ORGANIZATIONAL PATTERNS

Through omniscient, third-person narration, the reader accesses both the big picture of the plotline and the intimate thoughts of the eleven-year-old female protagonist, Yuki. Seventeen chapters, ranging from four and a half to ten pages in length, comprise the novel. In total, the text captures approximately a year and a half-long time period. The insightful prologue, from author Yoshiko Uchida directed to her readers, provides vital background knowledge by summarizing the historical context that heavily influences the book. Seven illustrations are also interspersed throughout the text and help communicate the feeling of the novel.

ISSUES RELATED TO THIS STUDY OF LITERATURE

THEME:

One principal theme of Uchida’s fictional autobiography is the self-perpetuating, destructive nature of fear. At the outset of the novel, Japan’s surprise, aggressive and deadly attack on Pearl Harbor scares America. The ensuing events of the text are employed by Uchida to clearly show how fear seized the nation and triggered violation of its principles of liberty and justice for all, as internment of Japanese people was mandated. This is especially highlighted by Yuki’s mother’s situation and her response. Although she is forced to leave the majority of her belongings and re-create life inside barbed wire, although she is an innocent victim of the country’s self-destructive fear; she continues to care for others. When FBI agents enter her house, treat her as the enemy and arrest her husband, she hospitably offers them tea and chocolate cake. Continually, she combats fear with increased love and understanding of others, highlighting through contrasts the devastatingly destructive character of fear. She explains, “Fear has made this country do something that she will one day regret, Mr. Kurihara, but we cannot let this terrible mistake poison our hearts. If we do, then we will be the one to destroy ourselves and our children as well.” (90). Two decades later, President John F. Kennedy would say “The only thing we have to fear is fear itself,” also acknowledging the danger of fear. Uchida’s historical fiction shows readers that the United States government first imposed a curfew on those of Japanese descent, then stripped them of their
weapons or tools, and finally relocated them to internment camps, all because of a fear that they were “the enemy.” In 1983, the Commission of Wartime Relocation and Internment of Civilians stated that the causes of this violation were “race prejudice, war hysteria, and a failure of leadership” (Uchida viii). “Hysteria” translates into the epidemic of fear that seized the nation and unjustly prompted this crime against the people and the constitution. P.25 has good suggestions

Uchida speaks out through a second theme to say that similarities amongst people should triumph over discrimination. The initial pages of the text keep the family colorless; there is no hint at a different ethnicity. When readers first meet the Chan family, they see typical United States citizens; Ken loves baseball, basketball and going to see movies with girls (2). Yuki’s mentions their love of pizza and hamburgers, the long-standing icon of American food. Moreover, no discriminatory comments are made by their neighbors who love and respect the family; instead there is an obvious feel of a connected community. A few pages later, Uchida starts weaving in their ethnic background by mentioning chopsticks, rice bowls (4) and the small Japanese church they attend (6). This set up intentionally lays the foundation for the theme of the text because the family is first seen through a common lens before their differences are accentuated. Only when Japan bombs Pearl Harbor do American citizens start classifying individuals into racial categories. Consequently, Yuki and her family suddenly become irreconcilably different; they are viewed as outcasts and are denied fundamental rights. Fathers are inexplicably ripped from their families with no due process of law and the remaining Japanese individuals on the West Coast are uprooted from their lives and forced to evacuate to painfully uncomfortable internment camps. The omniscient narrator allows the readers to witness the atrocity of the government’s actions and how discrimination is inhumane. Throughout it all, the characters remain real to the readers; the universality of humanity is highlighted. Ultimately, Uchida shows that individuals are more alike than different. Her design of the text communicates the message that horrible events would be prevented if the commonality of humanity was emphasized more than pitting each other’s differences against the other.

SETTING:

Initially the story is set in the Sakane household located in Oakland – dense Japanese population. When the father is sequestered by the FBI, he is held temporarily in San Francisco Immigration
Detention Headquarters and then transferred to an Army Internment Camp in Missoula, Montana. Yuki, her mother and her brother Ken, are taken to the Internment Camp in Tanforan, California for four months. To their dismay, they then are forcefully relocated to Topaz, Utah over a long, uncomfortable part of the drab scenery described. At the end of the novel, the family is finally freed to live in the more urban Salt Lake City.

POINT OF VIEW:

The story is told by an omniscient, third-person narrator. One advantage of this narrator choice is that the reader can objectively watch the confusing tumult of events taking place. Simultaneously, the narrator is able to reveal the emotions and thoughts of the protagonist, Yuki, an eleven-year-old girl who is second-generation Japanese. Her older brother Ken is 18 years old and studying at a local university. Her mother and father are respectable first-generation citizens. Thus the reader experiences history through an emotive perspective, making it more personal. In this way, Uchida can concentrate more on the devastating effects of the government’s behavior and empower the novel to convey a moral.

FORESHADOWING:

Repeatedly the last line of Yuki’s thought predicts what ominous event will occur shortly. For example, she says, “Yuki felt no fear, for at that time she had no way of knowing that this was only the beginning of a terrible war and that her small comfortable world would soon be turned upside down” (9). At this point in time, Yuki’s normal way of life is only inhibited by the curfew and other military controls regarding what possessions the Japanese could own. Except these changes, she still lived in her house and had the same routine and access to supportive friends. However, with the words “would soon be turned upside down,” the narrator is advising the reader that Yuki’s situation is about to worsen drastically. Again, the narrator foreshadows future action by saying “But Yuki felt a sudden chill come over her, and the mild evening desert breeze seemed now to hold the cold breath of night” (102). The warning chill and the disconcerting cold night were portents of her friend Emily’s collapse, caused by a serious illness. A lot of symbolic images are packed into this predictive moment which prepares readers for Emily’s battle with tuberculosis.
METAPHOR & SIMILE:

Usage of both metaphor and simile aligns with the state core curriculum standards, which specifies that seventh and eighth graders work proficiently with these literary tools. Uchida’s novel person or idea to an audience. For instance, Ken directly compares a lady to a vulture (39) because she figuratively swoops in on a wounded prey to get what she wants; she acts as a vulture by taking advantage of the Japanese plight to get their father’s prize gladiolas, since they are forced to evacuate.

Likewise, Mr. Kurihara “said America was making prisoners of its own citizens, inspecting them, searching them, and herding them like cattle from one camp to another” (90). He uses both the metaphor that equates American citizens with prisoners and a simile that compares the Japanese to cattle to describe the horrible behavior of the government.

AFFECTIVE ISSUES RELATED TO THE WORK

Students reading this book will likely range between the ages of Yuki, 11, and her older brother Ken, 18. Undoubtedly, readers will connect to the emotions conveyed by the text since they are typical of that stage of life which the readers share in common with the characters.

The experience of moving homes is guaranteed to strike a chord with a large percentage of modern-day students. But teachers will need to compare and contrast how the moving experience different for the students in the classroom than from the one cataloged by the book.

Similarly, sibling relations can be a topic of discussion and analysis relevant to students’ lives. This novel portrays both the antagonism between siblings but simultaneously the deep love that unites the brother and sister, refined by the difficult circumstances they must endure together. Teachers can ask students about what experiences they have had with their siblings such as when they have had to work together on a common goal.

Also, the broad topic of discrimination will speak to students in the classroom. It is likely that many will have felt, if not racial, social, economic or gender discrimination. This focus can be expanded to address the particular experiences or factors in students’ lives that receive negative reactions from others. For example, students of particular faiths might be ostracized from certain groups.

Another issue tied into this is individual differences. How do we react to people different from us? Are we afraid of others who are not recognizably the same as us? Do we think it
impossible to understand people with different beliefs than ours? Are we condescending? Has anyone treated us like this?

Yuki also is traumatized by the death of her beloved pet, Pepper. Students will have experienced like encounters with death. Loneliness, Caring and Understanding will be other general topics teachers can extract details from the text to illustrate meaning.

**VOCABULARY:**

Religious Words: “Seminary” (6) “Chapel” (6),

“Caucasian” (15)

Discuss the negative racial connotation of “Jap” (20)

Japanese words:
- Both first and last names of the characters
- Bonsai is the name of a tree (38)
- Likewise, the novel uses the 1940s terms to refer to different generations of Japanese citizens living in the United States
  - Issei (26) are first generation Japanese living in the United States
  - Nisei (20) are Japanese born in the United States.

Military/Government Jargon: evacuation (24), internment, aliens, refugees, fleet (5), barracks (49), War Bonds (35), bayonets (45)

“Euphemism” (64)

Explain Tuberculosis and “Sanatorium” (108)

**BACKGROUND KNOWLEDGE:**

Teachers should prepare information on World War II, especially concentrating on the Southern Pacific Front of that War, such as who were the allies and the major battles. For example, Executive Order 9066 authorizing the internment which was issued by President Franklin D. Roosevelt is a necessary document to review and is mentioned on page 29 of the novel. Also, the basic tenets of the Constitution should be reviewed since this internment was unconstitutional. Similarly, patterns of immigration in the mid-1900s inform the textual situation. One should know why there was a high influx and concentration of Japanese in California and how this affected citizens already living there. Additionally, a survey of the Japanese culture will bring added depth to the traditions and thought processes of the Sakane family.
Geography also plays an important role since it highlights the change in lifestyle for the family. Websites listed below explain climate of Topaz, Utah. Such background will address the dust storms and why arrowheads could be found there. Additionally, talking about Utah’s reception of the camp will shed more light on how American handled diversity.

**IMPLICATIONS FOR STUDENTS OF DIVERSITY:**

Considering the ever-increasing number of diverse ethnicities in the United States and the fast rate at which these populations are growing, it is likely that a teacher will have students from diverse background in his or her classroom. One reason this novel is a great tool to confront and study discrimination with students is because it does not express a negative view of the Japanese culture. Instead, it is written by an insider of the culture who can portray a positive understanding of the people’s traditions. Building off of this, teachers should validate the minorities represented in the classroom by asking them to share the positives of their culture with the class.

It is also likely that some of the students in the class will relate personally with the experience of discrimination, although this particular example occurred over fifty years ago. Students should be encouraged to use the events and personal feelings of Yuki’s life to analyze their own. A teacher can explain how specific aspects of the novel fit into broader categories, such as when the FBI seized Mr. Sakane, leaving the family fatherless. Loss in general is the underlying topic that could facilitate student interaction with the text, for instance expressing when they have felt similarly or differently and why? Or, what forms does the discrimination the characters experience come in? Today, prejudice is not so obvious but are there still systematic ways of oppressing minorities. How do we see discrimination in our own school?

**GENDER ISSUES:**

Although the protagonist is female, her status as a young child strips her of some legitimacy since it is easy to write her off as naïve. Also the novel clearly defines Yuki as weaker than her brother Ken on occasion. Yet, simultaneously, the sensitivity and understanding nature of women is accentuated and almost celebrated as the only remedy to the hatred which fear triggers. Yuki and Yuki’s mother are the primary characters and often reach out to help improve the rough conditions of their neighbors and friends. Yet, many scholars warn that such characterization of
women as kind and submissive perpetuate a sick American myth that creates hollow stereotypes of women who can never be real; either the submissive, compliant mother or the evil seductress. However, the full-access-pass into Yuki’s mind, made possible by the third-person narration, prevents her from being rigidly cast into one of these binaries and allows her to be both kind and upset at the same time. This female author creates real female characters.

THE CENTRAL QUESTION/ENDURING THEME:

How should we handle diversity? The overarching goal of author Uchida is to teach the American people about individual value and the richness that diversity adds to the culture. She poignantly shows how destructive fear and its partner hatred can be to human lives. Uchida simultaneously inserts a serious discussion on justice and upholding the constitution and the founding principles of this nation. Effectively, she has readers consider diversity and how it is viewed and approached in the United States. She forces readers to dig deeper than surface level, to see people as individuals and humans like themselves and then decide what diversity means for relationships.

RESEARCH ISSUES/PROJECT IDEAS:

DIVERSITY OPINIONAIRE: (adapted from Jeff Wilhelm’s “Getting Kids into the Reading Game: You Gotta Know the Rules”). Formulate survey about fear, hatred and diversity which the students first respond to and then survey other high school students, parents and teachers. In class, students will tabulate the results. The teacher will lead a discussion about the different points of view expressed. Return frequently to this opinionaire to gauge how the characters in the novel are responding, if it was similar to any of the student responses. Based on the observations, students can also present a plan to the principal of how they would like to encourage more tolerance. One helpful source for materials and suggestions is the organization, Teaching Tolerance, supported by Southern Poverty Law Center.

LETTER TO U.S. CONGRESS: after studying the U.S. Constitution, its interplay with the Executive Order 9066 and the subsequent internment of citizens of Japanese ancestry, and the current War on Terrorism, compose a letter to a Senator or Representative expressing the thoughts about modern-day diversity issues and what the government’s approach should be. Reference the Japanese internment, comparing and contrasting it with the current war situation.
INTERVIEWS: Students “become a character for a day” while other students interview them. It will reflect knowledge of the condition of the camps and the feelings of that particular character and citizens on the whole. The interview can be filmed if the technology is available.

PERSONAL POEM: Throughout the text, Mrs. Sakane finds an escape from her depressing situation through the pen. She writes eloquent poems to deal with her emotions. Following her example, students will write a Japanese-influenced poem about their personal experiences with discrimination.

NEWSBROADCASTS: Grasping the significance of this novel heavily relies upon background knowledge of the war situation and the United States in the 1940s. Students can help each other gain a functional repertoire of the history through news broadcasts. Each student will have one partner will research one historical aspect of the time and present a five minute “breaking news” episode to the class.

MOCK INTERNMENT CAMP: assign students roles as “residents” in the camp and re-create the experience of living in a camp for one school day

MEDIA/VIRTUAL TOURS: Teachers will love the following websites which provide a rich amount of images, music, text and first-person accounts to bring the experience of the Japanese internment to life.
1. http://www.topazmuseum.org/ - website of Topaz museum
3. www.pbs.org/childofcamp/ - documentary of six Americans of Japanese ancestry who were confined to internment camps
4. http://americanhistory.si.edu/perfectunion/experience/index.html - “Japanese and the U.S. Constitution:” interactive galleries that exhibit music, text, images, and first-person accounts, students can post their thoughts too!
5. http://digital.lib.usu.edu/topaz.php - links to literary magazine written and illustrated by camp members, school yearbook, Executive order,

FUNCTIONAL/INFORMATIONAL TEXTS:

2. Executive Order 9066 – President Franklin D. Roosevelt authorized the internment of American citizens of Japanese ancestry.
3. Use the links listed above which provide primary source texts from the literary magazine created in the Topaz Relocation Center and the Topaz Times, along with student work while in the relocation centers

**Other Websites with Teaching Resources:**
- [http://www.archives.gov/education/lessons/japanese-relocation/](http://www.archives.gov/education/lessons/japanese-relocation/) - wonderful documents to be used for teaching the novel
- [http://www.nps.gov/history/history/online_books/anthropology74-ce12.htm](http://www.nps.gov/history/history/online_books/anthropology74-ce12.htm) - “Confinement and Ethnicity: An overview of World War II Japanese American Relocation Centers