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Focus on Friendship or Fights for Civil Rights? Teaching the Difficult History of Japanese American Incarceration through The Bracelet

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Focus on Friendship or Fights for Civil Rights? Teaching the Difficult History of Japanese American Incarceration through The Bracelet

Abstract

In regard to the imprisonment of 120,000 Japanese and Japanese Americans after the bombing of Pearl Harbor, euphemisms abound. The most popular of these is the term “internment” in reference to the events initiated by the War Relocation Authority as a result of Executive Order 9066. However, as Daniels (2005) and other Asian Americanists have noted, internment is a legal process designed for prisoners of war and civilian enemy nationals. As two-thirds of those who were imprisoned as a result of EO 9066 were U.S. citizens, these individuals by definition do not fall under the legal designation of internment and their imprisonment without due process was a violation of their civil rights. Therefore I use incarceration, rather than internment, for its legal accuracy and apt description of what happened to Japanese and Japanese Americans on the West Coast during World War II. Similarly, I avoid euphemistic language, such as relocation and evacuation, which deliberately evades the trauma, hardship, and lack of due process faced by Japanese and Japanese Americans during this time period.

Disciplines

Bilingual, Multilingual, and Multicultural Education | Early Childhood Education | Educational Assessment, Evaluation, and Research | Japanese Studies

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Cover Page Footnote

1. In regard to the imprisonment of 120,000 Japanese and Japanese Americans after the bombing of Pearl Harbor, euphemisms abound. The most popular of these is the term “internment” in reference to the events initiated by the War Relocation Authority as a result of Executive Order 9066. However, as Daniels (2005) and other Asian Americanists have noted, internment is a legal process designed for prisoners of war and civilian enemy nationals. As two-thirds of those who were imprisoned as a result of EO 9066 were U.S. citizens, these individuals by definition do not fall under the legal designation of internment and their imprisonment without due process was a violation of their civil rights. Therefore I use incarceration, rather than internment, for its legal accuracy and apt description of what happened to Japanese and Japanese Americans on the West Coast during World War II. Similarly, I avoid euphemistic language, such as relocation and evacuation, which deliberately evades the trauma, hardship, and lack of due process faced by Japanese and Japanese Americans during this time period. 2. All names are pseudonyms

Focus on Friendship or Fights for Civil Rights? Teaching the Difficult History of Japanese American Incarceration through *The Bracelet*

Noreen N. Rodríguez

“They’re Japanese American,” Luisa¹ stated confidently. Alex volunteered, “They look Japanese but they were born in America!” Paty added, “They’re different.” Victor looked directly at the teacher. “It’s like you, Miss. You was born in China?” he asked tentatively.

“Actually, I was born here,” Ms. Ye said gently. “I was born in Texas.”

Victor nodded vigorously. “Yeah! You’re Chinese and you was born in America.”

Ms. Ye explained, “I would consider myself Chinese American.”

This interaction during a read-aloud about Japanese American incarceration in Ms. Ye’s second-grade classroom reveals how young learners rarely have opportunities to understand what it means to be Asian American. In schools and society, race is generally presented through a Black/White binary, and Asian American history is largely absent in P-12 schooling and textbooks. The two Asian American historical events that are most often featured in secondary curricula are Chinese American immigration during the 1800s (during the gold rush, to build the transcontinental railroad, and/or the Chinese Exclusion Act in 1882) and Japanese American incarceration during World War II (An, 2016). Similarly, Asian American children’s literature overwhelmingly focuses on immigration (albeit across many ethnicities and into the contemporary period) and Japanese American incarceration.

The substantial body of children’s literature on Japanese American incarceration offers early childhood and elementary educators a unique opportunity to introduce the topic to young learners. In particular, these stories provide narratives that depict civil rights injustices beyond the Black and White binary. However, the details of Japanese American incarceration are complex, often taught superficially if at all, and constitute what historians and social studies educators refer to as “difficult history.”

Japanese American Incarceration as Difficult History

Gross and Terra (2018) propose five criteria that explore what makes difficult histories so difficult to teach and learn: (1) they are central to a nation’s history; (2) they tend to refute widely accepted versions of the past or national values; (3) they connect with current questions or problems; (4) they often involve collective or state-sanctioned violence; and (5) partly due to the previous four conditions, they create disequilibria that may require people to change their assumptions or beliefs.

Japanese American incarceration was a major domestic aspect of U.S. involvement in World War II that, at the time, was purportedly executed in the name of national security. At the behest of the U.S. government, 120,000 Japanese and Japanese Americans living on the West Coast were forcibly removed from their

1 All names are pseudonyms.

homes, with their assets frozen, and required by law to live in isolated prison camps surrounded by barbed wire and armed guards, unable to leave of their own accord and without due process.

Recently, the Trump administration used executive order 9066 (EO 9066), issued in response to the bombing of Pearl Harbor, as precedent for an Executive Order Trump referred to as a Muslim Ban. These facts are disequilibria-inducing in light of the Commission on Wartime Relocation and Internment of Civilians study (1983), which found that the exclusion and detention of Japanese Americans due to EO 9066 was unjustified and the result of “race prejudice, war hysteria, and a failure of political leadership” (p. 18).

While the teaching of difficult histories, including Japanese American incarceration, has received a great deal of attention in secondary social studies scholarship (Camicia, 2008; Epstein & Peck, 2017; Gross & Terra, 2019; Levy, 2014), it is generally understudied with young learners. Typically, examinations of teaching difficult history to young learners tend to focus on two historical events: enslavement and the Holocaust (Farley, 2009; Patterson & Shuttleworth, 2019; Schweber, 2008; Stanley, 1999; Thomas, Reese, & Horning, 2016). Some scholars argue that such traumatic events should not be taught to young learners at all (Schweber, 2008; Totten, 1999); however, particularly for youth of color and those who hold marginalized identities, these difficult histories may be a part of students’ own family histories, meriting inclusion in ways that are developmentally appropriate without whitewashing or sugarcoating the past (Rodríguez, in press).

Unfortunately, unlike their secondary counterparts, early childhood and elementary educators who complete traditional teacher preparation programs rarely receive in-depth history coursework that might provide them with the content knowledge needed to teach difficult histories in nuanced and developmentally appropriate ways (Bolick, Adams, & Willox, 2010). Moreover, as instructional time dedicated to social studies continues to decline in elementary classrooms (Heafner & Fitchett, 2012), pre-service teachers are unlikely to witness any social studies lessons in practice at all (Hawkman, Castro, Bennett, & Barrow, et al., 2015). In recent years, children’s literature about difficult histories has become increasingly common, from texts that explain and interpret national histories about invasion, conquest, violence, and assimilation (Bradford, 2007) to stories about racial injustice (Rodríguez, in press; Patterson & Shuttleworth, 2019). Yet little research has explored how educators engage young learners in difficult history through children’s literature.

Japanese American Children’s Literature

Given the neat alignment of Japanese American incarceration with Gross and Terra’s (2018) criteria for difficult history, the popularity of children’s literature about this topic might appear unusual. In Wee, Kura, and Kim’s (2018) study of Japanese American children’s literature published between 1990 and 2016, seven of the 37 books in their collection (19 percent) focused on Japanese American incarceration. Upon closer inspection, however, Japanese American children’s literature does not necessarily directly address the aspects that make this history “difficult.” For example, in the seven books about Japanese American incarceration in Wee, Kura, and Kim’s (2018) study, Japanese American youth were depicted “as passive and quiet, not speaking up for themselves, wanting (elders) to stand up for them” (p. 46) in response to mistreatment by White peers. Further, children’s literature often uses the passive voice as a tool to disguise the perpetrators of violence (Rodríguez, 2018), failing to question why events such as enslavement and Japanese American incarceration occurred in the first place and never explicitly naming who created these systems of injustice and how certain individuals benefited from them in myriad ways while others suffered immeasurably.

For these reasons, Japanese American children's literature is not inherently an ideal tool to take up this difficult history. As with any book, the ways in which educators and students take up the text, both visual and written, have tremendous impact on the meaning that readers make. In this essay, I explore how two experienced elementary educators utilized the same famous picture book about Japanese American incarceration in distinct ways and to very different ends. Their divergent approaches illustrate the complexity of teaching difficult histories and the demands made on both educators and students.

Teaching Japanese American Incarceration with *The Bracelet*

The Bracelet by Yoshiko Uchida (1996) was the common book explored by Ms. Huynh and Ms. Ye, two elementary educators in a large urban public school district in Navarro, Texas. Renowned Japanese American author Yoshiko Uchida has written over 30 books, including a substantial number of children's and young adult fiction about Japanese American incarceration and a memoir of her own family's imprisonment in Topaz, Utah (Harada, 1998).

The Bracelet describes a Japanese American family's experience leaving their home and friends after EO 9066 was issued, as they are forced to board a bus and live in temporary barracks fashioned out of former horse stalls at the Tanforan Racetrack in California. Streamas (1997) describes the book's plot as "interracial friendship triumph(ing) over internment" (p. 127), while Potucek (1995) considers the book to be primarily a friendship story that necessitates only "a simple discussion of the relocation and internment" (p. 568).

Ms. Ye and Ms. Huynh were both experienced teachers who attended a district workshop about Asian Pacific Islander Heritage Month. They received copies of *The Bracelet*, which was recommended as one means to teach Japanese American incarceration. The receipt of the book, accompanied by the professional development they received about Japanese American incarceration at the workshop, inspired them to use the book in their classrooms.

Ms. Huynh had worked in elementary schools for 10 years and, at the time of the study, was teaching in a third-grade classroom at a small elementary campus. Her school was located in a predominantly White and affluent neighborhood, but was ethno-racially diverse due to the local university's graduate student housing located within the school's boundaries. Despite her many years of working with young students, Ms. Huynh had rarely taught social studies and had never taught Japanese American incarceration before.

Ms. Ye had worked in elementary schools for eight years. At the time of the study, she was teaching second grade at a large Title I school. Her class consisted of Latinx, Black, and mixed race students. Although Ms. Ye was relatively new to teaching second grade, she had experience teaching third grade, which included reading aloud *Sylvia and Aki* (Conkling, 2011), a chapter book about Japanese American incarceration and Mexican American school segregation.

Both teachers invited me into their classrooms during the Spring 2016 semester, where I observed them teach multiple lessons about Asian American history. They also participated in several semi-structured interviews and reviewed examples of student work with me over the course of the semester. Their lessons with *The Bracelet* were the first instances of Asian American history teaching that I observed in their respective classrooms.

Teaching *The Bracelet* as a Social-Emotional Story of Friendship

Although Ms. Huynh admitted that social studies was not one of her teaching strengths, she considered herself to “have a huge focus on community and social skills building.” Social-emotional learning (SEL) was a recently implemented district-wide initiative that she happily took up and infused throughout the day and across content areas. Consequently, SEL was a major theme in her teaching of *The Bracelet*.

She introduced the book by explaining, “Today’s story that we’re going to read is going to conjure up some SEL types of ideas on what a friend is, how we should treat people, how we should treat strangers, and judging others.” Before reading, she asked students to turn and talk to a partner about what friends do and say and how they should treat each other. Students discussed the prompts in pairs, then shared aloud with the rest of the group before Ms. Huynh proceeded to read *The Bracelet*.

As she shared the front cover of the book with the class, Ms. Huynh reiterated, “I really want you to think about how we should treat people even if we’re not friends, and what’s wrong with judging people based on their race, or maybe their religion or their culture.” She then introduced the text: “This book is called *The Bracelet*, and it happens in a time after World War II.” This introduction was factually incorrect—the story takes place shortly after the United States joined the war. Ms. Huynh did not provide students with any additional historical context for the book before reading.

Throughout her read-aloud, Ms. Huynh stopped periodically to ask students to reflect on the events in the text. Her questions overwhelmingly focused on characters’ emotions: “How are Emi [Japanese American main character] and Laurie [Emi’s White American friend] feeling about going to [prison] camp?” “Her action is slamming the door. She went from feeling one way to a different way. How is she feeling now?” “Have you ever lost anything that’s important to you? How did it make you feel?”

While these questions emerged from events in the book, they ultimately focused on students’ emotions and did not provide opportunities for them to reflect upon how the unfolding events inspired specific emotions in the novel’s characters. Ms. Huynh’s focus on emotional expression and individual student examples and connections decentered the plot of *The Bracelet*.

For example, when Emi says goodbye to Laurie before her family is forced to leave their home, Emi’s frustration and anger are evident in her slamming of the front door. Emi is upset because her family’s forced removal and relocation is unjustified: they have committed no acts of disloyalty, yet because of their Japanese heritage, they must leave their home, friends, and lives behind. She is a child, yet along with everyone else of Japanese descent, she is considered a threat to national security.

Ms. Huynh’s question about this scene pivoted away from the plot. After asking students how Emi was feeling when she slammed the door, she asked if any of them had ever slammed a door and if it was okay to feel mad. The conversation shifted away from the injustice wrought against Japanese Americans—and did not attend at all to the notion that what was happening was unjust. Instead it centered the various ways the third graders expressed their anger, and was followed by discussion of coping mechanisms such as taking deep breaths and counting.

After the scene when Emi’s family arrives at Tanforan and discovers their new home will be a horse stable, Ms. Huynh stopped to ask students what they were thinking. She proposed, “What if I said, ‘All the kids

with blonde hair, pack up your bags and move to the horse stables?” Students began to talk excitedly, as some were indignant and others were entertained and giggling. While one student declared, “That’s unfair!” another asked, “Miss, can I go too?” Another child volunteered, “Me too, I want to go!”

Although Ms. Huynh had tried to illustrate the arbitrary nature of Japanese American removal on the West Coast in her example, students excitedly focused on the possibility of going to a place with horses. Their confusion suggested a lack of understanding (there were no longer horses at Tanforan because it had been converted from a racetrack to an assembly center for Japanese American detainees) and their enthusiasm demonstrated a lack of empathy. Moreover, Ms. Huynh struggled to redirect them and resumed reading without clarifying why she had proposed what she did or why the U.S. government considered horse stables to be appropriate housing for Japanese Americans during wartime.

The book concluded, and Ms. Huynh quickly read the afterword, which supplied the historical context otherwise missing from the read-aloud. Unlike her approach to the primary text of the book, Ms. Huynh read the short paragraphs of the afterword quickly, without pausing to check for student understanding. When we spoke later, Ms. Huynh admitted, “I don’t think I’m very strong in teaching history, but I’m comfortable teaching community because I feel that in my classroom.”

While she was proud of herself for teaching content that was new to herself and to her students, she said, “I was kind of just treading water, trying to learn the content and teaching about the internment camps... [it] really stretched me [as a teacher].” Ms. Huynh’s comments suggested that her feelings of discomfort regarding history may have resulted in her deliberately avoiding the historical aspects of the book in favor of the SEL components with which she felt more instructional confidence. This seemed especially evident in her lack of clarification during the Tanforan scene and her hurried approach to the afterword.

Given Ms. Huynh’s emphasis on SEL and the lack of historical contextualization, the class concluded *The Bracelet* with little understanding of Japanese American incarceration. Instead, Japanese American incarceration was a blurry background to a story about friendship. Not until her follow-up activity did Ms. Huynh clarify that the camps in which families like Emi’s lived were “prison camp[s]—this is not a summer camp.”

Students’ misunderstanding of the nature of the isolated and inhospitable camps in which Japanese Americans were forced to live demonstrated the lack of attention paid to the historical content of the story. Ultimately, this light-handed and ahistorical approach evaded the facts that make Japanese American incarceration a difficult history, allowing the theme of friendship to take precedence. However, despite Ms. Huynh’s prefacing of the book as a story about friendship, her emphasis on SEL throughout the reading lessened the importance given to this theme as well.

Teaching *The Bracelet* as Part of the Ongoing Fight for Civil Rights

While Ms. Huynh read *The Bracelet* in a single day, Ms. Ye structured her lesson over the course of three days. On the first day, Ms. Ye shared “a picture flood” with her second-grade students, providing an assortment of primary source photos from the Library of Congress depicting EO 9066 and Japanese Americans as they loaded buses and lived in desert and mountain camps. She asked students to think aloud as they studied the images and formulated questions. During this picture flood, Ms. Ye remained silent, rotating around the room recording all the questions she heard.

The next day, she began by reviewing the student questions that emerged during the picture flood: “I want us to be thinking about some of these questions that you were asking [yesterday].” Each question was written neatly on a sticky note and posted on the easel that stood in the corner of the carpet, where they could be viewed by all (Figure 1). Students eagerly began to discuss the questions before them. “We’re gonna find out why, we’re going to find out what is it that happened... who forced them there and why did that happen,” Ms. Ye explained. “Can we ask questions while you’re reading?” one student inquired. “Definitely!” Ms. Ye affirmed.

Ms. Ye began reading. A few pages in, she paused. “Listen carefully to this part,” she said. “This is gonna help us answer some of our questions.” As she continued reading, one student, Symphony, murmured to herself. Ms. Ye noticed Symphony’s response to the text and encouraged her to share her thoughts aloud with the group. “The government made them go to the camp... maybe because they were bad, I think?” she offered tentatively. Ms. Ye prompted Symphony to further explain her thinking: “So the government made them go to the camp because they were...” “Japanese?” Symphony answered. “Because they were Japanese,” Ms. Ye repeated. “Was there something else?”

“And they looked like the enemy?” Symphony’s hesitation led to a prolonged conversation as more and more students engaged in the discussion, trying to determine why Emi’s and other Japanese American families were forced to leave their homes. Although Ms. Ye did repeat one line from the text for clarification (“The government was sending them to a prison camp because they were Japanese Americans and America was at war with Japan” [Uchida, 1996, n.p.]), this student-led conversation unpacking the first part of the book lasted for over eight minutes. During this time, students questioned what kind of camp Emi’s family was going to and made comparisons to the treatment experienced by African Americans and Native Americans that they had learned about in previous picture books.

One student, Alejandro, connected the phrase “prison camp” to jail. “Prison—it’s not a good word,” he said. “It’s like jail.” “Tell us about that,” Ms. Ye urged. “Why would someone be in prison in the first place?” Several students responded, “Because they did something bad” and “You do something wrong.” Ms. Ye began to paraphrase their statements when one student protested, “But they didn’t do nothing wrong! They’re just taking them ‘cause of the way they look!”

Students continued to eagerly explain what they understood to be happening in the text. Symphony thrust her hand up and announced, “I wonder if at the prison camp, there’s only Japanese.” Ms. Ye replied, “That’s great wondering. Will you write this down?” She repeated Symphony’s question and continued reading. A few minutes later, during the scene when the family discovers they will be living in a former horse stall, Alejandro muttered, “That’s messed up!” Ms. Ye paused and said, “I just heard Alejandro, he went, ‘That’s messed up!’ Turn to your partner real quick and talk about why that’s messed up.”

Ms. Ye created space for students to create their own questions about the text and used individual comments and utterings during the read-aloud to guide understanding for the larger group. Importantly, *The Bracelet* was not the first time students had read about injustice. During their prolonged conversation at the start of the book, one student referenced a prior read-aloud about Native Americans, while others referred to readings about the anti-Black racism experienced by Martin Luther King, Jr. and Nelson Mandela. In this way, students were already attuned to noticing instances of discrimination and injustice; Ms. Ye did not need to establish this frame for them book by book.

Ms. Ye was deliberate about providing her second-grade students with ample discussion time during the read-aloud; she let them know before reading that they would take two days to complete the book, despite it only being 32 pages long. This was an important part of her teaching philosophy:

For them to question and know that it's okay to question. I think that's why, when those things come up, I'm not afraid to talk about it, because why not talk about it? When else are you going to have another opportunity to talk about it? If that's a question you have, let's talk about that. I feel like sometimes my kids go back and forth between "Oh, that was a really great conversation" versus "Oh, we want to finish the book." I'm like, it's okay to not finish the book. I enjoy having these conversations with you. We are all smarter because of these conversations.

Ms. Ye's commitment to creating ample opportunities for student questions, and her scaffolding and paraphrasing when such questions arose, facilitated rich conversations around injustice and discrimination. The third day, when they concluded *The Bracelet*, students discussed patriotism and unpacked why Emi had to go to the prison camp but her friend Laurie did not. Several students explained that Laurie didn't have to go because "she wasn't Japanese." Symphony added, "She was just regular."

Ms. Ye used this statement as an anchor for deeper investigation. "What do you mean by regular?" As students tried to provide examples of what a "regular" person was like, Ms. Ye asked what it meant to be different. Finally, acutely aware that every one of her students was a child of color, she asked, "Do any of us in this room look like [Laurie]? Does that mean that all of us are not regular?" Without uttering the word race, Ms. Ye led a powerful conversation with her second-grade students about who is considered American and worked with them to decenter normative Whiteness.

After completing *The Bracelet*, Ms. Ye asked students, "What are some ideas that you have about how the civil rights of the Japanese Americans were taken away, and how they were treated?" While the conversations from the previous day had alluded to injustice and racial profiling, Ms. Ye clearly articulated the events of the story as examples of civil rights violations. Consequently, the class discussion about who is considered "normal" or "regular" segued into ways that people justify unequal treatment of others, and connected to previous conversations about injustice.

The Challenges of Teaching Japanese American Incarceration through Children's Literature

Ms. Ye's lesson about Japanese American incarceration using *The Bracelet* was a masterful example of the possibilities of having complex conversations with young children about issues with which adults often struggle. Ms. Huynh's lesson illustrated a far more typical dilemma: How can teachers discuss difficult histories when students (and even teachers themselves) lack historical background/context? The juxtaposition of these two teachers' approaches to the same book, and the vastly different student responses that resulted, offers some insight into the challenges and opportunities posed by children's literature about difficult history.

The teachers' initial framing of *The Bracelet* served an important role in establishing how students responded to the text. Ms. Huynh's third graders anticipated a friendship story and were relatively unconcerned with the actions of the government that occurred in the background of the text. And while the SEL focus could have allowed students to examine the causes of the emotions expressed, those opportunities were overlooked. Ms. Ye's second graders began the book with questions about an unknown historical event; their approach was that of detectives intent upon discovering clues and answers to their questions.

More importantly, the broader context of the lessons also impacted students' responses: Ms. Huynh's class had been reading a range of unrelated picture books prior to this lesson, while Ms. Ye's class had read many picture books about African American history in the weeks before they encountered *The Bracelet*. For Ms. Huynh's class, *The Bracelet* was a new text about the familiar topic of friendship. Ms. Ye's class was exposed to a new type of discrimination beyond the Black/White binary.

Ms. Ye's use of a picture flood served a number of important purposes prior to reading *The Bracelet*. First, it situated the book within a particular historical context. Students' interaction with primary sources made clear that, while the story they read might be fiction, it mirrored real experiences of people in the past. Ms. Huynh introduced the book solely as a friendship story, providing no indication that the story was based on historical events and the experiences of real people.

Second, the picture flood gave Ms. Ye's students an opportunity to generate their own observations and questions about the sources before them. When they began the book, students were highly interested in discovering the answers to their questions and engaged with the text much more eagerly and deeply than most of Ms. Huynh's students, who anticipated a story of friendship and demonstrated less interest in the historical events in the text.

Third, some of the primary sources selected were directly connected to illustrations in the book. For example, the photo of a storefront sign stating, "I am an American" mirrored an illustrated storefront sign in the book that declared, "We are loyal Americans." By the time students saw the illustration in the book on the second day of the lesson, they had already spent time wrestling with the meaning and significance of a similar phrase. The various degrees of sense-making that had already taken place added greater nuance to their understanding of the scene when they saw the phrase in the book, within the context of Emi's story.

Recommendations for Classroom Practice

The use of primary sources to complement narrative text was particularly powerful with young students who have yet to learn American history. While neither group of students had learned about Japanese American incarceration before reading the novel, Ms. Ye's class was familiar with multiple examples of discrimination and racism in U.S. history. Several of Ms. Huynh's students revealed a range of knowledge about World War II, albeit in Europe, rather than domestically, after reading *The Bracelet*.

When young students are relatively, or entirely, unfamiliar with American history, they often default to popular narratives of ongoing progress and American exceptionalism. More importantly, history is often told to young learners through a singular omniscient, Eurocentric perspective that omits historically marginalized groups and/or multiple perspectives, concluding with happy endings of a post-racial society where individualism and meritocracy triumph over adversity. The introduction of primary sources, particularly of individuals omitted from the master narrative of U.S. history (Takaki, 2008), created space for students to interpret historical artifacts within and beyond their existing schema.

While social studies researchers have examined the impact of such critical historical thinking with secondary students (Salinas, Blevins & Sullivan, 2012), less scholarship has explored how similar work might help young learners (re)consider the historical narrative and their developing understandings of *who* is considered American and a citizen (Rodríguez, 2018).

As young students are just beginning to learn about U.S. history in elementary school, educators must be careful when presenting historical narratives that serve to counter master narratives that students have yet to fully comprehend. For example, the master narrative of U.S. involvement in World War II is that the United States joined the war in response to the bombing of Pearl Harbor and thereafter played an active role in demanding an end to Hitler's dictatorship and grossly dehumanizing actions.

The more complex version of events, including Japanese American incarceration, is often saved for high school. Therefore, when Japanese American incarceration is presented to young learners, it is generally done so through picture books (rather than textbooks) without important context such as a century of pre-existing anti-Asian sentiment and immigration legislation. Moreover, these books typically emphasize Japanese American resilience and survival while omitting why Japanese Americans were targeted specifically and very differently from Italian and German Americans. In an educational atmosphere that continues to deemphasize social studies time in the classroom (Heafner & Fitchett, 2012), the introduction of complicated historical narratives and counternarratives is not easy work and it requires educators to commit to contextualization, explanation, and constant revisiting of historical concepts.

Educators who are interested in taking up the challenge of teaching difficult histories to young learners can add nuance to the limited narratives found in picture books by supplementing the text (before, during, and after reading) with primary sources, timelines, and maps. Together, these social studies tools can firmly establish that students are learning about events from the past that impacted real people and provide important historical context. Moreover, students need to be exposed to multiple perspectives of historical events in order to recognize how groups of people were affected differently; these perspectives can vary based on age, class, geography, or other markers of identity.

In the case of Japanese American incarceration, a number of options are available that provide diverse youth perspectives of life in World War II prison camps; while *The Bracelet* is an excellent starting point, it must not also be the end point of a unit on Japanese American incarceration. As illustrated in the contrasting approaches of Ms. Huynh and Ms. Ye, educators should invite students to ask questions about these histories and texts throughout their learning, allowing their own curiosities and connections to guide conversations rather than determining a single instructional theme in advance and adhering strictly to it.

Teorey (2008) argues that Uchida and other authors of Japanese American incarceration present and analyze their experiences "to teach all Americans to destroy social barriers, stand up to ignorance and intolerance, and build inclusive, multicultural communities" (p. 240). However, whether or not these lessons are actually executed for these purposes is dependent on the ways in which students and educators engage with the written and visual text. For example, both the cover and front matter of *The Bracelet* prominently feature the numbered tags that were given to all Japanese Americans who were detained and taken to prison camps; these tags were overlooked by both the teachers and students in this study, but could have been the source of rich discussion about dehumanization.

Many picture books about Japanese American incarceration focus on the popularity of organized youth baseball at the camps (Harada, 1996; Moss, 2013); yet, if educators solely focus on the patriotism and ingenuity of those incarcerated or how baseball gave them a sense of freedom in the midst of terrible circumstances, the misguided rationale behind incarceration is lost. Children's literature about Japanese American incarceration can present a difficult history for students to wrestle with, or it can uphold master narratives of American progress and tenacity. Educators play a vital role in determining which path students will take.

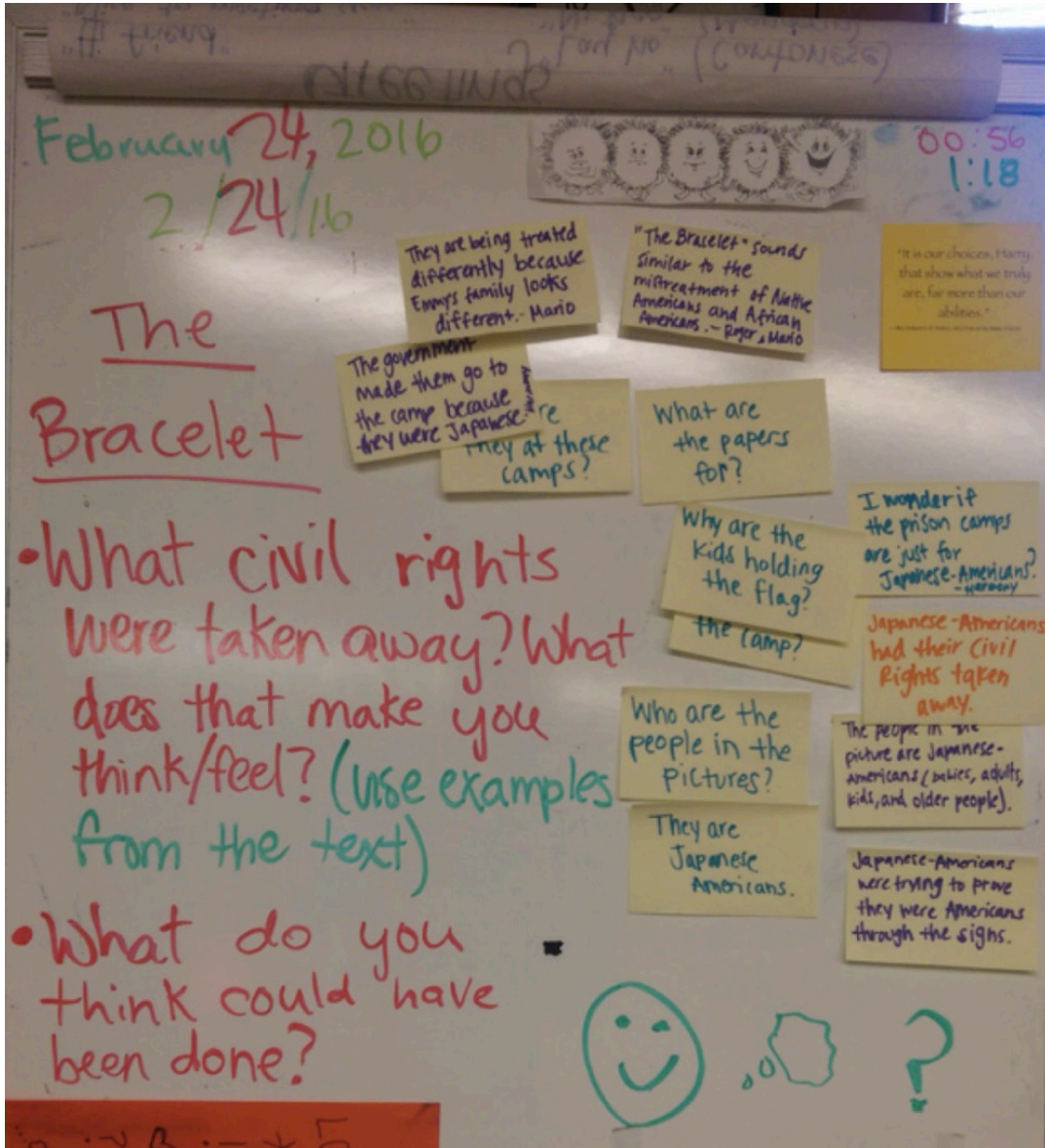


Figure 1. Student-generated Questions from Library of Congress Primary Source Set on Japanese American Incarceration in Ms. Ye's Classroom

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