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# Book Club in a Box

## FAREWELL TO MANZANAR

### About the Book

During World War II a community called Manzanar was hastily created in the high mountain desert country of California, east of the Sierras. Its purpose was to house thousands of Japanese American internees. One of the first families to arrive was the Wakatsukis, who were ordered to leave their fishing business in Long Beach and take with them only the belongings they could carry. For Jeanne Wakatsuki, a seven-year-old child, Manzanar became a way of life in which she struggled and adapted, observed and grew. For her father it was essentially the end of his life.

At age thirty-seven, Jeanne Wakatsuki Houston recalls life at Manzanar through the eyes of the child she was. She tells of her fear, confusion, and bewilderment as well as the dignity and great resourcefulness of people in oppressive and demeaning circumstances. Written with her husband, Jeanne delivers a powerful first-person account that reveals her search for the meaning of Manzanar.



-Laurel Leaf Publishers

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### About the Authors

Jeanne (Toyo) Wakatsuki Houston was born September 26, 1934 in Inglewood California. She is the daughter of first and second-generation Japanese American parents. Her father Ko, a fisherman, was born in Hiroshima while her mother Riku was born in Hawaii. Jeanne and her family were detained at Manzanar, a Japanese internment camp, during World War II. After their release from the camp in 1945 Jeanne's brothers and sisters moved to the East Coast while Jeanne

and her parents moved back to California. Several years after the war Jeanne entered the University of San Jose. While attending the University, Jeanne studied sociology and journalism. During her college years Jeanne met her husband James D. Houston. The couple married in 1957. Between 1955-57 Jeanne worked as a group worker as well as a juvenile probation officer in San Mateo, California. Soon after leaving her job Jeanne

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left for France where she studied at the Sorbonne as well as the University of Paris. During this point in her life Jeanne started to focus on her writing. In 1973 her book *Farewell to Manzanar* was published. The screenplay for the book was written in 1976. In 1984 she wrote *Don't Cry, It's Only Thunder* with Paul G. Hensler. She published *Beyond Manzanar and other views of Asian-American Womanhood* in 1985. Jeanne is also the author of the teleplay "Barrio" with her husband James D. Houston. Jeanne has won a number of awards including the Humanities Prize and the Christopher Award both for the screenplay *Farewell to Manzanar* as well as an award from the National Women's Political Caucus and the Wonder Woman award both in 1984. She currently lives in Santa Cruz, California with James and their children Corinne, Joshua and Gabrielle.

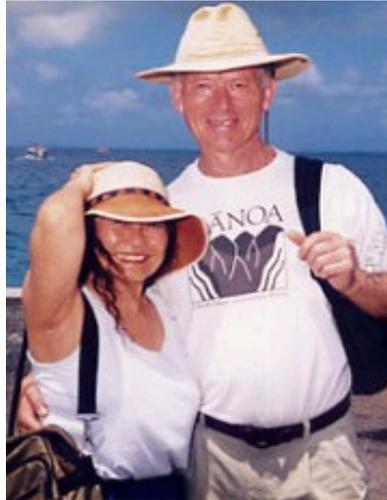
During World War II over 110,000 Japanese Americans were interned in camps set up by the United States government. Jeanne Wakatsuki Houston and her family spent three and a half years in one of those camps. The Wakatsuki family, along with ten thousand other Japanese Americans, were shipped to Manzanar. The Manzanar internment camp was located in the desert between Los Angeles and Reno, Nevada.

In *Farewell to Manzanar*, Jeanne explains how she and her family were one of the first families shipped to the internment camps and one of the last to be released. Jeanne's family, being fishermen, were

seen as a threat to national security (the government believed they would smuggle oil to the Japanese navy).

Jeanne's memoirs are not only her story but also the story of her family. Her father was deeply affected by the experience. This event seemed to strip him of his spirit. Although Jeanne was only seven when she arrived at the camp, the experience dramatically changed her life. She struggled for years to find peace within her own identity. Jeanne has compared the incident to a rape. According to her, "You feel you must have *done* something. You feel you are part of the act." It took her almost twenty-five years to talk about the experience. Jeanne's visit back to Manzanar in 1972 helped her come to terms with her experience; she no longer felt ashamed of what she had gone through. She realized the experience made her who she is. According to Jeanne, "Papa's life ended at Manzanar, though he lived for twelve more years after getting out. Until this trip I had not been able to admit that my own life really began there."

-Rachel Cassarino  
Houghton Mifflin



## Discussion Questions

1. What does shi-ka-ta-gai-nai mean? How does it affect the Japanese Americans' response to the internment?
2. With Papa gone, who became the leader in the family? How did he/she handle the new role?
3. When Mama and Papa were distracted with worries, who did the author look to for attention? What did she get involved in? Why couldn't she continue?
4. What kind of family was Papa from? Why did he leave Japan? Why was he humiliated when he first arrived in the U.S.?
5. In what ways did Manzanar have the semblance of a normal world?
6. What had happened to Eleanor? How did it make Papa and Mama so unusually intimate? How did their intimacy make the author feel?
7. For what reasons were the Japanese Americans fearful of leaving camp following the announcement that all the internment camps were to be closed?
8. Why was Woody in Japan? What did Woody realize by visiting his family in Japan?
9. How did the society receive the Japanese Americans returning home?
10. What did the author become aware of once she returned to school? How did she respond to this?
11. What important realization did she get by being a majorette for the Boy Scouts?
12. What happened to Papa once Woody returned from Japan?

13. What changes occurred in the family as a result of the internment?

14. What differences did Jeanne see between Radine and herself as they moved up to high school?

15. Why did Jeanne decide to go "exotic" in competing to become carnival queen? Was it an effective strategy? Why or why not?

16. When Jean was told that the administration was stuffing the ballot box, she reacted with indifference, saying, "I already sensed, though I couldn't have said why, that I would lose either way, no matter how it turned out." (p. 175) How would she lose either way, whether she became queen or not?

17. During the procession on coronation night, Jean thought, "It wasn't the girl in this old-fashioned dress they had voted for. But if not her, who had they voted for? Somebody I wanted to be. And wasn't. Who was I then? (p. 181-182) Who did she want to be? Why couldn't she be that person?"

18. As Jeanne was about to leave Manzanar, she recalled the image of papa bringing a car to camp just before their departure. Why would this be important to her in finally breaking away from Manzanar and all that accompanied it?

**Source:** Linda J. Choi, San Mateo Community College District  
<http://smccd.net/accounts/choi/esl854/Manzanar.htm>