old routines.



Jeanne isn't quite evaluating Papa's feelings correctly, but her anger and frustration is justified—after all, he's hastening the dissolution of the family that began upon arrival at Manzanar.



Papa is suffering from public stigma both from Anglo-American society and within the Japanese community. The women's suspicion shows how prejudice can easily brew in times of fear, even within already marginalized communities.



Paradoxically, while the lack of privacy means that the family is always together physically, it actually drives them apart emotionally. Physical conditions at Manzanar aren't just inconvenient, they prevent the family from living a normal and healthy life together.



Papa's feelings of shame have completely warped his personality and almost overcome his love for his family; although Jeanne frequently praises Papa's ability to keep up his dignity, she also shows that an excessive preoccupation with dignity can be harmful.



Suddenly Kiyō, who has been hiding in his own bunk, jumps onto the floor in his underwear and punches Papa in the face. Papa's nose starts bleeding, and Kiyō steps back in horror; Jeanne feels like he's "bloodying the nose of God." He expects to be punished, but Papa looks at him with a combination of "outrage and admiration" and does nothing, so he runs out the door. Jeanne goes to Mama, relieved that the fight has ended but feeling "a miserable sense of loss" at the strange changes that are occurring in the family.

Kiyō spends a few weeks living with one of their married sisters; when he returns home he begs Papa's forgiveness, wanting "some order preserved in the world and in the family." Papa accepts the apology and Kiyō is reinstated in the barracks, but Jeanne feels that something has changed forever. Papa continues to drink and continues to abuse Mama, and it seems like there's no way to change the situation.

CHAPTER 9: THE MESS HALL BELLS

Papa never speaks about his time in Fort Lincoln, and Jeanne believes that his silence is a result of his deep shame at being accused of disloyalty; for a Japanese man, there is "no greater disgrace" than such a charge. He's also had to reckon for the first time with his lack of legal rights in the country he considers his home. All the men at Manzanar suffer from this "emasculat[i]on," and everyone deals with it in some way, most less extreme than Papa's.

Jeanne says that the men's festering bitterness finally erupts in what is now known as the December Riot, which occurs on the anniversary of the Pearl Harbor attack. Some outside commentators called it a demonstration of "militantly pro-Japan forces," but Jeanne says it's a result of the complex pressures and indignities of camp life.

For months before the riot, frequent mess hall bells announce public meetings to discuss both immediate problems, like wages and food quality, and bigger dilemmas, like whether the internees should "revolt," declare their patriotism, or even return to Japan. Tensions are so high that people threaten to assassinate each other.

On a smaller level, Kiyō is imitating Woody by taking on the adult role of protecting Mama and preserving family order. However, while Woody stepped into this role due to Papa's absence, Kiyō does so due to Papa's incapacity, a much more troubling development which emphasizes the changes taking place in the family, rather than its unity.



Even though Kiyō knows he's right, he'd rather preserve old family norms—in which respect for parents is paramount—than win the argument and acknowledge that Papa is suffering a breakdown.



Jeanne frequently shows how Japanese culture helps the internees build strong and productive lives at Manzanar; however, the traits that Papa derives from his Japanese heritage sometimes hamper him—and by extension, cause serious tension in his family.



The discrepancy between Jeanne's interpretation of the riot and the commentators' shows how preconceived prejudice can influence even the perception of clear facts—another insidious way that racism shapes the Asian-American experience.



The public meetings emphasize the internees' strong sense of community, even though they haven't lived together long. However, their implicit powerlessness is also clear—their committees have no legal standing and they have no formal way to petition the governmental bodies that control their lives.



On December 5, five men badly beat Fred Tayama, a member of the Japanese American Citizens League, which is frequently accused of collaborating with the camp administration. The next day, authorities arrest three men, one of whom is a young cook popular for frequent acts of defiance. The cook had recently accused a Caucasian steward of siphoning supplies of sugar and meat to sell on the black market; this is particularly meaningful charge since rumors have been flying that infants in the camp have died as a result of saccharin being substituted for sugar. The cook's arrest is the immediate cause of the riot.

Papa does not participate in the riot and makes the children stay inside for its duration, but Jeanne remembers the unnatural quiet that lasts throughout the preceding morning, and hearing crowds rush outside the barracks after dark. Shouting in Japanese, the mob rushes from the hospital to the police station, searching for someone on whom to take out their anger. Papa calls them idiots and derides their plan to return to Japan; Mama says that maybe over there "they would be treated like human beings." Papa tells her to be quiet and predicts that someone will be killed before the night is over.

Joe Kurihara emerges as the leader of the rioters; he's a former U.S. soldier so indignant at his current treatment that he wants to give up his citizenship and sail to Japan. He sets up a megaphone and begins giving speeches, alleging that Tayama and the administration are attempting to cover up the sugar stealing. The authorities agree to release the young cook, but the mob is not assuaged, and by this time it's in control of the camp. A group heads to the hospital in search of Tayama. Others go to the police station to taunt the officers and sing in Japanese; the police throw tear gas into the crowd and, in the confusion, start shooting. This immediately stops the riot; two young men die as a result of the conflagration.

All night after the riot, demonstrators keep the mess hall bells ringing, so Jeanne can't sleep. She looks out the window and sees the searchlights sweeping over the camp. When she wakes up, the bells are still ringing—it's the only sound she can hear.

CHAPTER 10: THE RESERVOIR SHACK: AN ASIDE

In an aside, Jeanne takes on the perspective of her brother-in-law Kaz, the foreman of a reservoir crew and one of the few people allowed to work outside the camp. The night of the riot they are given pickaxes to defend themselves in case rioters accuse them of being inus and attack. They drive out to the chlorine shed and then settle into the small shack where they will spend the next twenty-four hours attending to the reservoir.

The siphoning of resources from a marginalized and stigmatized community corresponds to the robbery of Japanese-American possessions and land which is occurring simultaneously outside the camp. Although she rarely discusses it explicitly, Jeanne shows that racial prejudice is often motivated by the possibility of economic profit.



While Papa is unyielding and adamant in his interactions with American authorities (for example, he refuses to give "safe" answers when he's questioned at Fort Lincoln), he also refuses to ally himself blindly with the insurrectionist forces. Papa's reluctance to belong to one particular group is a trait he passes onto Jeanne, who will eventually realize that her identity is too complex to be labeled simply as "Japanese" or "American."



Kurihara's former service in the military emphasizes that frustration and rioting stems not from Japanese sympathizing but from a sense of betrayal—after all, Kurihara risked his life for the very country that has now imprisoned him for disloyalty. The sudden death of two men shows the lurking perils of life at Manzanar, even though the circumstances often seem merely inconvenient and not actually dangerous.



While bells are normally a sign of order—announcing regular meals or meetings—today they've turned into a sign of chaos.



Like Papa, Kaz is neither aligned entirely with the government or the anti-government forces. He's cooperating with the administration, but his work also helps provide basic services and improve quality of life at Manzanar.



As Kaz is lying on a bunk, the door swings open and four soldiers run in, telling the “Japs” to get up against the wall. Startled, Kaz asks what’s going on; the young sergeant, apparently believing he’s discovered some saboteurs, demands to know why they’ve left camp and why they have weapons. The sergeant leaves to confirm their story, and until he comes back Kaz and the rest of his crew stand in the cabin with the other soldiers’ guns trained on them, knowing the panicky young men could shoot at any moment.

The sergeant seems clearly panicked and unprepared to deal with an actual insurrection, but Kaz surmises that his panic leads to aggression and can potentially be fatal. This is a small reflection of the unchecked and unsubstantiated fear that leads to the internment process in the first place.



CHAPTER 11: YES YES NO NO

In December, a newly-arrived camp director issues every family a Christmas tree as an apology for all the hardship that lead up to the riot. For Jeanne, the holiday season is dispiriting—there are no good presents, the weather is terrible, and Papa is completely drunk.

Christmas trees represent “typical” American traditions, so it’s ironic that the internees receive them as they’re being actively excluded from mainstream American life.



In February, another period of uncertainty arrives with the Loyalty Oath—a document asking each person over seventeen to affirm their willingness to serve in the U.S. Army and their “unqualified allegiance” to the U.S. This becomes an even more “divisive” problem than the riot, because everyone is involved. Even Papa leaves his isolation to participate in the debate.

The loyalty oath brings anxieties about belonging in America to a boiling point. Internees have to either affirm their loyalty to a government that has treated them abominably or confirm the very disloyalty that they’ve been wrongly accused of.



Jeanne is too young to understand the quandary; she only knows that men are constantly coming and going from the barracks, and when Mama and Granny try to stop their arguing Papa shouts at them.

It’s important that Jeanne only fully understands these political events in hindsight. Through moments like this, she emphasizes the contrast between her youth at the time of internment and the maturity she’s cultivated over years before finally understanding the experience.



Papa also argues with Woody about the oath, telling his son that if he goes to war he must believe completely in what he’s fighting for, which he can’t do because internment has undermined his faith in America. Woody refuses to disrespect Papa by arguing with him, but he insists that as an American citizen he will sign the oath and join the army as soon as possible. Woody knows that his filial duty is to listen to Papa talk, even though he’s already made his decision.

Like Kiyoo, Woody is committed to preserving the fiction that Papa is a powerful and competent patriarch, even if it’s inconvenient or annoying. Somewhat more independent to her brothers, Jeanne will be less hesitant to confront or disobey Papa as she grows up.



The Loyalty Oath stems from the desire to incorporate Nisei men into the armed forces. Japanese civic groups have been pushing for this, in order to prove Japanese loyalty; the U.S. government also needs more volunteers. The oath is supposed to “weed out the disloyal” in preparation for such a process, but it’s actually a ridiculous idea; no actual saboteur would admit his disloyalty, while the indignity of signing an oath against Japan after such harsh treatment in American makes many internees “militantly anti-American.”

Even though Papa rails against the oath, he knows he will sign “Yes Yes”—in other words, answer yes to all the questions. If he doesn’t, he believes he might be sent back to Japan, forever separated from his family. However, it’s hard to stick to this decision in the camp, where anti-American feeling is running high and some groups are trying to pressure people into signing “No No.”

A block meeting is scheduled to discuss the oath and Papa decides to attend, even though he knows people will gossip about him as an “inu.” However, he wants to prevent people from bullying the whole block into signing “No No.” Woody wants to accompany him, but Papa insists the meeting is only for heads of households. He dresses up in his best clothes, sobers up, and walks out of the barracks alone.

During the meeting, Jeanne plays hopscotch with other girls in the windy yard. Walking home, hears men yelling inside the mess hall and recognizes Papa’s voice calling the other men “trash” in Japanese. Suddenly, the door opens, and a man emerges, chased by Papa, who hits the man with his cane and jumps on top of him, fighting in the dust.

As Jeanne later finds out, when Papa speaks during the meeting people begin murmuring and calling him an “inu.” The man Papa is now fighting is the one who made the accusation aloud. Jeanne has never seen him so angry; the fight only stops when some other men drag him away.

A minute later, a sandstorm hits. The men drag Papa into the barracks and Jeanne follows him. He sits silently inside while Mama pours him tea, and Woody and Chizu arrive to discuss the day’s events. A friend of Chizu’s also visits, and as Jeanne goes to bed she and Papa begin to sing old Japanese songs around the fire. Eventually, Papa begins to sing the Japanese national anthem as everyone else hums along; he makes the song into a “deep-throated lament,” and tears begin trickling down his cheeks. Jeanne has seen him cry only rarely, usually while listening to someone else play music.

The Loyalty Oath doesn’t actually serve any valid purpose. In fact, it seems more like an additional attempt to stigmatize and shame the Japanese-American population by reminding them that mainstream society refuses to accept or trust them. The brewing anti-American sentiments show that fear and intimidation are the wrong way to encourage immigrants to assimilate into American society.



Again, although Papa resents the methods of the U.S. government, he displays a high level of commitment to his life in the U.S., even if it means further distancing himself from his Japanese roots.



Here, Papa represents the importance of free speech and independent thought, even though it often results in public censure—like the “inu” comments he will only exacerbate by arguing for signing the oath.



Jeanne’s childish game emphasizes her youth at the time of these events and relative distance from them as they occur. Even though everything is uncertain around her, she feels relatively secure in her new life.



Even though he often does so in violent and impractical ways, Papa always shows Jeanne the importance of standing up for her personal dignity.



It’s interesting that Papa sings the Japanese anthem just as he’s defended loyalty to the United States and fought with a man who sees him as a traitor to Japan. One of Jeanne’s recurring arguments throughout the novel is that her family’s mixed cultural heritage—both Japanese and American—augments its appreciation and love for each culture, rather than diluting it.



Later, Jeanne learns that Papa had grown up singing the national anthem every morning at school. Unlike other countries' anthems, it's not a martial song but actually an ancient poem which expresses hope that Japan will endure "until this tiny **stone** will grow into a massive rock" covered in moss. The endurance it describes is both national and personal, describing both the country and an individual's life.

Outside the house where Papa grew up in Japan stood a large **stone** lantern. Every morning, someone poured a bucket of water over the lantern, so that over the years moss grew over the stone. As a boy, Papa learned that the anthem referred to the specific type of moss which grows over stones like these.

The government wants internees to turn away from their Japanese heritage, but for Papa the culture of his birth is what gives him the strength and confidence to endure the trials he faces in his adopted country.



Throughout the memoir, stones will symbolize perseverance in the face of obstacles; they also show how traditional Japanese culture can be brought to bear on modern quandaries.



CHAPTER 12: MANZANAR, U.S.A.

Manzanar means "apple orchard" in Spanish, and in fact there were once orchards in the town before drought dried it up in the twenties. A few groups of fruit trees survive, and in 1943 the Wakatsukis move to Block 28, which abuts one of the old pear orchards. Papa cares for the trees and the family harvests the fruit and stores it in a specially dug root cellar.

Mama has arranged the move, arguing that she needs to live in Block 28 because of its proximity to the hospital, where she works. As a result of the loyalty oath, some families are finally being relocated outside the camp, where "sponsors" vouch for their loyalty, and inside living space is opening up especially for people like Mama who are shrewd enough to pounce on a recently-vacated apartment. In Block 28, the Wakatsukis have twice as much space; Ray and Woody cover the walls with sheetrock and install linoleum on the floors. There are three colors of linoleum through the camp, and many families cut into small pieces in order to create elaborate, tile-like patterns in their barracks.

Papa continues to brew moonshine, but he's drinking less and spending more time outside. He doesn't take a formal job but instead "dabbles" in hobbies he's never been able to pursue, like carving furniture and even hiking outside the **barbed wire** fence—after the authorities have given permission. His favorite pastime is collecting **stones** and building a rock garden outside the doorway.

Moving to Block 28 allows Papa to invest his energies in the kind of jobs he often had before internment, and to feel as if he is providing something useful for his family. Returning to these old routines helps him overcome his shame and despair.



While Papa is slowly recovering from his breakdown, Mama's shrewd maneuvering and understanding of camp dynamics shows that she's the real decision-maker now. The common practice of decorating floors with linoleum shows that internees have turned away from disruptive resistance like riots and instead are fighting against the indignity of internment by making Manzanar into a livable and even beautiful place.



Papa's rock collections echo his singing of the Japanese anthem after the riot. The stones are a physical manifestation of his ability to create something beautiful in a terrible situation.



Papa also paints with watercolors, usually portraying the mountains in the distance. Mount Whitney is visible from the camp, and it reminds Papa and the other Issei of Fujiyama, a mountain in Japan. For the Issei, natural phenomena like mountains are reminders that one must “simply endure that which cannot be changed.”

After the move, life settles into a pattern that remains undisturbed for the rest of the war, as everyone resolves to make the best of internment. Gradually, internees are making the camp livable. They create **rock** and vegetable gardens that are visible even from outside the fence and provide fresh vegetables for the mess halls. Men who had once been gardeners build a park with ponds and waterfalls, where people walk in the evening to look at the mountains. On the gravel paths, it’s possible to forget that one is a prisoner, and even enjoy being in Manzanar.

As Manzanar becomes more orderly and familiar, people stop wanting to leave, especially when doing so means setting off into the unknown. Within the camp, where people create new roles or recreate their old jobs, it’s possible to forget that “America had accused us, or excluded us, or imprisoned us.”

Manzanar becomes a town with both Asian and American elements. The parks and **rock** gardens are reminiscent of Japan, but there are also “churches, Boy Scouts, beauty parlors [...] glee clubs, and softball leagues”—everything that an American small town would have. Every morning, Mama goes to work in the mess halls and visits young mothers; she always wears a homemade sun hat to protect her skin from the heat.

Woody has capitulated to Papa and agreed not to volunteers but to wait until the army drafts him; in the meantime, he works at the general store. Enterprising Kiyo uncovers arrowheads in the sand and sells them to old men. Ray plays in the football league; sometimes Caucasian teams visit for matches. Lillian is a high school student and sings in a country band called The Sierra Stars, while Bill leads a dance band called The Jive Bombers, which plays for regular weekend dances.

In 1944, the high school creates and publishes a yearbook called *Our World*. It portrays students wearing sweaters and holding books while they walk past the barracks and **barbed wire**, cheerleaders with pompoms, and students performing in a play about “a typical American home.” Each senior gets a headshot, accompanied by the name of the high school from which they would have graduated under normal circumstances.

Like the rock gardens, Papa’s comparison of Whitney and Fujiyama is an example of how Japanese-Americans turn to their heritage in order to feel more secure and at home in their adopted country. In contrast, Jeanne will cultivate a sense of belonging by moving away from that heritage.



The internees’ ability to mobilize and improve their surroundings shows their strong sense of community—a trait Jeanne says her elders brought with them from Japan, but that also serves them in America. Here, a melded cultural identity helps the internees to succeed in America, rather than hindering them.



Ironically, it’s when they’re excluded from mainstream society that the internees can recreate the parts they like—like jobs and public parks—while also distancing themselves from the prejudice that pervades their lives in America.



In a way, Manzanar becomes a representation of the internees’ ideal world—a town in which both American culture and Japanese heritage are valued and mixed. It’s tragic to know that this kind of town just can’t exist in the racist American society that lies outside the barbed wire.



While Papa clings to traditional Japanese culture, his children generally identify with more “American” pastimes, like football and country music. As she grows up, Jeanne will follow her siblings’ example—she even exceeds them by assimilating into American culture even when this causes conflict with Papa.



It’s interesting that all these typical high school events occur in the context of the barbed wire. The juxtaposition both highlights the racial injustice underpinning life at Manzanar and shows how their seclusion allows Japanese-American students to have a high school experience devoid of racism or prejudice.



The yearbook also contains snapshots from other aspects of camp life—chickens in coops, dentists' office, and drying laundry. On the last pages there is a large photograph of a guard tower against the background of the Sierras, and a well-tended path that curves along a row of elm trees. A woman is walking down the path; Jeanne knows that this road leads towards the edge of the camp, but the **barbed wire** is invisible in the photo. In retrospect, the image seems “both stark and comforting.”

For Jeanne, this photo represents Manzanar's gradual transition from a prison to a refuge. As internees develop it into a functional society and inconveniences lessen, she and others around her become less aware of the fences that trap them there, eventually forgetting about them at all.



CHAPTER 13: OUTINGS, EXPLORATIONS

After moving to Block 28 and establishing a better sense of order, Jeanne becomes happier and more tranquil in Manzanar. Moreover, she finally has a real school to attend. For the first year, all teachers were volunteer and there was no equipment or formally allocated school building. Now a full-time staff has been hired and barracks have been converted into an elementary school and high school, complete with desks and lab equipment. Jeanne says that her fourth-grade teacher was the best teacher she ever had, a strict woman whose efforts made sure that Jeanne was fully prepared to return to school on the outside.

Jeanne's teacher at Manzanar is a marked contrast to the teacher she had in Los Angeles, who refused to talk to her because she was Japanese. In this way, school at Manzanar protects Jeanne from experiencing the racism that would surely befall her if she was attending a mainstream school.



Jeanne sings in the elementary school glee club, learning folk songs that are popular throughout the country. Outside school, she participates in recreation programs, often staffed by young Caucasians hired by the government. In the company of leaders, groups of children can go on hikes or picnics outside the **barbed wire** fence, and restrictions gradually loosen. Whenever she goes on a trip Jeanne takes a jar to collect water from the pure mountain streams.

Though it's exciting to leave the fence, it's also a reminder that the restrictions of internment don't serve any real purpose or stem from any real threat, but are merely an expression of racial prejudice towards a marginalized group.



Jeanne's favorite leader is Lois—like many Caucasians who volunteer at the camp, she's a Quaker. She's having a covert affair with a Nisei boy, and in order to have time alone they take all the girls on camping trips. Jeanne and her friends enjoy the ghost stories Lois tells, as well as the gossip circulating about her romance. As she falls asleep, Jeanne can hear the two counselors sneaking into the woods, but she's more preoccupied with the fact that this is her first night outside the **barbed wire** of Manzanar.

Jeanne is observing a moment of growing up for Lois, who is experiencing her first teenage romance. At the same time, she's experiencing such a moment of her own by leaving the fence. The juxtaposition of these two experiences shows that for Jeanne, Manzanar represents childhood, while leaving its bounds is synonymous with the inevitable progression into adolescence.



Still, Jeanne reflects that if someone told her she was free to leave Manzanar, she would have run home to the barracks. She likes looking at the Sierras, but it's frightening to actually think of going there. Anyway, she's happy at Block 28.

Jeanne's explicit affirmation of comfort at Manzanar emphasizes the extent to which the camp has become a place of safety—not just as a refuge from racism but as a childhood idyll.



Instead of thinking about the outside, Jeanne focuses her energy on explorations within the camp, looking for “that special thing I could be or do myself.” People are offering classes in all kinds of different activities, and Jeanne learns baton twirling from a teenager; she practices, joins a baton club, and enters contests. When she eventually returns to California, she uses this skill to gain acceptance in her new high school and prove that she belongs—it’s the “one trick I could perform that was thoroughly, unmistakably American.”

Even at ten, Jeanne is much more drawn to “American” activities like baton twirling than traditional Japanese skills. She once visits an old geisha who is teaching traditional dance at Manzanar, but she struggles to understand the woman’s dialect and the teacher seems like “an occult figure, more spirit than human.” Soon, Jeanne hurries back to her more familiar activities.

Still, Jeanne is fascinated with the Japanese lifestyle the geisha embodies, and she explores it through two girls in her class who continue taking the classes. Wealthy and full of themselves, the girls tell Jeanne that to become a good Japanese dancer she has to put cold cream in her hair and stop wearing underpants—instructions Jeanne follows until Mama catches her and explains that the girls are just being mean.

Fed up with the geisha, Jeanne turns to ballet, which seems like a fun idea. She reports to an abandoned barracks where a woman is starting to give classes. When everyone has assembled, the amateur accompanist begins to play and the teacher dances dramatically. It’s clear she was once a good dancer, but now even Jeanne can tell she’s overweight and out of practice, and it’s sad to watch her perform. Jeanne is fascinated by her legs, which her sisters would make fun of for their prominent veins.

To be polite, Jeanne participates in the day’s class. But when the woman eventually takes off her ballet shoes and reveals her bleeding feet, she decides she can’t take the class—in fact, the woman’s “very need to hold on to whatever she had been” makes Jeanne frightened and confused.

For Jeanne, trying out different extracurricular activities is a way of trying out different identities. Thus, baton-twirling is not just a way to pass the time but a way to align herself with “typical” American culture, rather than the Japanese heritage of her parents.



Jeanne’s description of the woman as foreign and disturbing is markedly different from Papa’s nostalgia for Japanese culture—it’s almost as if she’s mimicking mainstream American suspicion of her own heritage.



Jeanne’s interactions with the geisha—or her students—are never meaningful or improving. This humorous incident shows that Jeanne is unable to connect with her heritage in the way she feels she ought to, even at a young age.



While the geisha signifies nostalgia for Japanese culture, the ballet dancer seems to represent the futile desire for everything to stay as it was in the outside world—she pursues dancing even though she’s a little too old and out of practice. Jeanne’s disenchantment shows her unwillingness to commit to outdated cultural practice of any kind.



Jeanne doesn’t understand and can’t relate to the woman’s desire to recapture her pre-internment identity—perhaps because Jeanne barely remembers life before Manzanar and is crafting her entire identity within the camp.



Jeanne’s most serious “exploration” is her flirtation with Catholicism. She resumes studying with the nuns Sister Mary Bernadette and Sister Mary Suzanne and listening to stories about the martyrs. She’s primarily inspired by watching one of the orphans be confirmed in an elaborate ceremony. The orphans are generally ostracized (even by Jeanne and her friends) so Jeanne feels particularly impressed to see an orphan girl arrayed “like a bride” in a splendid white dress, for once the center of positive attention. She wants to be a “queen” like this girl.

A few days later, Jeanne announces to her parents that she’s going to be baptized and confirmed. Papa is immediately outraged, shouting that she’s too young and that if she converts to Catholicism she won’t find a good Japanese boy to marry. Jeanne turns to Sister Bernadette, who tries to remonstrate with Papa, but he is implacable. For weeks, Jeanne is sulky and angry with Papa, imagining “the white-gowned princess I might have become.” As she returns to practicing her baton, she imagines throwing Papa into the air and watching him twirl around until she catches him.

The comparison of the orphan girl to a “queen” foreshadows Jeanne’s later role as her high school’s carnival queen. In both cases, Jeanne seeks confidence through receiving attention and participating in cultural rituals—both of which are signs of external acceptance, rather than internal development.



Jeanne sees Papa as standing between her and acceptance and confidence—just as she will blame Papa for the racism and rejection she faces as a middle school student outside the camp. In both cases, she’s attributing the faults of a large and deeply flawed social system to the nearest scapegoat at hand: her father.



CHAPTER 14: IN THE FIREBREAK

In retrospect, Jeanne is thankful that Papa prevented her from making such a serious religious decision at the age of ten. She also understands that without a job, income, or even a real house, he needs to maintain the illusion of control wherever he can. However, this situation makes him behave tyrannically to his family and causes Jeanne to become distanced from him.

As the youngest child, Jeanne is used to receiving a lot of attention from her parents, but now she turns to Woody and Chizu more often. When her oldest sister Eleanor gives birth, Jeanne experiences the first taste of the “total separateness” that growing up entails.

Eleanor and her husband, Shig, have been living outside the camp since 1943; but when Shig is drafted, Eleanor can’t find work and returns to Manzanar. When she goes into labor at the camp hospital, everyone is very worried—the hospital has very little blood plasma, and one of Jeanne’s sisters had to receive blood from Woody during labor, while her sister-in-law actually died from post-partum hemorrhaging. Papa and Mama have been taking turns sitting with Eleanor throughout her long labor.

Unlike her siblings, who are willing to submit to Papa in order to maintain a sense of family unity, Jeanne fights for her independence even when it sets her apart from her family.



While growing up allows Jeanne freedom and excitement she enjoys, it also means she’s alone in new and frightening ways.



The perils of childbirth at Manzanar—and the death of one of Jeanne’s relatives—shows how bad circumstances really are under the veneer of civilization. It also shows the real consequences when society considers the needs of its marginalized groups as inherently less important.



On the second afternoon, Jeanne is walking through a firebreak to the hospital with Papa when they see Mama running toward them and shouting. Papa is clearly terrified that Eleanor has died; but when Mama finally draws into earshot, she shouts that Eleanor is safe and has given birth to a boy. Both Mama and Papa start crying and talking excitedly. Watching them, Jeanne feels “an odd detachment,” understanding that the intimate scene taking place is between her parents and has nothing to do with her.

Papa puts an arm around Mama. He’s wearing a turtleneck she knit for him during his fishing days, and Mama’s hands finger the yarn. Both of them continue to weep and talk quietly, as Jeanne watches.

While Eleanor’s successful childbirth is a moment of family unity and celebration, it’s also a moment of personal closeness for Mama and Papa. This is a positive moment, since the spouses have been largely distanced from each other since Papa’s return. But it also allows Jeanne to see that her parents have an inner life and a relationship that is fundamentally inaccessible to her.



This sweater also appears in the first chapter, showing that in some sense the family’s love for each other hasn’t changed since internment.



CHAPTER 15: DEPARTURES

In the next months, Mama and Papa grow closer together. Meanwhile, the camp population is dwindling. Some people have managed to relocate to the outside through “sponsors,” and others have joined the military. Most of those who remain are very old or very young.

A few months after Eleanor gives birth, she moves to Reno and lives with friends there. Woody receives his draft notice in August 1944; Papa suggests that he could refuse to report for duty, but Woody is determined to go. In November, he leaves camp along with nineteen other young men. A photo of their departure later appears in the camp paper. Jeanne is almost as distraught as if Papa were leaving, since Woody has been such a bulwark to the family.

As Jeanne watches Woody depart, she stands between Mama and Chizu; because of this, she remembers the day three years earlier when they watched the fishing boats sail away, only to return once news of the Pearl Harbor bombing arrived. Now, though, the entire camp has gathered; the Japanese-American regiment Woody will be joining is now famous, proving its patriotism by fighting heroically in Europe. Jeanne imagines that Woody must be thinking of his own opportunity to demonstrate courage, while Mama must be remembering another Manzanar mother whose son has recently been killed in Italy.

The fact that able-bodied people are more and more able to leave shows that Manzanar has become more of a shelter than a prison, providing a place to stay for older and younger people who are unable to navigate life in the increasingly anti-Asian climate of America.



Jeanne’s sadness shows her reliance on her family but also emphasizes how much that family has changed, in that she now considers Woody a more effective father figure than Papa himself.



It’s important that the entire camp gathers to see off the young men with pride. Even though they’re excluded from American society and considered disloyal, they still feel themselves to be Americans and are proud to contribute to the war effort.



In some ways, Woody's departure is a typical wartime moment—“full of proud smiles and half-concealed worry.” However, it's complicated by the uncertainties of internment—Mama and Papa don't even know where they will be living, or what their citizenship status will be, when Woody returns. Jeanne says that when the answers to these questions become clear, the family only becomes more worried.

Jeanne's childhood—and the Wakatsuki family's experience of the war—is no less “American” than anyone else's, as this “typical” moment shows. Yet, internment adds additional layers and difficulties to it.



CHAPTER 16: FREE TO GO

The Supreme Court has heard several cases related to internment in the past years. In the first case in 1942, a university student objected to the evacuation order and army curfew, but the court upheld the army's decision out of “wartime necessity.” The second case challenged the “racial bias” of the exclusion acts that forced Japanese-Americans inland, claiming due process violations. The court struck down these objections as well.

The Supreme Court's support for internment, although it seems obviously unjust in hindsight (and although subsequent Presidents have formally apologized) shows how deeply seemingly illogical prejudices can take root at the highest levels of government.



The final case, *Ex Parte Endo*, challenged internment itself, and this time the Supreme Court rules in favor of internees, saying that “the government cannot detain loyal citizens against their will.” As a result, the army retracts its exclusion orders and announces that all the camps will close in the next year.

While legal support for internment is waning, the internees are well aware that this does not guarantee their social acceptance or even safety when they return to their homes.



The Wakatsukis are far from overjoyed at this news. They don't even have a house to return to, since their property is surely occupied by others now. Moreover, Mama and Papa—and to a limited extent, Jeanne—know that throughout the war American society has been permeated by “racist headlines, atrocity movies, hate slogans, and fright-mask posters,” all maligning Japanese-Americans.

The Wakatsukis are not just enduring a period of imprisonment; they're grappling with the knowledge that the life they've worked so hard to build, both materially and psychologically, has been largely destroyed.



For decades, racist “civic” organizations like The Native Sons of the Golden West have stoked anti-Asian sentiment; now they're joined by newer hate groups like “No Japs Incorporated in San Diego,” and even farmers' associations that worry about competition posed by the return of internees.

Racism isn't a naturally occurring phenomenon but rather a philosophy stoked by different groups for economic and political gain.



Moreover, the Wakatsukis are now used to living only among other Japanese. Jeanne notes ironically that before the war, Japanese-Americans were often accused of being “clannish” and reluctant to assimilate; now, after years of isolation, these tropes are becoming a reality.

Segregation and exclusion only hinders Japanese assimilation and loyalty to America, rather than encouraging it.



In January 1945, internees begin leaving and trying to recover their old homes and land. Frightening stories return to the camp—one man is assaulted in Seattle, while a mob opens fire on a Fresno farmhouse. When Jeanne’s sister May leaves for the East Coast with her husband, armed guards escort her to the train station for her own protection. As she goes to sleep, Jeanne hears her elders discussing the Ku Klux Klan much as her brother discussed the prospect of internment before the war.

All this is very confusing to Jeanne, as she’s always imagined the world outside as “inaccessible yet wonderfully desirable”—she conjures the outside party through her vague memories but mostly by flipping through the Sears, Roebuck catalogue. In her catechism days, she always prayed for the arrival of things that only exist in the outside world, like dried apricots.

Jeanne isn’t worried about physical violence—she can’t actually make herself believe that such things would happen. She’s more apprehensive of the prospect of being hated and humiliated. On some levels, Jeanne feels that she won’t be able to respond to people’s hatred because she deserves it. She would rather remain at Manzanar forever than face it.

Many of Jeanne’s older siblings are more restless at Manzanar than worried about racial hostility—they decide to relocate to the East Coast, where there’s less history of racism against Asians. Billy, Tomi, and their baby boy move to work for a frozen food company in New Jersey; Jeanne’s sisters Frances and Martha, along with their husbands, soon join. The family tell each other that once they have settled, Mama and Papa and the younger children will join, but everyone knows that Papa is too old and weakened to start life again in a new place.

In fact, now that Papa is free to leave Manzanar he has no idea where to go. Jeanne compares his paralysis to that of black slaves at the end of the Civil War who stayed on their plantations for lack of anywhere else to go.

CHAPTER 17: IT’S ALL STARTING OVER

In June, the Manzanar schools close permanently. The high school’s last yearbook includes a photo of a hand breaking the [barbed wire](#) fence with pliers. Word goes around that everyone has to leave by December first; internees who don’t leave on their own will be resettled by the government in the town of their choice, shipped out on a weekly schedule.

Clandestine hate groups like the Ku Klux Klan are different from internment programs in that they don’t have a legal basis—but they are similar in that they hinder Japanese-Americans from living freely and accessing opportunity. The implicit comparison to a famously racist organization highlights the essentially racist goals of internment.



One of the hardest things for Jeanne as she matures into adolescence is reconciling the amazing world of her fantasies with the actual society to which she returns—and eventually realizing that complete acceptance in that society is not only unattainable but not worth the effort.



It’s clear that Jeanne has inherited Papa’s extreme aversion to—even fear of—shame. At the same time, she’s also inherited Mama’s unwillingness to confront those feelings head-on.



The family is further fractured by Jeanne’s siblings’ relocation. Although it’s inevitable for children to move away from their parents, the fact that this decision is explicitly inspired by the desire to avoid racism shows the part that prejudice and internment play in the dissolution of family unity.



Here, Jeanne puts the Asian-American experience in the context of other white-supremacist systems that have dominated America’s history—namely, slavery.



While the barbed wire at first seemed insurmountable, the students communicate their new sense of power and independence by depicting its downfall.



Passively, Papa decides to wait until he's scheduled to leave. He doesn't even have a definite job to go back to, because a wartime law has made it illegal for Issei to have fishing licenses, and he's sure that his boats have been stolen. At least in camp his family has enough to eat.

Throughout the scorching August, Papa sits in the shade and reads the newspapers aloud, telling the family about Japan's final losses. When he reads about housing shortages on the West Coast, he becomes frustrated and abandons the newspaper. He and Mama begin arguing about what to do, and Papa becomes short-tempered again.

When Mama gets tired of arguing, she tells Jeanne to rub her back and release some of the tension. Since Jeanne isn't strong enough to rub out the knots, Papa takes over, firmly digging his thumbs into Mama's back. Papa says that Mama should see a doctor for her back, but she's unable to because the hospital is so understaffed.

Papa reassures Mama, telling her that the block leaders have decided to send a petition to the administration demanding that internees be allowed to stay at camp until they figure out somewhere definite to go. However, it's clear he's unsure if the petition will work. When Mama asks Papa bleakly what they are going to do, he proposes one of his far-fetched ideas: getting a government loan and founding a "cooperative" in California to house displaced Japanese-Americans. He says that the government is obligated to help internees get a new start after all the trouble it's caused them, but when Mama asks doubtfully if the government will actually do anything, he resumes massaging in silence.

When the atomic bombs fall on Hiroshima, the war is definitively over and the Wakatsukis realize they must return to the outside world. Just as Pearl Harbor ended the prewar period of Jeanne's life, this "appalling climax" is the end of her time at Manzanar. Internees are happy to see the end of the war, but any celebrations are dampened by the atomic bombing—Papa is worried about his remaining family in Japan, especially since his own children are now scattered across the country.

While Papa reads the papers and looks at the mountains, other families leave the camp every day. When it's finally time for the Wakatsukis to leave, there are only two thousand reluctant internees left inside Manzanar.

Papa used to be an active and decisive man, but internment has destroyed his ability to make decisions and undermined his confidence in his ability to provide for the family.



Again, indecision and powerlessness triggers tension within the family. The Wakatsukis are most at peace with each other when they can preserve the conventions that dominated their lives before the war.



Papa's short temper, exacerbated by internment, contrasts with his massaging of Mama's back and concern for her health, reflecting his ultimate tenderness for his wife and family.



Papa's far-fetched schemes used to be a source of excitement for the family, and Jeanne always takes pride as she recounts his prewar escapades. However, now they seem unrealistic and reflect his powerlessness, rather than his ability to improve their circumstances. At this point, it's Mama who emerges as the more practical and capable spouse.



The news of the atomic bombs is another moment of fracturing for the family. Since they don't even know if their relatives have survived, they may be totally cut off from their Japanese heritage, which has been the binding force between them both before and during the war.



The family's growing reliance on the camp contrasts starkly with their initial reluctance to move there.



CHAPTER 18: KA-KE, NEAR HIROSHIMA: APRIL 1946

Jeanne takes on the perspective of her brother, Woody, who is stationed in Japan with occupying American troops. One day, he goes to visit Papa's family in the town of Ka-Ke. His elderly aunt Toyo shows him a family grave plot which has been upended by the aftershocks of the atomic bomb; she says that they are lucky only one member of the family died in the bombing.

Toyo also shows Woody a [stone](#) marker where Papa is "buried"; Woody is initially confused, but Toyo says the stone was placed to remember him after his immigration, when the family had no contact with him but wanted to remember him. Toyo says that her happiness at seeing Papa's son "erases all this war has put us through," and Woody tears up.

Woody has been afraid to visit his family; it's hard enough to be a Nisei among the occupying troops, and he's constantly afraid that the Japanese consider him a traitor. When he finally does visit, he brings a suitcase full of sugar, which is in desperately short supply; he has access to it through his job, which is to break up black market operations and confiscate goods. When he finally arrives, he realizes that it doesn't matter if he's an American soldier or what gifts he brings—it's enough that he is Papa's son.

The family accept the sugar with profuse thanks but carry it away quickly, in accordance with the Japanese tradition of not showing impolite interest in gifts. Woody senses that they're embarrassed to be in dire need of such basic supplies. In fact, while the family compound has been spared bombing and is decorated with a beautiful [rock](#) garden, after years of war they have almost no possessions.

However, Aunt Toyo doesn't act like a citizen of a defeated nation; she's characterized by "an ancient, inextinguishable dignity." Her cook prepares a delicious if small meal which is accompanied by tea. Afterwards, Toyo shows Woody to a guest room and insists that he take her own silk quilt. As Woody lies down, he thinks that Papa will be happy that his family has survived and proud of the reception they've given his son. Woody himself is relieved that all Papa's fantastic stories about his family's estate and pride have turned out to be true.

Woody dozes off but wakes suddenly and notices Toyo watching him and silently crying. She was Papa's favorite aunt, who loaned him the money he needed to get to America, and now she tells Woody how much he looks like Papa. She tells him to sleep and hurries away.

Despite their fears, it seems that most of Japanese Wakatsukis have made it through the bombings intact. This is a moment of hope for family unity, after so many circumstances have conspired to weaken it.



It's interesting that his family commemorates Papa with a stone—this both roots him in his Japanese culture and emphasizes the endurance of their connection to him, even though he is physically far away.



In America, Woody's complex cultural heritage isn't valued—he has to prove his loyalty before he can even serve in the army. In contrast, his Japanese family accept his complexities, even though he's come to them as part of an army that has defeated their country.



The family's delicate acceptance of his gift mirrors Mama's commitment to maintaining politeness and conventional norms, even in the midst of dire circumstances.



For Toyo, personal dignity isn't about winning or losing—it's about behaving properly no matter the circumstances. Her equanimity shows a more complex approach to personal dignity, and a greater resilience to shame, than Papa displays.



Even though Woody has grown to replace Papa as head of family, thus emphasizing his differences from his father, Toyo's comment is a moment of reconnection and filial satisfaction for him.



Woody is struck by how graceful Toyo is even while sliding the screen shut—she’s accustomed to moving with such grace from centuries in the same surroundings. Woody rubs his cheeks and imagines Papa’s face, thinking about how Papa’s bearing and dignity are reminiscent of Toyo. He wishes he had asked Toyo to tell him about Papa’s youth but tells himself that tomorrow he will talk to her and learn everything he wants to know. Tomorrow he will climb a hill outside of the town and “see what [Papa’s] eyes used to see.”

For Woody, connecting with his cultural heritage and with Papa’s youth are inextricable. The family is strengthened by its rich cultural heritage, but at the same time this means that internment’s attack on Japanese culture is also indirectly an attack on the family.



CHAPTER 19: RE-ENTRY

A few days before the Wakatsukis’ scheduled departure from Manzanar, Papa decides he wants to leave “in style.” Suddenly coming out of his “lethargy,” he walks to the nearest town with the intention of buying a car. Mama thinks this is a bad idea, but he scoffs her advice away. Papa has always preferred unusual cars, with which he distinguishes himself from his neighbors. Tonight, he returns with a dark blue sedan. In order to transport the family and all its possessions, Father makes three trips from Manzanar to Long Beach, during which the car frequently breaks down.

When Papa finally springs into action, it’s not with a practical plan but a decision that will preserve the family dignity—at least in his own eyes. While Papa may improve everyone’s morale, it’s clear that the family needs Mama in order to survive.



Jeanne and Mama go in the first trip; Papa is driving frantically and becomes outraged every time the car breaks down, but every time the car breaks down Jeanne hopes they will be stranded in the desert forever.

Although Jeanne has always dreamed of the outside world, now that she’s beginning to understand the prejudice she’ll face there she feels more comfortable at Manzanar.



Papa has been drinking throughout the trip, but he sobers up as the family approaches Los Angeles; they’re all dreading some sign of hostility towards Japanese-Americans, something to match the stories they’ve heard. Even though Jeanne doesn’t understand exactly what’s going on, she’s heard so many people talking about hatred that she’s afraid as she huddles in the backseat.

When Jeanne arrived at Manzanar, she was too young to be confused or frightened; now, although she’s returning to her childhood home, she’s old enough to begin to understand the complex racial dynamics that will impede her life there.



However, as they first drive into Long Beach, the family encounters not overt racism but “indifference.” The family feels like “fleeing refugees” and imagines that everything in the outside world is transformed, and it’s almost surreal that things seemed almost unchanged.

The surreal atmosphere of their homecoming reflects how truly distanced the Wakatsukis have been from the outside world since the inception of internment.



However, in the ensuing months the Wakatsukis discover that many of the most important things have changed. For one thing, they have nowhere to live—housing shortages are indeed serious, and some returning internees are even living in churches. The American Friends Service helps the family find an apartment in a Long Beach government housing project. For Jeanne, it's exciting to live somewhere with its own stove and flushing toilet; not until years later does she realize the project, Cabrillo Homes, is decrepit and depressed.

Mama is able to recover some kitchenware she'd stored with neighbors before internment. However, the warehouse where she stored most possessions has been "robbed" and there's not trace of her furniture or valuable wedding gifts. The car Papa bought before Pearl Harbor has been repossessed, and there's no trace of his boats. Economically speaking, he's as badly off as when he arrived with nothing in 1904.

Papa never quite recovers from this blow, but he doesn't give up either. For Jeanne, this demonstrates the way that America "can both undermine you and keep you believing in your own possibilities." To keep his mind of the dire state of things, Papa begins drafting sketches for the housing cooperative he still dreams of starting.

Meanwhile, Mama busies herself with the immediate concern of providing for the family. She soon gets a job at a cannery, knowing that she's going to be the only breadwinner for a while; Papa would never accept a menial job of this sort, for him to do so would make Mama even more ashamed than he. Every morning Mama carefully fixes her hair and puts on makeup. Then she rushes out of the apartment to join her carpool, which is filled with other Japanese women who have fulfilled the same morning rituals.

Jeanne gradually begins to lose her sense of dread and fear. She's soothed by listening to the same radio programs that marked her life before the war. However, when she starts public school in the fall, she realizes that she was right to have apprehensions about returning home.

Jeanne feels lucky to live in the housing project even though it's primitive compared to the comfortable house where she grew up. Although the internees did their best to make Manzanar livable, her delight at a flushing toilet reveals how rudimentary and inhumane circumstances there were.



The loss of the family's material possessions shows that racism isn't just motivated by ideology but also the possibility of economic profit. By acquiescing to the internment of their neighbors, Caucasian Californians could appropriate their property and goods without resistance.



For Jeanne, being an American isn't an unqualified positive or negative experience. While she writes about the injustices American society perpetrated on her family, she also credits the American ethos for motivating her to persevere.



Mama's careful dressing isn't a mark of vanity; it's a way to maintain her personal dignity, even though she has to work a grueling job and live in a cramped house. Mama's coping strategies are much more effective than Papa's—his feelings of shame prevent him from working, even though the family badly needs the income.



Jeanne always finds comfort in American culture, which is more familiar to her than Japanese traditions. However, she will come to realize that the people with whom she shares this culture will often refuse to accept her.



CHAPTER 20: A DOUBLE IMPULSE

On Jeanne's first day of sixth grade, her kindly teacher asks her to read a page aloud. After she finishes, a blond girl turns around and says, "I didn't know you could speak English." Jeanne is stunned to learn that such a thing had ever been in question. She sits down, realizing that while she won't suffer physical abuse at school she'll always been seen "as someone other than American, or perhaps not be seen at all."

In her years at Manzanar, although Jeanne knew her family hadn't done anything wrong, she never truly questioned why the government put them there. The girl's remark is a moment of "illumination" on this question, and the start of Jeanne's pervasive feelings of shame.

From that day on, Jeanne frequently wants to be invisible. She feels that if people notice her, they will only see her Asian face and consider her part of a faceless bloc of Japanese, rather than as an individual. Jeanne notes that internment is only possible when people "stop seeing individuals"; in fact, she's inherited the inability to see herself as one from the very people who put her family in Manzanar and can't believe she speaks English.

However, another part of Jeanne wants to "prove" that she belongs in America, just as Woody proved his patriotism by joining the army. For the rest of her schooldays, these two impulses are constantly at war within her.

Soon, Jeanne learns that she's accepted in certain areas of school life—she's expected to be a good student and athlete and allowed to join clubs like the yearbook and newspaper. Things outside school are trickier—some girls' parents won't allow them to invite her over, which makes it hard for her to cultivate friends. When things like this happen, Jeanne feels guilty and ashamed as if she is "imposing a burden" on her friends.

Jeanne's first day of school shows her how much prejudice and propaganda has taught people to think of Japanese-Americans as essentially foreign. For Jeanne, who considers herself American and is in fact largely alienated by Japanese culture, this both humiliating and unsettling.



It's not until Jeanne returns to Long Beach and goes to school with students who don't accept her that she begins to understand the feelings of shame with which Mama and Papa have always struggled.



It's depressing to be considered as a member of a faceless group, rather than on her own individual merits. However, at some points it's also comforting—if people don't notice Jeanne they can't overtly attack or humiliate her.



The twin impulses to be unnoticeable and notable are part of many coming-of-age experiences; however, in Jeanne's case both these possibilities are complicated by the discrimination she experiences.



It's especially important that Jeanne herself feels guilty when people discriminate against her. This shows that she's come to see internment as her own fault and to be ashamed of it, when the opposite is true. She also considers the burden of social acceptance to be hers alone, rather than expecting tolerance and open-mindedness from others.



Jeanne excels at school and extracurriculars, but she's still not satisfied and doesn't feel that she belongs. She decides she wants to join the Girl Scouts. By now, she's become friends with the girl who was surprised to hear her speak English—Radine also lives in Cabrillo Homes, and they often walk to school together. When Jeanne asks if she can join Radine's Girl Scout troop, Radine seems uneasy but promises to ask her mother, the troop leader. The next day, she politely tells Jeanne that she can't join. Jeanne too responds politely, saying that she understands.

Jeanne doesn't truly blame Radine—she's used to people's parents being suspicious of her. As if in compensation, Radine becomes extremely protective of Jeanne, always challenging people who give her hostile looks on the way to school. Radine's outspokenness shocks Jeanne, whose instinct is to avoid these looks.

Jeanne teaches Radine to baton twirl, which bring the two girls even closer together. Practicing every day, they soon master all the common stunts. In the fall, they try out to baton twirl for a Boy Scout band in the housing complex next to theirs. Jeanne even gets to be the lead majorette, and she and Radine get beautiful uniforms and white boots and hats. They perform at all the junior high assemblies and in parades each spring.

Jeanne explains that for her, it's easier to gain acceptance from men's organizations than women's. Like high school and college sororities, the Girl Scouts is run by mothers and quick to exclude Asians. On the other hand, the boys and fathers in the Boy Scout troop like to have Radine and Jeanne, who are both maturing early, at all their events. Jeanne is too young to understand that her acceptance is based on her sexuality or that this is really "another form of invisibility." However, she does know that her "femininity" is a good way to overcome anti-Asian sentiment.

Jeanne's brothers are proud of her new role in the parades, but Papa is not; he wants her to cultivate a more traditionally Japanese feminine demeanor and is always lecturing her about the perils of showing her legs and smiling too much.

Jeanne's quick friendship with Radine shows how racial prejudice can fade after meaningful contact between members of different groups. However, Radine's mother's intransigence is a reminder that prejudice against Asian Americans far outlasts the war and the official "tests" of their loyalty.



Although Jeanne is like Papa in many ways, her unwillingness to confront those who malign her is very different from Papa. In many ways, she copes with her feelings of shame as Mama does—by making sure her own behavior remains irreproachable.



Baton twirling buys Jeanne some limited social acceptance, so it's ironic that she learned this skill from another Japanese girl at Manzanar—it's an example of the cultural fluidity that characterizes her identity and which her Anglo-American peers refuse to recognize.



The trope of Asian-American women's sexual appeal to white men is another harmful stereotype preventing these women from feeling truly at home in American society. Yet it's only by buying into one stereotype—however unwittingly—that Jeanne can relieve the feelings of foreignness she suffers most of the time.



Papa's refusal to bow to cultural pressure is an important lesson to Jeanne; however, since he's relatively isolated from Anglo-American society, he's not appreciating or responding to the social pressures she faces.



However, Jeanne’s feeling influenced less and less by her family; she doesn’t like being in the crowded apartment, where the family eats in shifts and Mama is rarely home. Moreover, she’s lost respect for Papa—he’s never able to gain support for his housing cooperative idea, and a later scheme he and Woody develop for harvesting abalone also fails.

Woody has returned from Japan confident and mustached, bringing valuable gifts from Aunt Toyo. Papa is proud to see how much Woody has grown, but it also seems like he’s “shrinking” in comparison. Papa starts drinking again, a development which Jeanne witnesses in “sorrow and disgust.” She channels her shame at the family’s poverty, their strained home life, and the stigma she endures at school into her shame of Papa and her feeling that he is responsible for what is happening to him.

Papa refuses to come to the parades when Jeanne marches, but she’s even more upset when he does show up to events. One night the PTA hosts a dinner for all the students in the scholarship society, of whom Jeanne is one. Papa and Mama arrive completely overdressed. As each student is presented, the parents are also introduced and stand up to give a quick wave to the crowd. When it’s Jeanne’s turn, Papa performs a slow ceremonial bow. Everyone looks at him in uncomfortable silence except Mama, who is pleased with his dignity. Jeanne wants to scream—or, better, to become invisible.

CHAPTER 21: THE GIRL OF MY DREAMS

Jeanne says that she can trace her path over the next few years by her shifting relationship with Radine. They start off much the same: Radine’s family is even poorer than Jeanne’s and they both derive satisfaction from the attention they get from the Boy Scouts. In a junior high school full of immigrants and minorities, they are more or less “social equals.”

However, when the girls move to a majority white high school, everything changes. Radine is asked to join high school sororities, while Jeanne is excluded. Boys flirt with Jeanne but ask Radine to dances. In the school band, Radine graduates to song girl, a better position, but the band teacher has to have a special discussion with the school board and some parents before Jeanne can be a majorette. Even though she’s the most qualified candidate, he’s unsure “if it was allowable for an Asian to represent the high school in such a visible way.” Jeanne feels guilty that he has to go to such trouble for her, and she’s grateful when she finally gets the position, and vows to work twice as hard to prove she belongs.

Jeanne wants Papa to be a fatherly provider, fulfilling the role he occupied before the war and which society expects of men. Her expectations may seem unrealistic, but it’s true that Papa, absorbed in his own feelings of shame and hurt, is doing little to give his children a steady and stable home life.



While Woody’s development into a confident man is necessary and positive, it also highlights the decline of Papa and the rest of the Issei generation. Correspondingly, Jeanne’s increasing ability to navigate the world around her makes her aware of the skills Papa lacks and makes her mad at him for not being an attentive enough parent.



At this moment, the cultural differences between Jeanne and her parents are starkly clear. Mama and Papa are so ensconced within the Japanese-American community they don’t even know it’s not considered “normal” to bow in such a way. On the other hand, Jeanne is not only highly attuned to Anglo-American culture, she considers displays of her own “foreign” heritage as an embarrassment and cause for shame.



Radine and Jeanne come from similar socioeconomic situations, which emphasizes that it’s racial discrimination that’s responsible for their changing fortunes in high school.



It’s shocking that the band teacher has to court approval from individual parents so that Jeanne can be a majorette. Even though Jeanne has taken pains to do everything expected of an “American” teen and obscure traces of her heritage, the school hesitates to see her as a representative student. This shows that, in Anglo-American society, being “American” isn’t just about sharing a culture but about being part of the same race.



Jeanne isn't discouraged by discriminatory treatment but rather by witnessing the social acceptance Radine achieves so effortlessly. They have shared everything, but Jeanne's inability to fit in now drives them apart. While Jeanne has adopted "white American values," white America won't adopt her. Even if it did, that would pose problems at home—Jeanne knows that even if a white boy did ask her out, he would have to come to Cabrillo Homes and face Papa, who would shout and embarrass her.

Jeanne doesn't want to change herself or her heritage. She just craves the acceptance that Radine enjoys. Starting in high school and throughout her life, Jeanne has a recurring dream in which she sees a beautiful blonde girl walking through a room of other teenagers, admired and beloved by everyone; meanwhile, Jeanne watches the scene through a window, not envious but feeling that she can never have what this imaginary girl has.

Jeanne loses interest in school and starts cutting class and hanging out in the streets. She might have dropped out altogether, but eventually Papa decides to start farming again and moves the family away from Cabrillo Homes. Recently, he'd almost died while on an extended drinking binge; frightened out of his alcoholism, he's sobered up and decided to make a new start leasing land from a strawberry grower outside San Jose.

As a senior in high school, Jeanne starts over in San Jose; despite the stigma of her race, she has a certain amount of cache from the big-city high school she attended before. When it's time to elect the annual carnival queen, Jeanne's homeroom chooses her. She and fifteen other girls have to parade in front of the student body in a special pep rally. Jeanne knows she won't succeed if she dresses conventionally like the Caucasian girls, but she also doesn't want to look too Japanese; she decides on a sarong and wears her hair loose. When she walks into the gym, all the boys start howling and whistling, and she knows she's going to win.

The next day, while the ballots are being counted, Jeanne's friend Leonard Rodriguez runs up to her and says that he caught the teachers trying to rig the vote—they're afraid of what the parents say if they let a Japanese girl be carnival queen. Instead, they want to elect Lois Carson, whose father has donated a lot to the school.

In both her school and home life, Jeanne feels that she doesn't fit in. She's too Japanese at school, and too American for Papa's expectations. The lack of any social environment where she feels completely at home not only causes loneliness but makes Jeanne ashamed, as if not fitting in is a sign of personal failure.



Jeanne's dream poignantly evokes the sense of acceptance that she will never achieve, showing how deep her feelings of loneliness run. At the same time, it shows that for Jeanne—as for many teenagers—personal fulfillment is more about being liked by others than being satisfied with herself.



Papa's new start also means a new social start for Jeanne—potentially preventing her from dropping out of school. Even though father and daughter are often in conflict, this parallel between them emphasizes the similarity in their characters and their struggle to find a sense of belonging in a country that remains suspicious of their heritage.



When Jeanne was a majorette with the Boy Scouts, she didn't really understand that they had allowed her in because of her long legs. Now, she understands more explicitly that she can use her sexuality to be accepted in high school. While Jeanne is pleased with the results now, her later ambivalence about being carnival queen shows her knowledge that this isn't the complete and wholehearted sense of belonging she's craved.



Here, the teachers appear in a consummately undignified and even immature light. Through their behavior, the memoir argues that racism leads to the degeneration of personal character.



Jeanne affects nonchalance and pretends not to care about the outcome, reluctant to admit how much she wants to win. But Leonard is outraged, saying that she can't let this happen. He runs back into the office, where he threatens to expose the teachers to the student body and create a scandal. An hour later, the teachers announce that Jeanne has won the contest. She can't quite believe what has happened, but she forces herself to look "overjoyed."

That night, Jeanne has to admit to Papa that she has won the carnival queen contest. When she tells him about the outfit she wore, he becomes enraged and accuses her of "showing off your body." Mama tries to intercede, but Papa shouts her down, yelling about the importance of modestly and grotesquely imitating a girl's walk. He tells Jeanne that if she keeps acting like this no Japanese boy will want to marry her and she'll have no prospects except white boys—a grave insult. He even yells at Mama, saying that it's her fault Jeanne has no allegiance to traditional Japanese culture.

Furiously, Papa demands that Jeanne sign up for Japanese deportment classes at a nearby Buddhist church. He says he'll allow Jeanne to be carnival queen if she agrees to this. Jeanne takes the bargain, but she only lasts through ten lessons—the teacher sends her away because, due to her majorette training, she smiles too much.

Papa never mentions the carnival queen contest again, but Jeanne can sense he's reluctantly proud of her independence and ability to stand up for herself. Meanwhile, Mama is very proud and helps Jeanne pick out a dress to wear to the coronation ceremony. She craves acceptance just as much as Jeanne does.

Under Mama's influence, Jeanne decides on an elegant but modest ball gown—unlike the other girls in the ceremony, who are wearing strapless dresses. Although she used the sarong to win the contest, she wants to be "respectable" now.

On the night of the ceremony, the gym is decorated like a church, with a plywood throne and a carpet made out of bed sheets. Jeanne waits in the locker room with her four attendants. One of them is Lois Carson, who cattily compliments Jeanne on her "sedate" choice of dress. All the other girls agree. Lois tells Jeanne how much she loves Chinese food, and all the girls discuss recipes until it's time for them to take the stage.

Jeanne feels it would be a sign of shame to admit she wants to win, but this shame prevents her from advocating for herself—it's Leonard, with his understanding of the injustice uncomplicated by any feeling of personal guilt, who saves the day. Just as with Mama and Papa, Jeanne's feelings of shame prevent her from pursuing the things she truly wants.



It's understandable that Papa wants Jeanne to preserve his beloved culture, but he's not being the understanding parent she needs right now—by mocking female sexuality, he's reinforcing the impression Jeanne receives at school that her body is different from others and worthy of shame. In contrast, Mama is more concerned with Jeanne's well-being than Japanese culture—even if she equates well-being with social acceptance.



Jeanne's inability to complete the classes is a reminder that, even though she's not considered American enough by her classmates, she's too Americanized to participate fully in Japanese culture.



Mama's support is crucial for Jeanne at this moment; however, her emphasis on acceptance at all costs is part of the reason that Jeanne doesn't fight back when people slight her or feels too timid to combat the teachers over the election results.



Jeanne's desire to be "respectable" shows that she considers her body something shameful and not proper—unfortunately, this is a trope enforced both by Papa and the lewd whistles of boys at school.



Lois's blithe comments about Chinese food are almost funny, yet highlight the inability of Anglo-Americans to perceive Asians individually, or even distinguish between discrete cultures. That Jeanne declines to tell Lois off shows that she doesn't consider herself entitled to this recognition, even though she craves it.



Jeanne walks onto the carpet of sheets, feeling like a bride. There's a polite round of applause followed by a lot of murmuring; hot and disoriented, Jeanne imagines everyone is talking about her dress. The throne seems so far away, and her dress seems ridiculous. She wonders if Papa was right about the whole thing; after all, the teachers didn't even want her to be carnival queen. Jeanne thinks about all the kids who voted for her and resolves not to let them down, although "in a way I already had"—they voted for the girl in the daring sarong, not a sedate queen.

Jeanne reaches the throne and looks back at her attendants. She knows that after the ceremony Lois Carson will host a party at her house, but she won't be invited. She wants to cry, and she wishes she was ten years old. She feels that it's "too late," both to be a traditional dancer as Papa wants or to be a true carnival queen. She wants the ceremony over so that she can get out of this dress, but first she has to "follow this make-believe carpet to its plywood finale."

CHAPTER 22: TEN THOUSAND VOICES

Jeanne says that as she comes to comprehend the enormity of internment, she becomes deeply ashamed of "being a person guilty of something enormous enough to deserve that kind of treatment." In order to appease this sense of guilt, she tries to become someone "acceptable" to her accusers. But by the end of high school, she knows that trying to fit in this way is as unlikely and unsatisfying as trying to emulate her Aunt Toyo. She needs craft another kind of identity, but it takes her many years to do so.

Jeanne is the first person in her family to finish college, and to marry a non-Japanese person. Busy with her adult life, Manzanar gradually fades from her mind. Sometimes she talks about visiting the camp's ruins, but there's never enough time and Jeanne never has the courage. Sometimes she imagines she dreamed the whole experience—even her family rarely discusses this period.

Jeanne compares the family's inability to discuss internment to an episode she and Kiyoko underwent. Waiting for the bus shortly after their release from Manzanar, they pass an old woman who says, "why don't all you dirty Japs go back to Japan" and spits at them. Kiyoko and Jeanne walk home without discussing the incident and never speak of it to their family. Even though they both remember it, it's too painful to talk about.

Jeanne thought that this would be the best moment of high school, proving that she belongs among her peers. However, now she feels both undermined by those around her—thanks to Lois's comments—and unsure that her persona as "carnival queen" reflects her true self. The identity she's spent so much time crafting turns out not to be fulfilling.



Jeanne finally realizes that she can't gain personal satisfaction by trying to fulfill rigid ideals of what an American teenager should be. At the same time, this has been her goal for so long that relinquishing it is a deeply disorienting and disappointing sensation. Ultimately, her disillusionment now will help her accept and take pride in her complex cultural identity.



As she nears the end of high school, Jeanne finally begins to understand that her desire to fit in at all costs stems from a feeling of guilt that is completely unwarranted. At the same time, she knows she can't just retreat into Japanese culture, as her own identity can be encompassed neither by the culture of her heritage or her country.



Although these two milestones mark ways in which Jeanne's life differs from Papa's, they also reflect the independent spirit and disdain for convention that she inherits from him.



This experience is a kind of bond between Jeanne and Kiyoko, a moment of racism that they experienced together, unlike the high school discrimination Jeanne undergoes alone. However, because they are too ashamed to talk about it, it becomes something that drives the family apart, rather than bringing it together.



In 1972, thirty years after she first arrived there, Jeanne and her husband take their three children on a road trip to Manzanar. The highway is filled with hikers and bikers heading into the national parks, and Jeanne finds it hard to connect this scene with the isolation of Manzanar.

Almost nothing remains of Manzanar now. The barracks, guard towers, hospital, and parks are all gone. Only two gatehouses, a small graveyard, and some elms planted by internees remain. Standing in the wind among the ruins, Jeanne thinks of Mama, who has been dead for seven years. She believes in ghosts, and she feels that she's in the presence of everyone who died at Manzanar and hears the murmur of their voices.

Jeanne walks through the camp with her husband, identifying the foundations of different buildings. In some places, [rock](#) arrangements are still intact. Papa once told Jeanne that even in Fort Lincoln the Issei men gathered stones and sorted stones that are beautiful. Jeanne says that this impulse is a “characteristically Japanese” method of coping with harsh circumstances, and she's proud that the rock gardens have outlasted the guard towers. To her, each stone represents a family who had lived with dignity at Manzanar.

Jeanne comes across the remains of a park, but it soon fades into desolate weeds. At the beginning of the visit, Jeanne felt able to detach herself from Manzanar's history and view it objectively. Now, she feels her old connection to it more strongly. Crossing a firebreak where the camp used to hold talent shows, Jeanne remembers the glee club in which she sang and feels like a ten-year-old again, watching Papa and his friends smoking and playing board games.

Jeanne and her husband look for the remnants of Block 28. Soon, they smell the few pear trees that remain. The children join them, bored. They know the basic facts about internment, but they don't understand exactly what they're seeing.

Jeanne's husband walks the kids back to the car, and Jeanne watches her eleven-year-old daughter walk away. She was about the same age during her time at Manzanar, and it's because internment happened at such a critical point in her life, between childhood and adulthood, that everything else since has “referred back” to Manzanar. Until now, Jeanne hasn't been able to acknowledge that while “Papa's life ended” at camp, hers began there. She no longer wants to lose Manzanar or erase it from her memory. She just wants to say farewell.

The crowded highway represents the changes that time has wrought not only on Manzanar's physical setting, but the society that produced it and has now largely forgotten about it.



Even though Manzanar was a place of imprisonment, now it's a landmark where Jeanne can feel close to family members who are now gone. Her feelings of reconnection are a reminder of the many ways in which Manzanar was a safe and comforting place for Jeanne as a child.



Again, stones represent the melding of Japanese culture and American society—rock gardens are something the Issei bring from Japan in order to survive in America. The rock gardens' triumph over the guard towers shows Jeanne's confidence that cultural complexity and diversity is ultimately stronger than the racist impulses that led to Manzanar.



Jeanne is torn between viewing Manzanar as a passive spectator and as an erstwhile inhabitant. She's been able to build a satisfying adult life largely by detaching herself from Manzanar, but now she has to realize how central it's been to her identity all along.



In some ways, the children's indifference to Manzanar is positive—it shows how Jeanne's life has ultimately transcended internment. At the same time, it underlines the poignant distance between Jeanne's childhood and her current life.



Watching her daughter develop into an adolescent helps Jeanne understand her own journey—and perhaps feel more kindness towards herself than she did at the time. Because of Jeanne's age when she was interned, the experience of living at Manzanar and re-entering society is synonymous with coming of age—she grappled with cultural and personal identity simultaneously, and the two will always be intertwined.



This visit has helped Jeanne finally jettison the shame and guilt that she's always associated with internment. These days, she rarely feels out of place in America. However, earlier this year she read about anti-Japanese sentiment rising because of fear of the competitive Japanese economy. She doesn't truly feel threatened, but she also realizes that she'll always be prepared for the events of her childhood to repeat themselves.

Jeanne slowly walks back to the car, finding another collection of [stones](#) on the way. It could be the one that lay outside her own door, or it might not. She hears Mama's voice and almost smells the cork that Papa used to heat up and place against her back when it hurt.

Jeanne imagines an episode right before the family's departure from Manzanar, which she now realizes is Papa's "final outburst of defiance." Mama is packing when Papa announces his intention to buy a car. She says this is a crazy idea that they don't have money to buy a car, but he runs out of the house with his cane before she can protest more.

Late in the afternoon, Mama, Jeanne, Chizu, and May see Papa proudly returning with the new sedan. He smells like whiskey; laughing exuberantly and revving the engine and says he will give all the women a ride. Everyone reluctantly piles into the car and Papa drives the car as fast as possible, even though there are two flat tires and he's drunk. All the passengers are flopping around in the back, and Mama screams that Papa is going to wreck the car. Jeanne starts to cry and the others are shouting. Papa swerves into a street and drives past barracks where people are packing their things; as they pass one family heading towards the gates, Papa leans out the window and shouts merrily that they shouldn't miss their bus.

Papa pulls off the street and drives along some deserted barracks, eventually plunging through a firebreak. By this time, the women have stopped shouting. From this angle, Jeanne can't see the [barbed wire](#) fence; she knows she should be afraid, as she normally is when considering life outside the camp, but for once she feels Papa's contagious "craziness" and "liberation." She believes completely in his ability to shepherd the family safely into the future.

While Jeanne has largely overcome the discrimination that characterized her childhood, Manzanar has left her with an indelible awareness of the dark potential of racist sentiment left unchecked—the same awareness that the reader should derive from reading her memoir.



It's unimportant whether the rock garden actually belonged to Jeanne—she's able to relate to it whether it was built by Papa or another Issei, because of the communal experience all internees shared.



Here, Jeanne retells an episode from earlier in the memoir. At the time she was consumed with fear and reluctance to leave Manzanar. Now, she's able to perceive this moment in terms of its significance to her family life.



Right now, Papa seems to embody his worst characteristics—his capacity to make impractical decisions and his alcoholism. He's even exposing the family to danger by driving drunk. However, he's also reclaiming his pride by making sure the family doesn't have to depart Manzanar as they arrived, on a bus. Although this gesture doesn't mean much to anyone else, it shows Jeanne the importance of preserving dignity in one's own eyes, rather than striving for social acceptability.



Jeanne and the reader know that her life after Manzanar will be characterized by shame and alienation, especially with regard to Papa. Here, she's able to reclaim a moment of family togetherness and confidence from that painful narrative.



When he reaches the [barbed wire](#) fence, Papa turns sharply and drives back towards the bus stop, where he honks the horn and shouts, “No bus for us!” The people standing there are astonished but amused. Slowly, Papa drives back to Block 28, where the remainder of the packing awaits the family.

Empirically speaking, Jeanne’s family—and especially Papa—never completely recovers from internment. However, Jeanne’s retelling, and her decision to end on this moment, means that her evocation of their pride and strength is what emerges most strongly from the experience.



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