

Camp Experience E7

TEACHER BACKGROUND

The camp experience had many similarities regardless of the location. The camps were in desolate areas, and in Arkansas the camps were located in rural swamplands. The inmates had to adjust to a bleak lifestyle that included barrack quarters, lack of privacy, and standing in line for the mess hall, bathroom, and laundry. The Issei and Nisei did what they could to endure the hardships and make their barracks a home.

MATERIALS

Excerpts from *Seven Times Down, Eight Times Up: The Mary Tsukamoto Story* by Rosemary Fajen and excerpts from “My Autobiography” by Lillian Fujimoto.

PROCEDURE

1. Have students read the Student Readings Sheet or read selected excerpts aloud to the class.
2. As a class, brainstorm a list of daily activities from the camp on the board. Such activities might include eating at the mess hall, standing in line cafeteria style for their food, standing in line for the latrine, going to school, participating in recreational activities after school, living in their barrack room, and explaining their evening and bedtime routine. They could close with a comparison between their life in Jerome, Arkansas and their life in camp at Fresno, California or a comparison between their camp life and life in Stockton, CA before December 7th.
3. Have the students pretend that they are a fifth grader in the Jerome camp and write a journal entry entitled “A DAY IN JEROME.” They can use some of the daily activities the class has brainstormed to get them going.

Camp Experience E7 Student Readings Sheet

Excerpts from *Seven Times Down, Eight Times Up: The Mary Tsukamoto Story* by Rosemary Fajen

The military police came and pulled down all of the blinds on the windows so that people could not see in. They did not want anyone to see that the passengers inside were Japanese being taken to an unknown destiny... They arrived that sad day at the gates of what was to be their new home—the Fresno Relocation Camp...it was here they would enter through the prison gates to their new lives... They were now called internees. Mary looked up. She saw a tall watchtower with a guard posted inside with a rifle... She looked around at the barbed wire fence surrounding the entire camp. As they walked through the camp entrance, the gates closed behind them with a thud that Mary would never forget...

—pp. 30-31

(Mary) tried to bring order into their small twenty by twenty-five foot room... There were six of them in the small room. The tar paper roofs dripped onto their coats. The pine walls separating their room from the next family's were thin. There were gaps and knotholes destroying their privacy. There were open walls at the top and no ceilings. They could hear the voices through the walls... Their packing crates became tables and cupboards. Poles were found and covered with bedspreads for closets. Sheets were strung across the tiny room allowing everyone their own space.... They would do what they must to survive... Meals at the camp were a problem...the first meal that awaited them was a smelly mutton stew with globs of jello melting in it. (Mary) was not ready for the sight of the bathrooms that awaited her. The walls were screened and there was no privacy. The toilets were back-to-back and so bodies were almost touching... There were only two latrines for the entire camp...

—p. 33

Five months later another shock came to the camp. They were to be moved again! "We feel like our country's throw-a-ways," they said. This time they were to move to a permanent camp that had just been built in Arkansas. "We know nothing of the life there..."

The five day journey to Arkansas by train was hard. The two thousand mile trip left the five thousand passengers on board tired and sick. The first day there was no food or water to be had. The rest of the journey in the dark, shuttered cars was draining. Finally Arkansas greeted them—Jerome Relocation Camp.

—p. 39

In spite of the difficult move, Mary and Al were thankful to have a room for just the three of them...it was just a sixteen by twenty foot room. The wooden floor was an improvement over Fresno. So were the good wood ceilings and there were no holes in the walls.

—p. 40

...the townspeople who lived in Denson, Arkansas, a nearby town, were in shock... They became frightened. "The enemy is invading!" And once more, the prejudice grew deeper.

—p. 41

The first few days at Jerome were a disaster. The drinking water was not good and so everyone got sick. The latrines were most in demand. But...they now had flush toilets! ...there was little privacy here. Mary and Al worked hard to turn their little room into the Tsukamoto home... They divided it into a bedroom area and a living room. Al built tables, shelves, and even a smaller dresser for Marielle (their daughter). Mary made curtains, table clothes and bed covers. ...their quiet life here was better than their life at Fresno. Winter in the Arkansas camp was much different than in California. The colder weather meant it would be harder to keep warm. For fuel the men had to go to the nearby forest area to chop down trees. Then they had to carry it back to camp...

—p. 41

Mary worked hard in the camp. She was a born leader. ...Al and Mary...worked in the recreational groups, in clubs and organizations, and at the two schools. ...there was something for everyone. Arts and crafts in the camp flourished. People painted, did needle work, made dolls, carved wood, and created silk art... ...Mary felt her heart grow with pride. She had been trying so hard to be an American, she had forgotten the beauty of her ancestors.

—pp. 45-46

Excerpts from " My Autobiography" by Lillian Fujimoto

Stockton, the town with a population of about 55,000 at the present, had a new member to add to its community on July 12, 1927. Yes, that was I.

I have no sisters nor brothers, so I have grown up being the only child.

I took my first trip when I was three years old while living on 21 S. Madison Street. Mother took me to Japan for six months. Managing somehow to remember, I returned home and told Dad all about the things which had attracted me.

You see, Dad was an Insurance Agent working for the Calif. Western State Life Insurance Company in Stockton until the evacuation. He remained at home while we were abroad. Dad's boss still writes and says that his job will be waiting for him when he returns.

He (dad) speaks and writes English while Mom can only speak and write Japanese with little efficiency in understanding English.

After our return [from Japan], Dad bought me one of my favorite childhood toys, a golf set. You see, he plays golf a great deal, and I guess it just runs in my blood. Very often during the weekends, I used to go with him to various country clubs in California.

When I was five, I attended the Monroe kindergarten with a lot of other youngsters. Some of them are still in my classes today.

During that same summer in 1932, Dad bought us a nice house on 36 Delhi Avenue which was about one mile from town. It had seven rooms, a medium fire-place in the parlor, two good-sized lawns, gardens, and a doghouse for Fuji, our favorite dog. Our home contained nearly everything to make a family of three happy. Oh, yes, those were the days.

Our house was located near the Municipal Plunge, the park, and the tennis courts, so often on Sundays after coming home from Church (Buddhist), I used to go and play tennis.

My adulthood athletic equipment included a basketball, a punching-ball, a tennis racket, skates, and a bicycle.

"Plink, plink, plink." That's what you'd hear in 1935 over at our place. That's right, I started taking piano lessons. My, those first few years were boresome (sic), but later, things changed. The following month of the war, January in 1942, is when I had to discontinue with my lessons. The present conditions forced me to.

Since we lived far from the town where nearly all of my Japanese Nisei chums were, I missed out on some of the gaiety. However, I belonged to several clubs. Dad, of course, couldn't drive me back and forth in his car all the time, but he always took me to basketball practice nights.

Enjoying a great many things, I like sports, movies, socials, and the radio as my favorites. In High School, I enjoyed Italian, Gym, history, and English. Although I'm taking a fourth course in mathematics, I won't say I like it or dislike it. Anyway, a great thing happened to me when I was grade 9A. I got on the Honorship Roll!

I looked forward to summer vacations as everyone does. During those holidays, I spent weeks in the mountains, on the beach, and in the cities. On the hot, sultry days, I managed to bake cakes. My first lessons were discouraging, but as time went on, the cakes become eatable.

So-- you can see that everything was going along smoothly until the war broke out and until the evacuation began in May.

I didn't think much of going to the Stockton Assembly Center, but when we were informed of going to Arkansas, I looked forward with great pleasure. You know, one hasn't much chance of traveling such great distances during wartime. I enjoyed the endless panorama of beauty and interest during the trip, but the deserts became slightly boring.

I'm looking forward to going to college either during our stay or after we get out, but whatever the case may be, I hope to return to Stockton. However, what the future holds, no one knows.