

Discussion Questions for *Dear Miss Breed* by Joanne Oppenheim

Some questions adapted from www.scholastic.com

1. Did you like the book?
2. Was the information covered in it new to you?
3. [Play the “day that will live in infamy” speech from Roosevelt.] If you were alive during World War II, what memories do you have of how Japanese Americans (or German Americans or Italian Americans) were treated?
4. We all like to think that “we” would be different than others but it is easy for us to say that in hindsight. Why do you think Miss Breed was able to behave the way she did in the times?
5. I was struck by the Doublespeak identified on page 45: the evacuation order said that “all persons of Japanese ancestry, both alien and nonalien” in the San Diego area were ordered to register and leave. What was meant was “both aliens and citizens”. Any comments on why the order was written this way?
6. What parts of the experiences covered in the book really struck you?
7. Any reactions to the quotations on page 147? [“Certainly the best present we give the Japs for Christmas would be a kick in the pants. Especially, if the obligation were to take place near a large body of water.” “I could never look a serviceman in the face if I were to extend Christmas greetings to a Jap.”]
8. “In some newspapers the cry went out to kill Japanese internees for every American GI who was murdered.” it says on page 172. What do you think about that?
9. Do you think the situation would be any different today if a World War took place? Did this book make you think about how Arabs and Muslims living in the U.S. have been treated since September 11? Consider the debates over imprisoning people without formally charging them with a crime, or the Patriot Act that allows the government to eavesdrop on suspects.
10. There’s some irony in this passage from page 206: “Even before the war began, the need for people who could speak, read, and write Japanese was urgent to the military. But as they scouted the relocation centers, the army discovered that most of the Nisei had little or no proficiency in the language of their parents. Most of them were just too Americanized!” Any comments?
11. [Pass around *Dr. Seuss Goes to War*.] I was surprised to read the information about Dr. Seuss and his negative cartoons about Japanese Americans. Was anyone else? Any comments?
12. What do these letters tell us about American history at this time?
13. What questions would you like to ask the writers if you could?
14. Like all writers of history, Ms. Oppenheim has a point of view— a perspective on historical events she presents to her readers. Can you detect the author’s voice and her point of view?
15. Is there a difference between the concept of civil liberties and the minimum rights guaranteed by the Constitution?