

The following set of lesson plans is designed, like those in our first book, *From Our Side of the Fence*, for former camp prisoners who wish to document their experiences. Over the years, we have done many presentations throughout the West Coast, including a writing workshop at the Japanese American National Museum. We have been heartened to hear of other communities and individuals who have been inspired to tell their own stories in Seattle, Portland, Los Angeles, and elsewhere. It is our hope that this new material will encourage other individuals to begin writing, new communities to form, and existing ones to continue their journeys. The stakes are high; time is running out; these stories need to be told before they are forever lost.

This time around, my process of creating this material and writing topics was much different. Since the writers and I had worked together so closely for such a long period, we had built a rapport of trust and mutual respect. Rather than impose a generic, limiting, or arbitrary set of writing topics upon them, based only on my limited knowledge of Resettlement, I made an important decision during the course of our class: to gradually let the process of exchange—between teacher and writers, among the writers themselves—lead us toward the formation of a curriculum.

Initially, in our first several months, I provided a great deal of structure, offering topics derived from my own knowledge about the Resettlement and themes and ideas I thought they would find interesting. At the same time, I emphasized that they could choose their own path and direction for any given prompt.

As time progressed and we gathered momentum, the generation of topics was no longer an isolated act done by me; instead, I relied upon the synergistic nature of dialogue and community. The more I heard, the more I realized how much more there was to learn about the Resettlement experience. The students became guides for me, teaching me about their personal histories through the lively conversations we had, powerful stories we shared, and useful feedback we gave each other. From these exchanges and reading and commenting upon their work, I gathered ideas for prompts and generated many of the topics that follow.

In this two-year period of focused writing, each student took off in his or her chosen direction, writing about Resettlement in a variety of ways: some focused on a limited historical period; others covered a span of many decades. Either way was fine. While we agreed that Resettlement was largely defined by their postwar experience, we also agreed

not to be limited by time periods or static definitions of the emotional and psychological process that Resettlement also represented to them. The following topics and lesson plans are based upon a pedagogical strategy of structured freedom: to offer specific topics that can spark ideas, be used for freewrites, and generate scenes and stories and, at the same time, to allow the room for exploration and reflection upon what experiences might prove most relevant to any given individual.

—Brian Komei Dempster

Writing Assignment #1—Leaving Camp

1. Describe your first memories of leaving camp. Was it the train ride home, the first meal you tasted beyond barbed wire? What images, tastes, smells do you recall? What emotions—fear, uncertainty, relief? Be sure to use specific details and descriptions in recreating your experience.

Writing Assignment #2—Homecoming

In your first assignment, we explored your departure from camp. This prompt will ask you to move forward in time, looking at the concept of homecoming. Write on one of the following topics.

1. Describe your first experience or memory of home after your release from camp. Did you return to your original home? If not, what were the circumstances and where did you go? Be sure to make the setting and experience of home as vivid as possible. How did your new "home" compare with camp, your home before camp? Compare and contrast the similarities and differences with specific details. Describe the impact on you, your siblings, your parents. Did you have any significant encounters? Did you experience prejudice, racism, unexpected acts of generosity and kindness? If so, dramatize.
2. Focus on an object that you lost during the war and that you missed during camp and/or after your release from camp. Examples from *From Our Side of the Fence* include Sato Hashizume's piano, Wayne Osaki's dog, Teny, and Toru Saito's marbles. What particular memories were and are connected to the object or possession or pet you lost? After camp, did you try to replace the thing you had lost? Were your attempts effective or not?