

Internment and Resilience: Researching the Lives of Japanese Canadian High School Graduates

WORKSHEET 4.1 Yearbook (Annual) Analysis Activity

Richmond High was the only high school in Richmond, B.C. before Japanese Internment. The blended community of Euro-Canadian and Japanese Canadians was a peaceful and friendly one before the upheaval of ww2 and internment.

The primary sources you will examine tell a special story of community. In the following activity, you will analyze Richmond High School yearbook pages and answer questions based on visual analysis and personal interpretation. Please move around the stations and fill out the following sheets. We will be doing this activity over two days. *This will be assessed.*

Station 1: Opening Messages – RHS Annual 1942

1. What is Principal MacNeill’s main concern about the war?

He is concerned that students (mostly boys) will leave school early to join the war/war effort. He believes that industry needs students with training (which high school can provide) and suggests a co-op / training system might be useful where students help out in industry as assistants.

2. What does class valedictorian, Roy White, say about Japanese Canadians? What is the tone or main message of his valedictory? What are the expected war roles for women? (page 5)

He says it will be “the last group to have the presence of Japanese students until the war in the Pacific is over. It is with deep regret that [he] must admit that the crisis in the East has made this so” and “Our Japanese classmates will have to translate to their mother and fathers the reason for the sudden upheaval of their daily lives...” The tone is somber but patriotic. Women were expected to continue with Red Cross (nursing) work and maintain the home front.

3. What does the yearbook editor, Marion Beckwith, say about Japanese Canadians? Who likely designed the yearbook cover? (page 7)

Marion says “probably this will be the last term in which our Japanese friends will be with us. We are sorry to see them go, for we have had many good times with them. They have been good friends, and we wish them the best of luck.” She also thanks Japanese Canadian yearbook members for doing the year book’s artwork: Roy Miyashita, Makoto Otsu, & Shizumu Ito.

4. What does Yoshiko Oda see as “doing [her] share to help Canada in her war effort?” How might this response surprise you? How does she hope to keep her high school friendships alive? (page 12)

Yoshiko implies that Internment or “this parting has had to be” and implies that Japanese Canadians are “doing our share to help Canada in her war efforts” though obeying the wartime internment orders. One might think that Yoshiko would feel betrayed or angry at being sent away but this is not reflected in her published letter. She hopes to write letters to her friends.

5. What surprised you about the *perspectives* of the opening messages of the yearbook of 1942? Were they what you expected? Why/why not?

Various answers

Station 2: Life in a 1942 B.C. high school

1. Look at the annual staff on page 7. Who are the people that are writing the yearbook? Who are the teacher sponsors / advisors? How might the annual look if it were written by students of a different cultural background? From what cultural background do the teachers come from? (p. 13)

Of the staff of 26, 11 are male, 13 are female, 2 are Japanese Canadian — David Naruse, Roy Miyashita — and the rest are European Canadian. Both teacher sponsors / advisors are European Canadian. Various answers for how it might look different. Teachers are all EC.

2. Look at the graduate photos starting on page 8. What are some fashion trends from this era? What are the common hair styles? Are there any differences between European Canadians and Japanese Canadians?

Fashion trends: suits & ties for men, blouses for girls. Female hair is smooth with big rolled curls curling away from face. Male hair is combed back. There doesn't appear to be any difference between the two cultural groups.

3. Look at the list of advertisers on page 6. Do you recognize the names of any of these businesses? Are any still operating? Are there any non European Canadian business names included in advertisers? Should there be advertising in yearbooks?

Still around: HBC, Sprott-Shaw School, Birks, Non European: M.K. Gung, Uneeda Printers. Students from Richmond will recognize many of these names and might visit the old Steveston Drug Store building in the village. Note: Uneeda Printers appears to have been a Japanese Canadian owned business. Pittman's Business College has a historical building in Vancouver. Advertising: various answers.

4. What are some of the activities that Japanese Canadians are involved in at the school? What might this tell you about their identity?

Japanese Canadian students participated in everything but are noted for ju-jitsu, a Japanese martial art (p. 23) and fencing (which may refer to kendo), sports, boys basketball, (p 29 onwards). Alas, no hockey players. Various answers for identity.

5. What subjects were taught in high school then that aren't in your current school? In what subjects did Japanese Canadian students excel? (see page 21 "Our Outstanding Students")

Not currently taught: Latin, Secretarial Practice, Typing, Try-out Typing, Shorthand, Bookkeeping,. Japanese Canadians excelled in Industrial Arts, Shorthand, Art — although they are well represented in all areas of excellence including English. This may reflect the post secondary careers they likely would join, pre Internment.

6. How is high school different today? Comment using evidence from above questions.

Summary

Station 3: The war in high school

1. What is a Victory Bond? How did students honour past students who were now in the war? (p. 14)

Loans that people could buy to help finance the war effort without raising taxes. Past students were sent Christmas parcels.

2. On page 23 it mentions that a third school dance was rejected "because of the ban on school activities after dark." Why would they be banned? Look to the poster on page 41 for a hint.

Activities after dark would be seen as wasteful due to needing energy to run lights and music; these resources would be better used for the war effort. It's possible, although less likely, that Richmond also had a black out law. Also, it seems that people were worried about eye strain caused by dim lighting.

3. A new optional cadet course is advertised on page 27th. What students are encouraged to take this course? What subjects will be included? Why might these be useful for, in the war? Why wouldn't Japanese Canadians be taking this course in the autumn of 1942?

"All senior boys" are encouraged to take this course. Subjects include signaling, semaphore (flag signaling) and buzzer (radio broadcasting), first aid, knots and lashings (hammocks), aircraft recognition, fieldcraft, squad, platoon, company, battalion, and ceremonial drill) These skills would be useful in the army, navy, and airforce. Japanese Canadians would be already interned by September 1942 so couldn't take this course. Also, JC's were prohibited by owning radios through an order issued on Feb.2, 1942.

4. Read the winning Victory essays on page 35 & 38. What is its theme or message? Who likely chose the essay's winner? How might this affect the message of the winning essays? Why isn't Japanese Canadian internment not mentioned?

Theme: give Canada its all! Established teachers likely assessed the winners. Students would be less likely to be political. Perhaps with Roper essay, JC internment isn't mentioned due to its conflict with the message of "mutual respects by citizens and officials alike."

5. Look at the artwork throughout the annual which likely was co-designed by Roy Miyashita, Makoto Otsu, and Shizumu Ito. On page 57 the symbolism and allusion is explained. How might the seagull have additional meaning to Japanese Canadians, many of whom are familiar with this seagoing bird especially with JC's facing Internment within months of the publication?

JC fishermen knew the birds well and would use their behavior to detect storms and the whereabouts of fish. Perhaps a free bird is a hopeful symbol of life post war and post internment?

6. How did the war, pre-internment, affect the daily lives of all students in BC but especially Japanese Canadian students?

Various answers