Dear Miss Breed

Discussion Guide

There are many ways to begin a book discussion in your own home, workplace, neighborhood bookstore or coffee shop, public library, church, etc. The idea behind ***One Book, One San Diego*** is to have all citizens in the San Diego area reading the same book at the same time, creating a kind of citywide book club and sense of community.

The first step in conducting a book discussion is to visit any of the 35 San Diego Public Library locations and obtain a copy of *Dear Miss Breed*. Also, be sure to explore the links provided on the *Dear Miss Breed* section of the library's website at www.sandiegolibrary.org for additional information about Miss Breed and her young friends.

After obtaining a resource guide, pick a date to gather a group of friends, relatives or co-workers to discuss the book. Having trouble gathering a group together? No problem: *The Friends of the San Diego Public Library* will offer public book discussions at branch locations throughout the city. Check out the events calendar for dates and times.

Once you have your group together, an easy way to begin the book discussion is to ask everyone in your group to bring a favorite passage or question to the meeting and spend some time going around the room and discussing each one. It is probably a good idea to have one person in your discussion group act as moderator who can pose questions to the group and help keep the conversation organized. If you plan on being the moderator, please read on to learn more about leading a book discussion.

How to Lead a Book Discussion Group

Getting started:

- Try to arrange seating in a circle (so participants can face each other).
- Introduce yourself (your name, your role in the library).
- Have discussion participants introduce themselves (this will help people get to know each other and accustom them to hearing their own voices in a group setting).
- Spend a few minutes introducing the text and establishing the parameters of the discussion. Doing so will give the group a moment to recall the text to mind, and it will help establish you in your role as the moderator.
- An ideal book discussion group would comprise 5 to 15 participants. If you have more than 15, you may want to ask that participants raise their hand (as they would in a classroom) before making comments. Name tags are also a good idea for larger groups.
- Put your watch by your discussion notes, so that you can inconspicuously keep track of the time.

What should I, as discussion moderator, do in *preparation* for the book discussion?

- Go into the discussion with a set of questions *and* references to relevant passages in the book.
- When you type up discussion notes, use a large font size so that you can read them at a glance.

What should I be doing *during* the book discussion?

- Bring your own point of view into the discussion, but try to avoid "steering" the discussion excessively. You don't want to appear indifferent, but you don't want to turn the discussion into a lecture either.
- Keep the discussion on topic—personal experiences may certainly help illuminate a text, but remember to keep the focus on the one thing everybody in the discussion has in common: the text itself.
- Try to get participants to refer back to specific passages or events in the text.
- Make connections between comments made by participants (e.g., "Sally's comment reminds me of what Bob was saying earlier about…").
- Keep the discussion moving: don't get stuck too long on disagreements.
- Wrap it up: as the discussion winds down, briefly summarize the discussion (what people agreed about, what people disagreed about, etc.).

What if nobody in the book discussion group has anything to say?

- This is not likely to be a problem, since the participants are self-selected.
- When posing a question, don't get frazzled if you don't get an immediate response. They need time to process your question, and what might seem like an eternity to you as moderator is just a few moments for them.
- Avoid "fishing" (i.e., asking questions that are geared towards getting a particular response). Similarly, avoid questions that can be answered with a simple "yes" or "no."
- If discussion lags, looking at specific passages will help jog memories (read the passage aloud or ask someone in the group to read it aloud).
- Group chemistry is a mysterious thing—you may just wind up with a quiet group, and that is nothing to worry about.

What if one person in the group is dominating the discussion and/or bullying other participants?

- Every group has its "alpha" personality that adores the sound of his or her voice. If one person attempts to dominate the group, don't be afraid to observe aloud that the conversation is becoming lopsided and ask that person to allow others to participate.
- Discussions of social policy issues can provoke strong feelings; when people get upset, they tend to speak in generalities. If the discussion gets heated, navigating the group back to the particularities of the text by looking at a specific passage or scene may help calm things down. Participants who become belligerent towards you or other members of the group should be politely but firmly asked to leave.

Dear Miss Breed Discussion Questions

Preface

1. Oppenheim talks about "doublespeak" in her book. Just what is "doublespeak" and why is it important to know about? Can you think of modern day examples of doublespeak?
2. What dates are so memorable to you that you remember where you were when you heard about the event?

Chapter 1

1. Describe the inhumane treatment when the FBI came to make the arrests.
2. How did life for the Japanese change after World War II was declared?
3. How did the Nikkei respond to being "evacuated"? Would you have responded the same way?
4. How were Japanese Americans represented in the popular press during WWII?
5. What anti-Japanese activity had gone on prior to Pearl Harbor?

Chapter 2

1. What was Executive Order 9066? Are there modern day corollaries?
2. Oppenheim asked some of the occupants of the camp what they had to leave behind that hurt most. If you could choose one item other than necessities to take with you, what would it be?

Chapter 3

1. Describe the reception at Santa Anita and the dehumanizing the Japanese were forced to endure.
2. How was the Japanese philosophy *shikata ga nai* ("there are some things that cannot be helped") reflected in the letters to Miss Breed?
3. How did the children's letters differ according to their ages?
4. Cite some of the most blatant propaganda used to justify the incarceration.
5. How did the inhabitants attempt to make a home of Santa Anita?

Chapter 4

1. What kind of schooling was available at Santa Anita?
2. What was the daily life like?

Chapter 5

1. What activities did the incarcerated engage in?
2. What finally drove the inhabitants to riot?

Chapter 6

1. Describe the living conditions at Poston.
2. What were the furnishings in the barracks like?

Chapter 7

1. Describe the schooling at Poston.
2. Why did the Japanese children prefer Caucasian teachers?
3. What advantages did Elizabeth Kikuchi see in the Poston schools?
4. What discrimination did the furloughed farm workers who left the camp face?

Chapter 8

1. How did the various families celebrate Christmas in the camp?

Chapter 9

1. Why were the Issei reluctant to agree to Question 28?
2. Why were the Nisei reluctant to agree to this question?
3. What feelings did the young people have as they left the camp?
4. Isamu Noguchi, the Japanese sculptor, was interned at Poston. Do you know of other famous Japanese who were "evacuated"?

Chapter 10

1. Why were the internees reluctant to return to their homes?

Chapter 11

1. What stipulations did the Japanese make if they were to be drafted?
2. What effect did incarceration have on family dynamics?

Chapter 12

1. Was there anything ironic about the Japanese serving in the U.S. armed forces?
2. Why did the U.S. government prefer that the Japanese not resettle in clusters?

Chapter 13

1. What happened to the Japanese who returned to California?

Chapter 14

1. What changes did the U.S. make toward the Japanese and other minorities after World War II?

General questions:

1. Oppenheim invites comparisons between the war hysteria in the U.S after Pearl Harbor and the conduct of the American government (and populace) in the wake of 9/11. Are there valid parallels? Why or why not?
2. Play the devil's advocate: Is there any way at all of justifying the detention of Japanese Americans in concentration camps during WWII?
3. What do the books Miss Breed sends mean to the children in the camps? Why does she send them?

Broad themes and issues for discussion:

- nationality and nationalism
- civil liberties vs. national security
- adult-child friendships
- racism

- literacy and freedom
- cruelty and generosity
- family separations
- propaganda