

TWO DAYS AND ONE SUITCASE Suggestions for Adult Discussion

- The three-year imprisonment of 120,000 Americans of Japanese descent was a well-kept secret at the time and remained so for many more years. When did you first learn about this? What did you know about this piece of history prior to reading the book?
- What is an experience in your life that is in some way similar, or familiar emotionally, to what the people in the camps experienced?
- We will use the terms “othering” and “belonging” to mean: the situation in which some people or groups are defined and labeled as not fitting in within a larger social group. This can influence how some people perceive and treat people in the “out-group.”
- When do Helen, Tomi, or others in the book experience othering?
- Who worked to create belonging? What did they do?
- Watch this brief video in which a woman named Matsu Homma recalls her encounter with a young US soldier who sincerely asks her if she is a human being. Discuss the dangers of “othering.” <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-InTumn3iU>
- During this period, many people believed that the incarceration of Japanese Americans was justified because of the fear engendered by the war and the attack on Pearl Harbor, but history shows that an anti-Japanese American attitude had been held and encouraged for years prior to the attack. When in your lifetime has a group of people had their civil or human rights threatened because of some other groups’ fears?
- Can one wrong set the scene for later injustices: did the incarceration of Japanese Americans create a tolerance, acceptance, or a numbness toward abuse of human rights in subsequent injustices such as McCarthyism in the 1950s and, more recently, Islamophobia?
- Pages 202-205: Discuss how the Chinese Exclusion Act of 1882 later affected Japanese immigrants to the United States. Also see: https://encyclopedia.densho.org/Chinese_Exclusion_Act/
- Page 104: What might have been the consequences of renouncing citizenship?
- Where were the considerations each family had to make--for the generation not able to get citizenship and for their children and grandchildren who had citizenship?
- Consider your own ancestors’ story: how did your family’s story unfold in the United States? How did they benefit from having immigrated? The immigrant generation from Japan was not allowed to become citizens. If your immigrant ancestors were able to obtain US

Citizenship, imagine what would have happened to them if they had not been able to. How would that have affected their lives? How might restrictions placed on them affect you now?

- If you are, or have parented a child, what was your reaction to Helen's parents' decisions at the time of this story? Were the scenes of Helen having talks with her parents meaningful to you as a parent?

Evaluate the book by using the exercise called "The Rose, the Thorn and the Bud."

- Where in the story did you find buds, an example of growth or improvement for a character? Did you find yourself hoping for something positive to result from you having read this book?
- Where in the story did you find thorns, when an action or character disappointed, angered or left you uncomfortable? Did you reflect on situations in your life or in the world in general that reminded you of difficult issues in the story?
- Where did you find roses, the parts that made you laugh, love or hope? Did you find examples of courage, of compassion?