

# Fish Ponds, Sumo and Philosophy

Handout 4-A (1)

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Name \_\_\_\_\_

## Fish Ponds, Sumo and Philosophy

As told by Mr. Masaji Inoshita, a former inmate of Gila River

**What follows is a true story. See if you can analyze the clues and answer the questions correctly. Write in full sentences.**

*“Shikata ga nai,”* my mother said, when we were being forced to leave the West Coast. She said the same thing when we shoveled out the horse manure and moved into a stall at the fairgrounds. She said it every day at Gila River, 20 miles south of Phoenix, Arizona. “It can’t be helped.”

The other phrase we heard a lot was, *“Nasakenai,”* or “It’s a shameful situation.” Some people got stuck in those phrases, a kind of Japanese cultural philosophy. They turned bitter and sulked. But most people did not. Most people got busy, as soon as they could. Most people found jobs within the camps. They cooked. They typed. They grew vegetables. Some made camouflage nets. Professionals, like doctors and dentists, treated patients. Children went to school. Adults took classes in all kinds of crafts. There were sports. Baseball stadiums and fields were built, and sumo pits were popular. And so many people built fish ponds.

Fish ponds are part of Japanese culture. Fish ponds are found throughout Japan in gardens, providing a home for koi and turtles and other aquatic creatures. Fish ponds allow the eye a place to rest, to contemplate. They are a refuge for the eye and the heart. Many inmates built fish ponds under their buildings, an early swamp cooler effect in the desert. Ponds were different in shape and concept. Some had children’s handprints all around the border. Some had fairy bridges above and below the water. Some were decorated only in black stones, some in white. Others had Japanese characters written in the cement. Some were a series of interconnecting pools and some had waterfalls.

Whether your passion became your job, sports, a craft, or contemplating fish in a pond, everyone agreed, *“Shikata ga nai.”* It can’t be helped.



# Fish Ponds, Sumo and Philosophy

Handout 4-A (2)

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Name \_\_\_\_\_

1. What does “Shigata ga nai” mean? \_\_\_\_\_
2. What does “Nasakenai” mean? \_\_\_\_\_
3. Think. What do you think the two Japanese phrases above show about the traditional Japanese philosophy? Explain.  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_
4. Name 3 jobs that people worked at in the camps. \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_
5. Which would you rather attend, a baseball game or a sumo match? Explain why. \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_
6. Explain at least two reasons why the inmates built fish ponds. \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_
7. Use the rest of this page (or a blank sheet of paper) to draw the most beautiful fish pond you can dream up. Be creative. Put in interesting details. Don't forget the fish!

# What Happened After the War?

Handout 4-B (1)

56

Name \_\_\_\_\_

**What follows is a true story. See if you can analyze the clues and answer the questions correctly. Write in full sentences.**

Finally the day came when World War II ended and inmates were allowed to return home. But where was home? Many families had no where to return. They did not own homes or land. They had been forced to sell all of their furnishings. For the most part they no longer were business owners. Most had sold everything they could not carry. Those who had left things in storage found much of it had been stolen or ruined. Stories came back to the camps that some Americans still thought a Japanese face meant the enemy. Some people remained near the camps, some returned where they had come from, and some – especially the elderly – refused to go anywhere, because of their uncertainty. Meanwhile each inmate was issued a one-way train ticket and \$25 from the U.S. government and instructed to return home.

Wherever people went they had to start over from scratch. Nisei soldiers came home from the war and found no one would hire them. Signs announced: No Japanese need apply. Men who had proved themselves in battle as heroes were reduced to picking crops or washing dishes. Slowly, slowly Japanese Americans shouldered their next challenge and began to re-establish themselves. The camps closed, and anything of value was recycled, so that today only concrete pads, bits of wire and pipe are left to testify to structures that once held so many people. And memories, lots of memories.

1. Where did Japanese Americans go to when they were released from the camps? \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_
2. Why would the elderly refuse to leave? \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_
3. How much money did each inmate receive to go home? Was it enough? \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_
4. What kind of memories do you think Japanese Americans have of incarceration? \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_
5. Pretend you are a Japanese American student and write a one-page letter to a school friend explaining why your family is or is not returning home after World War II ends.

# Japanese American World War II Experience Pre-Test

Handout 4-C (1)

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Name \_\_\_\_\_

**What do you know about the Japanese American World War II experience?**

**Answer the following questions to the best of your ability.**

**True-False Place a T or an F in the blank provided.**

- \_\_\_\_\_ 1. Individuals of Japanese descent in Arizona were treated like everyone else in America during WWII.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 2. Many persons of Japanese descent in America were found guilty of treason during WWII.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 3. Depending on where persons of Japanese descent lived in America, they were removed from their homes.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 4. Persons of Japanese descent were allowed time to sell their possessions or store them before being removed from the area.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 5. There were ten major War Relocation Authority camps located in Arizona, Arkansas, California, Colorado, Idaho, Utah, and Wyoming.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 6. Most persons of Japanese descent were supporters of the Japanese empire.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 7. Persons of Japanese descent in the camps were given meaningful work and acceptable living conditions.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 8. Most persons slated for removal reported as instructed.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 9. Most Americans questioned whether civil rights were being violated when persons of Japanese descent were separated and confined.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 10. Persons in the camps were not allowed to have cameras or radios.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 11. Persons in the camps were not allowed to keep their pets.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 12. Japanese traditions, including patience and loyalty, helped inmates weather the things that happened to them.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 13. In spite of Hawaii's population being almost one-third Japanese American, no large-scale confinement sites were established there.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 14. Mass incarceration of persons of Japanese descent made sense, as America was at war with Japan.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 15. This kind of government policy can never happen again.

