

## Family F2



*Henry Sugimoto*  
*Family in Camp Room (Family in Jerome Camp), ca. 1942*  
*Oil on canvas*  
*Gift of Madeleine Sugimoto and Naomi Tagawa, Japanese American*  
*National Museum (92.97.88)*

### BACKGROUND

Yoshiko Uchida based *Journey to Topaz* on the experiences of her own family during World War II. Like the main character Yuki Sakane, Uchida grew up in a close-knit family, typical of Japanese American families headed by *Issei* or immigrant parents.

Henry Sugimoto based his documentary paintings on the experiences of his family at Fresno Assembly Center in California and at Jerome and Rohwer Relocation Centers in southeast Arkansas.

### FAMILY IN CAMP JEROME

Print an image of the *Family in Camp Room* from the Japanese American National Museum website. Look closely at the painting which Sugimoto painted with a limited supplies which he sneaked into the camps with him: three brushes, a few tubes of paint, and a small bottle of turpentine. He painted on the heavy cotton that belongings had been wrapped in for the forced relocation to Arkansas and on sheets and pillow cases that were given to him, some by poet John Gould Fletcher who, along with his wife writer Charlie May Simon, became friends with the artist.

For a while Sugimoto painted in secret, fearful of what the authorities might do to him, but later was able to paint in the open. The Jerome Center director even shared his art with

groups outside the camp and his work was exhibited in a one-man show at Hendrix College in Conway, Arkansas in February 1944 that he and his wife Susie were allowed to attend.

In this painting, the artist has pictured a family of four in their cramped barrack apartment. The pot-bellied stove backed by a brick wall is like the wood-burning stoves that heated the barracks at Jerome and Rohwer. On top of the stove is a teapot of hot water just as Uchida describes in her book.

The mom appears to be knitting after her housekeeping chores are finished for the day as indicated by the broom leaning against the wall. The dad is reading a paper and the children are drawing and reading at their little table. The War Relocation Authority only provided army cots for each person, so inmates created their own furniture, like the bench, table, and shelving pictured here, from scrap wood.

On the shelf to the right Sugimoto has included several important items. The American flag, which the artist included in several paintings, declares his support of his adopted country which would not grant Japanese immigrants citizenship until the Walter-McCarran bill was passed in 1952. There are also a clock and a framed photograph, possibly of a loved one on active duty in the all-*Nisei* unit, the 442<sup>nd</sup> Regimental Combat Team. There is also a sculptural vase, called *kobu*, handmade from wood in craft class. The vase contains flowers that are possibly handmade of paper in another popular class organized and taught by the inmates to help fight boredom in the camps.

#### ACTIVITY

Look at the image of *Family in Camp Room* available online. (See **Resources**.) Talk about it. What does the title reveal? Who is in the picture? What are they doing? What else is in this intimate picture of a family? What colors do you see? Shapes? Patterns? Now put the print away.

Read the journal entry about your family. Who is in your family? What do you like to do together? What does your home look like inside? Or what does it look like outside?

In your journal or on heavy weight paper (about 10 x 12 in.), use permanent marker to draw your own picture of your family doing something together inside or outside your home. Is it daytime or nighttime? Is it a sunny day or a cloudy or rainy or snowy day? Color the drawing with markers, colored pencils, crayons, or watercolors. How is your work like Sugimoto's? How is it different? Why is Henry Sugimoto's art important? Date your work.

*Fourth Grade Arts Standards:* A.1.1, A.1.2, A.1.3, A.1.4, A.1.6, A.1.7; A.2.1, A.2.2, A.2.3, A.2.5, A.2.6, A.2.7, A.2.8; A.3.1, A.3.3, A.3.5, A.3.6, A.3.7, A.3.9.

*Fifth Grade Visual Arts Standards:* A.1.2, A.1.3, A.1.4, A.1.5, A.1.7, A.1.8, A.1.9, A.1.10, A.1.11; A.2.1, A.2.2, A.2.4, A.2.5, A.2.6, A.2.7; A.3.1, A.3.3, A.3.5, A.3.9.