

# “Fear gave me strength to fight.”

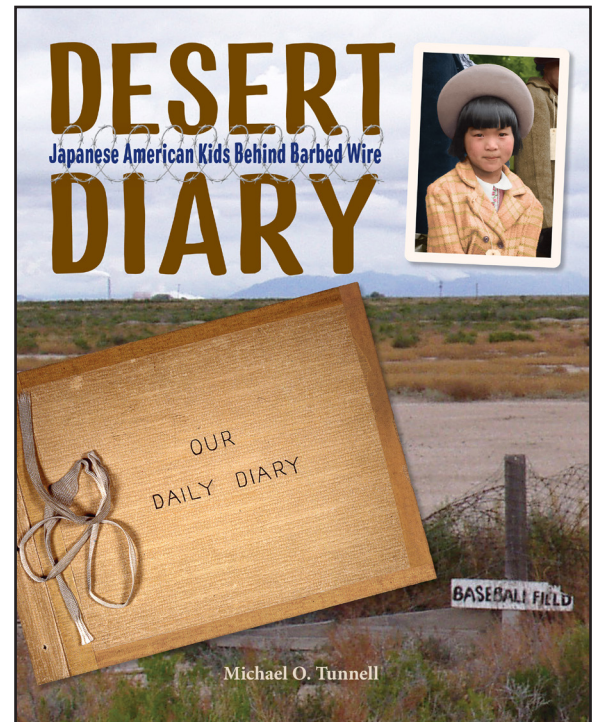
—Yoshiko Uchida, child imprisoned at Topaz War Relocation Center

## About the Book

This moving primary source sheds light on the stories of Japanese American children imprisoned during World War II.

Mae Yanagi was eight years old when she started school at the Topaz War Relocation Center, a square mile of Utah desert. Her third-grade class kept an illustrated diary full of details about schoolwork, sports, pets, and holidays—as experienced behind barbed wire. Diary pages, archival photographs, and narrative nonfiction text convey the harsh challenges experienced by the children of this prison camp, as well as their remarkable resilience.

This historical account by award-winning author Michael O. Tunnell fleshes out a little-known primary source from an important chapter of United States history with interviews from Mae Yanagi and her former classmates. A must-read for young people discussing Japanese American imprisonment during World War II.



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## About the Author



Michael O. Tunnell is a professor of children's literature at Brigham Young University. He is the award-winning author of many picture books, nonfiction books, and novels for primary, middle-grade, and young-adult readers, including *Candy Bomber* and *The Children of Topaz*. Michael lives in Orem, Utah.

## About World War II

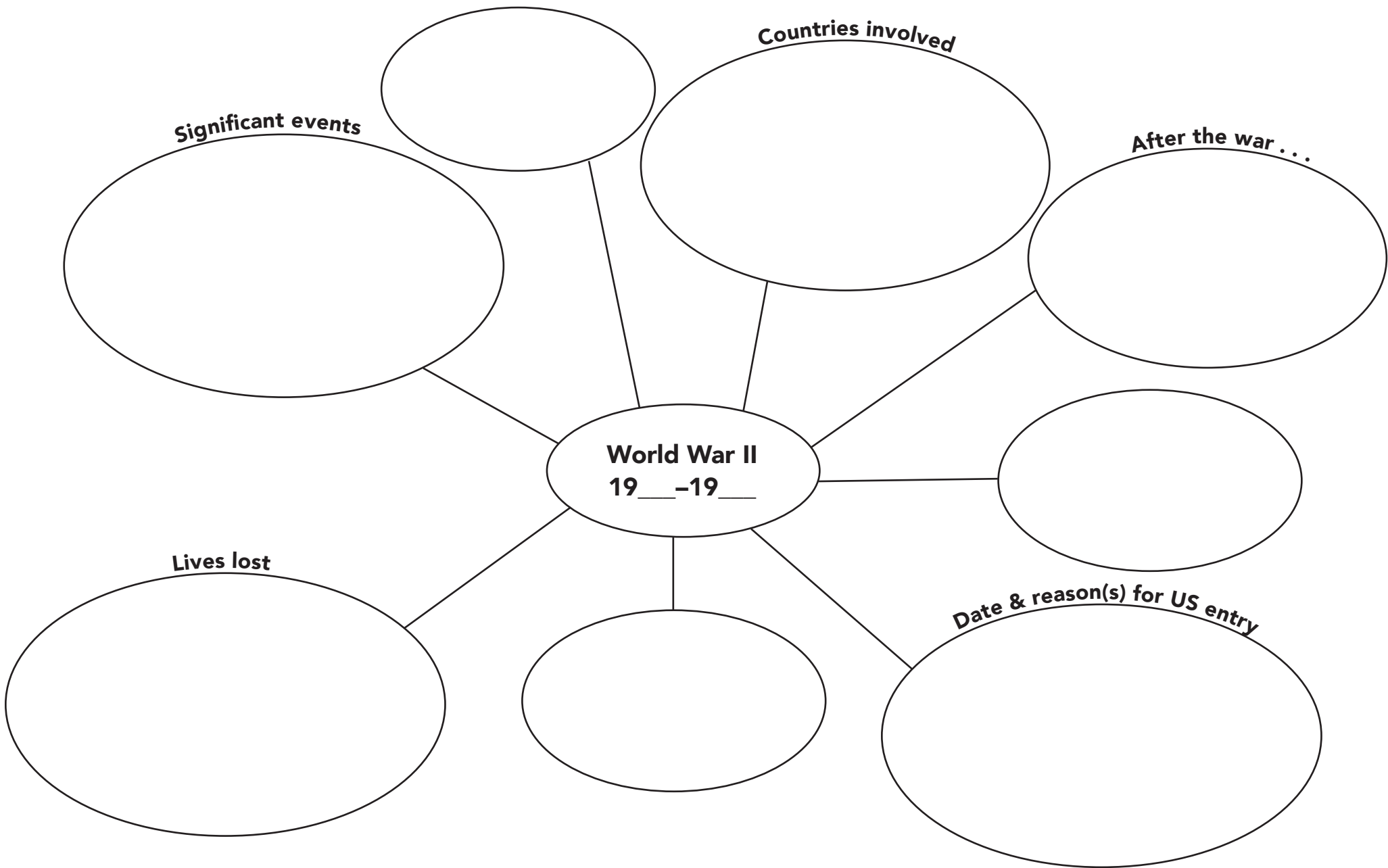
- What is meant by the terms Nikkei, Issei, and Nisei? Why do you think these distinctions were/are useful? Discuss some of the ways you see people use generational distinctions today.
- What was life like for Nikkei families before World War II?
- What do you know about World War II? Use the attached knowledge web to map your understanding.
- What did Mae's family and other Nikkei families have to do to prepare for their forced removal and detention?
- How long did Mae's family live in detention at Tanforan and Topaz?
- What are some ways in which detained Nikkei families supported the war effort? How was this complicated by the government's treatment of detainees?
- What happened in the summer of 1943 to all people in the camps seventeen and older?

## About Topaz

- Where was the Topaz War Relocation Center located? What was the environment like there?
- What were some daily hazards experienced by people at Topaz?
- What were mealtimes like at Topaz?
- What jobs did Mae's parents do? How was working at Topaz different from working before the war?
- How was school life in Topaz different for high schoolers and grade schoolers? What did the children in Mae's class study?
- What are some ways in which people coped with life in Topaz? How did they spend their spare time?
- What was it like to be sick or injured at Topaz?
- What kinds of animals lived in Topaz? How was pet ownership affected by the climate and living conditions there?
- How did people mark holidays and other occasions at Topaz?

## About Life After the War

- When World War II ended and Japanese Americans were released from Topaz, where did they go? What was life like for them in the post-war United States?
- Why were some people reluctant to leave Topaz?
- In retrospect, how does Mae Yanagi feel about her time as a prisoner? What are some of the after effects of removal and imprisonment on Nikkei families?
- What have US lawmakers and politicians done in the years since Executive Order 9066 to redress the wrongs done to Japanese Americans during World War II?



## Keep a Classroom Diary

You never know what future generations will consider historically important. Today's diary entry could be tomorrow's primary source. Start a classroom diary like Mae's with daily or weekly entries. If possible, include a class photo and roster at the front or back. Consider tracking the following:

- Weather
- Students' daily lives
- School & classroom events
- Cultural experiences (holidays, recitals, birthdays, other milestones, etc.)
- Local news
- National and international news
- Memorabilia (posters, photos, letters, artwork, newspaper clippings, etc.)

Bonus: As a class, draft an email to an archivist or museum asking if they would like to preserve your finished classroom diary in their collection.

## Know Your Representative

Long after Japanese American prisoners were released, they and their descendants sought justice by contacting their elected representatives. Find out who your representatives are at the city, state, and federal level. Pick one and research them: how long they've served, where they're from, what their education was like, and what their views are. Put together a presentation for your fellow students to introduce them to your representative.

Bonus: Write a letter to your representative with the following parts:

- Introduction (who you are; where you go to school; and what ward, precinct, or district you live in. If it's relevant, you can include an affiliation like your scout troop or community service organization)
- Appeal (what you want your representative to do on your behalf and why it's important to you)
- Polite closing

## Human Rights Matter

As a class, discuss the meaning of the term "human rights." Give a brief overview of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, adopted by the United Nations in 1948, and ask students to guess what rights are listed in this declaration. Then, read through the articles of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (available at [www.un.org/en/universal-declaration-human-rights](http://www.un.org/en/universal-declaration-human-rights)). Each student should choose an article and respond to it in one of the following ways:

- Create a poster or short video communicating the importance of this document.
- Write a brief piece of prose or poetry reflecting on this document and what it means to them and their community.
- Make a trifold poster board which displays a brief summary of past and current issues relating to this document, using words and pictures.
- Write a short essay comparing and contrasting the document to one of the amendments in the Bill of Rights.