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Lesson One

FOCUS: Biography

Examining an author's life can inform and expand the reader's understanding of a novel. Biographical criticism is the practice of analyzing a literary work through the lens of an author's experience. In this lesson, we explore the author's life to understand the novel more fully.

Julie Otsuka's family history figures prominently in the subject matter of *When the Emperor Was Divine*. After the bombing of Pearl Harbor and the onset of World War II, the FBI arrested her grandfather. Subsequently, like many Japanese Americans at the time, her mother, grandmother, and uncle were all incarcerated at internment camps.

Read

Read Handout One: Excerpt from "Julie Otsuka on Her Family's Wartime Internment in Topaz, Utah" by Julie Otsuka (*Newsweek*, October 15, 2012) in class.

Topaz, Utah, was one of ten United States internment sites that housed some of the 120,000 Japanese Americans incarcerated at the beginning of World War II. After the U.S. government put Executive Order 9066 into effect, members of Julie Otsuka's family went first to the Tanforan temporary detention center and then to the Topaz internment camp. Nearly 60 years later, Otsuka toured Topaz with a Utah schoolteacher.

Discussion Activities

Fictional adaptations from history are common. Does an author with relevant personal or familial history have a particular responsibility to tell the story? Do you think this passage reveals why Julie Otsuka decided to write her novel? What are the challenges involved with writing a work of fiction so closely based on one's own family experiences? What are the benefits?

Writing Exercise

Ask students to imagine that they are a National Park Service ranger tasked with writing the paragraph-long text for a monument marker at the site of the Topaz, Utah internment camp. Have them do research on the site and perhaps on some other internment sites as well. What would they write?

Homework

Read "Evacuation Order No. 19" from the novel.

Have students consider the following questions while reading:

1. What do you notice about the woman's decisions in packing up her house? To which events does the author point our attention?
2. Are there any moments that suggest to you that something is wrong?
3. What do you make of the two incidents with the family pets? What tone do they set for the novel?

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Lesson Two

FOCUS:
Culture and History

Cultural and historical contexts give birth to the dilemmas and themes within the novel. Studying these contexts and appreciating intricate details of the time and place help readers understand the motivations of the characters.

One of the many reasons that this novel has enjoyed such widespread popularity and community interest is that its subject matter, though removed in time by many years, is still an important and troubling part of our national conversation.

Given the fact that Japanese Americans were singled out because of their national heritage following Pearl Harbor, one topic that the novel implicitly raises is that of racial profiling.

Read

Have students read the National Institute of Justice's definition of racial profiling:
http://www.nij.gov/topics/law-enforcement/legitimacy/pages/racial-profiling.aspx

Then, give them five minutes to read this argument about racial profiling:
http://aclu.procon.org/view.answers.php?questionID=000725

Discussion Activities

After students have finished reading, ask them to summarize each side's argument—the one from those who advocate for the efficacy of racial profiling and the other from those who find it problematic. Then have students argue the position they feel most comfortable supporting. What are some examples that the students could offer from their own sense of history or their own experiences?

Writing Exercise

Ask students to draft a three-paragraph letter to a local politician about the dangers of racial profiling. Instruct them to consider first the issue and its context, raise the concerns or problems that they have with the other side's argument, and finish by arguing the point they support.

Homework

Read "Train" from the novel.

Have students consider the following questions while reading:

1. What might the mother have been thinking on this train ride east? How might the girl or the boy feel differently?
2. How do the children seem to make the best of the train ride?
3. Why do you suppose that the soldiers want the shades of the train kept down?
4. Much of the imagery in this chapter is drawn from the scenes viewed from a window of the train without a shade. What kinds of images do we see? Do they have any significance?

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Lesson Three

FOCUS:
Narrative and Point of View

The narrator tells the story, with a specific perspective informed by his or her beliefs and experiences. Narrators can be major or minor characters, or can exist outside the story altogether. The narrator weaves her or his point of view, including ignorance and bias, into telling the tale. A first-person narrator participates in the events of the novel, using "I." A distanced narrator, often not a character, is removed from the action of the story and uses the third person (he, she, or they). The distanced narrator may be omniscient, able to read the minds of all the characters, or limited, describing only certain characters' thoughts and feelings. Ultimately, the type of narrator determines the point of view from which the story is told.

One of the central stylistic decisions Otsuka makes has to do with the narrative perspective. The novel is told from five different perspectives: the mother, the daughter, the son, the familial "we" of the fourth chapter, and finally the first person singular "I" of the father's chapter.

Discussion Activities

The first two chapters are told from third-person perspectives. How might the story be different if any of the main characters had been given names? How might the story be different if it had been written exclusively in the first person? What reasons might Otsuka have had for writing most of her novel from the third-person perspective?

Writing Exercise

First- and third-person narratives are fairly standard in modern fiction. Tell students to imagine that they and their family are returning home after a long time away. Maybe they are moving back to a place they once lived. Perhaps they were traveling for a few weeks on vacation.

Split the class up into three groups. Each group's members will write about returning home from a different perspective. The first group will write from the third person, the second from the first-person plural, and the third group from the first-person singular.

In a subsequent class, ask the students to discuss answers to this question: what do you notice about the different effects of those perspectives, given the fact that the material is similar?

Homework

Read "When the Emperor Was Divine" from the novel.

Have students consider the following questions while reading:

1. What relationship does the boy have with the father?
2. What do you notice about the boy's experience at the internment facility? What does he do to pass the time? What are the moments when he struggles?
3. What role do the letters between father and son play in this chapter?

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Lesson Four

FOCUS:
Characters

A central character in a work of literature is called the protagonist. The protagonist usually initiates the main action of the story and often overcomes a flaw, such as weakness or ignorance, to achieve a new understanding by the work's end. A protagonist who acts with great honor or courage may be called a hero. An anti-hero is a protagonist lacking these qualities. Instead of being dignified, brave, idealistic, or purposeful, the anti-hero may be cowardly, self-interested, or weak. The protagonist's journey is enriched by encounters with characters who hold differing beliefs. One such character type, a foil, has traits that contrast with the protagonist and highlight important features of the main character's personality. The most important foil, the antagonist, opposes the protagonist, barring or complicating his or her success.

Discussion Activities

One reason this novel interests readers is because, three chapters into the book, it might be difficult to identify a hero or protagonist. Many readers may find the American government to be an obvious antagonist, but determining a protagonist might be more difficult.

Of the three main characters we've met so far, do you see a protagonist emerging? Must all novels have an individual character who serves as the protagonist? If we do struggle to identify a protagonist, what might our struggle tell us about the nature of Otsuka's goals in the creation of this story?

Writing Exercise

Have students choose one character from *When the Emperor Was Divine* who seems heroic. What are the characteristics that make that character heroic? Look closely for three pieces of textual evidence to support your statement. Ask students to select three brief passages that could each be incorporated into two or three sentences of their own creation that provide evidence to support their claim. Make sure their responses address *how* the character they have chosen is heroic.

Homework

Read "In a Stranger's Backyard" from the novel.

Have students consider the following questions while reading:

1. The narrative perspective shifts from the individual (the woman, the girl, or the boy) to a plural "we." What effect does this have on your reading of the chapter?
2. What changes do you notice in the home? The neighborhood? The neighbors?
3. What might the family's selection, "without thinking," of a room that first night indicate about the effects of internment?
4. In what ways are the children's "loyalty" to America tested in this chapter?
5. What do you make of the father's homecoming? Was any aspect of this encounter surprising?

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Lesson Five

FOCUS: Figurative Language

Writers use figurative language such as imagery, similes, and metaphors to help the reader visualize and experience events and emotions in a story. Imagery—a word or phrase that refers to senses like sight, sound, smell, touch, or taste—helps create a physical experience for the reader and adds immediacy to literary language.

In addition to imagery, similes, and metaphors, an author can use tone and diction to deliver meanings beyond what a word or phrase might mean literally. Tone represents a narrator's attitude towards a subject, and diction is the choice of words that the author uses to communicate that attitude. Otsuka's matter-of-fact prose style often utilizes a quiet tone and subtle diction.

Discussion Activities

"*Shikata ga nai*" is a phrase in Japanese that means "it cannot be helped now" or "nothing can be done about it." This phrase has been utilized in other works about the Japanese internment, and is even inscribed on a San Jose, California, monument memorializing the Japanese-American experience of internment. Looking closely at the tone of the narration in the following excerpts, how might the tone and diction fit the meaning of "Shikata ga nai"?

> In a few hours he and the girl and their mother would wake up and go to the Civil Control Station at the First Congregational Church on Channing Way. Then they would pin their identification numbers to their collars and grab their suitcases and climb up onto the bus and go to wherever it was they had to go. (Excerpt from the end of "Evacuation Order No. 19")

> She looked at her watch one more time and then she stared up at the sky, as though she were thinking. "Right about now," she said, "I bet they're having a good time." Then she started walking again. (Excerpt from the beginning of "When the Emperor Was Divine")

> The next day, for the first time ever, she sent the boy and his sister to school with peanut butter and jelly sandwiches in their lunch pails. "No more rice balls," she said. "And if anyone asks, you're Chinese." The boy had nodded. "Chinese," he whispered. "I'm Chinese." (Excerpt from the middle of "When the Emperor Was Divine")

Writing Exercise

1. Ask students to choose one feeling or sentiment from the following list: compassion, anger, frustration, regret, joy, or resignation.
2. Then ask students to think of five or six words that they might choose to communicate that sentiment, without using the word itself. For example, if a student were to choose anger, he or she would need to avoid using the word "anger" or other forms like "angry." The goal here is to communicate a feeling in ways that shape the reader's impression of tone without directly telling the reader how he or she should feel.

   Here's an example for "joy": "Arthur bounded into the room clutching the college acceptance letter he had just excitedly snatched from the mailbox and opened. With a beaming grin, he exclaimed to his family, 'I got in!'"

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FOCUS:
Figurative Language

Choosing words like "bounded" instead of "walked," "clutching" as opposed to "holding," and "exclaimed" instead of "said," the author can imply a positive sentiment to the reader.

3. Have students create a sentence based on one of the above sentiments, and then discuss the reasons for their choices with classmates.

Homework

Read "Confession" from the novel.

Have students consider the following questions when reading:

1. How does this final chapter help explain the father's behavior at the end of "In a Stranger's Backyard"?
2. This chapter is a significant departure in tone and perspective from the prior chapters. What effect did those changes have on you in your reading?
3. What has the father's experience with internment done to him?
4. Do you think the father's apology at the end of the novel is sincere?

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Lesson Six

FOCUS: Symbols

Symbols are persons, places, or things in a narrative that have significance beyond a literal understanding. The craft of storytelling depends on symbols to present ideas and point toward new meanings. Most frequently, a specific object will be used to refer to (or symbolize) a more abstract concept. The repeated appearance of an object suggests a non-literal, or figurative, meaning attached to the object. Symbols are often found in the book's title, at the beginning or end of the story, within a profound action, or in the name or personality of a character. The life of a novel is perpetuated by generations of readers interpreting and reinterpreting the main symbols. By identifying and understanding symbols, readers can reveal new interpretations of the novel.

Otsuka's novel tackles, among other themes, the question of what it means to be a Japanese American. Present in the first chapter of the novel are countless images and objects closely related to American life and culture: Woolworth's, the YMCA, a Victrola record player, Joe Palooka comic books, and other such iconic examples of Americana.

But alongside these symbols of American life can be found a constellation of Japanese symbols as well—the mother's homemade plum wine, the rice balls at lunch, the Kagoshima ivory chopsticks, and the barley water.

Discussion Activities

At two points in the novel, more of these possible symbols present themselves. At one point, Otsuka describes the boy writing his family's identification number on the shell of his pet tortoise. In another place, we learn about the daughter that "[p]inned to her collar was an identification number and around her throat she wore a faded silk scarf."

Given the tortoise shell's inscription and the collision of the identification number and the silk (often associated with Asian countries) scarf, what might Otsuka be suggesting about the experience of internment for these children?

Writing Exercise

Have students choose one object or symbol from the novel that they feel most accurately represents the family's or one character's experience of internment. In a single paragraph, have them explain why they feel that object or symbol has such power and how the object or symbol contributes to the novel's effect.

Homework

Have students read Handout Two: Direct vs. Indirect Characterization.

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Lesson Seven

FOCUS: Character Development

Novels trace the development of characters that encounter a series of challenges. Most characters contain a complex balance of virtues and vices. Internal and external forces require characters to question themselves, overcome fears, or reconsider dreams. The protagonist may undergo profound change. A close study of character development maps the evolution of motivation, personality, and belief for each character. The tension between a character's strengths and weaknesses keeps the reader guessing about what might happen next and the protagonist's eventual success or failure.

Authors are afforded two principal options when seeking a method to develop characters in their stories: direct and indirect characterization. Direct characterization uses a narrative voice to tell the reader what the character is like; indirect characterization uses the speech, actions, thoughts, and interaction of that character as ways to highlight his or her personality.

In *When the Emperor Was Divine*, Otsuka primarily chooses indirect characterization to illustrate the characters. As Handout Two describes, indirect characterization places much of the responsibility on the reader for interpreting a character's personality. We are asked to determine a character's motivations based on what the author *shows* us, not on what a narrator *tells* us. While the narration in this story does present us with the characters' actions and thoughts, it does not often comment or editorialize.

Discussion Activities

Have students read closely these four passages from the novel, each from a different family member's perspective. Try to identify what we can learn from one of the following sources of indirect characterization: actions, speech, or thoughts. What is revealed through these methods? Are there traits present that seem representative of the character about which the passage is written?

> **The woman:** When she got home the woman took off her red dress and put on her faded blue one—her housedress. She twisted her hair up into a bun and put on an old pair of comfortable shoes. She had to finish packing. She rolled up the Oriental rug in the living room. She took down the mirrors. She took down the curtains and shades. She carried the tiny bonsai tree out into the yard and set it down on the grass beneath the eaves where it would not get too much shade or too much sun but just the right amount of each. She brought the wind-up Victrola and the Westminster chime clock downstairs to the basement. (Excerpt from the beginning of "Evacuation Order No. 19")
>
> **The girl:** Without lifting her eyes from the map she stuck out her hand. "Lemon, please," she said. Her mother leaned over and dropped a lemon into the girl's palm. The girl stood up and opened the window and tossed the lemon out into the desert. It soared through the air and hit a gnarled trunk of blackened sage as the white house grew smaller and smaller in the distance. The girl had once been the star pitcher of a softball team and she knew how to throw. "Don't lose that arm," her mother said under her breath. "I wasn't planning on it," said the girl. (Excerpt from the beginning of "Train")

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FOCUS:
Character Development

The boy: Whenever the boy walked past the shadow of a guard tower he pulled his cap down low over his head and tried not to say the word. But sometimes it slipped out anyway. *Hirohito, Hirohito, Hirohito.* He said it quietly. Quickly. He whispered it. (Excerpt from the beginning of "When the Emperor Was Divine")

The father: Who am I? You know who I am. Or you think you do. I'm your florist. I'm your grocer. I'm your porter. I'm your waiter. I'm the owner of the dry-goods store on the corner of Elm. I'm the shoeshine boy. I'm the judo teacher. I'm the Buddhist priest. I'm the Shinto priest. I'm the Right Reverend Yoshimoto. *So prease to meet you.* (Excerpt from the beginning of "Confession")

Writing Exercise

If someone were to write a story in which you were a character, and decided to do so using only indirect characterization, what would they write? Ask students to compose a passage that they think accurately captures one aspect of their personality through indirect characterization. Have them pay close attention to the details they read about in Handout Two.

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Lesson Eight

FOCUS:
The Plot Unfolds

The author crafts a plot structure to create expectations, increase suspense, and develop characters. The pacing of events can make a novel either predictable or riveting. Foreshadowing and flashbacks allow the author to defy the constraints of time. Sometimes an author can confound a simple plot by telling stories within stories. In a conventional work of fiction, the peak of the story's conflict—the climax—is followed by the resolution, or denouement, in which the effects of that climactic action are presented.

A great exercise in examining the plot structure of a conventional story is to try to identify the climactic event. The climax of a story is the point towards which all early events lead (the rising action or complication), and all effects afterward (the resolution) are a result of its happening. What makes this exercise both challenging and fun is that students often disagree about what a story's climax is. The resulting discussion often reveals details or considerations that not all students have been able to spot the first time through the story.

Discussion Activities

Is *When the Emperor Was Divine* a conventional story? Can we identify a climactic event in the novel? Is the nature of the narrative, which is chronological and independently episodic, problematic in determining a classic plot structure?

Homework

Have students choose and read six of the ten Op-Ed pieces from a 2012 *New York Times* debate, "Crossing the Line Between 'Immigrant' and 'American.'" What do these contributors have to share about their sense of what it means to be American? What does it mean to be an immigrant?

http://www.nytimes.com/roomfordebate/2012/11/15/how-immigrants-come-to-be-seen-as-americans

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Lesson Nine

FOCUS:
Themes of the Novel

Themes are the central, recurring subjects of the novel. As characters grapple with circumstances such as racism, class, or unrequited love, profound questions will arise in the reader's mind about human life, social pressures, and societal expectations. Classic themes include intellectual freedom versus censorship, the relationship between one's personal moral code and larger political justice, and spiritual faith versus rational considerations. A novel often considers these age-old debates by presenting them in new contexts, or from new points of view.

Issei, *Nisei*, and *Sansei* are terms that refer either to Japanese immigrants or their descendants. An Issei is a Japanese immigrant to America; Nisei are the American-born children of Issei; and Sansei are Nisei's children and the grandchildren of Issei. Each generation has its own special relationship with the family's country-of-origin and America. In Otsuka's novel, this manifests itself in the range of responses to the internment.

Discussion Activities

Have students read Handout Three: Immigration, Nationalism, and Discrimination in the U.S.

How are the five characters' identities shaped both by others' perceptions and each character's own sense of self? Does "becoming American" require a first- or second-generation family to renounce their cultural beliefs? What differences do you see in the characters' varying responses to the experience of internment? What moments in the text speak most powerfully to the Japanese Americans' struggle to define an identity that is both Japanese and American?

Writing Exercise

Ask students to make a list of at least ten things that an individual should believe if he or she is to be an American citizen. Then have them explain briefly why they think it is important to believe five of those things.

Homework

Students should begin work on outlines for their essays or preparation for their capstone projects. Outlines should include a thesis statement and topic sentences; preliminary work on the capstone project will depend on the project.

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Lesson Ten

FOCUS:
What Makes a Book Great?

Great stories articulate and explore the mysteries of our daily lives in the larger context of the human struggle. The writer's voice, style, and use of language inform the plot, characters, and themes. By creating opportunities to learn, imagine, and reflect, a great novel is a work of art that affects many generations of readers, changes lives, challenges assumptions, and breaks new ground.

Discussion Activities

As a brainstorming activity, ask students to think independently of four to five characteristics of a great book and write them down. Students should consider their own reading experiences both in and out of school to create their lists. Then divide students into groups and ask them to discuss the characteristics they've noted.

Finally, ask the class to come together to develop a single list of what the group believes to be the most important characteristics of a great novel. What qualities do the students see in *When the Emperor Was Divine*? Are there enough to qualify the novel as a great novel?

Writing Exercise

Compile a dust jacket "brag sheet"—testimonials—of one-sentence reviews for the novel. Each student is to come up with one sentence of praise for the novel, much as one might see on the back cover of a novel or in the first few pages. The sentence should capture the spirit or the impact of this novel. When all students' submissions are in, the collection could be published in poster form for the classroom.

Homework

Students should begin drafting their essays or continue work on their capstone projects.

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Excerpt from
"Julie Otsuka on Her Family's Wartime Internment in Topaz, Utah"

Dorothea Lange/National Archives and Records Administration

By Julie Otsuka

There is a photograph in the National Archives of my mother, uncle, and grandmother taken by Dorothea Lange on April 29, 1942. The caption reads: "San Bruno, California. Family of Japanese ancestry arrives at assembly center at Tanforan Race Track." My mother, 10, is turned away from the camera and all you can see is a sliver of her cheek, one ear, and two black braids pinned to the top of her head. In the background is a large concrete structure with a balcony—the grandstands. My grandmother, 42, is wearing a nice wool coat and listening intently to the man beside her, who is pointing out something in the distance—most likely the newly built barracks in the middle of the racetrack, where she and the children would be sleeping that evening. My uncle, who is 8, is carrying his mother's purse for her beneath his left arm. Hanging from a canvas strap around his neck is a canteen, which is no doubt filled with water. Why? Because he is going to "camp."

Clearly, my uncle had a different kind of camp in mind—the kind of camp where you pitch tents and take hikes and get thirsty—and clearly, his mother has allowed him to think this. But he is only just now realizing his mistake, and the expression on his face is anxious and concerned. Tanforan was a temporary detention center for thousands of Bay Area "evacuees" on their way

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to Topaz, Utah, one of 10 internment camps in which 120,000 Japanese and Japanese-Americans were imprisoned during World War II.

[…]

Shortly after [*When the Emperor Was Divine*] was published, in the fall of 2002, I received an unexpected invitation to fly out to Utah. Although I had long resisted making this trip—I wasn't sure that I wanted to see the place where my mother had spent the war—now that the book was finished, it felt like it was time.

Topaz is located at the end of a dusty gravel road on a desolate stretch of desert 125 miles southwest of Salt Lake City. When I arrived it was January and the landscape—barren and bleak, bleached white by the sun—looked oddly familiar, like a washed-out version of the place in which I had been living, every day, for the past six years, in my head. Aside from the barbed-wire fence, little remained of the original camp, but it was clear that at one time many people had lived here: you could still see the concrete foundations of the barracks and the ground was littered with rusty nails and shards of broken glass and crockery. My guide, Jane Beckwith, a high-school English teacher in the town of Delta 16 miles away, had been coming out to the site with her students since 1982. Her father, the former owner of the Delta newspaper, had printed the high-school yearbooks for the camp, and as a child she would leaf through their pages, wondering about the people with the strange-sounding Japanese names. It was her dream, she told me, to one day open a small museum dedicated to the history of Topaz. As we walked across the sand, she pointed out a formation of stones—remnants of a rock garden built by an anonymous former resident. Every block, she said, had its own character. Eight was one of her favorites. My mother had lived in Block 28, but there wasn't much of it left to see.

Before we drove back into town she took me over to the side of the road to look at the new Topaz memorial marker, a replacement for the old one, which had become unreadable after vandals had adopted it as a target for shooting practice. The new memorial appeared virtually indestructible—a plaque and several photographic etchings embedded in a long low slab of concrete. Because it was not as tall as the old one—it literally had a "lower profile"—it was less likely to end up as a target. "Noticeable but not too noticeable," as the local paper put it. I wondered, though, if the old marker—its words riddled with bullet holes—shouldn't have been left standing. For it, too, was part of the story. In fact, maybe it was the story.

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http://www.newsweek.com/julie-otsuka-her-familys-wartime-internment-topaz-utah-65457.

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Direct vs. Indirect Characterization

Characterization is what an author does in a story to communicate to the reader what kind of people his or her characters are.

Direct characterization is communicated directly by the author, almost always through what a narrator or trustworthy character tells us. *Indirect characterization* is a little more complicated: The reader's understanding of a character is based on what a character does, says, thinks, or what another character says about him or her.

In John Steinbeck's *Of Mice and Men*, the narrator says, "Curley was quick and mean." We don't have to do much interpretation there! That would be an example of *direct characterization*.

But, when the two main characters—Lennie and George—are walking together in the opening chapter of the novel, Steinbeck's narrator tells us that Lennie "dropped his blankets and flung himself down and drank from the surface of the green pool; drank with long gulps, snorting into the water like a horse." Here we may have to think a bit more. Why does Lennie act this way? What impressions do his gulping and snorting provide about his personality? These are the kinds of questions that readers must answer when faced with *indirect characterization*.

Sophisticated readers will also look carefully at the diction, or choice of words, that the author uses in instances of characterization. *Connotation*, an important element of diction, is a term that refers to both the literal definition of a word and the emotions the word elicits in the reader.

For example, "slim" and "scrawny," which both mean skinny or slender, elicit different emotions from the reader. "Strong-willed" does not affect readers in the same way as "pig-headed" does, even though both mean stubborn.

In looking closely at both *direct* and *indirect characterization*, readers will have to decide not only what the author tells us or what the character's speech or behavior indicates but also how the words the author uses are supposed to make us feel.

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Immigration, Nationalism, and Discrimination in the U.S.

From its earliest days, America has been a country of immigrants. Immigrants have helped to shape, drive, and enliven what has become known as the American experience. In his proclamation on Constitution Day and Citizenship Day in 2013, President Barack Obama offered to those gathered that

> We are a proud Nation of immigrants, home to a long line of aspiring citizens who contributed to their communities, founded businesses, or sacrificed their livelihoods so they could pass a brighter future on to their children.

Over our nation's history, however, racist and xenophobic words and actions have often greeted immigrants. In the eighteenth century, Benjamin Franklin worried that the influx of German immigrants would dilute or overtake the predominately British culture of the colonies. The Chinese Exclusion Act of 1882 imposed a ten-year moratorium on Chinese labor immigration, out of fears that greater numbers of Chinese would threaten the character of American towns and cities. German Americans during both world wars were subjected to maltreatment, discrimination, and even incarceration for simply being of German descent. Both the Irish, in the 1840s, and Hispanics throughout the twentieth century, have been accused of stealing U.S. jobs. In the 1920s, federal legislation greatly restricted immigration from non-European countries, essentially imposing a racial prerequisite for American citizenship. Even though many point to immigration as one of the hallmarks of American freedom and opportunity, its history has been troublesome.

Despite efforts to learn from past mistakes, what struggles still exist? Immigrants are often faced with difficult decisions regarding their relationship between their native country and the United States. Scholars and social theorists speak of the challenges for immigrants of forging a dual identity—one that embraces a new American culture while retaining and celebrating the unique characteristics that their native culture offers.

It is this dual identity that Japanese Americans were forced to deny during World War II. In Otsuka's novel, a team of army recruiters asks the mother the following question in a "loyalty questionnaire":

> Will you swear unqualified allegiance to the United States of America and faithfully defend the United States from any or all attack by foreign or domestic forces, and forswear any form of allegiance or obedience to the Japanese Emperor, or any other foreign government, power or organization? (End of "When the Emperor Was Divine")

To the Japanese Americans, the denial of one's native country, its beliefs and customs was unimaginable. Yet this was precisely what they were being asked—to deny their very heritage in a false binary proposed by the American government. One plus one must equal one, it seemed, not two. Most, including the mother in our story, answered yes to the question posed in the loyalty questionnaire, justifying it by saying, "it's all just words."

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