



# EAST of The ROCKIES

HIGH SCHOOL LEARNING KIT

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### SYNOPSIS

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

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

### RECOMMENDED AGE

12-17 years

### RECOMMENDED SUBJECTS

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

#### **Overarching inquiry question:**

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

### HISTORICAL CONTEXT

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

### PEARL HARBOR ATTACK

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

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### RELOCATION

#### STUDENT ACTIVITY

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

Rank the following in order of importance for you:

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



### LIFE IN THE CAMPS

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

#### STUDENT ACTIVITY

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

### CONTEXT

The separation of families was common because able-bodied men were sent to road camps to build highways in the interior of B.C. Shacks were hastily constructed and served as shared accommodations for several families. Living conditions were harsh and crowded; the intent was to segregate families from white communities. Those in the prairies were often housed in shelters intended for livestock. Schooling for students was interrupted, and faith groups stepped in to provide education for interned children. The province of British Columbia refused to provide education, despite its constitutional responsibility to do so. The savings to B.C. amounted to 13 million dollars over the period. The traditional family dynamic of Japanese families was shifted—children often had to act as language interpreters between their parents and camp officials. Many worked labour-intensive jobs with deplorable living conditions. Food shortages in internment camps resulted in food deliveries from the Red Cross.

### INTERMENT

#### STUDENT ACTIVITY

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

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

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### CONTEXT

The pressure to remove and incarcerate Japanese Canadians was initiated by B.C. politicians like Alderman Wilson in Vancouver, and by the federal government and politicians such as A.W. Neill, Howard Green, Senator Reid and others, through campaigns such as Keep BC White. The language used to describe the relocation of Japanese Canadians was deceptive. “Evacuation,” a word typically associated with taking people to safety, actually meant loss of homes, businesses, property and civil rights. The dispossession of Japanese-Canadian property, as noted by Landscapes of Injustice researchers, was the second-largest in Canada’s history.<sup>1</sup>

### STUDENT ACTIVITY

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

[nfb.ca/m/playlists/4e360519240d4b60ad6af44f1b1fe0f7/playback](https://nfb.ca/m/playlists/4e360519240d4b60ad6af44f1b1fe0f7/playback)

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

### EXILE AND DISPERSAL

### STUDENT ACTIVITY

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

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



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### CONTEXT

Once the war ended, internees were subject to a dispersal policy that was intended to destroy the Japanese-Canadian community. People were given two choices: either to move “East of the Rockies,” to the few areas that would welcome them, or be exiled to Japan. Postwar Japan was a devastated country; people were starving and cities had been destroyed by bombing. Of those interned in the camps, 75 percent were Canadian citizens, and many had either not lived in Japan for decades or would face barriers because of a lack of practical and language skills. Life in Japan presented a different type of discrimination because Japanese nationals perceived these émigrés as a burden and a source of shame. They had no means to restart their lives, since all their property and possessions had been confiscated. In the United States, Japanese Americans were allowed to return to their homes before the end of the war, and their properties had not been confiscated or sold.

### IMPACT ON FUTURE GENERATIONS

#### STUDENT ACTIVITY

##### Open question:

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

##### Extension question:

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

### CONTEXT

One of the impacts, especially of the dispersal, was cultural detachment, since family, friends and neighbours would never live in the same place again. Descendants of the Nisei (people born in North America whose parents were Japanese immigrants) speak English as their first language and are completely acculturated, identifying

with North American values, norms and expectations. One of the consequences of this history is not just the loss of Japanese communities, but also the loss of pride and comfort in identifying as Japanese Canadian through language, culture and tradition. This has resulted in the highest inter-marriage rate in Canada: over 90 percent. Today, though there are 120,000 Japanese Canadians, there is not a single Japantown in Canada, in contrast to the many Chinatowns that exist throughout the country and the three Japantowns in the U.S., for example. In the 1980s, the redress movement in Canada was spearheaded by Japanese Canadians who had been deeply affected by their treatment by the government. They sought compensation for the sale of their land and properties, and an acknowledgement that the government had suspended their rights as citizens. The government had also reneged on its promise to keep properties safe for their return, and instead sold lands and homes without the owners’ consent at below prewar market value. In 1988, Prime Minister Brian Mulroney acknowledged that the harm done to Japanese Canadians had been unjust, and a token compensation package was established, finally allowing people to officially right the wrong, grieve the past and build for the future.

#### STUDENT ACTIVITY

##### Primary Source Document Analysis

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

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

Japanese Canadians at train station, Slokan City, B.C.



DOWNLOAD FILE



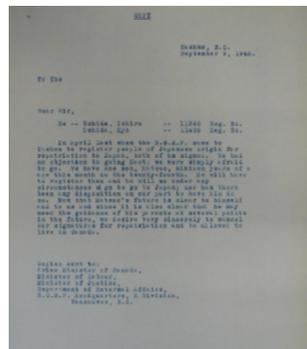
Living conditions for interned families



DOWNLOAD FILE



Letter from Japanese Canadians protesting deportation order



DOWNLOAD FILE



News about Pearl Harbor attack



DOWNLOAD FILE



News story regarding sale of property



DOWNLOAD FILE



Japanese National Registration card

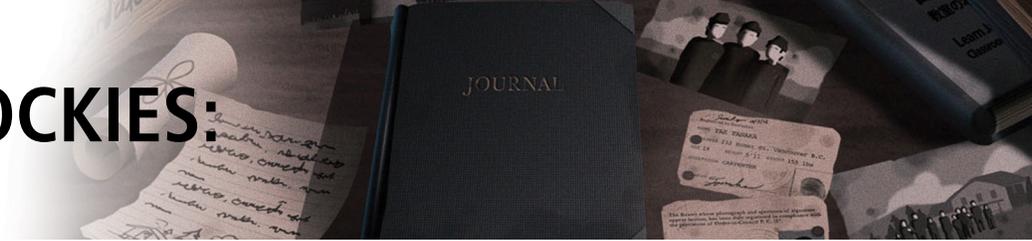


DOWNLOAD FILE



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### RELATED NFB TITLES FOR ADDITIONAL EXPLORATION

*Minoru: Memory of Exile*

[nfb.ca/film/minoru-memory-of-exile](http://nfb.ca/film/minoru-memory-of-exile)

*Enemy Alien*

[nfb.ca/film/enemy\\_alien](http://nfb.ca/film/enemy_alien)

*Sleeping Tigers: The Asahi Baseball Story*

[nfb.ca/film/sleeping\\_tigers\\_the\\_asahi\\_baseball\\_story](http://nfb.ca/film/sleeping_tigers_the_asahi_baseball_story)

*Force of Nature: The David Suzuki Movie*

[nfb.ca/film/force-of-nature-the-david-suzuki](http://nfb.ca/film/force-of-nature-the-david-suzuki)

### RESOURCES AND SUGGESTED READINGS

Kogawa, Joy. *Obasan*. Penguin Random House Canada, 2017.

Kogawa, Joy. *Itsuka*. Caitlin Press, 2018.

Omatsu, Maryka, and Jackie Bohez. "Swimming Upstream." YouTube, May 2, 2018, [youtube.com/watch](https://www.youtube.com/watch).

### CREDITS

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

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