

# ***PinkMonkey*® Literature Notes on . . .**

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"Farewell to Manzanar"

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## ***FAREWELL TO MANZANAR***

**by**

**JEANNE WAKATSUKI HOUSTON  
JAMES D. HOUSTON**



Edited by Diane Sauder

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## KEY LITERARY ELEMENTS

### SETTING

The memoir opens in December 1941 in Ocean Park, California. Ocean Park is a coastal community near Santa Monica; many inhabitants make their living by fishing. After the bombing of Pearl Harbor, the Wakatsuki family relocates to Terminal Island, an essentially Asian society. The navy evacuates Terminal Island completely, and the family moves to.....

### CHARACTERS

#### Major Characters

*Jeanne Wakatsuki* - the narrator of the novel. As a child, she is cheerful and innocent. Her family is moved to an American relocation camp for Japanese-Americans, where she tries to.....

*Ko Wakatsuki* - the patriarch of the Wakatsuki family. He is an imposing figure in his family of ten children. He does everything with a flourish and basks in the.....

*Mama Wakatsuki* - a dignified woman and supportive wife and mother. She emerges as a .....

*Woodrow "Woody" Wakatsuki* - the oldest Wakatsuki son.....

#### Minor Characters

*William, Eleanor, Frances, Lillian, Reijuio, Martha, Kiyo, and May Wakatsuki* - Jeanne's siblings.

*Chizu* - Woody's wife. She is almost like a mother to the younger Wakatsukis.

*Kaz* - Jeanne's brother-in-law, a foreman of reservoir maintenance detail.

*Toyo* - Ko's favorite aunt. She is the one who gave him the.....

*Radine* - Jeanne's only friend at Long Beach Polytechnic High School.

### CONFLICT

*Although the book is non-fiction, it can be analyzed according to the traditional pattern of conflict usually used for works of fiction.*

**Protagonist:** The protagonist is Jeanne Wakatsuki. She is both author and narrator of *Farewell to Manzanar*, in which she tells the true story of her life in a relocation camp in America during World War II. Jeanne retells her childhood story with the objectivity of an adult sociologist. She writes the story as a way of making sense of her early childhood and adolescence and the affect it has had on her as .....

**Antagonist:** The antagonist is the post-war treatment that the author receives as a Japanese American. World War II has a palpable presence throughout the memoir. It is the force that confines the Japanese-Americans to relocation camps and the force that .....

**Climax:** The climax is a two-fold event: Hiroshima is bombed and the camp closing is announced. The bombing of Hiroshima is climactic because it represents a painfully.....

**Outcome:** Some thirty years after her family leaves Manzanar, Jeanne is able to make.....

### **PLOT (Synopsis)**

*Farewell to Manzanar* is a straightforward, autobiographical tale. The text opens with a foreword in which the main character/narrator/author reveals her present position. She is an adult, telling about events that happened to her as a child. The years have given her both education and perspective, enabling her to talk about the difficult subject of her childhood. This introduction frames the memoir, which unfolds, novel-like, afterward.

The story is about Jeanne Wakatsuki and her family, composed of her mother, father, and nine siblings. Her parents are first-generation Japanese immigrants, called *Issei*. The children are called *Nisei*, because they are natural American citizens and second-generation Japanese. The story begins on a weekend in December 1941. The Wakatsuki women stand waving good-bye to.....

### **THEME**

Racial prejudice, the strain of war, and the gradual decline of the family are all.....

### **MOOD**

The mood of the memoir is reflective. In re-living her past, Jeanne Wakatsuki is.....

### **BACKGROUND INFORMATION**

#### **JEANNE WAKATSUKI HOUSTON AND JAMES D. HOUSTON**

Jeanne Wakatsuki Houston and James D. Houston jointly author *Farewell to Manzanar*. The novel is the real life account of Jeanne and her family during World War II, when they were detained in an American concentration camp out of national paranoia.

Jeanne Toyo Wakatsuki is the youngest daughter of Ko and Riku Wakatsuki, natives of Japan who come to the United States in search of the American Dream. Born on September 26, 1934, in Inglewood California, Jeanne is the youngest of four boys and six girls in the Wakatsuki family.

Jeanne Wakatsuki was only seven years old when Pearl Harbor was attacked and her family was displaced to a Japanese detention camp. She struggled to understand why she was living in a place surrounded by guards and guns. When the camp was closed, Jeanne struggled to be a poor teenager of Japanese descent in a country that was very anti-Japanese. Jeanne, however, did not let her

### **HISTORICAL BACKGROUND**

*Farewell to Manzanar* is the true story of Jeanne Wakatsuki and her family during World War II, when the Japanese-Americans were confined to internment camps all over America. The first sign of trouble for Japanese-Americans was the bombing of Pearl Harbor on December 7, 1941. Though many of these American citizens of Japanese descent had never heard of Pearl Harbor, they immediately felt the consequence of being from Japan in wartime America.

Provoked by the violent and deadly surprise attack on Pearl Harbor, President Franklin Roosevelt declared war against Japan. Almost immediately the Japanese Americans on the West Coast began to feel an open hatred expressed against them by their fellow citizens of European descent. The government completed matters by arresting more than three thousand Japanese-American males on grounds of.....

## CHAPTER SUMMARIES WITH NOTES

### PART I

#### Chapter 1: "What is Pearl Harbor?"

The Wakatsukis are a Japanese family with ten children, the youngest of whom is Jeanne; she is the narrator and author of the memoir. In December 1941, the Wakatsukis are living near Long Beach, California. Mr. and Mrs. Wakatsuki are immigrants; they have come to the United States from Japan, searching for the American Dream. Jeanne's father and brothers man a fishing boat called *The Nereid* and work for the canneries on the coast.

On this particular day in December, Jeanne stands on shore with the other Wakatsuki females; they all wave good-bye to the Wakatsuki men as they set out to sea. As the women watch the *Nereid* travel further away, it suddenly turns and heads back to shore. Jeanne and the others are confused about the strange return until a cannery worker on the docks runs toward them; he delivers the news that Japan has just bombed Pearl Harbor in a deadly surprise attack.

Jeanne's father is immediately frightened that his ties to Japan will cause him trouble; he goes home and burns the flag he had brought from Hiroshima, as well as all documents that might tie him to Japan. The family then relocates to the home of their eldest son, Woody, who lives on Terminal Island. After two weeks, Ko Wakatsuki, Jeanne's father, is arrested and interrogated. Later the family learns that he has been taken into custody and falsely charged with supplying oil to Japanese submarines offshore. The family is devastated at the news.

#### Notes

*Farewell to Manzanar* is a memoir, a true story of remembrance of a period in the author's life. Jeanne Wakatsuki-Houston, the author and narrator of the memoir, tells the story of her childhood and adolescence after she has become a mature adult. In the Foreword, she explains the book is her effort to look into the past and come to terms with those years she spent in a relocation camp. She and her family were sent to Manzanar simply for being of Japanese descent, even though Jeanne and her siblings were native-born Americans. The author admits that in the past she has tried to deny the memory of life in the camp; but she no longer feels she can avoid her painful past. Writing the memoir is an attempt on her part to purge her heart and mind of those camp years. It also is intended to give an accurate account of life in the internment camp, which is unique among historical concentration camps. In the camps, located on American soil, an attempt was made to make life "normal," despite the painfully deliberate circumstances.

Jeanne is the protagonist of the memoir, even though she is only seven years old at the start of the tale. As a result of her youth, she cannot understand the magnitude of Pearl Harbor or why her family must move to Woody's house. As a small girl, she then observes with confusion the arrest of her father and the subsequent move to Manzanar. Everything is a blur to Jeanne as a child, but the adult narrator is able to put more meaning and understanding into the incidents that occur after the bombing of Pearl Harbor. Having been trained in sociology, Jeanne, the narrator, is able to.....

## OVERALL ANALYSES

### CHARACTERS

#### *Jeanne Wakatsuki*

Jeanne is the main character of the book and the protagonist of the memoir. She is the youngest of the Wakatsuki children; as a result, she receives a lot of attention, is somewhat spoiled, and is very sheltered. She is also a happy and confident girl. When Pearl Harbor is bombed, she is very young, barely seven

years old. When her family is forced to leave their home in California and move to Manzanar, it seems like an adventure to her. The horrible living conditions in the camp affect her less negatively than the rest of the family. She rejoices at moving from bunk to bunk, jumping on straw-filled mattresses, playing with friends and running from.....

### ***Ko Wakatsuki***

Ko is the oldest son of a rich Samurai family from Hiroshima, Japan. Financial circumstances compel his father to run a 'tea house' in Hiroshima to make ends meet. Ko is totally dismayed over this lowly act and wants to leave home. His favorite aunt gives him .....

### ***Mama Wakatsuki***

Throughout the memoir, Wakatsuki's wife is called Mama; in fact, her given name is never revealed. The constant reference to her maternity is most appropriate. As the mother of .....

## **STRUCTURE**

*Farewell to Manzanar* is an autobiographical memoir that spans a large portion of the life of Jeanne Wakatsuki, the author. The book opens with a Foreword that serves as an introduction to the problems that will be presented and solved in the narrative. It then proceeds to.....

## **THEMES**

As a memoir, *Farewell to Manzanar* possess no contrived themes, only the real human issues that confront ordinary people in a time of war. Some of the recurring.....

### **Major Theme**

The journey that Jeanne makes in her memoir highlights several steadfast truths. The most important is the significance of family heritage. Manzanar happened because people were Japanese, a different and threatening heritage during the war. It is Jeanne's father who.....

### **Minor Themes**

The injustice of the war and subsequent detainment of Japanese-Americans is also.....

## **STYLE**

The major stylistic feature with which this heart-rending autobiography is narrated is its simple and lucid prose. It is objective, like a report, and avoids the irrelevant details that are.....

## **QUESTIONS**

1. "When your mother and your father are having a fight, do you want them to kill each other? Or do you just want them to stop fighting?" Ko compares the war between Japan and America to arguing parents. Explain the meaning of this comparison and its impact on the entire memoir.
2. Compare and contrast the journeys of acceptance made by Woody and his sister Jeanne. How are they similar? How do they differ?.....

**End of sample MonkeyNotes for "Farewell to Manzanar"**