

7 *Crossing the Pacific*

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CLOSE-UP 7

1. "Gold Mountain"

1. Look at the picture and say as much as you can about it: period, place, characters, activities...
2. Check your answers by reading the text.

When news of the Gold Rush reached Canton in 1848, thousands of young Chinese boarded boats to "Gold Mountain", as California was then known. By 1852, 25,000 Chinese had reached "Gold Mountain".



2. The transcontinental railroad

1. What does this photo celebrate? Why is it in a unit about Asian Americans?
2. Read the text and explain why there aren't any Chinese in the photo.

At its peak, 9,000 to 12,000 Chinese worked for the Central Pacific Railroad Company in some of the dirtiest and most dangerous jobs. Many sources claim that up to 1,000 Chinese died during the project as a result of avalanches and accidents with explosives.



The project, which had started in 1863, was completed on May 10, 1869 and a famous ceremony was staged where the two railroad lines joined in Promontory Point, Utah. The Chinese workers were forbidden from appearing in this famous photograph. The speeches congratulated European immigrant workers but never mentioned the Chinese.

3. Angel Island

1. Read the text once and find the translation of these words (in the right order):
interdire – ouvrier – traïter – installation – candidature – abroger – accorder
2. Read the text again, then cover it and explain what Angel Island was and the reason for its being nicknamed the "Guardian of the Western Gate".
3. Draw a parallel between Angel Island and Ellis Island. (Use an encyclopaedia or the Internet if necessary.)

In 1882, Congress passed the Chinese Exclusion Act, which barred virtually all immigration from China and prevented all Chinese already in the USA (even their American-born children) from becoming US citizens.

- 5 By 1885, large numbers of young Japanese, Koreans and Indian labourers began arriving on the West Coast to replace the Chinese. From 1910 to 1940, Angel Island Immigration Station, located in the middle of San Francisco Bay, served as the "Guardian of the Western Gate" and was used to process mainly Asian immigrants. Angel Island detainees experienced overcrowded facilities, humiliating medical examinations, intense interrogations and countless days (sometimes months and even years) spent at the Immigration Station, waiting for either approval of their applications or deportation.
- 15 Congress eventually repealed all Chinese exclusion laws in 1943, granting Chinese the right to become naturalized citizens.

4. Pearl Harbor

1. Before reading the text, describe the poster and say everything you know about Pearl Harbor.
2. What does this kind of poster reveal about the Americans' feelings after Pearl Harbor?
3. Read the text and explain why some American citizens were put into detention camps.

On December 7, 1941, Japanese planes bombed all the US military air bases on Hawaii. Most ships anchored in Pearl Harbor were sunk or damaged; 188 aircraft were destroyed and 2,403 Americans killed.

On December 8, 1941, the US Congress declared war on Japan. Civilian and military officials had doubts about the loyalty of the Japanese on the West Coast and there were even rumours of sabotage and espionage. So in February 1942 the US government submitted the west coast population of Japanese immigrants and their American-born children to surveillance, restriction, expulsion, and finally imprisonment in detention camps. Some 120,000 individuals, two thirds of them American citizens, were deprived of their property and freedom.



5. Asian Americans today

A. Statistics

Read the figures in the chart below and explain why Asian Americans have often been called the “model minority”.

Socio-economic characteristics of Asian and other ethnic groups in the USA									
Ethnic groups	Whites	African Americans	Hispanics Latinos	Chinese	Filipinos	Asian Indians	Koreans	Vietnamese	Japanese
Population (million)	190	35	39	2.8	2.1	2	1.2	1.3	0.9
Not proficient ¹ in English (%)	0.7	0.8	30.3	31.3	7	8.4	32.9	40.4	10
Less than high school (%)	15.3	29.1	48.5	23.6	13.3	12.6	13.8	37.8	9.5
College degree ² (%)	25.3	13.6	9.9	46.3	42.8	64.4	43.6	13.8	40.8
Advanced degree ³ (%)	3	1.2	1.6	8.5	4.3	12.5	5.1	2.5	4.6
High-skilled ⁴ occupation (%)	21.4	12.3	9.6	41.9	29.7	51.6	27	22.6	32

1. [prə'fɪʃənt] *compétent* – 2. ['kɒlɪdʒ dɪ'grɪ:] *licence* – 3. *maîtrise et au-delà* – 4. *hautement qualifié*

B. A success story

Look at the picture, read Lin's biography, and find the missing group of words (?).

Maya Ying LIN is an American architect and sculptor, born in 1959 in Athens, Ohio, of a Chinese family who had emigrated to the US in the 1940s. Lin was catapulted to fame in 1982 while she was still an undergraduate at Yale University and designed the ? in Washington, D.C.



6. Talking point

Draw a parallel between the history of Black Americans and Asian Americans. What are the main differences and similarities?



1. When does the action take place?
2. Imagine where the Japanese are deported to. Why?
3. Explain the presence of newspaper photographers.
4. Who are the people “who would be following us within the next two days”. (l. 44)
5. Describe and try to explain the evacuees’ attitude.

Nisei Daughter is an autobiographical account by a Japanese-American who describes her childhood, adolescence and young womanhood while growing up in a Japanese immigrant family in Seattle, Washington, in the 1930s. She traces her growth from her early childhood days in Seattle to the internment camps of Idaho, where her family was relocated by the United States War Department during World War II.

7. Evacuation

On the twenty-first of April, a Tuesday, came the news. “All the Seattle Japanese will be moved by May 1. Everyone must be registered Saturday and Sunday between 8 a.m. and 5 p.m. They will leave next week in three groups, on Tuesday, Thursday and Friday.” [...]

Automobiles rolled up to the curb¹, one after another, discharging more Japanese and more baggage. Finally at ten o’clock, a vanguard of Greyhound buses purred in and parked themselves neatly along the curb. The crowd stirred² and murmured. The bus doors opened and from each, a soldier with rifle in hand stepped out and stood stiffly at attention by the door. The murmuring died. It was the first time I had seen a rifle at such close range and I felt uncomfortable. This rifle was presumably to quell riots³, but contrarily, I felt riotous emotion mounting in my breast.

Jim Shigeno, one of the leaders of the Japanese-American Citizens’ League, stepped briskly up front and started reading off family numbers to fill the first bus. Our number came up and we pushed our way out of the crowd. Jim said, “Step right in.” We bumped into each other in nervous haste. I glanced nervously at the soldier and his rifle, and I was startled⁴ to see that he was but a young man, pink-cheeked, his clear gray eyes staring impassively ahead. I felt that the occasion probably held for him a sort of tense anxiety as it did for us. Henry⁵ found a seat by a window and hung out, watching for Minnie⁶ who had promised to see him off. Sumi⁷ and I suddenly turned maternal and hovered over⁸ Mother and Father to see that they were comfortably settled. They were silent.

Newspaper photographers with flash-bulb cameras pushed busily through the crowd. One of them rushed up to our bus, and asked a young couple and their little boy to step out and stand by the door for a shot. They were reluctant⁹, but the photographers were persistent and at length they got out of the bus and posed, grinning widely to cover their embarrassment. We saw the picture in the newspaper shortly after and the caption underneath it read, “japs good-natured about evacuation.”

Our bus quickly filled to capacity. All eyes were fixed up front, waiting. The guard stepped inside, sat by the door, and nodded curtly¹⁰ to the gray-uniformed bus driver. The door closed with a low hiss¹¹. We were now the Wartime Civil Control Administration’s babies.

When all the buses were filled with the first contingent of Japanese, they started creeping forward slowly. We looked out of the window, smiled and feebly waved our hands at the crowd of friends who would be following us within the next two days.

Monica SONE, *Nisei Daughter* (1953)

1. [k3:b] (US) *trottoir* – 2. [st3:] *s’agiter* – 3. [kwel 'ra:ɪəts] *réprimer les émeutes* – 4. *surpris* – 5. Monica’s brother – 6. Henry’s fiancée – 7. Monica’s sister – 8. *ici, tourner autour de* – 9. *réticent* – 10. *sèchement* – 11. *sifflement*