

TWO DAYS AND ONE SUITCASE Resources for Discussion With Grades 3-8

Resources written by Anne E. Neuberger for discussion with grades 3-8 and adults based on TWO DAYS AND ONE SUITCASE using an excerpt from the book for discussion and activities.

Excerpt #1 from Two Days and One Suitcase (See Part 5: From Relocation to Segregation, p 121.)

Helen and her family are in Tule Lake Segregation Center in northern California. Helen quickly makes friends, and now she and a girl named Tomiko are going to Helen's housing unit after school to study together.

It was snowing as Tomiko and I hurried from the guardhouse. Once again, I signed under the gaze of a silent soldier holding a gun and wondered how Tomi felt about this rule.

We were going to study together at my quarters. There was a big geography test the next day. As we walked, she asked me about my family.

"I am the youngest," I said. "Larry is two years older than me, and Mari is four years older. Mari is courageous and will do all sorts of gutsy things if it means helping someone. Larry is quieter, but he is always asking questions. He gets angry when he sees things that are wrong and nobody is doing things about it."

Tomi giggled a little at my description. Snowflakes settled onto her black hair, like tiny jewels.

"I'm also the third child, but I am not the youngest—I have a little brother too. The two older than me are also brothers," Tomi said as we hurried along.

"Yosh is in the army. We think he is in Italy. He is in the 442nd Regimental Combat Team. All the soldiers are Japanese-Americans. They are getting famous for how brave they are."

I listened. I didn't know much about this unique unit.

"They have more medals and awards than any other in the army!" Tomi said proudly. "Of course we worry about Yosh a lot, too."

"And your other older brother?"

"Yes, Jiro. He is just a year younger than Yosh. He's here with us. Do you know about the questionnaire that everyone has to fill out? The one asking about loyalty?"

I nodded. My nose was getting cold and I was anxious to reach our quarters.

But Tomiko seemed lost in her thoughts. “Jiro has been going through agonies trying to decide whether or not to sign the loyalty oath. He is loyal and loves this country, but he is very angry about what is happening to our family.”

I started to say we were almost to my barracks but she was so focused on her concerns, she went on, “He talks about how they have locked up our obaa-san and our baby brother. And me, his little sister. We are in this prison for no reason that makes any sense.

“Jiro says he has ‘to make a statement against this evil injustice and all the harm it has caused,’” she said. “I know he respects what Yosh has chosen to do, but Jiro feels really strongly about this. Helen, I am worried about him too, in a different way.”

We ran up the steps and into the warmth of our barracks. With some hot chocolate Mari had made for us, we settled down to study.

The names of the countries in Europe were on the test. The teacher had given us a blank map for us to fill out.

“Italy,” Tomi said, writing that in the correct space on her map.

“The one that looks like a boot,” I said.

“The one where Yosh is,” she said, wistfully.

I tried to concentrate on my map but kept thinking how crazy it was that Tomi could name all those countries but couldn’t go beyond the fence here.

And what was even crazier was that her brother was in one of them, fighting for the country that was keeping his family in prison. [end]

Discussion Suggestions

Use these questions for group or family discussions, for writing journal reflections, or making comparisons.

Learning From the Excerpt

The situation that day: Helen and her friend Tomiko were going to study together in Helen’s housing unit. It was much bigger than Tomomi’s family unit. Before Tomiko could go to Helen’s place, they had to go to a guard tower where Helen signed a paper saying Tomiko was visiting her. A soldier with a gun stood near them as they signed.

Helen was not happy about this. Of course she was uncomfortable with the soldier holding a gun. In addition, she did not like that she, a twelve-year-old, had to sign for Tomiko coming to

her place. Even worse, if Helen wanted to visit Tomiko, no one had to sign for Helen. She could go to her friends' places without permission.

- Why do you think Helen had more freedom than Tomiko?
- How do you think Tomiko felt about Helen signing for her? How would you feel if you were Tomiko in this situation?
- How would you feel if you were Helen?
- What Tomi and Helen experienced can be called "white privilege." Have you experienced this in some way? Explain.
- Imagine you were suddenly forced to leave your home and were now living in a place enclosed by a barbed wire. You could not leave this area. You did not know how long you would be there. You did not know what would happen when you were allowed to leave. Consider what this experience might be. Write about it as if you are in one of the camps.
- Helen was used to moving to unusual places because her family had lived on numerous army bases during World War II. She was not upset when her parents chose not to return to their home, but to go to the camps instead. However, she was shocked at what this new experience was. How do you think you would react to Helen's circumstances and her parents' choices?

The housing situation: Helen lived in a barracks apartment with three bedrooms, a kitchen/living room and bathroom. Tomiko lived in a one-room barracks apartment, with no running water, bathroom, or kitchen. A typical unit was 16×20 feet.

- If possible, measure this space out in your home. Both Helen and Tomiko's parents were with them; Tomiko's grandparents were also with her family. Look at the excerpt.
- How many family members were living in Helen's quarters?
- How many live in Tomiko's quarters?
- Look at the space you have measured and imagine your family living and sleeping in that space. Compare it with the space you have. Write a paragraph about this.
- Explain the information about the space Tomiko lived in to your family. Share what you wrote with them and ask them to discuss and imagine how they think they would have coped with this situation.

- Why do you think Helen’s family was given the larger and more comfortable apartment?
- Do you think discrimination had something to do with this? Why or why not?

The difficulties faced by Tomiko’s brothers: During World War II, most young men in the United States had to make difficult choices. Joining the military almost certainly meant that they would end up in extremely dangerous and difficult circumstances. However, this was a vast war, and most families saw a need for their sons to fight. Both Yosh and Jiro were the age when young men had to make these choices.

However, at the beginning of World War II, Tomiko’s brothers would not have been allowed to join the military! They were considered “enemy aliens,” even though they were born in the United States and were citizens. In 1943, that was changed, and the 442nd Regiment was formed for Americans of Japanese ancestry. They were not allowed to fight in any other regiment. Yosh joined the army, but because of the loyalty oath, he and Jiro had additional things to think about.

- What was Jiro thinking about in making his decision?
- What was he feeling?
- Consider the idea of Yosh fighting for freedom with the army when his family was in prison just because they were Japanese-Americans. What do you think and feel about this?
- Do you think dividing soldiers by their ethnicity is a good or bad idea?
- The “Loyalty Oath” caused Jiro and countless others huge problems. To learn about it, see Part 4 and the bibliography in TWO DAYS AND ONE SUITCASE.

Excerpt #2 from Two Days and One Suitcase (See Part 3: Camp Amache, Colorado, page 46.)

The Hannan family went to the town nearest Camp Amache soon after they had arrived. While her mother, brother and sister bought groceries, Helen went with her father to the bank.

“Good morning,” Dad greeted the bank teller. “I’d like to open an account, please.”

Given that bank accounts are a big part of a bank’s business, we didn’t expect any problems.

The teller wore a dark blue dress with tiny yellow flowers on it. I admired the lace collar. She looked up over her glasses and studied first Dad and then me.

“Are you new in town?” she asked.

I felt funny. Her voice held no friendliness.

“Yes,” Dad answered breezily. “Just got here, and need to have a bank account!”

I thought he sounded pleasant and friendly, but she looked at him with narrowed eyes.

“Are you working at that camp?” she asked, her voice low.

I felt a sort of tightness in my stomach. Dad, however, remained relaxed.

“Yes, at the relocation center.”

“We don’t give accounts to people from the camp.” Her voice was flat.

“Well, everyone needs to have a bank account, and this is the only bank in town,” Dad said. “I hope you will accommodate me.”

“We don’t give accounts to people from the camp,” she repeated in the same flat voice but louder. This time I saw a look in her eyes that said, “Don’t even try to ask again.”

A door behind her opened up and a man stepped out from what was probably his office. “Is there a problem, Miss Morgan?” he asked.

Quickly Dad spoke, directing his words to the man. “We are here to open an account.”

“He’s from the camp,” Miss Morgan said.

“We don’t give accounts to people from the camp,” the man said.

Had they practiced saying that?

Dad stood there silently for a moment, just looking at the man.

I held my breath.

“You are in the banking business, correct?” Dad said. His voice remained level.

“We don’t want your business,” Miss Morgan said.

Dad did not move right away. I think he was trying to decide what to do next. But the man had no problems in deciding.

He came around the counter and headed to the door. He opened it and stood aside of it, waiting for us to leave.

“Good day to you, sir,” he said. Clearly, we were being dismissed.

Dad gave me a quick look as if to say, “Just follow me.”

We walked out of that bank, never to return. [end]

Discussion Suggestions

Use these questions for group or family discussions, for writing journal reflections, or making comparisons.

Learning From the Excerpt

The situation that day: The Hannans were new to the area and needed to find places to shop, bank, etc. Setting up an account at the bank should have been a routine matter, but instead they were unable to so do.

- Why do you think the bank staff treated Helen and her father this way?
- How do you think Helen felt when she first walked into the bank? How and why did her feelings change?
- List the feelings you think Helen had during her time in the bank.
- Imagine you are Helen’s father. How would you have responded to the bank’s staff’s behavior?
- Now imagine what the bank people might have said or done if one of the Japanese-American children from the camp had gone into the bank that day. Write or tell someone how you would feel if you were in this situation.
- Have you ever experienced this kind of treatment? If so, describe the situation, and how you feel about it.
- Now imagine you were one of the people working at the bank. What would you be thinking?
- What would you be feeling? How did you come to feel that way?
- How did you feel trying to think like the bank people?