AN EDUCATOR'S GUIDE TO *WE ARE NOT STRANGERS*

INTRODUCTION

Marco Calvo always knew his grandfather, affectionately called Papoo, was a good man. After all, he was named for him. A first-generation Jewish immigrant, Papoo was hardworking, smart, and caring. When Papoo peacefully passes away, Marco expects the funeral to be simple. However, he is caught off guard by something unusual. Among his close family and friends are mourners he doesn't recognize—Japanese American families—and no one is quite sure who they are or why they are at the service. How did these strangers know his grandfather so well?

Set in the multicultural Central District of Seattle during World War II and inspired by author and artist Josh Tuininga's family experiences, ***We Are Not Strangers*** explores a unique situation of Japanese and Jewish Americans living side by side in a country at war. Following Marco's grandfather's perspective, we learn of his life as a Sephardic Jewish immigrant living in America and his struggles as he settles into an America gearing up its war efforts. Despite the war raging just outside US borders, Papoo befriends Sam Akiyama, a Japanese man who finds his world upended from President Roosevelt's Executive Order 9066. Determined to keep Sam's business afloat while he and his family are unjustly incarcerated, Papoo creates a plan that not only changes the lives of the Akiyamas but of the entire Nihonmachi community.

An evocative and beautiful color-illustrated historical fiction graphic novel revealing the truth of one man's extraordinary efforts, We Are Not Strangers converges two perspectives into a single portrait of a community's struggle with race, responsibility, and what it truly means to be an American.



WE ARE NOT STRANGERS
Based on a True Story
by **JOSH TUININGA**

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6½ x 8½" • Hardcover • 208 pages



ABOUT THE AUTHOR

JOSH TUININGA is an author, artist, and designer living in North Bend, Washington. After studying fine art at the School of the Art Institute of Chicago, he founded an art and design agency, where he continues to work as its creative director. His work has been published in *Communication Arts* magazine and *HOW Design* magazine, and he was awarded with the Communication Arts Award for excellence in illustration. Tuininga is the author of the children's books *Why Blue?* (Xist Publishing, 2014) and *Dream On* (Indiegogo campaign, 2019). ***We Are Not Strangers***, which has been awarded a 4Culture Heritage Grant, is his first graphic novel.

BEFORE READING

1. Ask students to visualize the average American and draw this person. Discuss commonalities in what was depicted and why students envisioned Americans in this way. Have students look up the actual numbers and compare to their illustration: **https://shorturl.at/dikmN (saturdayeveningpost.com)** and **https://shorturl.at/jstDP (Census.gov).**

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2. It is important that students research/discuss Sephardic Jews and the historical movement and struggle of this community before reading the book.

3. Have students use Google Earth to explore the Seattle Central District.

4. Define the term "civil rights" and explain it. Can you think of an example of civil rights violations in the US, either in the past or today?

5. Is it possible for American citizens to be arrested and detained without any evidence of a crime being committed? Because of their race?

6. Analyze the cover of ***We Are Not Strangers***. What will you be reading about? What do you notice about the people and their feelings?

7. Read the preface. Why did Josh Tuininga write this story?

8. Read the introduction. What happened to people of Japanese descent after the attack on Pearl Harbor? Why do you think this happened? What role did the role of multiracial interaction play when certain American citizens decided to help? Who were these people? What did they do? Why did they do it?

9. Have students keep a list of the dates mentioned throughout the book and create a timeline of what is happening in the world. Students could be assigned individually or in teams to develop images for each of the dates and add to a class timeline and/or PowerPoint presentation.

10. Where did the Jewish Holocaust happen? (After reading, revisit this question.)













DURING READING

1. Keep a running list of connections between the Jewish and Japanese American experience during this time period.

2. **P. 8, panels 2–3**: What is the importance of this necklace? (Hamsa)

3. **P. 9, panels 3–4:** Why is the Rabbi cutting the narrator's shirt? (Kriah)

4. **Pp. 12–13**: What does the narrator mean by saying, "They were from a different neighborhood." How do you know?

5. **P. 18**: When you think of a Jewish immigrant, does your mental image match these illustrations? Anything surprise you?

6. **P. 19**: What happened to the Ottoman Empire in WWI? Why would it be struggling in 1938?

7. **P. 20**: Why would the narrator's grandfather, called "papoo", purposefully drop his hat off the boat in panel 4?

8. **P. 21:** Compare images of Papoo going through immigration to photos from the same decade on Ellis Island.

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9. **P. 22**: What is Papoo trying to do/ become by coming to America?

10. **P. 23**: What is outlawed by the 18th Amendment? What is happening in panel 4 that is against this law?

11. **P. 23, panel 5**: Why is Papoo saving this money? What is his goal?

12. **P. 24**: Kristallnacht–what was this event and how does this tie into situation that is developing in the United States?

13. **P. 27**: What is being depicted in the newspaper? Why would the Jewish refugees be sent back to Germany? For more information: **https://shorturl.at/psuLT (history.com)**.

14. **Pp. 27–29**: What is Papoo so excited about in this sequence?

15. **Pp. 32–33**: Describe the economic status of the family using visual evidence.

16. **P. 34**: What happened in Thrace? **https://shorturl.at/vABCF (state.gov)**

17. **Pp. 38–45**: Describe the relationship between Marco and Sam using visual and textual evidence.

18. **P. 50**: Have students look up "Japanese woodblock prints," or go to **https://rb.gy/kyl10 (metmuseum.com)** or **https://rb.gy/yndbz (mymodernmet.com).**

    Have students choose one to describe in detail. What does it mean to them? What do they notice? Have the students draw something in a similar style. How are they made? Here is a video from the Asian Art Museum: **https://rb.gy/igpj6 (education.asianart.org)**

19. **P. 52**: What happened during the Tacoma riots? What caused them? Have students research the incident and share the most pertinent facts about it–**https://rb.gy/0iou8 (tacomamethod.com)**

20. **P. 54**: What might Sam be thinking about as he looks at the woodcut? Have students put a thought bubble into the image.

21. **Pp. 61–62**: What connection can you make between the bombing of Pear Harbor and September 11, 2001?

22. **P. 63**: What do you think Sam's neighbors are thinking about after hearing the news about Pearl Harbor? Have students put a thought bubble in each window.

23. **P. 67**: What is happening on this page? Why? Describe how Sam and Marco are feeling using visual evidence.

24. **P. 69**: Why do you think Sam gives Marco his key?

25. **P. 75**: Have students read and discuss Order 9066. What is the connection with the Jewish Holocaust?

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26. Pp. 76–78: Discuss Marco's reaction to the announcement of Order 9066.

27. Pp. 81–91: What is the significance of the Rabbi's words? What do you think will be the impact on Marco?

28. Pp. 93–98: Describe the changes in Mary. Why does this happen? What would you have done if you saw this happen to Mary?

29. Pp. 101–103: What was the impact of Order 9066 on the town?

30. Pp. 104–105: Why did the artist devote two pages to Japanese cherry blossoms? What are their importance in both Japan and the US? Look up online **https://tinyurl.com/5n7mezb7 (nationalcherryblossomfestival.org)**. What might Marco be thinking as he looks up at the trees?

31. P. 107: What is the importance of the newspaper that Marco is reading? How does it connect to this story?

32. P. 109: Have students put a thought bubble in the panel for Marco.

33. P. 113: How do the neighbors react to the US Army Military Police coming and forcing the Akiyama family from their home? Describe both what they do and the reaction on their faces? What do you think they should have done? Why?

34. Pp. 114–115: As the Akiyama family prepares to board the train to the internment camp, what do you notice about the luggage?

35. Pp. 117–125: What are your initial reactions to the depiction of the internment camp? How would you feel if you were forced to move here against your will?

36. P. 132: What is the significance of the window? Refer back to the answer for number 31?

37. P. 136: What do you think Marco did for the Akiyama family? Why are they so grateful?

38. P. 142: What is the connection between the Jewish Holocaust and the Japanese American internment camps?

39. Pp. 146–162: What actions did Marco take to help his neighbors?

40. P. 147, panel 4: How might this panel summarize Marco's motivation to help?

41. Pp. 163–166: Why do you think Marco never talked about what he did?

AFTER READING

1. If you could speak to Josh Tuininga, what would you ask him?

2. What questions do you have about the events depicted in this book? What do you want to know more about?

3. What panel (or page) stuck out to you the most? Why? Be sure to include visual evidence (what you saw).

4. Imagine you were in the same situation as Sam or Marco. What would you have done?

5. How/why could this happen again today?

6. Explain the relationship between Marco and Sam. Especially during this time period, why would a Jewish person feel the need to help a Japanese American?

7. Ask students what, if anything, should be done to make it up to the survivors of these camps. Then read/listen to **https://tinyurl.com/wpnat9va (NPR.com)**. Have students discuss if they found these actions had done enough or not.

8. Pp. 126–129: Compare these signs to the ones actually photographed during this time period. How would they feel after being released and allowed to return to their homes?

9. Read the afterword and again reflect on the historical connections between peoples and persecution.

10. Have students write a response explaining their big idea takeaway from reading this book.

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11. How can we stop something like this from happening again?

PROJECT IDEAS

1. Create a comic on a modern civil rights issue.

2. Find out ways people helped Jews during the Holocaust. Create a comic.

3. Research modern AAPI issues in the United States, then draw a comic, create a PowerPoint presentation, or use other media to bring attention to these issues.

4. Using **page 116** as a guide, assign students in small groups to research each camp. Have them report back to the larger group, or in jigsaw groups, and compare what they find. Do any still exist today? Can they be visited?

5. **P. 123**: Research the 442nd Infantry Regiment and 100th Infantry Battalion (see links). Put together a PowerPoint presentation including images and maps of where they fought, their roles in the military, etc. Why would these men volunteer to go and fight for a country that had imprisoned them and their families? Would you?

https://tinyurl.com/2vvjb3mu (nationalww2museum.org)

https://tinyurl.com/35sjbz7c (nationalww2museum.org)

https://tinyurl.com/5bkwhrm4 (nationalgeographic.com)

6. **P. 155**: Research the actual propaganda posters in the United States at the time. See **https://tinyurl.com/2h4e6fa4 (history.navy.mil)**

SUPPLEMENTARY MATERIALS

Takei, George. "The power of pride." Filmed Jun 11, 2014, in Kyoto. TEDxKyoto video. **https://tinyurl.com/2mapvs8j (youtube.com)**.

National Archives. "Japanese-American Incarceration During World War II." Updated January 24, 2022. **https://tinyurl.com/tn5ffrvz (nationalarchives.com)**.

Fort Minor. "Kenji." Aug 30, 2010. YouTube video. **https://tinyurl.com/yc4vc9f5 (youtube.com)**. Have students listen to and annotate the lyrics to this song.

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