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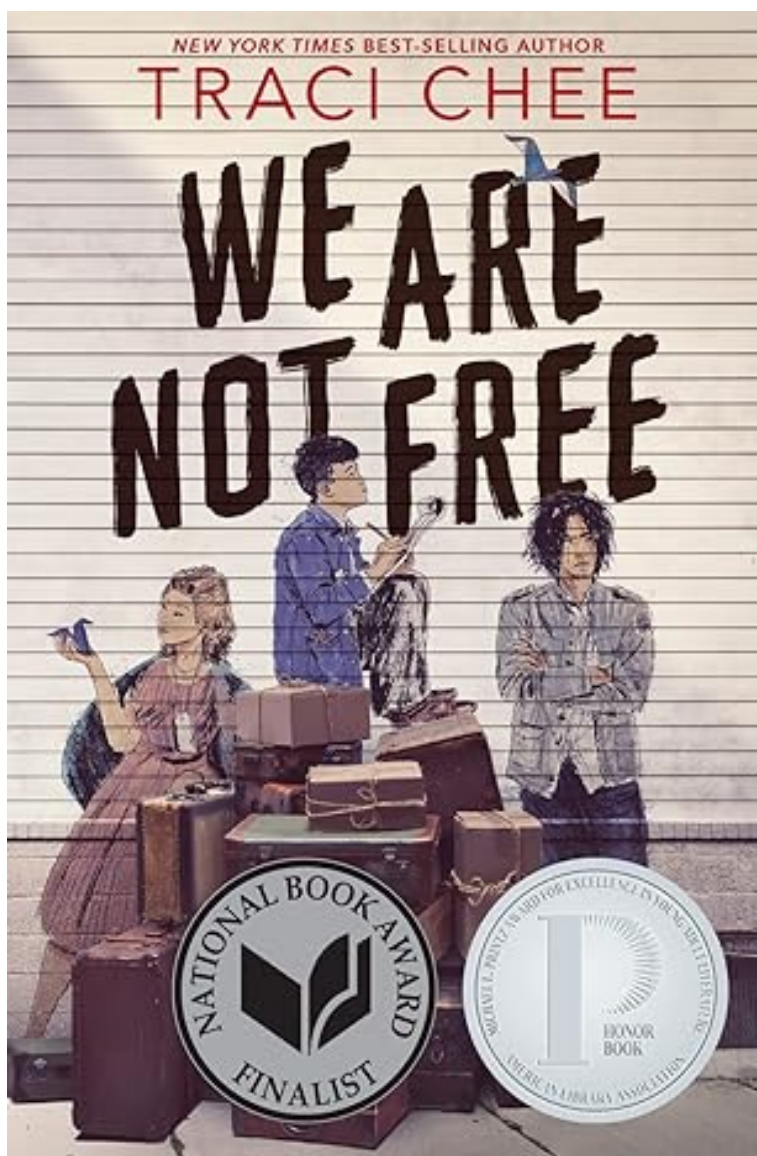
ENGL 112B Sec 01

Doctor Mary Warner

October 2, 2023

We Are Not Free

By Traci Chee



About the Author:

<https://www.tracichee.com/>



Source: <https://www.tracichee.com/bio.html>

Traci Che grew up in a small town in California and went to UC Santa Cruz to study literature and creative writing. Later, she attended San Francisco State University and earned a master of arts degree. Her debut novel is *The Reader*.

Summary:

We Are Not Free is set during World War II after the bombing of Pearl Harbor as anti-Japanese sentiment grew in America. The story follows the perspective of 14 Japanese-American youths, ranging from the ages of 14-20. All of them grew up in San

Francisco's Japantown and each chapter of the book follows over a 3 year period as different characters struggle with moving to and living in the Japanese internment camps.

Quote #1

“I back up, clutching my sketchbook, as the ketos surround me... Because we look like us.”(Chapter 1)

Minnow is a 13 year old second generation Japanese American. This scene depicts the discrimination he faces because of the negativity surrounding the Japanese after the bombing of Pearl Harbor. This experience is shared with many characters in the story and Japanese American at this time. Even though they are American and are loyal to America, they are still labeled as “enemy aliens” because of how they look. This harassment does not just extend to the Japanese but also Chinese and Koreans get targeted because they look similar to Japanese. There is also a question that many Japanese Americans had to face at the time: are they really American? They were born here but they are not treated the same as the rest of the American population.

Quote #2

“THURSDAY, JANUARY 27, 1944, 2100 HOURS... We were soldiers, and we were children. I mean, we are.”(Chapter 11)

Mas has joined the army in order to make sure the US can trust the Japanese Americans stuck in internment camps. Mas writes to his dead father and reminisces about him in order to find the courage to keep training. In addition, he writes about the good time he had as a kid with his friends and brother. Mas has so much pressure put on him because if he is not perfect the other soldiers will see him as less. He and other Japanese American have to work harder than others to prove to the other soldiers that they are loyal. But they did not need to do this if they

were accepted by the US in the first place. This scene shows how people deal with loss but also the hardships Japanese American had to face.

Quote #3

“I add silhouettes behind the curtains in my drawing...With a nod, the girl takes the sketch and tucks it into her pocket.”(Chapter 16)

After getting home to San Francisco Stan and Minnow meet and sit outside the Oishis' house. The house was rented out to another family but now that the Oishis are back the family must leave. But the family resists and starts to vandalize the house as they leave. The daughter of the family seems to feel bad for the Japanese as she talks to Stan and Minnow. They talk about how it was wrong to put the Japanese in camp and that this will happen again if there is no change. Minnow gives the girl a picture of the camps so that she will remember him. This discussion shows that there are people that sided with the Japanese Americans and opposed internment. But there was an overwhelming majority of people who feared the Japanese. In order to stop this from happening people must know what happened in these camps and make sure to not repeat this ever again with another group of people.

Classroom Use

I would implement the use of this book around the time we cover World War II. I would probably pair this book up with *Unbroken* by Laura Hillenbrand. As both books cover World War II I feel like using both of these books in tandem will help students understand the war from multiple perspectives. I would have student's write about what they know about World War II using the SSW format. Afterwards I would ask them what they know about Japanese internment. By gauging the students' knowledge I am able to give a brief history lesson in order to help students better understand the context of these books. Starting off with *Unbroken* until the book

gets to the bombing of Pearl Harbor. At this point I start implementing *We Are Not Free* as this is the time when the book starts. By combining these two books together the students will have a better perspective on what was happening in America and to American soldiers during the war. As both stories focus on the theme of survival loss and survival students will compare how each book presents these themes differently.

Why Should You Give This Book To Teens?

This book covers a time that every student probably learned in a history book World War II. Although some teens might not be able to relate to Japanese internment, there are still many themes in the novel about troubles teens face. They will be able to relate to at least 1 of the 14 characters as they have very different personalities and experiences. If there is at least one character that a teen can relate to they will be able to notice the similarities between all of the other characters. Moreover this would help give teens a new perspective of World War II because Japanese internment usually gets overshadowed by the Nazis, the Holocaust, and the fighting that happens in Europe and the Pacific Front.

How It Fits Best In Chapters 4-8 in *Adolescents in the Search for Meaning*:

Chapter 4: Books about Real-Life Experiences:

- The book covers a dark part of American history, Japanese internment.

Chapter 5: Books about Facing Death and Loss:

- Minnow, Shig, and Mas are reminiscing about their deceased father and what he would do in their situation and thinking about how to make him proud.
- All of the characters lost their homes and objects that meant a lot to them because they were unable to bring it to the internment camps.

- Many of them are separated from each other as they join the army: like Mas, Frankie, and Twitchy, or go to Tule Lake because they decided to renounce their loyalty to America in a survey: like Tommy, Aiko, Stan, and Mary.
- After being notified about the death of Twitchy in the war, there is a single entire chapter dedicated to all of the characters, switching to all of their perspectives, as they mourn for Twitchy.

Chapter 6: Books about Identity, Discrimination, and Struggles with Decisions:

- All of them suffer from discrimination as they are targeted for harassment by White American and having places not serve them because they are Japanese
- All of them question their loyalty to America because even though they are Americans they are still sent to the camps because they are also Japanese
- Tommy struggles with picking between being the ideal son his parents want or sticking by his friends

Chapter 7: Books about Courage and Survival:

- All of them survived the harassment, the living conditions in the camps, and separation from their friends.
- By the end of the novel most of the characters return back to San Francisco Japantown and try their best to return to society after their internment.

Quantitative

Lexile: Age Range: 14-17, 860L

AOTS: 5.5, AR Points: 14.0

Dale-Chall: 4th grade

Flesch-Kincaid: 4th grade

I would recommend this book to 8-12th grade students.

Qualitative

1. Structure
 - a. First-person perspective
 - b. Linear, but each chapter switches perspectives to a different character
2. Language Conventions and Clarity
 - a. Generally uses simple and easy to understand words
 - b. Uses some Japanese terminology that the reader might need to research
3. Knowledge Demands
 - a. Text requires knowledge of World War II so they can better understand what is happening
 - b. Knowledge about Japanese Internment will help readers understand the events easier
4. Levels of Meaning
 - a. Very straightforward as the chapters focus on one character and how they are feeling at that time