

Obasan internment camps transfer of values

[Countries](#), [United States](#)



How the Japanese Internment Camps Disrupted the Transfer of Values One of the darkest periods in Canadian history strongly revolves around the Second World War and the internment of Canadian-Japanese citizens. "Obasan," a novel by Joy Kogawa, explores the internment of Canadian citizens of Japanese descent through Naomi Nakane, a thirty-six year old schoolteacher, and her family. The novel chronicles the life of Naomi, providing many perspectives from different parts of her life, beginning with her life as a youth and her first-hand experience with the Japanese internment camps.

The Japanese internment camps disrupted the transfer of values between the three generations, the Issei, Nisei, and Sansei, by separating families. This separation occurs specifically in "Obasan," through Naomi and Stephen, their father and uncle, as well as Naomi, her mother and Obasan. The three generations discussed in "Obasan" are the Issei, Nisei, and Sansei. The Issei are Canadian residents born or raised in Japan. Aya Obasan is most representative of the Issei in the novel. The children of Issei, born and raised in Canada, are called Nisei. The Nisei explored in this novel include Naomi's mother, father, and Naomi's aunt, Emily.

Finally, the Sansei, children of Nisei who are born and raised in Canada, consist of Naomi and Stephen, her brother. All three of these generations have different experiences, traditions, and values, passed down from generation to generation. These values and traditions were disrupted in Canada during and after WWII because of Japanese internment camps. The separation of the Sansei generation, Stephen and Naomi, and the Nisei, because of the Japanese internment camps, had a great affect on the

disruption of transference of values. The father of Stephen and Naomi, Mark, was separated from them for a large portion of their childhood.

This separation, due to the internment camps, led to the Sansei generation missing out on such values as leadership, or strength. Instead, Mark focused on trying to keep regularity, a common value, in the Sansei generation's lives, demonstrated through the following quotation: " We've heard from Mark . . . All he thinks about are Stephen's music lessons" (Kogawa 113). This excerpt from the text displays that Mark is trying to, despite the separation of the two by the internment camps, keep regularity in Stephen's life by encouraging his musical studies.

Naomi also is deprived of natural values normally passed down through generations, because of the Japanese internment camps. A value a child might inherit from their parents is hard work. This hard work would be instilled upon the different generations through family routines around the house. These family routines were constantly interrupted by Naomi's families' constant uprooting as well as the unnatural living they experienced in the brutal internment camps. One attempt at instilling hard work in the Sansei around the house, though short-lived, occurs in Slokan.

This hard work is displayed in the following excerpt: "[Stephen] and Uncle work together and . . . A vegetable garden, flowers, a lawn, and a chicken coop with several chickens appear. " (Kogawa 149). Hard work was also a value passed down from generation to generation through education and school. Schooling was absent in the lives of the Sansei for over two years because of the Japanese internment camps: " Until May 1943, when we first attend school, Stephen and I have no formal studies" (Kogawa 149).

The Nakane's, despite the hardships they faced in the Japanese internment camps, made a valiant, and effective, effort to transfer the values from different generations to Naomi and Stephen. A value very important in Japanese culture is wisdom. Although the internment camps have separated the families, specifically Naomi and Stephen from their parents, values are still transferred from other family members. On page 150, Uncle is seen teaching the children which wild foods are safe and which are not, shown through this quotation: " He shows us which ones we are to pick . . . Under the canopy, Uncle says, if the mushrooms are white, they are not good. " (Kogawa 150). This quotation displays the transfer of wisdom from Issei to Sansei, a transfer of values that, without the Japanese internment camps, would have been transferred by the Nisei generation, specifically Naomi and Stephen's mother and father. In September 1941, Naomi's mother travels back to Japan to take care of Obaa-chan, her ailing grandmother, with promises to Naomi to return to Canada soon (Kogawa 72). Shortly after, the bombing of Pearl Harbor takes place, leaving the whole continent of North America in fear and shock.

With restrictions put in place on the movement of the Japanese-Canadians, Naomi's mother is unable to return. With the absence of her mother, Naomi misses out on the values her mother would have passed on to her. Naomi instead relies on Obasan to learn her values in the internment camps. Because Obasan is Issie, there is a gap between her generation and Naomi. This gap includes Naomi adopting Japanese values and traditions, rather than the Japanese-Canadian values she would learn from her mother. For

example, on page 138, Naomi is taught to not be “wagamama,” or selfish and inconsiderate, by Obasan (Kogawa).

This teaching demonstrates the disruption the internment camps had on transfer of values, forcing Naomi to rely on Obasan to learn core values as opposed to her mother or father. Obasan teaches Naomi other important values, like kindness and generosity. Obasan and Naomi are travelling on a train when Obasan notices a woman, who recently gave birth to a baby, which has no belongings. Obasan displays kindness and generosity, sacrificing some of her food for the woman and baby, strongly influencing Naomi and teaching her important values: “Obasan hands me an orange from a wicker basket and gestures . . . “For the baby,” Obasan says urging me” (Kogawa 121). This transfer of values from Obasan to Naomi, though gapping generations, produces an immediate effect. On the same train ride, Naomi mimics her aunt: “In a fit of generosity I take my ball and give it to Stephen. “You can keep it,”” (Kogawa 124). Throughout “Obasan,” Aya overtakes the role of mother, and clearly transfers values from her generation to the Sansei’s in the best way she can. In the final analysis, “Obasan” provides an in-depth look at the Japanese internment camps and the effects these camps had on the Japanese-Canadian people.

By separating families, the Japanese internment camps disrupted the transfer of values between the three generations, the Issei, Nisei, and Sansei. This separation, in “Obasan,” specifically involves the mother, father, uncle, and Obasan of Stephen and Naomi. It’s truly remarkable, and a testament to the caring Nakane’s, that Stephen and Naomi matured to be

such successful individuals. Works Cited Kogawa, Joy. Obasan. Lester & Orpen Dennys Ltd. , 1981. Print.