

ACTIVIST · ACTOR · AMERICAN

GEORGE TAKEI MY LOST FREEDOM

A Japanese American World War II Story



Illustrated by **MICHELLE LEE**

EDUCATORS' GUIDE

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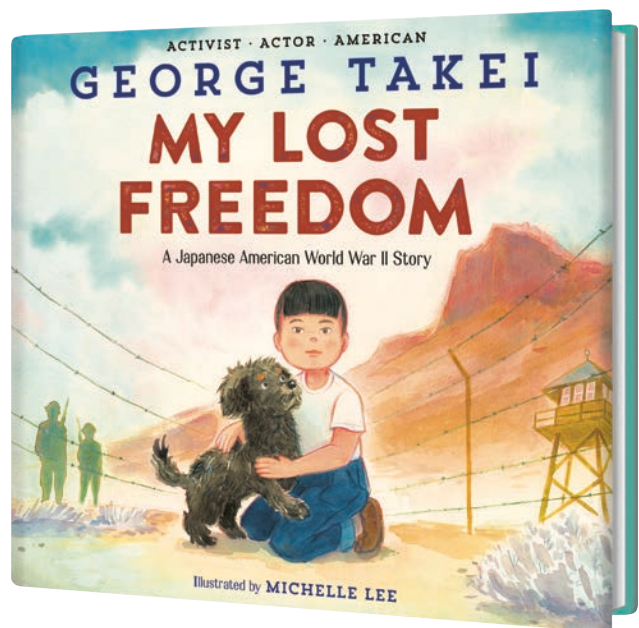
ABOUT THE BOOK

February 19, 1942. George Takei is four years old when his world changes forever. Two months after the bombing of Pearl Harbor, President Franklin D. Roosevelt declares anyone of Japanese descent an enemy of the United States.

George and his family were American in every way. They had done nothing wrong. But because of their Japanese ancestry, they were removed from their home in California and forced into camps with thousands of other families who looked like theirs.

Over the next three years, George had three different “homes”: the Santa Anita racetrack, swampy Camp Rohwer, and the infamous Tule Lake. But even though they were now living behind barbed wire fences and surrounded by armed soldiers, his mother and father did everything they could to keep the family safe.

In *My Lost Freedom*, George Takei looks back at his own memories to help children today understand what it feels like to be treated as an enemy by your own country. Featuring powerful meticulously researched watercolor paintings, this is a story of a family’s courage, a young boy’s resilience, and the importance of staying true to yourself in the face of injustice.



Themes: Autobiography, Asian/Asian American Interest, Nonfiction, Racism & Prejudice, History & Social Studies

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Photo credit: Brenda Bazán



George Takei is a civil rights activist, social media superstar, Grammy-nominated recording artist, *New York Times* bestselling author, and pioneering actor whose career has spanned six decades. He has appeared in more than forty feature films and hundreds of television roles,

most famously as Hikaru Sulu in *Star Trek*, and he has used his success as a platform to fight for social justice, LGBTQ+ rights, and marriage equality. His advocacy is personal: during World War II, George spent his childhood unjustly imprisoned in US incarceration camps along with more than 125,000 other Japanese Americans. He now serves as chairman emeritus and a member of the Japanese American National Museum’s board of trustees. George served on the board of the Japan–United States Friendship Commission and, in 2004, was given the Gold Rays with Rosette of the Order of the Rising Sun by the emperor of Japan for his contribution to U.S.–Japan relations.

ABOUT THE ILLUSTRATOR

Photo credit: Crown BFFR 2024



Michelle Lee is an illustrator and author who has been drawing since she could hold a pencil. Her illustrated book *My Love for You Is Always* received starred reviews from *Kirkus Reviews* and *BookPage*. As an Angeleno and an Asian American, George’s story resonated with

Michelle. She lives and works in the same area of Los Angeles where the story begins and ends.



PRE-READING ACTIVITIES

Look into History: Attack on Pearl Harbor

My Lost Freedom tells about George Takei and his family's experiences in U.S. prison camps during World War II. Their story begins with the bombing of Pearl Harbor on December 7, 1941. Examine this important day in history by completing a five Ws chart; divide a sheet of paper into five sections labeled Who, What, When, Where, and Why. As you research the attack on Pearl Harbor fill in the sections with the details you learn.

Pre-Reading Pondering: What Makes an American?

Look at the front and back covers of the book. George says, "We were branded as 'enemy aliens.' But I am not an enemy or an alien. I am an American." Think about what makes somebody an American. Is it how they look? Where they live? What they do? In addition, consider whether you identify as American. Why or why not? Share your thoughts with a partner, group, or the whole class.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. *My Lost Freedom* describes some of the experiences of Japanese Americans in U.S. prison camps during World War II. These prison camps, also called *incarceration camps*, included places such as Camp Rohwer and Tule Lake. Using details from the story, draw a picture or write a description of what these camps looked and felt like to the Japanese American people who had to stay there.
2. At school, George and the other children recited the Pledge of Allegiance. In the pledge, the United States is described as a place of liberty and justice for all. What do you think that phrase means? Why does George say, "Those words meant the very opposite of being guarded by soldiers in a barbed wire camp"?
3. Kids and adults often see events and situations differently. For example, while traveling by train, George thinks the soldiers are being silly and roaring like lions, but they are in fact calling out "Rohwer! Rohwer!" to announce the next stop. After Mama's smuggled sewing machine is revealed, George and his siblings join in their parents' laughter, although they don't know why they are laughing. Our understanding of what's going on around us affects our opinions and memories. Can you think of an example like this from your own life? Have your feelings and thoughts about an event or situation changed after time has passed or after finding out more about it?
4. The Japanese Americans at Camp Rohwer had to answer a loyalty questionnaire. Question 27 asked, "Are you willing to serve in the armed forces of the United States on combat duty wherever ordered?" Question 28 asked, in part, "Will you swear unqualified allegiance to the United States of America?" Think about the many people who had to answer these questions, including elderly prisoners, women, and people who feared being separated from their families. Why do you think George says they are "trick questions"?
5. One of the happier memories from Camp Tule that George describes is watching movies in the mess hall. Why do you think these moments were so important to him? How might those experiences have affected his later life?
6. George and Henry discover a shaggy dog and name him Blackie. How did Blackie help the Takei family? Does your family or someone you know have a pet, and how has the pet helped or benefited you or them?
7. At Tule Lake, a group of young men gather in the mornings to jog and protest their unjust treatment. They chant "Was-shoi! Was-shoi!" which is a Japanese chant meant to boost unity and peace. As they chant together, the young men encourage one another and gather strength as a group. Afterward, angry soldiers come looking to throw them in jail. What motivated these men to speak out? Did they do something wrong or illegal by protesting? Why or why not?
8. In the Author's Note, George shares that his father would say, "As an American, I have American responsibilities." What did his father mean by "American responsibilities"? Do you feel like you share in these responsibilities? Why or why not? How do you carry out these responsibilities in your day-to-day life?
9. Think about the title of the book, *My Lost Freedom*. What "freedom" was lost for George and other Japanese Americans? What freedoms do you have now? Does everyone you know also have those freedoms? Why or why not?



EXTENSION ACTIVITIES

Everyday Resistance

Throughout the story, the Takei family demonstrates different forms of resistance against the harsh and oppressive treatment of Japanese Americans during and after World War II. They make decisions to help in their survival and to preserve their dignity and hope, and they engage in activities to rebel against injustice. Using the book as a resource, fill out the chart below with examples of Japanese

Americans, including Mama, Daddy, and other prisoners, who demonstrated resistance. Remember that resistance can be silent or loud, and can be seen in small and large actions. Under the third column, explain how the prisoners' actions challenged their classification as "enemy aliens" or countered their loss of rights and access to resources. An example is included.

Who	Action	Demonstration of Resistance
Prisoners	Form a baseball team	Organize a fun activity to pass the time and grow a sense of community

Beauty All Around

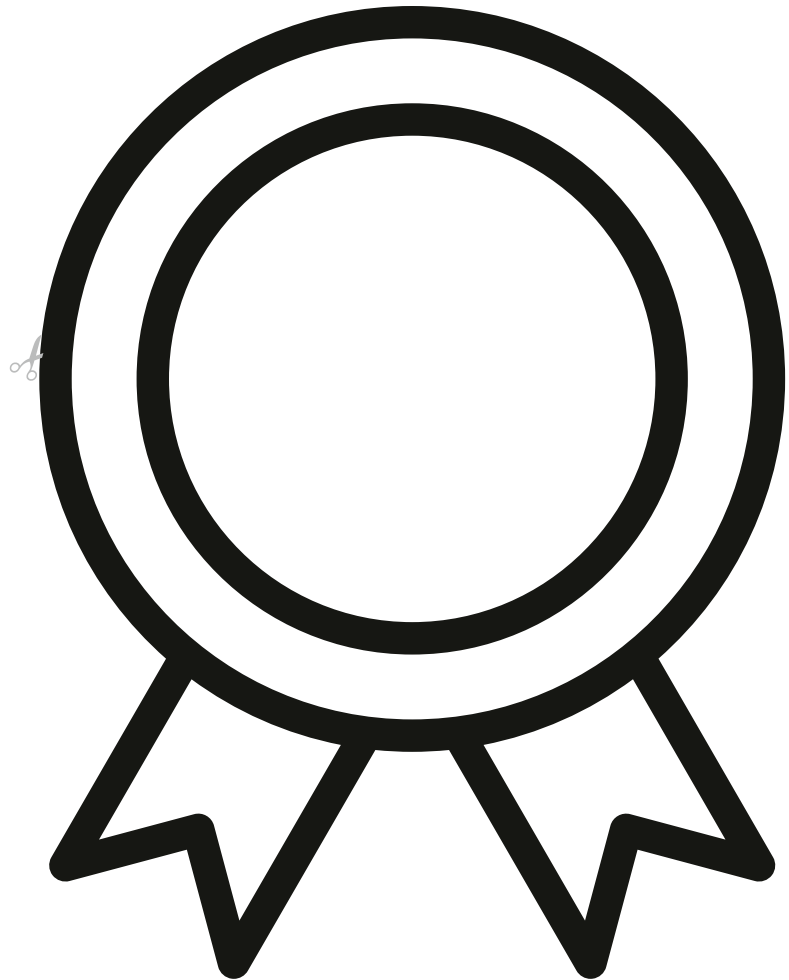
The Takei family is removed from their home and forced to live in many other places, including a horse stall and tar paper barracks surrounded by armed guard towers and barbed wire. Despite the dreadful conditions, George's mother tries to beautify these spaces so the family can feel more at home. Mama sews curtains out of fabric scraps and gathers rags to braid colorful rugs. She also creates artwork by twisting plant branches into sculptures. Mama shows how beauty can be created and discovered all around us. Using only found or made items, create a decoration or addition for your classroom or bedroom. Be creative and think about how resources might be utilized beyond their original purposes.



Honoring Our Heroes

In the Author's Note, George calls his mom and dad "solid American heroes." Heroes display courage and take action to help others. Though they did not have superpowers, George's mom and dad showed ordinary heroism to George and to other prisoners through their words and actions and made a difference in many people's lives. Do you know any heroes

like that? These might be people who stand up for others, who show kindness and bravery, or who take action to help those in need. Honor your own heroes by decorating the medal below. Afterward, be sure to cut out the medal and give it to your hero while explaining how they have made a difference in your life.



Research Report: After the War

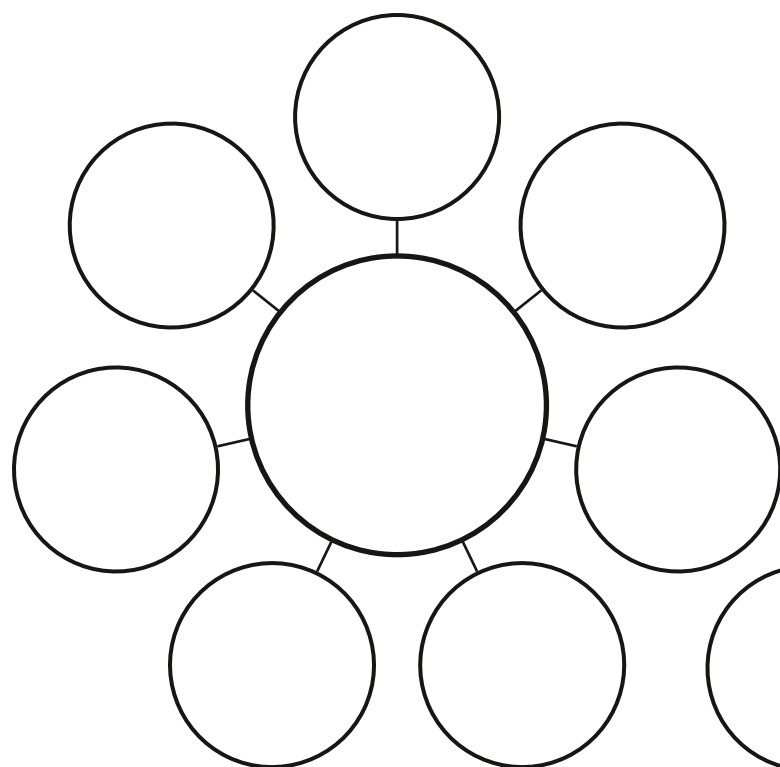
The harsh and discriminatory treatment of Japanese Americans did not immediately stop when World War II ended. Review the Author's Note to hear about the Takei family's experiences after the war. Continue your learning by researching other Japanese Americans' experiences after their release from the incarceration camps. Write a research report that includes information about their struggles to find housing, jobs, and fair treatment from others. Two helpful digital resources are the [Densho Encyclopedia](#) and [The National World War II Museum](#).



Words Matter

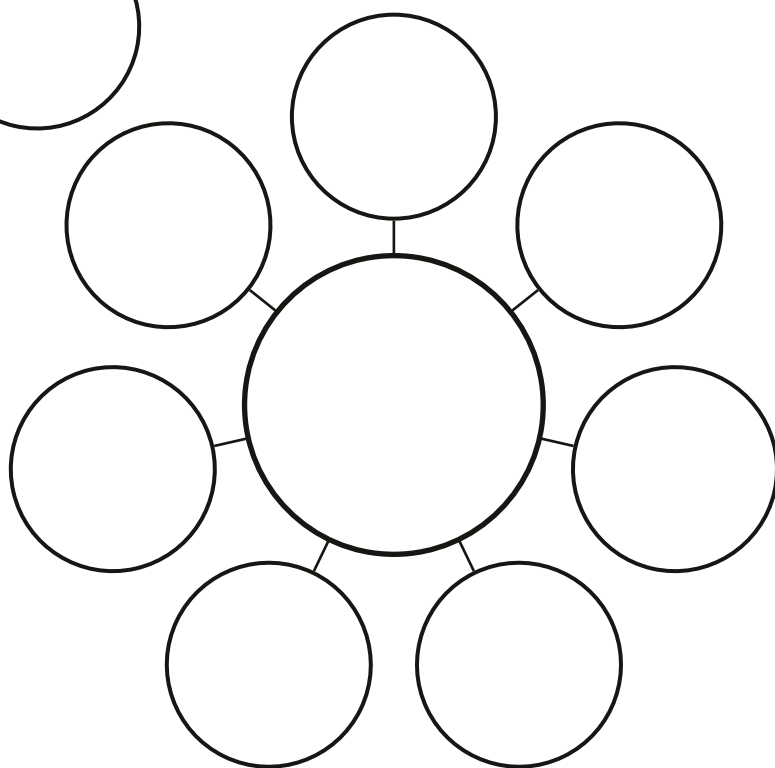
The words we say, hear, and read are powerful because they communicate very specific meanings and messages. *My Lost Freedom* shows how certain words had the power to influence or cause actions. Think about the word pairs below. Each pair was used in the story to refer to the same person, situation, or issue, but they communicated different ideas and messages.

Create a word web for each word in a pair and fill in the blanks with words that you think of when you hear or read the main words. Compare your word webs. What meanings do these words convey? How were the words in each pair used? Why were they used in different situations?



Word Pairs

- Immigrants vs. Americans
- Japanese Americans vs. Enemy Aliens
- Segregation Camp vs. Maximum-Security Prison



Joanne Yi, PhD is an adjunct assistant professor in Curriculum & Instruction at Indiana University. Her research centers the racialization of Asian Americans in children's literature and diverse representation in youth literature.



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