

## Journey F5



*Henry Sugimoto*  
*Arrival at Camp Jerome, 1943*  
*Hendrix College*

### BACKGROUND

*Frosty night*  
*listening to rumbling train*  
*we have come a long way*  
- Senbinshi Takaoka, Rohwer  
*May Sky* (167)

Trains were a major source of transportation during World War II. Pulled mostly by steam engines, they carried American troops, civilians, and freight. They also moved more than 110,000 Japanese Americans from the West Coast inland to ten concentration camps, including Jerome and Rohwer Relocation Camps located in the Arkansas Delta.

### ARRIVAL AT CAMP JEROME

This painting is one of at least three works that document the arrival of Henry Sugimoto's family at Jerome in October 1942. All three works portray the fatigue and disappointment the family felt when they arrived after the long train trip from Fresno only to find

that the barracks were not yet ready and they must sleep on a blanket spread out on the floor of a warehouse.

Because Sugimoto had limited materials, he used a dry brush technique in a palette of gray, brown, rose, blue, and green. The composition is dominated by three large figures: a mother with her arms about her child who clutches her doll and the father curled up beside them. Sugimoto gives us clues to the father's occupation as an artist: a roll of canvas labeled and leaning against a crate labeled with the word "PAINTING"; a copy of *Art News* clutched in his arms; the black beret that Sugimoto wore to identify himself as an artist.

Around the family are two suitcases, a trunk, and tied bundles, presumably wrapped in heavy canvas. The cloth, later collected from other inmates by Sugimoto's wife Susie, became his paint surfaces along with pillow cases and sheets, some given to him by John Gould Fletcher.

In the background is an open window, a compositional device the artist uses over and over. The viewer's eye is led beyond the confines of the foreground to another space in camp. Sometimes it is exterior space; sometimes it is an interior. Always there are elements of

concentration camp life, context clues for the viewer. In *Arrival at Camp Jerome*, the artist has included the steam engine of a train that transported the Japanese Americans to Arkansas. In front of the train are a camp building and the low barbed wire fence. Because the camp was surrounded by swamp and poisonous snakes including rattlesnakes, copperheads, and water moccasins, there was no need for a taller fence.

Sculptor Ruth Asawa included a departure scene in her *Japanese American Internment Memorial* which chronicles the Japanese American experience from immigration to redress. The artist sculpted the relief in baker's clay which was allowed to dry before it was cast in bronze.

The scene is based on Asawa's experience of being transported with her family to Rohwer Relocation Center by train when she was a teenager. Train cars swoop down the tracks toward a distant point. At the far end is the waiting steam engine, its telltale smoke curling back toward the viewer. A military policeman stands rigidly at attention holding his rifle with fixed bayonet to his side. He towers over the Japanese Americans boarding the



Photo by Isago Isao Tanaka  
Ruth Asawa  
*Japanese American Internment Memorial*  
(detail), 1994  
Bronze  
Robert Peckham Federal Building  
San Jose, California

train in a real and a figurative sense. Another M. P. stands to the right with his rifle held in a ready position.

Asawa recalls that on the trip to Arkansas the shades had to be drawn over the train windows during the day but could be put up at night. She remembers seeing the beauty of the Arizona desert by moonlight. Yoshiko Uchida recounts a similar experience of seeing the Great Salt Lake “shimmering in white moonlight . . . an almost magical sight.” (*Journey to Topaz* 104)

### ACTIVITY

Trains were and still are a familiar sight and sound in the Arkansas landscape. Their images appear in the work of internee artists and poets alike, a symbol of their long journey. Set up a toy train on the floor. Draw it at eye level with Sharpies on long paper measuring about 6 x 15 inches.

*Fourth Grade Visual Arts Standards:* A.1.1, A.1.2, A.1.3, A.1.7, A.1.9; 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.3.4, A.3.5, A.3.6, A.3.9.

*Fifth Grade Arts Standards:* A.1.1, A.1.2, A.1.5, A.1.7, A.1.8; A.2.1, A.2.2, A.2.3, A.2.4, A.2.5, A.2.6; A.3.1, A.3.4, A.3.5, A.3.6, A.3.8, A.3.9.