

POETRY

The following poems are called *tanka*—a form of Japanese poetry similar to *haiku*, except *tanka* have 31 syllables in a 5-7-5-7-7 pattern. These *tanka* poems were originally written in Japanese by *issei* (first-generation Japanese Americans) and later translated into English. Thus, the syllabic pattern does not correlate in the English translation.

These *tanka* were written by an *issei* in California who was sent to an incarceration camp in Poston, Arizona.

By Kenichi Takemoto

Sand

Unable to pack my strawberries
I instead packed my family
First to Salinas Race Tracks
Then on to the deserts of Arizona
Where strawberries do not grow

My children are Americans
My parents are Japanese
Being *issei*, I feel caught between
Two countries at war
Hoping the desert storms will subside

These poems were reprinted with permission from Gary Mukai, grandson of Kenichi Takemoto.

Group Task

Complete the following tasks as a group:

1. Discuss and answer the following questions. Have one group member record the answers for later class discussion.

- Poetry is a deeply symbolic way of representing emotion, meaning, mood, and setting. What types of emotion, meaning, mood, and setting does this particular poem represent?
- What are some of the themes present?
- How is symbolism used?
- Does this poem attempt to convey a particular message to the reader? If so, what is the message?
- What would be a good title for this poem?

2. Visual art is also a symbolic way to represent emotion, meaning, mood, and setting. In a collage of images and words cut from magazines and other printed material, try to capture what you feel is the essence of this poem.

3. Imagine that you are also an issei who is in an incarceration camp. If you could write a letter to your parents, whom you left behind in Japan when you emigrated, what would you say? Do you have mixed feelings about having left Japan to come to the United States? Include in your letter a tanka poem of your own, following the syllabic pattern of 5-7-5-7-7. Prepare to share this with the rest of the class.

POETRY

The following poem was written by Dr. Ruth Yoshiko Okimoto, a nisei (second-generation Japanese American) who was incarcerated with her family at a camp in Poston, Arizona.

"The Rattlesnake and Scorpion"
A Desert Home, Poston, Arizona 1942

Said the Scorpion to the Rattlesnake,
"What manner of commotion is happening here?
The sawing of lumber and pounding of nails,
 black tarpaper falls and covers my trail.
Tall fence posts pierce deep into the ground
 securing chainlink fences and barbed wire from town."

Said the Rattlesnake to the Scorpion,
"Indeed, huge pipes obstruct and crisscross my path,
 and loud swishing noises disturb my sleep.
Why, I went foraging for food and found
 my favorite hunting ground vanished today
 and more will dwindle, I've heard them say."

Said the Scorpion to the Rattlesnake,
"And worse even yet, small human fingers foolishly grab
 my sisters, brothers, cousins, and all,
 and drown them in jars filled with alcohol."
"How foolish, indeed," replied the Rattlesnake,
 "Don't they know of your sting, my venomous bite?"

Said the Scorpion to the Rattlesnake,
"What kind of human would dare intrude into our sacred place?
We've lived on this land for centuries, I'm told,
 so, why do they come here to ravage and destroy?
We've lived in peace, both you and I,
 with no intent to hurt or annoy."

Said the Rattlesnake to the Scorpion,
"Some humans, I'm told, regard those who differ in skin
 or thought with what they call 'justifiable' hate."
"As you know," continued the Rattlesnake,
 "humans are the most dangerous animal of all;
 they kill with lethal weapons ten feet tall."

Asked the Scorpion of the Rattlesnake,
"So what do you think they are building here,
 in the midst of our desert home?"
Answered the Rattlesnake with a somber voice,
"It's something menacing, and I fear
 portend of dangers yet unclear."

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Group Task

Complete the following tasks as a group:

1. Discuss and answer the following questions. Have one group member record the answers for later class discussion.

- Poetry is a deeply symbolic way of representing emotion, meaning, mood, and setting. What types of emotion, meaning, mood, and setting does this particular poem represent?
- What are some of the themes present?
- How is symbolism used?
- Does the poem attempt to convey a particular message to the reader? If so, what is the message?

2. Visual art is also a symbolic way to represent emotion, meaning, mood, and setting. In a collage of images and words cut from magazines and other printed material, try to capture what you feel is the essence of the poem.

3. Pick up where the poem leaves off and write at least two more verses from the viewpoint of the Scorpion and the Rattlesnake. Think about their perspectives. Symbolically, who might the Scorpion and Rattlesnake represent? Who else was negatively affected by the incarceration other than the Japanese Americans? Note that Native Americans were displaced during the construction of the camp in Poston. Prepare to share the two verses with the rest of the class.

POETRY

Lawson Fusao Inada was born in Fresno, California, in 1938. He is a sansei (third-generation Japanese American). In May of 1942, his family joined more than 110,000 other Japanese Americans in camps where they were confined for the duration of World War II. He was initially detained at the Fresno County Fairgrounds, then moved to a camp in Arkansas, and lastly was incarcerated at a camp in Colorado until the end of the war.

The following verse is an excerpt from his poem titled, "Children of Camp."

There was no poetry in camp.
 Unless you can say
 mud is poetry,
 unless you can say
 dust is poetry,
 unless you can say
 cruelty is poetry,
 unless you can say
 injustice is poetry,
 unless you can say
 imprisonment is poetry.

There was no poetry in camp.
 Unless you can say
 families are poetry,
 unless you can say
 people are poetry.

And the people
 made poetry
 from camp.
 And the people
 made poetry
 from camp.

The people made poetry
 with their very own hands—
 little gifts from scrap
 for precious loved ones,
 friends, elders, children.

And the people made poetry
 with their very own vision—
 ways of seeing beauty,
 ways of seeing humor,
 ways of seeing nature.

And the people made poetry
 with their very own hearts—
 ways of feeling community,
 ways of feeling spirit,
 ways of feeling appreciation.

There was no poetry in camp.
 But the people made it so.
 With hands, vision, hearts,
 the people made it so.

"Children of Camp" Verse IV.

This portion of "Children of Camp" © 1997 by Lawson Inada has been reprinted with permission from Lawson Inada, *Drawing the Line*, (Minneapolis, MN: Coffee House Press, 1997) pp. 115–116.

Group Task

Complete the following tasks as a group:

1. Discuss and answer the following questions. Have one group member record the answers for later class discussion.

- Poetry is a deeply symbolic way of representing emotion, meaning, mood, and setting. What types of emotion, meaning, mood, and setting does this particular poem represent?
- What are some of the themes present?
- How is symbolism used?
- Does the poem attempt to convey a particular message to the reader? If so, what is the message?

2. Visual art is also a symbolic way to represent emotion, meaning, mood, and setting. In a collage of images and words cut from magazines and other printed material, try to capture what you feel is the essence of the poem.

3. This poem is actually part of a song that was written by Lawson Inada. With your group members, make a music video out of this poem. You must come up with a melody for the song as well as content for the video itself. If you do not have access to a video camera, you may record the song on a tape and do a presentation/slide show using a slide projector and/or an overhead. If available, classes may also use Microsoft PowerPoint or a similar program for their presentations. Prepare to share this presentation with the rest of the class.

POETRY

The following poem was among the boxes of papers and watercolor paintings discovered in 1980 in an attic in Ithaca, New York. The materials in the attic were collected from the World War II incarceration camps and eventually became an important part of the Japanese-American Relocation Center Records at the Department of Manuscripts and University Archives at Cornell University.

No details are known about the author of the poem, but it is estimated that she wrote the poem sometime between 1942 and 1945, given the poem's discovery with other materials written during that time. The poem was among records kept in an attic storage site on Cornell University campus. The records were collected by Professors Morris Opler and Alexander Leighton, primarily from the Manzanar (Opler) and Poston (Leighton) incarceration camps and cover the period from 1935 to 1953.

"Manzanar" by Michiko Mizumoto (no date, est. 1942–1945)

Dust storms.
Sweat-days.
Yellow people,
Exiles.
I am the mountain that kisses the sky in the dawning.
I watched the day when these, your people, came into your heart.
 Tired.
 Bewildered.
 Embittered.

I saw you accept their compassion, impassive but visible.
Life of a thousand teemed within your bosom.
Silently you received them from your breast,
Nightly you soothed them to forgetful slumber.
Guardian and keeper of the unwanted.

They say your people are wanton
 Saboteurs.
 Haters of white men.
 Spies.
Yet I have seen them go forth to die for their only country,
Help with the defense of their homeland,
America.

I have seen them look with beautiful eyes at nature.
And know the pathos of their tearful laughter,
Choked with enveloping mists of the dust storms,
Pant with the heat of sweat-days; still laughing.
 Exiles.

And I say to these you harbor and those on the exterior,

"Scoff if you must, but the dawn is approaching,
When these, who have learned and suffered in silent courage;
Better, wiser, for the unforgettable interlude of detention,

Shall trod on free sod again,

Side by side peacefully with those who sneered at the
Dust storms."

Sweat days.
Yellow people,
Exiles.

Courtesy of the Division of Rare and Manuscript Collections, Cornell University Library; Collection # 3830:
Japanese American Relocation Centers Records

Group Task

Complete the following tasks as a group:

1. Discuss and answer the following questions. Have one group member record the answers for later class discussion.

- Poetry is a deeply symbolic way of representing emotion, meaning, mood, and setting. What types of emotion, meaning, mood, and setting does this particular poem represent?
- What are some of the themes present?
- How is symbolism used?
- Does the poem attempt to convey a particular message to the reader? If, so, what is the message?

2. Visual art is also a symbolic way to represent emotion, meaning, mood, and setting. In a collage of images and words cut from magazines and other printed material, try to capture what you feel is the essence of the poem.

3. Assume the role of one of the people being spoken to in this poem and write your reply to the "speaker" of the poem. When writing your reply, consider the following:

- Who is the speaker of the original poem?
- Who are you?
- Do you agree with the original speaker?
- Share some of your feelings and emotions with the original speaker.
- Have any of the original speaker's predictions come true?
- Prepare to share your work with the rest of the class.

POETRY

This poem was written by Lois Takaoka, a nisei (second-generation Japanese American) born in California. She was asked to recollect her thoughts on her life in an incarceration camp as a six-year-old girl.

"Heart Mountain, My Home"

Recollections by Lois K. Nakamura as a six-year-old.

Inside the barbed wire fence,
Rows of tarpaper barracks
March to the foot of the mountain.

Barren ground
Yields only sagebrush
Where shy rattlesnakes coil in hiding.
Winds blow hard
And the sand stings on legs and faces.

This is my home
Where it is
safe.
The guards on the towers with their guns,
They keep us safe
and
They keep us within the fence.

This poem was reprinted with the permission of the author.

Group Task

Complete the following tasks as a group:

1. Discuss and answer the following questions. Have one group member record the answers for later class discussion.

- Poetry is a deeply symbolic way of representing emotion, meaning, mood, and setting. What types of emotion, meaning, mood, and setting does this particular poem represent?
- What are some of the themes present?
- How is symbolism used?
- Does the poem convey a particular message to the reader? If so, what is the message?

2. Visual art is also a symbolic way to represent emotion, meaning, mood, and setting. In a collage of images and words cut from magazines and other printed material, try to capture what you feel is the essence of the poem.

3. Imagine that you and your group members are in charge of hiring staff for the Heart Mountain incarceration camp. The camp is in need of tower guards. You need to find a "qualified" guard to fill the position. Create a job advertisement flyer that includes a description of the job duties and requirements. When you create the advertisement, consider the following:

- What is the purpose of the job?
- How will you attract people to this job?
- What is your perspective as an employer?
- How does your perspective differ from that of the Japanese American child who wrote "Heart Mountain, My Home"?

Prepare to share this job advertisement flyer with the rest of the class.

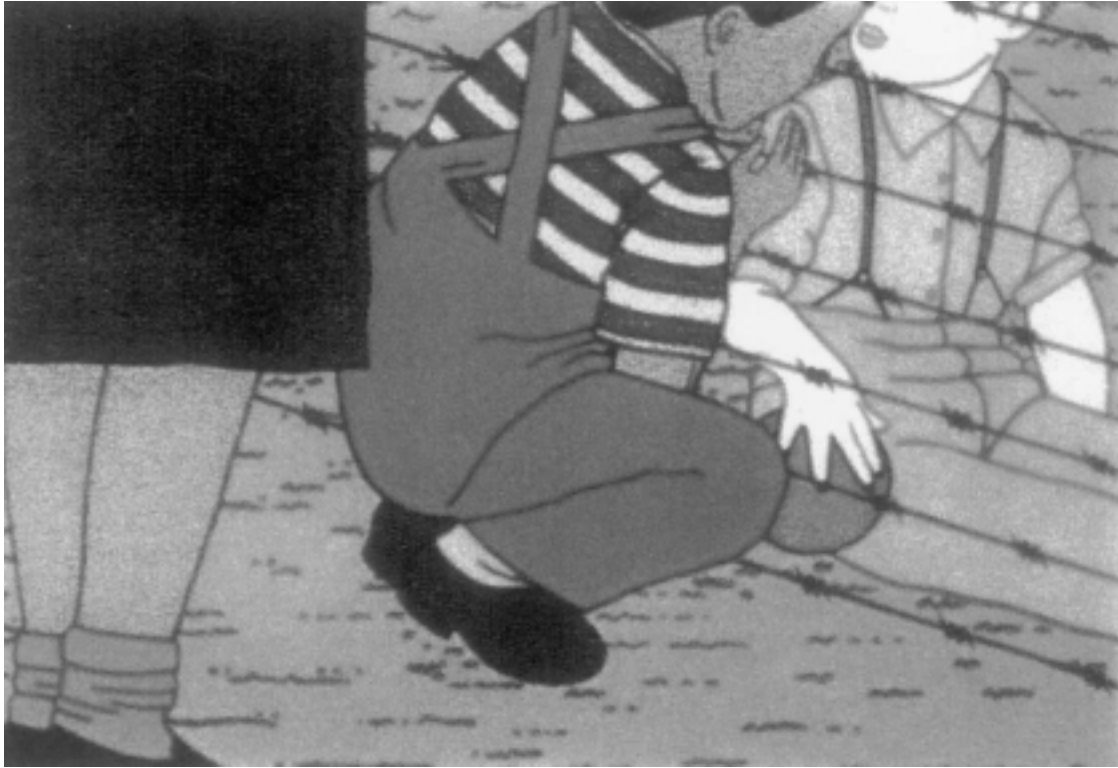
ARTWORK GROUP TASKS

Complete the following two tasks as a group:

1. Discuss and answer the following questions. Have one group member record the answers for class discussion.

- Art is a deeply symbolic way of representing emotion, meaning, mood, and setting. What types of emotion, meaning, mood, and setting does this particular piece of artwork represent?
- What are some of the themes present?
- Is there any symbolism used? If so, how?
- Does the artwork attempt to convey a particular message? If so, what is the message?
- If the artwork has no title, what would be a good title for it?
- Was the artwork created while the artist was incarcerated or afterwards? How do you think the passing of time might affect the message of the artwork?

2. Poetry is also a symbolic way to represent ideas, emotion, meaning, mood, and setting. With your group members, write a poem that would accompany this piece of artwork.

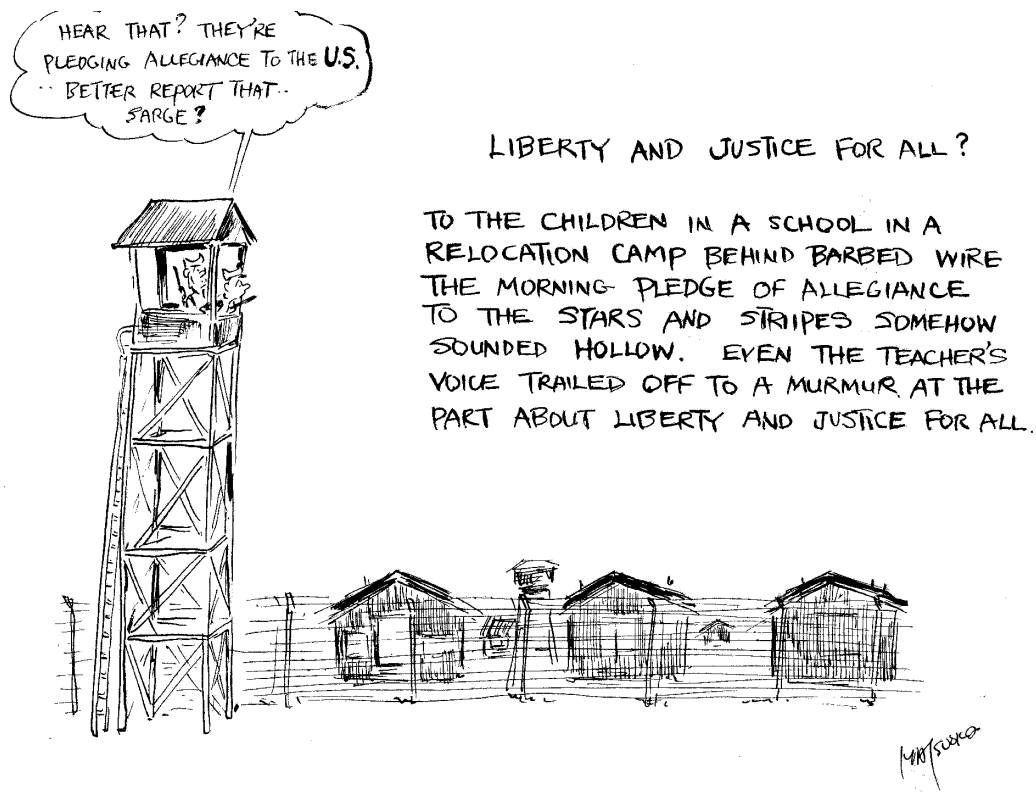


This painting was reprinted with the permission of the artist, Roger Shimomura. It is one of 10 images in the series titled, "Memories of Childhood," 1993.

Group #1

With your group members, write a five-minute conversation between Roger and his friend outside the barbed wire fence. You will be asked to act out this role-play for the class. When writing your role-play, consider the following:

- What do you think they are talking about?
- How old are you?
- What kinds of questions do you think his friend is asking?
- What kinds of questions do you think Roger is asking?
- How do you think the boys answer these questions?
- Be sure to include also the adult who is standing behind Roger. What is she thinking as the boys talk?
- Who is she?



This cartoon was reprinted with permission of the artist, Jack Matsuoka. The image originally appeared in his publication, *Camp II, Block 211*, (San Francisco: Japan Publications, Inc., 1974) p. 151.

Group #2

Students in the camps were required to say the "Pledge of Allegiance." Imagine you are the valedictorian of a graduating class, and you must deliver a five-minute valedictory speech. With your group members, write the speech and select one member to read the speech to the class. When writing the speech, consider the following:

- What is usually the topic of valedictory speeches?
- What is usually the mood, emotion, and tone of graduation ceremonies?
- How might a graduation ceremony in camp be different from the "usual" high school graduation?
- Would you incorporate seemingly ironic experiences in camp schools, e.g., saying the "Pledge of Allegiance"?



This drawing was reprinted with the permission of the artist, Dr. Ruth Okimoto.

Group #3

Have each group member bring in an old elementary school class picture. As you reminisce about your elementary school days, think about your classmates, your teacher, your school, your friends, your favorite activities, etc. What were your strongest memories from this year? Who were your friends? What sorts of games did you play? What do you remember about your teacher? Your classroom? Your playground?

Now, look at Dr. Ruth Okimoto's drawing. Have each member of your group assume the identity of one of the children in the drawing. Imagine that this is the first time you have all seen each other since you left the incarceration camp more than 50 years ago. Write a five-minute role-play of your encounter.



This cartoon was reprinted with the permission of the artist, Jack Matsuoka. The image originally appeared in his publication, *Camp II, Block 211*, (San Francisco: Japan Publications, Inc., 1974) p. 191.

Group #4

Write a five-minute role-play of this situation, depicting U.S. military officers presenting a Japanese American couple in the Poston, Arizona, incarceration camp with a posthumous* award for their son. When writing the role play, consider the following:

- What does an officer say in this situation?
- What do the parents say?
- What are the emotions and feelings of both the officers and the parents?

*posthumous: after one's death



"The Moron" was reprinted with permission from Gary Mukai, son of Masato Mukai.

Group #5

This cartoon, "The Moron," was drawn by Masato Mukai for the 1944 Poston, Arizona, incarceration camp high school yearbook. Before his death in 1991, Masato Mukai told his son that in many ways, coping with the contradictions of camp life made him feel like a moron. "The Moron" was a character he often used as a cartoonist for the school newspaper. Imagine you are in charge of developing a camp school newspaper. Each member of your group should have a role, e.g., cartoonist, editorial writer, general news editor, sports editor, etc. While developing the school newspaper, consider the following:

- What do you hope to convey through your newspaper?
- How does the newspaper reflect your feelings about camp life?
- Would you consider sending the newspaper to your friends outside of camp? If so, what would you like them to know about camp life?