

# MAKE JAPANESE INTERNMENT PROGRAM AGE- APPROPRIATE

To the Editor:

A big thank you for publishing Mr. Evans' letter concerning teaching the "full context of the Japanese internment decision." While I do not agree that the internment was "understandable" (despite the fact that I have a better understanding of the complexities of the world stage after reading his letter), I think his points are well taken about teaching the decision in its full context.

However, when one of Sakai's sixth-grade teachers recently approached my 76-year-old mother at a school band concert with the prospect of speaking to the class about her internment in a World War II Japanese Concentration Camp in

Indonesia, I just about fell out of my chair.

I looked across the classroom and saw that my mom, who speaks English as a fifth language, was smiling, talking with her hands, and chatting away, truly flattered in some way. And I shuddered. But a few moments later, she looked over at me and blinked in a certain way, and I was thankful to receive this silent message between mother and daughter that she was not going to do it. At that moment, I felt more love and gratitude toward her than ever before. Later, as we walked to my car, she turned and said, "I don't think they really want to hear the 'real' story...they're too young."

As a child, I was not spared from hearing the real stories. Truthfully, I just wanted the stories to stop. I even find them hard to hear as an adult, even though my mom, to some degree, has

“romanticized” her version, telling of planting gardens of corn, washing her clothes in the river and studying Japanese by candlelight into the wee hours of the night while her siblings slept. Certainly, it’s amazing what the human spirit will do to survive. But there are other stories she told me of the Japanese Imperial Army that I wish I had never heard.

In many ways, I’m thankful that most American children (and adults, for that matter) see war in the abstract. They will never know what it’s like to literally have to run for our lives, or live each day not knowing if we will be alive tomorrow. Whenever things wouldn’t go our way as children (i.e. unable to spend a night with a friend, go to a movie, or whatever), my mother would quip, “You’re still alive aren’t you?” In my youth, I always viewed this as such a cold-hearted comment. As an adult, I catch myself saying it to my

own children, but with an inner grin. It has taken me years to understand from where she was coming.

I don’t necessarily think we should shield our children’s eyes and ears from the horrors of war. I just think, in the best-case scenario, that war stories in our schools should be told in the amount of detail that is age-appropriate. As Mr. Evans pointed out, the full Japanese internment story is “a far too complicated subject for anyone younger than 16 or 17 who hasn’t studied world history.” Now that’s something I understand.

There are those such as Mr. Evans who believe the Japanese internment was “understandable” given the full context of the decision; hence, his viewpoints, perhaps, come across as “justifications” for this wrong decision. And then there are those in the Bainbridge Island School

District who only want to drive home how unjust the decision was, without giving the context.

To me, the solution to handling this complex issue is simple. Can someone on this island please teach these diametrically opposing views, by telling the “whole story” of this wrong decision, while at the same time, delivering the facts in such a way that our bright, Bainbridge Island children will naturally arrive at their own right conclusions?

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