



Diplomová práce

Comparative Study of Julie Otsukas novels in the Context of Asian American Literature

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Diplomová práce se bude zabývat třemi romány Julie Otsuka: *When the Emperor Was Divine*, *The Buddha in the Attic* a *The Swimmers*. Tyto tři romány budou předmětem komparativní analýzy, v románech budou identifikována významná témata, budou porovnávány způsoby jejich zpracování, a to v kontextu asijské americké literatury. Práce bude konzultována průběžně formou osobního, nebo online setkání.

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Annotation

This diploma thesis focuses on Japanese Americans and Japanese American literature. In the first part it establishes the context of Asian American society including an overview of Asian American and Japanese American literature. The second part deals with three novels written by contemporary Japanese American author Julie Otsuka. It analyses and compares the novels in terms of form and content and looks for connections between the reality of Japanese Americans and the selected literary texts. The aim of the third part is to prove or deny whether Japanese American literature can find use in English lessons in Czech schools.

Key words

Asian Americans, Japanese Americans, Asian American literature, Japanese American Literature, Julie Otsuka, Teaching English Through Literature

Anotace

Tématem této diplomové práce je japonsko-americká literatura a Američané japonského původu. V první části práce je stanoven kontext, ve kterém je nastíněna historie a kultura asijských migrantů do USA. Druhá část se zaměřuje na tři romány Julie Otsuka, současné americké spisovatelky s japonskými kořeny. Knihy jsou analyzovány a porovnávány z hlediska jejich formy a obsahu. Tato analýza se snaží propojit literární texty s realitou a historií amerických občanů japonského původu. Třetí část se soustředí na využití japonsko-americké literatury v hodinách angličtiny.

Klíčová slova

Američtí Asiati, Američtí Japonci, asijsko-americká literatura, japonsko-americká literatura, Julie Otsuka, výuka angličtiny pomocí literatury

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Introduction

Asian American literature is a rich and diverse body of literature that reflects the experiences, struggles, and triumphs of individuals with Asian heritage in the United States. It encompasses a wide range of genres, themes, and voices, offering a unique perspective on the complex intersection of culture, identity, and belonging.

The themes often touch on issues such as immigration, discrimination, generational conflicts, and the search for identity in a multicultural society. It's a powerful tool for fostering understanding and empathy, allowing readers to glimpse into the diverse experiences within the Asian American community.¹

The first step is to define what Asian American and Japanese American literatures are and what the history of these two bodies of literature is. However, to fully understand Asian American literature, its Japanese part specifically, it is essential to look not only at literary history and literary theory, but also at a number of non-literary fields including historical events because literature often mirrors real events and real people's lives. In simple terms, the relations between the reality and literature set the ground for practical exploration. When such context is established, a comparative analysis of specific literary works can be carried out.

As a contemporary representative of the Japanese American literature, Julie Otsuka has been selected. Her three novels are set in different historical periods however, it is expected to find themes, in her works, common within the area of Asian American and Japanese American literatures. Exploring and comparing the ways Otsuka deals with these themes will help uncover the foundations on which Japanese American literature is laid on. Beside the themes that are shared among some of the most acclaimed Asian/Japanese American writers, there are also some features of Otsuka's novels that are entirely individual and distinctive from other authors, as she takes inspiration from her own family's history.

¹ Text generated by ChatGPT (Asian American literature is a ... within the Asian American community.)

These autobiographical features enable the readers discover and better comprehend the effects of social and cultural differences upon one Japanese American family. Another significant feature of Otsuka's literary work is her writing style, which intensifies the message that Otsuka's novels try to convey.

Asian American literature and Japanese American literature are not very common topics in Czech schools. However, they can offer a number of topics and activity ideas that could relate to curriculums at the lower-secondary and secondary levels of education in Czech schools. Using literary texts, in general, could raise students' interest in various topics including the English language itself, especially if they are offered authentic literary texts which are quite easy to understand. Common practice in Czech classrooms is using textbook texts which are usually made up to suit a particular phenomenon of the English language. This thesis will try to find out whether the representatives of Japanese American literature can be used in Czech schools. Beside the benefit of improving students' English language skills, there is also the advantage of broadening students' knowledge in other, non-literary or non-language fields as in today's Czech educational system the cross-curricular learning is in the spotlight.

The aim of the thesis is to draw a connection between the reality of Asian Americans, particular focus being on the Japanese American diaspora, and Japanese American literature, and, subsequently, prove or deny that Japanese American literature can fit in the English curriculums in Czech schools.

In few parts of the thesis, short texts generated by ChatGPT will be used, mainly to summarize a certain phenomenon. In all cases, these texts are indicated by a footnote.

Part 1: Americans of Asian Descent

The Asian Americans

The term Asian Americans commonly refers to the citizens of the United States with Asian ancestry. This extremely heterogenous group includes, for example, people of Chinese, Japanese, South Korean, Indian, Filipino, Indian, Taiwanese or Vietnamese descent.

According to the US census in 2020, approximately 6 per cent of the US population identified themselves as Asian Americans (“Sociology”). However, others who may be of Asian descent, could identify themselves simply as Americans.

Although some of the first people from Asia arrived to the United States as early as the sixteenth century, the first major immigration wave happened in the second half of the nineteenth century when Chinese immigrants arrived during the California Gold Rush and later worked on the transcontinental railroad.² However, the Chinese Exclusion Act of 1882 marked the first significant restriction on immigration based on race or nationality, specifically targeting Chinese laborers.

In the early 20th century, immigration from other Asian countries began to increase, including Japanese, Filipino, Korean, and South Asian immigrants. The Immigration and Nationality Act of 1965, which abolished the national origins quota system, led to a surge in immigration from various parts of Asia. This shift contributed to a more diverse Asian American population. (Ling and Austin 2010, 2)

The experiences of Asian immigrants have varied widely, from the discrimination faced by Japanese Americans during World War II, as seen in the internment camps, to the model minority stereotype that emerged in the latter half of the 20th century. Today, Asian

² Text generated by ChatGPT (Although ... of the nineteenth century)

Americans constitute a significant and diverse community with roots in various countries and cultures, contributing to the social, economic, and cultural life of the United States.³

As the Chinese and the Japanese were the first major groups to come to the US, the following focus will be on them, mainly on their experiences after coming to their new homes.

Immigration Policy

As mentioned above, the first major group to arrive in the United States from Asia were the Chinese, followed by the Japanese. Thus, they were the first and most populous groups of Asians to experience life in the US, mainly on the west coast. As Ling and Austin (2010) mention these two groups differed fundamentally from each other in terms of national histories, native culture, and American experiences (1). Differences persisted even after their arrival to the USA, as the Chinese settled in towns and cities, and the Japanese, on the other hand, pursued agricultural opportunities (Ling and Austin 2010, 1). Another significant difference is the fact that until the 1960s the Chinese population remained predominantly male, while the Japanese was more balanced in terms of gender (Ling and Austin 2010, 1). This fact will also be discussed later in the text as it is reflected in Asian American literature.

With the increase of Asian population, the US government started to limit the numbers and the rights of Asian immigrants. One of the first restrictive documents was the Chinese Exclusion Act in 1882 which limited the Chinese immigration for ten years. It was also the first law that prohibited the entry to the USA based on nationality (Daniel 2010, 156). The need for some restriction was triggered by the fact that the Chinese were moving from rural areas to cities and they became a competition for white workers (Daniel 2010, 156).

³ Text generated by ChatGPT (The experiences ... cultural life of the United States.)

Generally, it can be stated that the Asian Americans (the Chinese, the Japanese, the Filipinos and others) started in the United States as a cheap labour with limited rights.

Another important restrictive document affecting Asian Americans was the Gentleman's Agreement of 1907 between Japan and the United States that followed the anti-Asian sentiments (Adachi 2010, 407). The strictest law that almost stopped immigration for forty years and affected mainly the Japanese population of the United States was the Immigration Act of 1924 (Moreno 2010, 51).

The US immigration policy including various regulations and orders often affected even those who were born in the United States, this will be discussed in the following chapters.

The situation for the Asian Americans improved with the Immigration and Nationality Act of 1965 which basically removed discrimination in immigration policy (Le 2010, 53).

Aspects of Immigration

Immigration means uprooting from familiar surroundings and, thereafter, relocating to an unknown place, often with the expectations of a better life. Even if a person is relocating to a culturally similar country, it is still a major change in a person's life than can deeply affect personality, regardless the historical period.

Immigrants often have to deal with issues that can have a huge impact on their daily lives. To name some of them, maybe the most significant, these are for example race, identity, stereotypes, segregation, insecurity, expectations, prejudice and the inner conflict between assimilation and keeping traditions of their original culture. Further, cultural differences may include the issues of religion, education, language, and for some immigrants all of these aspects of immigration can lead to cultural isolation.

For decades, Asian Americans were considered unassimilable compared to European immigrants who were culturally closer to American majority (Kim 2010, 31). The most

visible difference was, of course, the race. Also, their habits and traditions were completely different from the European American. Thus, this alien culture together with its bearers were considered inferior, much like the African Americans (Kim 2010, 31). Such long-term hostility inevitably led to segregation and isolation of Asian Americans which often resulted in economical failure (Kim 2010, 31). As their assimilation was not made easier, a lot of Asian Americans relocated to their own communities which included self-sufficient Chinatowns and Japantowns (Kim 2010, 31). As it will be discussed later in the literature chapter, the hostility towards Asian Americans was often triggered by the fear of the unknown.

However, what later helped assimilate Japanese Americans was the fact that, generally, they excelled in education and they were often more successful in academics and business than other groups of Americans (Kim 2010, 31).

Beside assimilation there are two other key terms related to immigration, these are acculturation and adaptation. Acculturation is defined as ‘a process of sociological and cultural changes that arise as a result of contact of different cultures’ (Soukup). Acculturation is a long-term process in which a person is in an immediate and permanent contact with individuals with different cultural background (Soukup). Acculturation is often described as an influence of the stronger and dominant culture on a minor culture (Soukup). As Berry (1997) explains, acculturation can have a deep impact on individual’s personality. Further, it can affect life in psychological, sociocultural and economic areas (6). Adaptation is defined as a final stage of changes in behaviour that help the person survive in a certain environment (Petrusek). As Berry mentions, the process of acculturation and adaptation occurs on two levels, psychological and sociocultural. The first one refers to individual’s feeling of satisfaction within the new culture, while the latter is related to acquiring social skills required

by the new cultural environment (Berry 1997, 14). Assimilation, acculturation and adaptation are, in various, forms, mirrored in Asian American literature.

Another important aspect of immigration is the language. The first generations of Asian American immigrants knew zero English or had just a little knowledge of this language. It is reflected in Asian American literature that the first generations learned basic vocabulary which was enough to get by when at work or shopping. The language was also the source of conflicts between generations as immigrant parents often spoke with strong accent while their children, who were already born in the United States and were not segregated in schools, could feel ashamed, as it is, in some cases, implied in literature. In the first decades of Asian American immigration to the United States, there were basically two different groups of parents. The first one wanted public schools to teach their children their native language and culture (which further led to segregation), the other group believed that if their children learn proper English, they would be able to succeed in life in the future (Chen 2010, 38). However, at the beginning of mass immigration, but also nowadays, there were and still are efforts to keep the native language, sometimes called the heritage language. The level of heritage-language maintenance depends of the level of segregation, class and institutions that bring the speakers together (Lo 2010, 62). As implied earlier, different levels of English can be a source of misunderstandings and can have negative effect on interpersonal relationships. (Lo 2010, 62)

Another theme that is related to immigration and has been portrayed in different forms in all kinds of art including literature is racism. Racism is defined as a hostile attitude towards members of another race (Ransdorf). It is usually based on prejudice and frustration which is often caused by the racist's own failures (Ransdorf). In the years of massive immigration from Asia to the United States, racism towards Asian Americans was supported by US immigration laws several times.

Asian American Literature

Asian American literature contains as many branches as there are Asian nations in the United States. The term is used for literary works written by American authors of Asian descent. The following part will focus on the most renowned writers and it will deal with the themes mentioned in the previous chapter and their reflection in literary works. Japanese American literature will not be dealt with here as it will be discussed in a separate chapter.

One of the broadest and most prominent part of Asian American literature are works of Chinese American authors. Chinese American literature started with the arrival of the first Chinese laborers and it often reflected immigrants' experience including all the hardships that came with their relocation (Jin 2010, 203). The beginnings of Chinese American literature are connected to works written in Chinese and also to the genre of folk rhymes (Jin 2010, 203). The immigrants' life in California was a frequent theme as the majority of immigrants were settling down in this state. Poems by Chinese American authors were translated into English and published with the title *Songs of Golden Mountain: Cantonese Rhymes from San Francisco Chinatown* (Jin 2010, 203). The following verses express the feelings of many immigrants from China:

The pair of mandarin ducks has been split apart;

The rouge-faced woman is left with a broken heart.

How she regrets urging Husband to go to the

Golden Gate. (Hom 1992, 12)

Sui Sin Far (born Edith Eaton) was a significant figure of Chinese American literature. She was half Chinese, born in England and she is often considered as the first Chinese American author (Jin 2010, 203). Wang (2008) says that she has been recognized as the first Chinese American writer to depict truly the Chinese in America with empathy (244). Her literary work has been admired for her rhetorical style through which she fought against

racism (Wang 2008, 246). She was writing her books in the times when the Chinese Americans were often called 'the yellow peril' (Wang 2008, 247). Much like the African Americans the Chinese Americans were facing hostility and racism. In her stories she often presents characters of Chinese Americans who she describes being as good as white Americans and she also supports mixed marriage (Wang 2008, 250).

During the twentieth century, some of the authors of Chinese descent established themselves as internationally known artists and many of them are recipients of literary awards. These authors include descendants of the first-generation immigrants.

One of these authors is Maxine Hong Kingston whose book *A Woman Warrior: Memoirs of a Girlhood Among Ghosts* combines autobiographical narration and her family's history with traditional Chinese legends. However, as Fong (1989) explains the narrator stays in the background and the author rather presents other female characters and their struggles related to their womanhood, and even the generational gap between the narrator/author and her mother (1). The hardship of immigration is also a theme here because the narrator's mother is rejected by her husband who is an Asian American immigrant (Adams 2008, 89). The book is considered a work of feminism and it has been praised for its unconventional narrative style.

Frank Chin is an American author and playwright of Chinese descent. He has been often considered Kingston's counterpart and, moreover, Kingston's critic. He accused Kingston of supporting Chinese stereotypes in *A Woman Warrior* to be accepted by American majority (Adams 2008, 86). Chin himself is an author of coming-of-age novel *Donald Duk* in which he explores the themes of Chinese American history (including hard immigrants' work on railroads) and growing up in two different cultures. Chin's novel is intentionally didactic as Chin believes that literature should serve educational purposes (Richardson 1999, 58). The novel's title refers to the famous Disney character and in the context of the book it relates to

racism the main character has to face. The name implies that the Chinese boy is as good and kind as the original Donald Duck, moreover, the name means that he is American (Richardson 1999, 59).

Frank Chin is also considered as a pioneer of Asian American theatre. *The Chickencoop Chinaman* is one his plays and, although its title refers to a stereotypical caricature of Chinese labourers, the main themes of the play are masculinity of Chinese American men and criticism of older generations living in Chinatown (Adams 2008, 80). Chin also co-authored a significant anthology of Asian American literature *Aiiieeee! An Anthology of Asian-American Writers* (Adams 2008, 83).

Amy Tan is a Chinese American writer whose most praised book is *The Joy Luck Club*. It focuses on the generational gap and explores the relationships between Chinese American mothers and their daughters (Jin 2010, 204). An important aspect of the book is the language as the mothers speak Chinese, while their daughters are native speakers of English. (Dunick 2006, 5). Much like with Kingston, Chin criticises Tan for being too American and writing for the masses, putting aside what it really means to be Chinese (Adams 2009, 122). Tan took inspiration from her own family. As she mentions in her speech given in 1990, she speaks different English than her mother. Tan also admits she when she was growing up, she was ashamed of her mother's English which was influenced by her native Chinese (Tan 1990, 1). Tan mentions, that she as a daughter associated her mother's imperfect English with a low level of her mother's thinking. Moreover, she says that her mother's English played a role when people in various institutions treated her badly until they spoke with her daughter who spoke perfect English (Tan 1990, 1). These implications of the importance of good English also occur in Asian American literature.

Asian American literature are not only works by Chinese Americans. It is such a diverse body of literature that cannot be covered in this paper as it includes works that were

written by American authors with roots in South Korea, Vietnam, Laos, the Philippines, India, Pakistan, Bangladesh, Myanmar, Cambodia, Indonesia, Malaysia, Mongolia, Nepal, the Pacific Islands, Singapore, Sri Lanka, Taiwan, Thailand and Tibet. In Adams' list of the most renowned Asian American writers, Chinese American and Japanese American writers prevail (Adams 2008, 5). However, there still is a number of authors of other nationalities who have formed the Asian American literary canon.

Carlos Bulosan was a Filipino American poet, novelist and journalist. In his autobiographical novel called *America Is in the Heart*, he recounts his youth in the Philippines and then his emigration to the United States in 1930, the time of the Great Depression (Weltzien 2013, 12). As Wesling explains, Bulosan describes 'repeated exposure to violence, injustice, and exploitation across innumerable cities, towns, and states' (Wesling 2007, 55).

Lan Cao is a writer of Vietnamese descent. She is the author of *Monkey Bridge*, which tells the story of a teenager and her mother adjusting to American culture while still thinking about Vietnam (Hinrichsen 2010, 584). It reflects on Vietnamese history as the two women reminisce the horrors of war in Vietnam (Long 2008, 12).

Wendy Law-Yone is a writer of Burmese descent. She wrote *The Coffin Tree*, a novel about Burmese siblings who are forced to leave their home and relocate to the United States where they face hostility and cruelty ("The Coffin Tree"). Adams (2008) compares *The Coffin Tree* to another work by an Asian American author, *Jasmine* by Indian American writer Bharati Mukherjee (130). Both books deal with themes of immigration, changing identities and postcolonialism (Adams 2008, 130).

One of the most successful Asian American contemporary writers is Jhumpa Lahiri, recipient of a number of awards including the Pulitzer Prize for Fiction. In her collection of short stories called *Interpreter of Maladies*, Lahiri presents a number of Indians and Indian Americans who try to adjust to the American way of living while missing India.

Asian/Pacific American Awards for Literature are awarded annually to significant works of literature in the categories of adult fiction, adult non-fiction, youth literature, children's literature and picture book. The reason for the award is 'to honour and recognize individual work about Asian/Pacific Americans and their heritage, based on literary and artistic merit' ("Literature Awards").

One of the latest winners in the category of children's literature, is Lisa Yee whose book *Maizy Chen's Last Chance* is about a Chinese American girl, a fifth-generation Chinese American, who explores her family's history as she helps her grandfather at the family's restaurant the Golden Palace ("Maizy Chen's Last Chance"). The winner book in the category of youth literature, called *Himawari House*, focuses on a young Japanese American woman, who is taking her gap year in Tokyo and tries to connect with her Japanese heritage while she must overcome language barriers ("2023 Asian/Pacific American Awards for Literature Winners").

Another appreciation of Asian American writers is The Asian American Literary Award. It has been awarded by the Asian American Writers' Workshop since 1998. Julie Otsuka, who will be the focus of the following part of this paper, is a recipient, as well as Jhumpa Lahiri and Maxine Hong Kingston ("*Asian American Writers' Workshop*").

Some of the Asian American authors are also recipients or nominees of The Newbery Medal which is awarded to 'the author of the most distinguished contribution to American literature for children' ("John Newbery Medal").

As implied in the previous paragraphs, Asian American literature has been highly influenced by the history of immigration and racism. It is often about the struggle of adjusting to a new life in the United States, generational conflicts, and homesickness.

Asian American literature takes on different forms, including the traditional ones such as the novel or short stories, poetry, but it also includes children's literature which often highlights the importance of knowing one's cultural heritage and family roots.

The first literary works of Asian American literature often share very similar themes. However, according to Adams (2008), since the 1990s it has been the period of heterogeneity, hybridity and multiplicity in this literary field (143).

The Japanese Americans

The Japanese were one of the first major immigrant groups to come to the United States for labour. These people were predominantly males and they found jobs mainly in agriculture. Most of them worked on the West Coast and Hawaii (Fryer 2010, 371). Throughout the first half of the twentieth century, Japanese immigrants found it hard to become US citizens, as it was believed that a person of colour cannot be an American citizen (Fryer 2010, 371). Also, they had to face racism and discrimination as there were persisting anti-Asian sentiments. The beginnings of the Japanese Americans are marked by the anti-Japanese movement which occurred in the 1890s (Austin 2010, 382). It was a continuation of anti-Asian sentiments focused on the Chinese immigrants in the earlier years. However, throughout the twentieth century, Japanese immigrants influenced politics and social matters in the United States (Fryer 2010, 371).

The Japanese have been included in the US census as an individual group since 1890. Nowadays, there are more than a million and half residents of Japanese descent in the United States ("Japanese Americans").

The Second World War

The most significant period of Asian American history is the Second World War. When, following the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor naval base, over 112,000 Japanese

Americans were uprooted from their homes throughout the Pacific Coast region and confined initially to assembly centres and later to more permanent internment camps in desolate areas (Gray 2010, 399). Anti-Asian sentiments from the beginning of the twentieth century and long-term racism towards Japanese Americans supported the relocation. Executive Order 9066 was issued in February 1942. It meant ‘forced removal of all persons deemed a threat to national security to relocation centres further inland (*“National Archives and Records Administration”*).

The order also applied to Japanese American children who were already born in the United States. Thus, whole families had to leave their homes, houses, education, jobs, everything they had, except for a few personal items. First, Japanese Americans went to the so-called assembly centres, and, usually after a few months, they were moved to concentration camps. There were camps in Wyoming, Arizona, Idaho or Colorado (*“National Archives and Records Administration”*). However, the most known are the camps Manzanar in California and Topaz in Utah as these two were depicted in popular works of Japanese American literature.

To allow students to continue and complete their university studies the National Japanese American Student Relocation Council was established. University students who had been relocated to internment camps were released and were able to continue their studies at universities mainly in the Midwest and Northeast (Wertheimer 2010, 444). This decision, supported by active educators, positively affected Yoshiko Uchida, an author which will be discussed later in this paper.

Education

The first generation of Japanese Americans believed that education could open the door to American mainstream society. Having good results at school, together with being fluent in English, could be one of the ways of assimilation (Krasnoff 2010, 379). Therefore,

the issei were willing to pay for their children's education so they wouldn't have to deal with obstacles such as racism and discrimination like their parents before (Krasnoff 2010, 379).

This applied not only to the lower levels of education but also to university studies as the Japanese Americans were one of the Asian American groups with a high number of college or university graduates (Krasnoff 2010, 379).

Generations

When studying the history and literature of Japanese Americans, one will inevitably come across the terms *issei*, *nisei*, *sansei*, *yonsei*, *gosei* and *nikkei*. The terms relate to both female and male Japanese Americans. However, they are widely used in literature to depict generational conflict between female characters.

The issei women were the first generation of Japanese women to come to the United States. In literature they are often depicted as the opposites of the nisei generation. The first-generation women usually worked in agriculture with their husbands, or they worked as maids (Sakamoto 2007, 99). The hardship they experienced included arranged marriage, low income, hard work and no chance for education (Sakamoto 2007, 99).

As Sakamoto (2007) explains, the issei became a threat for American laborers and farmers because they wanted to prove their loyalty to the United States so they were willing to work for less money than other workers (99).

The nisei are the second generation of Japanese Americans who were born to issei parents in the United States. Unlike their parents they were more Americanized, they learned English and they had better access to education (Sakamoto 2007, 100). However, both generations were still affected by racism, discrimination and the events related to the second world war.

The sansei are the third generation of Japanese Americans, grandchildren of the issei, the yonsei is the fourth generation and the gosei is the fifth generation ("Gosei"). With each

new generation, it is important for the Japanese Americans to remember and maintain their original culture, as Sakamoto emphasizes (Sakamoto 2007, 102). The term *nikkei* includes all generations of Japanese immigrants (“Japanese Diaspora”). There is also the term *kibei*, which refers to the second generation of Japanese Americans who were born in the United States, but they were sent to Japan to be raised by their grandparents. The reason why they had to be sent away was usually the hard work of their parents and lack of education opportunities. In their adolescent years, they returned to the United States (Morikawa 2010, 427).

Picture Brides

Some of the Japanese women came to the United States in the early twentieth century as the so-called picture brides. Like other immigrants, they had to cope with the harsh voyage across the ocean. The marriage to a Japanese man in the United States was usually arranged by an intermediary and the women were often disappointed when they saw their new husbands for the first time (Sakamoto 2007, 99). However, picture brides were a chance for Japanese American men to marry Japanese women (Krasnoff 2010, 451). Although these marriages were based on agreement and not on romantic feelings, they often lasted a life time due to the Japanese sense for obligation (Krasnoff 2010, 452). Nakamura (2014) mentions these women were often vulnerable to exploitation because they did not know the language and they were unfamiliar with customs and habits in the USA. On the other hand, they usually did not have trouble finding a job, although it was often a very exhausting one such as plantation work (Nakamura 2014).

Family Values

An important part of Japanese culture is the family. In the context of US immigration, the family had a huge influence on the level of acculturation. In the beginnings, Japanese male

immigrants usually contacted their families in Japan to find and send them wives. When they set up families, in general they required obedience, achievement and respect from their children. Thus, generational conflicts occurred, as the second generation of Japanese Americans was more individualistic and already American-raised (Ciment 2010, 404). However, the success of Japanese Americans is seen in their ability to fit in the US culture and society.

The continuous conflict between one's heritage and the need of assimilation is a frequent topic in many of the Asian American literatures. As for its Japanese branch, traditional family values are reflected in the *shushin* approach. It 'emphasizes the cultural transmission of traditional moral and social values, including proper behaviour, the primacy of the family, and subordination to authority' (Krasnoff 2010, 380).

Religion

Japanese major religions are Buddhism, Shintoism and Confucianism. First immigrants brought these three to the United States with them and they have been practiced ever since. These religions have in common the sense for duty, obligation to family and self-restraint (Watts 2010, 456). However, as Watts (2010) points out, Japanese Americans adapted their religious practices to American environment (456). Practically it meant replacing the word *temple* with *church* or regular Sunday meetings and Sunday schools (Watts 2010, 457).

There are different ways the Japanese American immigrants maintained their faith in their American homes. This phenomenon will be discussed later with examples from Japanese American literature as even one of the analysed book's title refers to religion.

Like the Chinese and other immigrants of colour, the beginnings of the Japanese Americans were marked by labour, discrimination and lack of opportunities. With each new generation, their situation improved, although social growth was interrupted by incarceration.

The experience of internment camps left an immense impact on the Japanese Americans. It has also been widely reflected in art including literature.

Japanese American Literature

Japanese American literature shares some of the features of the Asian American literature mentioned earlier. However, there are certain themes specific only for this literary branch.

Japanese American literature comes in all three fundamental literary forms, drama, poetry and prose, with the latter being the most common.

John Okada can be considered as the pioneer of Japanese American literature. He only completed one novel, however, it has been discussed on the scholarly level as one of the main works of Asian American literature since the 1970s (Adams 2008, 81). *No-No Boy* was completed in 1957 and it tells the story of a young Japanese American who is returning home after years of internment and imprisonment. He is experiencing identity struggle as he refused to fight in the US army a few years before. The book title refers to the loyalty questionnaire that young Japanese Americans were given when being drafted for the US army. The questionnaire included two essential questions: ‘Are you willing to serve in the armed forces of the United States on combat duty wherever ordered?’ and ‘Will you swear unqualified allegiance to the United States of America and faithfully defend the United States from any or all attack by foreign or domestic forces, and forswear any form of allegiance or obedience to the Japanese emperor, to any other foreign government, power or organization?’ (Lyon 2020). Answering *no* to these questions led to prison. The book focuses on the main character after his return from prison, after the end of war, as he struggles between being Japanese and being American. It also describes the generational conflict between the main character and his mother who is devoted and obedient to the Japanese Emperor (Wakida 2024).

Journey to Topaz is a children's story written by nisei author Yoshiko Uchida. The main character is a Japanese American girl who is forced to leave home with her family. This event is followed by their incarceration in the Topaz War Relocation Center and their return home (Chang 1984, 190). Uchida herself had the experience of being incarcerated during the Second World War, which makes her stories for children partly autobiographical. Another of her works, *Desert Exile* is a non-fiction book in which she gives an account of her own experiences after the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbour (Chang 1984, 190). As Chang explains, 'all of the Japanese Americans, including the Nisei who were U.S. citizens born in the United States, were under suspicion' (Chang 1984, 190). Moreover, the Japanese Americans were often asked by their Caucasian friends and neighbours whether they had known that the attack had been coming (Chang 1984, 190). Uchida was released from the camp before the end of the war to pursue her university degree (Chang 1984, 190). However, she put all the tragic memories of internment into her stories for children and adults.

Another Japanese American author who reflected upon her own internment camp experience is Monica Sone (born Kazuko Itoi). Her autobiographical story called *Nisei Daughter* is about a girl Kazuko who, at first, finds it hard to understand what it means to be Japanese and American at the same time (Adams 2008, 61). Later, together with her family she struggles because of evacuation to internment camp (Adams 2008, 61).

Topaz War Relocation Centre became Toshio Mori's home for several years. He was a writer who published in the camp newspaper and after the war he became the first Japanese American author to publish a book of short stories in the United States (Matsumoto 2021). The collection, called *Yokohama, California*, combines a satiric view of a small town Japanese American community and harsh reality of Japanese Americans after the Pearl Harbor attack ("Mapping Literary Utah - Toshio Mori").

Hisaye Yamamoto was a Nissei author whose most prominent work is a collection of stories called *Seventeen Syllables and Other Stories*. In her writing she focused on the role of women in Japanese American families on the West Coast (Kim 1987, 99).

Younger generation of Japanese American authors includes Cynthia Kadohata, Brian Komei Dempster and Naomi Hirahara. Cynthia Kadohata is a children's writer who was awarded the Newbery Medal for her young adult novel *Kira-Kira*. Although the main character deals with being the only Japanese American in her class, the story centres not about the race but rather about the relationship between two sisters ("Kira-Kira"). Brian Komei Dempster is a Japanese American professor at the University of San Francisco at the department of Asian Pacific American Studies. He is also an awarded poet whose poetry collection called *Topaz* (names after one of the internment camps) describes life in the camp. Dempster takes inspiration in his family's history and the experience of the Second World War is a frequent topic in his works that do not include just poetry ("Topaz"). He is the editor of the book *From Our Side of the Fence* which is a first-hand account of eleven former internees. The book also offers several lesson plans that can be used by educators to teach about Japanese American history ("Books"). *Making Home from War: Stories of Japanese American Exile and Resettlement* is another book that Dempster edited. It is a narrative of several former internees after they were released from the camp as they were struggling to return to their old lives ("Making Home from War: Stories of Japanese American Exile and Resettlement by Brian Komei Dempster"). In his latest poetry collection, he is again inspired by his own family, but in a different way, as he deals with his son's illness. Dempster is also a contributor the Collecting Nissei Stories website which enables Japanese Americans to share their families' stories, often writing about their experience from internment camps ("Collecting Nissei Stories"). Naomi Hirahara focuses on mystery stories, however, she is also a former journalist for the *Rafu Shimpo* newspaper ("About Naomi - Naomi Hirahara -

Biographical Information”). She worked for the newspaper during the Redress Movement that demanded restitution of civil rights to Japanese Americans after the years of oppression during the Second World War (“Redress Movement”).

Beside traditional literary forms, also modern works of literature occur. *Displacement* is a historical graphic novel for young readers created by Kiku Hughes. Its main character, a teenage girl, who goes back in time to witness her grandmother’s life in an internment camp (“Displacement”).

Also, one the most renowned literary critics in the United States, Michiko Kakutani, is of Japanese descent and she also happens to be Yoshiko Uchida’s niece (“Yoshiko Uchida”). In 2018 she published an opinion article in The New York Times called *I Know What Incarceration Does to Families. It Happened to Mine*. Kakutani’s mother, aunt and grandparents were among 120 000 people who were relocated, they were sent to one of the most known camp Topaz. In several aspects Kakutani’s description of her family is very similar to the narrative in *When the Emperor Was Divine* (the family lived in Berkeley, California in a white stucco house, Kakutani’s mother and her sister were US citizens, they were relocated to Tanforan where they were staying in former horse stables, afterwards they were sent to Topaz) (Kakutani). She also reminds that the government did not make a distinction between ordinary people and potentially dangerous individuals and that former first lady Laura Bush called the treatment of Japanese Americans during the Second World War as one of the most shameful episodes of U.S. history (Kakutani).

On its website, Rafu Shimpo is described as the nation’s leading Japanese American newspaper. It has been published since 1903. Its office is located in Little Tokyo in Los Angeles and it offers online news to the Japanese American community on daily basis. Julie Otsuka mentions Rafu Shimpo in one her novels implying that reading this newspaper is a regular activity for people of Japanese descent (“Los Angeles Japanese Daily News”).

There is a strong connection between the history of the Japanese Americans and Japanese American literature. As the lines above imply, one of the most common themes of Japanese American literature is the experience of the second world war including relocation to internment camps. Julie Otsuka, whose works will be analysed in the following chapter, is one of contemporary Japanese American writers who deals with the topics mentioned above. However, she adds her unique point of view, unusual writing style and autobiographical features.

Part 2: Comparative Analysis of Julie Otsuka's Novels

About the Author

Julie Otsuka is an American writer of Japanese descent. She has been selected for this paper as she is one of the successful contemporary writers who depicts the history of Asian Americans as well as their lives in present United States. She was born in 1962 in California. In her works she focuses on Japanese Americans and the hardships they have experienced since the times they came to the United States. As of 2023 she has published three novels for which she has received a number of awards including the Asian American Literary Award, PEN/Faulkner Award for Fiction and a Guggenheim Fellowship ("About Julie Otsuka").

Otsuka's novels are brief in span, however, they have been praised for the ability of saying a lot in just few words. As she writes one novel with an approximately ten years' pause, it can be said that she is not a very prolific writer. Nevertheless, as far as her themes are concerned, Otsuka is quite constant. In the analysis that follows, her three novels will be compared and contrasted, major themes will be identified with relation to Asian and Japanese American background. The first step of the analysis, however, will be the description of her unique writing style.

About the Novels

When the Emperor Was Divine (2002)

When the Emperor Was Divine is Otsuka's first novel. Its main focus is a Japanese American mother and her two children who are forced to leave their home and relocate to an internment camp after the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor. The story begins with the mother learning about the evacuation order and it ends when the family is back again in their home after several years of internment. Also, the father returns after imprisonment because after the attack on Pearl Harbor he became a suspected spy.

The Buddha in the Attic (2011)

In *The Buddha in the Attic* Otsuka goes back in time before the events of *When the Emperor Was Divine*. In a certain point of view *The Buddha* can be understood as *The Emperor's* prequel. In this book Otsuka deals with the hardships that the Japanese, mostly women, had to face when coming to the United States and settling there. The story begins with Japanese picture brides who are sailing to the United States where their future husbands are waiting for them. However, they have never met before and the life ahead of them will not be as they expected. The book depicts their miserable journey across the ocean, their unhappy marriages and raising children while working to exhaustion in the fields. The events of *The Buddha in the Attic* end where *The Emperor Was Divine* starts.

The Swimmers (2022)

Set in contemporary United States, the book, in its first part, tells the story of a group of keen swimmers and what happens after a crack is discovered at the bottom of their pool. It introduces a number of protagonists who seem to be very distant from each other (although often swimming in neighbouring lanes), having nothing in common except swimming.

Swimming helps them to escape from their troubled daily lives. The second part is a story of one of the swimmers, Alice, an elderly lady struggling with dementia. It is also a summary of Alice's family members' relationships towards her.

In the following analysis the abbreviations *The Emperor* and *The Buddha* will be used for shortening the book titles.

Theoretical Background

The novels will be compared and analysed in terms of their form and content. Form analysis will focus on the use of language, it will describe the compositional framework of the novels including comparison of places/settings and time. The analysis will also compare Otsuka's use of characters as there is a significant transition between the treatment of characters in the first two books and in *The Swimmers*. The novels also include humorous parts so these will be mentioned too. The analysis of content will identify major themes which are present in the selected books and subsequently it will compare the ways these themes are dealt with as one theme can be presented to the reader in different ways. It is supposed that the identified themes will be very similar to those mentioned in the previous part of this paper. They will be mainly related to the history of Japanese Americans in the United States and they will reflect social issues that have been a part of the lives of Asian Americans since their arrival to the USA.

Analysis of Form

The message that Otsuka's novels convey starts with the book titles. The title *When the Emperor Was Divine* relates to traditional old times which might represent the characters' safe place in comparison to their American reality. It reminisces the long history of the Japanese Empire, ignoring hostilities towards people of Japanese descent in the United States. The

emperor is a symbol of something certain and consistent. The title implies that the old good times are forever gone and the life ahead is full of uncertainties.

The Buddha in the Attic refers primarily to religion. However, a sacred item is put into relation with a part of a house which is usually used to store unnecessary things. This title again connects the old tradition which should not be forgotten with the reality of younger generations of Japanese Americans. It is an introduction to the stories of picture brides who took personal items from Japan to the United States with them, but they gradually adapted to the American way of life, leaving old things somewhere behind but still not getting rid of them.

The last title, *The Swimmers*, seems to be more modern in comparison to the previous two. It does not relate to Japanese history anyhow. It might imply Otsuka's transition from historical stories to contemporary writing. However, it does not say much about the story itself, it is only a hint that there will be a group of characters who share the same hobby.

There are certain specifics of Julie Otsuka's language. She is known to use enumerations and repetitions. These two intensify the meaning of the story and they appear in all her books. For example, in *The Buddha* Otsuka describes what the children learned (page 77: *They learned which mother would let them come over. They learned which barber would cut their hair. They learned when they could go swimming.*) These enumerations are sometimes more than a page long.

Also, a certain kind of direct speech appears. It is not put into quotation marks but it is printed in italics. It is something like a thought or a sentence that someone once said (*The Buddha* page 44: *We let them give us things we did not really want or need. If I don't take that old sweater, she'll accuse me of being too proud.*)

In terms of the language level *The Swimmers* is the most complicated out of the three novels. It seems that Otsuka gradually uses more complicated vocabulary and grammar.

Humour is also present in Otsuka's stories. *The Emperor* and *The Buddha* deal with very serious topics and there is not much space for humorous parts. However, in *The Swimmers* humour, absurdity and irony can be traced in the chapter called The Crack. It starts when the swimmers realize that there is a crack at the bottom of their beloved pool. At first, they cannot believe their eyes. Then some of them start to think that swimming over a crack brings bad luck. On the other hand, some of the swimmers try to downplay the importance of the crack but in fact they are worried what will happen to the pool. They try to find out who is responsible, they deal with many technicalities, they watch the crack intensively, they come up with unrealistic theories, they reach out to various experts and committees just to save the pool. These overreactions are the funniest parts of Otsuka's book. Also, mentioning the main character Alice seems funny as she forgets about the crack repeatedly and she is always surprised when she is told about the crack. However, the majority of the story is very serious and quite sad.

As mentioned earlier all three books are quite brief. The only one that exceeds one hundred and fifty pages is *The Swimmers*. However, in terms of storytelling, they all manage to cover several decades in the lives of Japanese Americans. *The Emperor* is divided into five chapters. The first, called Evacuation Order No. 19, takes place in Berkeley, California, in spring of 1942. It is a turning point in the lives of the main protagonists, however, for white Americans it is just an ordinary day. It begins with a young woman going to several shops in the town centre. At this point, several typically American place names are used such as Woolworth's, YMCA, University Avenue, California Street, Lundy's Hardware, J. C. Penney's. Then the first part continues in the woman's home where Otsuka describes a number of activities which the woman is doing to prepare the house for leaving the next day. This section is a description of the house which seems to be an average American household which is in contrast with future events when Japanese American families became enemies

who had to be evacuated out of their homes. The second part of the book takes place four and a half months after the events of the previous part. The woman and her two children are already on the train somewhere in Nevada. They are recollecting what happened weeks earlier, as they had to leave their white stucco house and relocate to Tanforan Assembly Centre in the south of San Francisco. This part of the book again contrasts the two worlds, Japanese Americans who are being transported to a camp and the typical American world they can see through the train windows (for example people going to work in the morning or a dog lying in the sun), the world here is divided into the world inside and outside of the train. The second part ends with the family's arrival to Topaz Internment Camp in the Utah desert. The third part of *The Emperor* is called *When the Emperor Was Divine* as it can be considered as the main part of the book. It describes the family's new life in barracks behind a barbed-wire fence. It is mentioned that their stay in Topaz began in late summer 1942. In this section individual parts of the camp are described such as shared washrooms and latrines, again very contrastive to their life in a family house. The setting is closely related to time. Otsuka describes the changes in seasons mentioning cold winters and extreme heat in summers, thus highlighting harsh conditions in which the internees had to survive. The fourth chapter is called *In a Stranger's Backyard*. After several years of incarceration, the family is back at their neighbourhood and back in their house which seems to them like a stranger's house. The change of place and time is significant here as it is another beginning of the family's new life. This chapter describes the period in which the family is settling down and making contacts again with their surroundings. The last chapter of *The Emperor* called *Confessions* is the father's short narrative taking the reader back in time to when he was arrested at his house.

The story of *The Buddha* follows the picture brides from their arrival to the United States in the early 1900s up to their disappearance caused by the evacuation order. The story covers several decades in picture brides' lives from their expectations to the conflict with

reality. The composition of *The Buddha* is made of eight chapters. The first one called Come, Japanese! takes place on the boat somewhere in the middle of the ocean. The brides come from different parts of Japan, cities, villages, islands and mountain regions. Their thoughts are somewhere between their past and their uncertain future with many of them wanting to return to Japan. The second chapter First Night is set in the United States and it describes the night of the arrival. Whites is the title of the third chapter. It describes the life after the arrival when the women with their husbands are settling down at the edges of the towns because they are not welcome in town centres by the predominantly white inhabitants. Other places that are mentioned in this part are labour camps, hot dusty valleys, barns, abandoned schoolhouses, packing sheds, orchards, fields, shacks, Watsonville, Fresno, Denair, Bacon Island, Holland Tract (agricultural areas in California) and later rich mansions where the former picture brides worked as maids. All these places are symbols of immigrant lives. It is also mentioned that these people often did not have any permanent home as they had to travel to a new destination after each harvest. The fourth chapter is called Babies and, again, through places it describes the hostility towards Japanese Americans. The women were giving birth under oak trees in unbearably hot weather, in dusty vineyards, in old cold shacks, in barns, in straw beds, in apple orchards, in the hills but also in parts of towns where Japanese American areas were quickly developing. After the chapter about giving birth, the chapter about children follows. It mentions similar agricultural places as the previous chapter however, it also mentions families living in J-towns. The following chapter, called Traitors, focuses rather on the events after the bombing of Pearl Harbor and the setting is not so important here as in the previous parts. However, it is implied that more Japanese Americans now live in cities or J-towns and they are not pushed to the outskirts of towns and to farms anymore. In this chapter Japanese Americans learn about the evacuation order, thus one place becomes very important for them. But this place remains unknown. The last two chapters, Last Day and A Disappearance,

highlight the importance of home as the characters are leaving their households. Also, time here is important because no one knows when they will return. In terms of time, Americans slowly but surely forget about their evacuated neighbours.

The Swimmers is divided into five chapters: The Underground Pool, The Crack, Diem Perdid, Belavista and Euroneuro. The first one is set in the underground pool (presumably located in New York City) which is further divided into individual lanes (the fast lane, the medium lane and the slow lane). It is described as a rather claustrophobic place but for the swimmers it is their safe place. Beside the pool another important place is the locker room, the place of strange encounters. Also, the water itself has its significance as it allows the swimmers to disappear from the outside world. This chapter divides the world in two separate parts, the world underground and the chaotic world above ground. The significance of the pool is emphasized in the second chapter which takes place mainly around the pool. The time flows slowly here, Otsuka writes about days, weeks and months, but an important time period is the ten-day technical break which transforms into a permanent closure of the underground pool. The third chapter is set in present day but it brings back the main character's memories as it alludes to the relocation and life in the camp. The fourth chapter is named after a special care home for patients with dementia. It means a huge switch from one own's house to a small bedroom shared with a stranger. The last chapter passes between the past and present in which the main character's life is slowly fading away.

The lives of characters in all three books are closely linked to places. Places have even a more significant role than time. There are two ways places are perceived in Otsuka's books. Some places are meant as home, a safe place for the characters. On the other hand, there are places that are considered unknown and hostile by the characters, often highlighting their fears and uncertainties.

As for the time, the reader is able to determine the historical periods, however, specific dates or years are not of a major significance. Otsuka rather focuses on the cycle of life from a specific starting point to a major milestone (in *The Emperor* it is returning to life as it was before imprisonment, in *The Buddha* it is the beginning of imprisonment, in *The Swimmers* it is the end of life). Some chapters describe just a short period (for example just one night), while others cover months, years or decades.

Each of the books has its main protagonists. However, the ways the characters are dealt with differ significantly. The main protagonists in *The Emperor* are the mother and her two children, a girl and a boy. Another important figure is the father who is absent most of the time. Throughout the whole story the reader learns about his existence thanks to his family members because each of them thinks about him very often and brings up memories of him. Physically he appears only in the last chapters. The reader learns that he is a broken man, unable to work, ruined by years of imprisonment. The first three chapters of *The Emperor* are told by the omniscient narrator. However, the story is told from different points of view. At first the mother's point of view is presented as she prepares herself, her children and the house for leaving their home. She seems to be very pragmatic. At the beginning of the story, she is a middle-class housewife. Although she is taking care of her children, she seems to be quite distant from them. Her thoughts are with her husband. When she is in the camp, she finds it hard to do anything including finding some work to do. She is presented as a passive character in contrast to her two children. However, at the end of the story, it is her who finds a job and supports the family. The second chapter of *The Emperor* is told from the girl's point of view. With innocence she watches the world go by from the train windows. She interacts with people on the train including an American soldier or an old Japanese American man Mr. Ito. She is described as a normal child paying a lot of attention to her hair and clothes. This child's point of view is in contrast with what is really going on. When the family reaches the camp

the point of view shifts again. The reader learns about the boy's perception of his new reality. Much like his sister, he is also an ordinary boy who has to adapt to new circumstances. He does this with more ease than his mother, trying to find some entertainment behind the barbed-wire fence. On the contrary to his sister, he thinks all the time about his father and waits anxiously for letters from him. The penultimate chapter is told in the first-person plural which is very typical for Julie Otsuka. This way of telling a story implies that it was not just the characters of the book who had to deal with the consequences of war. In reality there were thousands of Japanese Americans who were coming home from camps and they were being looked down upon. The last chapter is the first-person singular narrative. The father bitterly remembers the times when the FBI came for him and interrogated him. He implies that he was just an ordinary Japanese American man and that being accused of being a Japanese spy was absurd.

The Buddha has a lot of main characters. It is similar to the previous book as it has the first-person plural narrator. It gives the story a sense of collectiveness and it implies that here were thousands of young women with similar expectations and similar fate. Not only women here are important characters. Also, their new husbands play an important role because they are the reason why the women crossed the ocean and it is often up to them how the brides' new lives will look like. The last chapter of *The Buddha* is also told as the first-person plural but the narrators are Americans who lost their Japanese American neighbours.

In *The Swimmers* the main character is Alice, an elderly Japanese American woman. In the first part of the story which focuses on the pool her fellow swimmers are described. However, their relationships are very superficial, they do not know a lot about each other. When they accidentally meet above the ground, they often have nothing to say to each other. The only thing they have in common is the pool and swimming that allows them to escape their daily lives. In the previous two books Japanese Americans live in the neighbourhood

with white Americans but it was evident that there still was a certain distance. In *The Swimmers*, which takes place in the present, this distance disappears. Alice is in a natural contact with other people. However, there is a sense of alienation of today's world. Alice is not inferior to other swimmers. She is on an equal level. There is no racism and the only segregation here is according to the speed of swimming (fast-lane people or slow-lane people). In *The Swimmers* the narrator also shifts several times. There is again the first-person plural narrator representing all the inhabitants of the pool. Another part of the story is the third-person narrative which tells the reader what Alice remembers still and what she is no longer able to remember. The part in which the special care home is described is told from the point view of its employee as it describes the rules and the running of the home. In the last part of the book Alice's daughter appears and the narrator switches to the second-person narrator.

In all three books the main characters interact with many other people. In *The Emperor* the family has their neighbours. They also encounter fellow Japanese Americans on the train. They live together in the camp. They share the same place with hundreds of other people. In *The Buddha* the reader learns about the brides' families left at their Japanese homes, about the farmers they work for, about white American housewives and also about the children. In terms of characters, *The Swimmers* is basically divided into two parts, relatively unknown people in the pool and Alice's daughter and husband.

Nameless characters are an important feature in Otsuka's books and they immediately catch reader's attention. The main protagonists of *The Emperor* and *The Buddha* do not have names. It is another way to highlight the collective nature of the stories. The only main character that has her name is Alice. However, minor characters that are often mentioned just once have names. For example, in *The Emperor* the girl meets a Japanese American man Teizo Ishimoto who is called Ted by his friends. Often the names of neighbours or classmates

are mentioned. In *The Buddha* it is very similar. The narrator is *we*, without mentioning any names, but when this narrator brings up a story of specific woman, she is given her own name. The importance of name is emphasized in *The Buddha*. The brides who presumably had their original Japanese names were often given new, American names by their female bosses. The brides were often working as housemaids and as the book implies giving an American name made it easier for Americans to call at them. It also implies the brides' inferiority.

Analysis of Major Themes

The Second World War

The Second World War is the most significant theme in all three books, it has had a significant impact on the characters even decades after the war ended. This theme intertwines continuously through all three stories. Otsuka avoids battlefields and she only briefly mentions the Pearl Harbor attacks as she focuses mainly on the impact of the war on the ordinary people in the USA. The novel which deals with the Second World War the most is *When the Emperor Was Divine* but it is an important theme in the other two books as well. In *The Emperor* the facts that are related to war times are, for example, the evacuation order, train transfer to the internment camp and a few mentions, in the newspaper or on the radio, of faraway places where battles are being fought. *The Buddha* begins in the early 1900s, long before the Second World War. However, in the last chapters there is a strong feeling of war associated with fear, uncertainty and suspiciousness. In *The Swimmers* the experience of war is presented through the main character.

Health, Illness, Aging

In some parts of her stories Otsuka criticises the authorities and American majority that it ignored Japanese Americans when they needed medical care. In *The Emperor* the evacuees suffered from dehydration on the train. The train ride was extremely long and

exhausting, often in hot weather. The seats were hard and there was no privacy on the train. The situation was even worse in the desert camps where there were hot summers and freezing cold winters.

No medical care was provided to the picture brides. Otsuka describes the unimaginable conditions in which they gave birth to their children. It is implied that many of these children could have survived if they had got proper medical help. When growing in the camp, many of the children got an injury or had an accident often resulting in death. Also, the women often had to work with their husbands on farms which damaged their bodies. They suffered from the hot sun and many of them got heatstroke and died.

The only Japanese American character who gets proper medical care is Alice in *The Swimmers*. Her husband spends all his savings to secure that she is treated the right way.

The Swimmers together with *The Buddha* emphasizes the topic of aging. For Alice it means suffering from dementia, often forgetting things, storing them in wrong places, nor recognizing people. In *The Buddha* aging is depicted in individual stages of life. The, often inexperienced, brides come to the United States, they meet their husbands, gave birth, have children, learn about the harsh reality and end up in a camp.

Women

Although Otsuka's stories include important male characters, her main focus is on women. In general, women are mostly depicted as mothers and keepers of the house. They are not ambitious or independent. Otsuka does not deal with their emotions much. She rather describes their actions which makes the reader think about how they must have felt. It is often mentioned that women's work was often much harder than men's. They were inferior to their husbands as it was common for Japanese Americans that the wife had to walk behind her husband and she was the one to carry things. According to Otsuka, women were often sold to their husbands by their families and they were often treated very badly. Otsuka also

mentions that only women took care of their children. In *The Buddha* she states that men never changed a single diaper. Japanese American women are also described as very practical, strict, traditional and sometimes annoying. For example, in *The Swimmers* the daughter remembers her mother Alice instructing her to smooth down her skirt or never let anyone see her cry. Such clinging to old habits changes with younger generations.

Being Japanese in the United States

As it was already mentioned in previous chapters, being an immigrant in the early 1900 and throughout the first half of the twentieth century was very difficult. Although Japanese immigrants are known to be the most adaptable, they were often targets of hostilities. Specifically, in *The Buddha* Otsuka writes about coloured days in pool, restaurants that do not serve Japanese and people who do not want Japanese neighbours. In *The Emperor* the mother tells her children after the bombing of Pearl Harbor that from now on they will have peanut butter and jelly sandwiches for lunch at school instead of rice balls and she instructs them to pretend to be Chinese. This implies that Americans were not so hostile to all Asian Americans but they were mad with the Japanese. At the end of the story, the mother cannot find a proper job when she is back home from the camp and it is evident that the reason is her appearance and the persisting feelings towards Japanese Americans. In the first part of *The Swimmers*, there are no hints of racism. However, in the second part Alice remembers that when she met her husband, he was engaged to an American woman, but her parents did not want her to marry a man who looked like their gardener.

Being Japanese in Otsuka's novels also means troubles with the language as the older generations do not speak English. However, she mentions J-towns that were self-sufficient and enabled these characters to live in a familiar environment.

Also, in some parts of the stories the reader learns that even the Japanese Americans were hostile towards other ethnic groups such as Chinese Americans and Filipino Americans.

The Empire in the Life of Japanese Americans

Although living in the United States, Japanese American characters keep a piece of the Japanese Empire with them. Picture brides take kimonos and calligraphy sets to their new homes. Families get used to going to churches but they still have their Buddha statuettes at home. Children are reminded the name Hirohito, Japanese emperor, but they are told not to say the name aloud. Japanese cities are often mentioned, such Kyoto, Nara, Tokyo, Kagoshima, Nagoya, Niigata, Kumamoto or Hiroshima.

In Otsuka's stories Japanese objects are as important as typically American things such coke, baseball or YMCA.

Generational Gap

As the novels focus on families, they often depict the conflict between parents and their children. This is most visible in *The Swimmers*. The relationship between Alice and her estranged daughter has been influenced by their different attitudes and values. Also, the daughter witnessed that her mother has been subordinate and obedient to her father, she has not had ambitions, she has lived for the family. Her daughter, on the other hand, is childless and she is an ambitious writer who has never felt support from her mother. The beginning of this conflict lies in the past when Alice lost her first child, the perfect one as she says. Then the second daughter was born, being not so perfect at all. At the end of Alice's life, when she no longer recognizes her daughter, the younger woman realizes how hard life was for her mother.

In *The Buddha* generational conflicts appear on two levels. Firstly, in Japan as many of the picture brides were guilty of something so their families sent them away. Secondly, when their children grow up. The children are ashamed of their mothers who look worn out, do not use make up, have heavy Japanese accent. They are ashamed of their parents' cars, homes and clothing.

One of the hints of generational gap in *The Emperor* is when the girl starts talking in perfect English to an old Japanese American man. He does not understand a word as he knows only Japanese.

Autobiographical Features

As mentioned earlier, a lot of Asian American authors took inspiration in their own family's history. In case of Julie Otsuka's novels, the inspiration is significant. As she mentions on her website, the events of *The Emperor* were inspired by her grandfather who was arrested by the FBI a day after the Pearl Harbor attack as a suspected Japanese spy. Her grandmother together with her two children (Otsuka's mother and uncle) were sent to Topaz internment camp for three years ("About Julie Otsuka"). Like the characters in *The Emperor*, the life of Otsuka's relatives changed when they came back home. Her grandfather's health after imprisonment deteriorated and he was unable to work, her grandmother who used to be a middle-class housewife, became a maid (Zoffness 2023). Also, the settings of the stories relate to Otsuka's background as she was born and raised in California. Although she has lived in New York City for more than three decades, she considers California a place of her childhood and a place where her ancestors came to find a better life (Zoffness 2023). Otsuka admits that the theme of forced resettlement of Japanese Americans is extremely important for her (Zoffness 2023). She also says that even now a lot of Americans do not know about this part of American history (Zoffness 2023).

The characters in *The Swimmers* are also inspired by Otsuka's family, with Alice being Otsuka's mother and the unnamed daughter being the author herself. There are many hints, for example Alice's memories of a camp during the Second World War where she was with her brother, Alice's father who was taken away by the FBI (presumably Otsuka's grandfather), Alice's mother's hard work after the return. In this sense, *The Swimmers* seems to be a sequel to *The Emperor*.

Part 3: Using Asian American Literature in Czech Schools

Teaching English as a Second Language Through Literature

Contemporary primary and secondary education in the Czech Republic is based on the Curriculum framework which is basically a plan and a set of standards of knowledge and abilities which should be acquired by students in the course of their school attendance. This document sets the objectives of education as well as key competences, it emphasizes the importance of cross-curricular learning and support of talented students and students with special educational needs. The framework also gives teachers a certain level of freedom in how to teach and what materials to use.

Speaking from own experience, as a teacher with almost ten years of experience at secondary and lower-secondary school, it is still a common practice to use mainly coursebooks in English classes. However, the use of different materials brings more opportunities for students to see the actual use of English and it often raises students' interest in a great variety of topics. Students and pupils tend to get bored when using only their student's books and workbooks over again in each lesson. When the teacher offers to use a different material, it can make the students more cultural aware and it can simply be more interesting for them.

Gower (1983) defines authentic materials as anything a native speaker of English would hear or read or use (83). According to Gower (1983), authentic materials include newspapers, magazines, films, poems and other sources that are not primarily intended to teach the language (83). Also, documentaries, film trailers, advertisements, commercials, YouTube videos, podcasts, social media content can be used in English classes to convey the language and expand students' knowledge. The following paragraphs will focus mainly on literature as the authentic material.

Before the teacher brings the new material into class, he or she has to decide about a number of things. These are the level of English, appropriateness for the students, how to use the new material, which methods to use and what the outcome should be. Authentic materials do not have a graded level of language (Gower 1983, 82). It is up to the teacher to select the material carefully so it would not be too easy or too difficult for the students who might be in the same class but their level of English can be very different. Selected material should be appropriate for the target group in terms of age and interest as there is no point in presenting a topic that students are not interested in.

Authentic materials can be used to practice all four skills (reading, writing, speaking, listening) and to significantly enrich students' vocabulary. Activities that come out of authentic materials can be adjusted for individual work, pair work or group work and they can also be a basis for a long-term project.

Unsurprisingly, there are not just advantages but also disadvantages and risks when using authentic materials in class. To name some of them, the students might not be interested in the topic (this may be prevented by asking students to choose the topic themselves). Some students still prefer using the coursebook as it makes them feel safe in their English class. Also, they might not see connection between the authentic material and the curriculum in the coursebook. The biggest disadvantage is the fact that preparing an authentic material for students is very time consuming. It can mean spending hours preparing activities based on extra materials and the outcome might not be as expected. Another risk is that it can be difficult to fit the authentic material into the year's curriculum as the number of English lessons is always a limitation.

As mentioned earlier, Asian American or Japanese American literature is not a common part of curriculum in Czech schools. However, it offers a number of topics related to the educational plan and it can also be a tool of acquiring the language, and this applies to

both lower-secondary and secondary schools. The following paragraphs will try to explore how Czech teachers of English can make use of Japanese American literature in their classes. The initial assumption is that the teacher is familiar with the content of the book, decides to use it in an English class, and there are enough copies available for the students to work with. For the lower-secondary level the novel *When the Emperor Was Divine* has been selected. The experience is that students in the ninth grade of lower-secondary school are interested in the events of the Second World War and the selected novel can bring new points of view. For the secondary level of education, the book *The Swimmers* has been chosen as the authentic material. The third book, *The Buddha in the Attic* will not be taken into account because of its thematic focus as it deals mainly with women's issues. *When the Emperor Was Divine* and *The Swimmers* include grammar and vocabulary that students should already be familiar with. Proposed usage of the books will be connected to two specific curriculum frameworks (lower-secondary and secondary levels). The first one will focus on the ninth grade, the other will deal with the fourth year. For each level of education four lesson plans will be proposed with each one being aimed at a different phenomenon. The plans will take into account that a typical English lesson in Czech schools lasts only forty-five minutes. Each plan will be based on two or three pages from the book and these pages will serve as a source of individual activities. The first plan for each level will be focused on the introduction of the book as it is essential to make the students familiar with the story and set the context for other similar lessons. The first lesson can be either followed by only one or a few more just to make the English classes more attractive at times, or it can be a base for a long-term project.

The lesson plans are intended for real use in class. Thus, they will have a clear, uncomplicated structure. The first activity will be a lead-in activity, or an ice-breaker, to simply lead the students into the lesson. Then, three or more individual activities developing the selected topics will follow. These topics can be developed by various methods, such as

group work, pair work, individual work, discussions, writing and reading exercises and vocabulary practice. At the end of each lesson there will be a short closing activity summing up or evaluating what the students have learnt.

As already mentioned, cross-curricular learning is a major focus in contemporary Czech education. It is important for the students to understand the world in context and to be able to find relevant connections between individual subjects. *When the Emperor Was Divine* contains topics related to history, civics and geography. Moreover, students can also use their skills in art and information technology to process their newly gained knowledge creatively or search for more information on the Internet. *The Swimmers* offers topic connected to history, civics, physical education, psychology and ICT.

Using Japanese American Literature at Lower-Secondary School

The ninth grade of lower-secondary school has been selected because at this point students are supposed to have wider knowledge of grammar and vocabulary and are also expected to have gained higher cognitive skills. Also, the English curriculum for the ninth grade partially covers the topics that are present in *When the Emperor Was Divine*.

Students in the ninth grade are usually fourteen or fifteen years old. They are at the verge of transition to a higher level of education, preparing for entrance exams to secondary schools. The entrance exams include a test in Czech language in which they are required to analyse texts in terms of form and content. Generally, one of the main competences that should be acquired on this level of education is the ability of reading with comprehension. However, a literary text can be also used for training other skills as mentioned earlier.

In terms of the curriculum, the outcomes of English lessons in the ninth-grade should be the following: solving a problem and making decisions, understanding the main idea of a text, describing past events, retelling a story, asking for something, understanding a written text, finding specific information in a text, expressing feeling and fears, expressing a warning,

expressing agreement and disagreement, finding information about a country from different sources, giving advice. The ninth-grade grammar and vocabulary include revision of tenses, passive voice, relative clauses, should, might, adjectives, would you mind, first conditional sentences, time clauses, verbs x nouns, health problems and health care, feelings and fears, climatic changes, animal protection and generational differences.

From previous years, in terms of grammar and vocabulary, the students should be familiar with the present simple and present continuous tenses, the present perfect tense, the past simple and past continuous tenses, *will* and *going to*, phrasal verbs, modal verbs and *used to*.

According to the curriculum framework the strategies how to improve English and acquire desired competences are, for example, a great variety of activities, using ICT, solving problems independently or in cooperation with other students, becoming familiar with different cultures and countries and encouraging students to express themselves in full sentences.

If the teacher decides to use *When the Emperor Was Divine* in an English class, he or she must compare the book with the curriculum. As for the ninth grade the overlapping areas are all the outcomes and strategies mentioned above, grammar in general and also some parts of the required vocabulary. However, through reading the book students would learn much richer vocabulary than they are expected at their level. The plan also states that in English classes magazines, books and films are used to strengthen students' ability to understand a text.

Any part of the text can be used for training reading comprehension. However, students should not be given a part of a text without prior introduction to the book. In the first, introductory lesson the teacher should tell the students basic information about the book and why it is beneficial for them to work with it in class.

Lesson Plan 1: Introduction to *When the Emperor Was Divine* (pages 3, 4)

This lesson plan intends to introduce the book to the class. At the beginning of the lesson the teacher asks the students if they like reading books and if they have ever read a book in English. Such short discussion prepares the ground for using a book as an authentic material. As the students might not be familiar with the history of the United States or they might not have heard about different ethnic groups in the US, the teacher may use a map and show Japan and the United States and mention basic information about migration and the bombing of Pearl Harbor which they have probably heard about in history lessons.

The following activity puts the students into small groups and the teacher shows them the book cover (using an interactive board or a copy of the book itself). Students' task is to describe the cover and guess what the book is about. They have a few minutes to take notes and then the groups share their ideas with the rest of the class. The teacher or one of the students might take notes on the board. After the warm-up activity the students are given the text (pages 3 and 4) and they scan it to get the gist of it. They can ask for any unknown words. Then the students take turns in reading aloud as proper pronunciation is often neglected in English classes. The teacher checks that everybody understands what the extract is about. At this point the students should have a basic idea about the time and place. Then the students' attention is drawn to the title of the first chapter (Evacuation Order no. 19) and its first sentence: *The sign had appeared overnight*. A brainstorming activity follows, the students give their ideas what that sign could be or who (and why) was evacuated. Introduction to the book is finalised when the teacher sums up the story in a simplified way (that there are people of Japanese ancestry in the US, in December 1941 the Japanese bombed Pearl Harbor, which meant that the US entered the Second World War and ordinary people of Japanese ancestry had to be relocated to the desert). It is advisable to ask the students whether they are interested in the story and whether they want to read more of it.

Lesson Plan 2: Reading Comprehension of *When the Emperor Was Divine* (pages 106, 107)

This lesson plan corresponds with one of the expected outcomes in the school curriculum framework that states that the student should acquire the ability of understanding a written text. It also relates to the strategies such as becoming familiar with other cultures and countries and solving a problem.

The students now have a basic notion about the book and to lead them in the lesson the teacher might ask them what they remember from the previous lesson. After a short discussion the students work in pairs. They are given the text which is cut into pieces and their task is to put the extracts into correct order. This type of activity is quite popular with students although it is not the easiest. However, similar tasks (in Czech language) often appear at the entrance exams. The teacher monitors students' work and when they are done the class checks the results.

The extract is about the family coming back home from the camp. On page 106 there is a description of the place and how it has changed over the years. The students have time to read the text and their next activity is to draw the place and after their drawing is done, some of them try to explain what is in their picture. To sum up the lesson, the students tell how they would feel if they come back home after such a long time away.

Lesson Plan 3: Vocabulary in *When the Emperor Was Divine* (pages 23, 24)

This lesson plan intends to enrich students' active vocabulary. The teacher asks them what was the last time they were on a train. Then they are given a copy of the text. They have enough time to read the text properly so they can think about the meanings of the words. If they find a word and they are not able to guess its meaning from the context, they ask the teacher. The teacher writes all the unknown words on the board. After reading, the class

focuses on the board and together with the teacher they look for the words in the text and help each other to understand. On page 24 there is a description of the girl. So, another activity is to draw a picture of the girl and then describe her, without looking into the text. At the end of the lesson, the teacher covers the board and tests the students whether they remember new words.

Lesson Plan 4: Cross-Curricular Learning Using *When the Emperor Was Divine* (pages 76, 77)

This lesson plan will focus on improving students' English language skills as well as on gaining some new knowledge regarding the Second World War and the Japanese Americans as it might be an interesting point of view. In history classes students usually learn about the war in the European territory and in connection with the Japanese, they might have heard about Pearl Harbor.

As the initial activity the students find in the text nicknames for the Japanese and the Chinese. Then, they search for these words on the Internet and tell the others that these are slur words. They take turns in reading the extract aloud. After that they use the Internet again in groups and search for Japanese Americans and WW2. They take short notes and then each group shares what they have found. At the end, the students try to answer the following question: Why was the Japanese Tea Garden renamed the Oriental Tea Garden? A discussion on Japanese Americans should follow.

Using Japanese American Literature at Secondary School

At secondary schools the teaching is also dependent on the curriculum framework. However, teachers have to take into account the specific field of education on which the school is aimed. For the needs of this paper the traditional Czech grammar school has been selected. This type of school offers broad general knowledge and leads to the Maturita exam.

Students at the end of their fourth year are expected to have gained B2 level according to the Common European Framework of Reference. Although the level achieved might vary in the class, it is a frequent reality that students at grammar schools attend private courses or learn English through other channels, thus gaining better knowledge of English than expected.

Students in the fourth year of secondary school are usually eighteen or nineteen years old. They are preparing for their Maturita exam which, for many of them, includes English. There are 4 English lessons per week in the fourth year.

If the teacher decides to use a literary work in class, he or she might ask the students whether they even want to read it as students at this level of education may appreciate a certain level of independence.

As in the previous case of lower-secondary school, also here the teacher should compare the educational plan with what the book can offer. As for English in the fourth year, overlapping topics are, for example, global problems, American literature, reading literature in English without difficulties, discussion on various contemporary issues.

On this level students should already be familiar with all tenses, conditional clauses, modal verbs, phrasal verbs, wish clauses and they should be able to use broad vocabulary.

The education plan also highlights the importance of cross-curricular learning, developing of communicative skills and ICT skills. According to the plan the graduates are expected to have gained the abilities of understanding texts in a foreign language (including scientific texts with the use of a dictionary) and understanding the principles of democracy. They should also be able to work with facts and arguments and to find relevant information and check its validity. The plan also includes key competences and strategies of acquiring them. The strategies relevant for this paper are, for example, reading with comprehension, working with a text, searching for information, inspiring the students to read various kinds of texts, distinguishing between problems and searching for their causes, learning with

connection to the real world, expressing opinions, expressing feelings, motivating to accept cultural differences. The education plan for secondary school highlights the cross-cutting themes that should be included in English lesson throughout the whole study. Among these are multiculturalism, thinking in global context and cooperation of people with different cultural background.

Lesson Plan 5: Introduction to *The Swimmers* (pages 3, 4, 5)

At the beginning, the teacher asks the students about their favourite sports. Then, similarly, as in the first introductory lesson, the teacher shows the book cover to the students and gives them a few minutes to discuss in pairs or in small groups. They share their ideas about the content of the book. It might be surprising for them that there are two lines of the story. One about the pool and the other about Japanese Americans during the Second World War. The teacher should introduce this topic briefly to make the students familiar with a new point of view.

The students read the selected pages. Then they write down all the reasons why the swimmers come to the pool. They also tell the teacher why they want (or do not want) read more of the story.

Lesson Plan 6: Reading Comprehension of *The Swimmers* (pages 143, 144, 145)

This reading comprehension lesson focuses on family relationships, generational gap and the conflict between a mother and her daughter. As the first step the students make notes about what their life will be when they are old. They share their ideas. Then they read page 143 and they guess where it is taking place. They can tell whether they have visited such facility. They can also describe their feelings regarding such places and aging. Then they read the rest of the text and retell what the daughter did for her mother at the special care home. At

the end of the lesson students retell page 145 and share any ideas on how to deal with aging parents.

Lesson Plan 7: Vocabulary in *The Swimmers* (pages 8, 9, 10)

After the introductory lesson the students are already familiar with the pool. They have a quick look at the text and tell how are people divided in the pool (slow lane/fast lane). They tell which lane they would use and why. They are given enough time to read the text as it includes some more complicated vocabulary. They can use online translators to help them with understanding. Then, in pairs they choose one type of a swimmer and write his or her description, in their own words, based on the text. At the end of the lesson they share which words they had to look up.

Lesson Plan 8: Cross-Curricular Learning Using *The Swimmers* (pages 139, 140, 141)

For this lesson plan the topic of health has been selected. Firstly, the teacher asks the students what they do to stay healthy and how health of young people differs from health of retired people. The students read page 139 and in pairs they discuss what is wrong with the mother. Then they read the rest of the text. They make two lists: a list of activities that people with dementia should not do anymore and a list of acts that can help these people to cope with their illness. They share their ideas on the topic.

Conclusion

The aim of this paper was to find connections between Asian American history and Asian American literature with special focus on its Japanese part. The first step was to give an overview of Asian and Japanese American history and culture with regards to specific topics that are reflected in literature. The older generation of Asian American writers as well as contemporary authors, in many cases, deal with the same topics. They have often found inspiration in their families' histories, as they themselves or their ancestors had to deal with racism, segregation, exclusion and other trouble related to migration, or simply, to being different.

As a representative of contemporary Asian/Japanese writing, the novelist Julie Otsuka was selected. In the second part of this paper her three novels were analysed and compared in terms of their form and content. It is clear that Otsuka's books are significantly influenced by her family's history. In her first two books she writes about events before and right after the Second World War. However, her latest book is set in the present but, in some parts, it still looks back at the events after the Pearl Harbor attack. The results of the analysis are that in terms of topics, Otsuka's books are quite similar to other Asian American stories. However, she has a unique style of writing including her original use of repetition and enumeration. These are great devices that attract readers' attention.

The third part of this paper focused on the use of literature in Czech schools. It tried to find ways Otsuka's novels can be used in traditional English classes. The lesson plans, that were proposed, were intended to be concrete enough but, at the same time, to offer a certain independence to the teacher. They were not designed as scripts, but rather an inspiration, but still instructional enough. The findings are that Japanese American literature can find its use in Czech schools. It is essential to find such a text that is interesting enough for the students

and corresponds with their level of English. The books that were selected for Part 3 can fit in the curriculums for the lower-secondary school and secondary school. The language level of the books is also adequate for the selected school years. However, the topics of the books sometimes overlap the curriculum of more than just one school year (for example the Second World War is taught in the ninth grade but topics related to civics are studied in the eighth grade). As for the secondary level of education, Japanese American literature can offer a lot of topics that are included in the educational plans. However, in the fourth year of grammar school students usually focus on the preparation for their Maturita exams and at other types of schools it is questionable whether the students would be interested in Japanese American history. The disadvantages of using literature in English classes are the lack of copies, lack of time (usually just three or four lessons a week), unwillingness of other teachers to cooperate in cross-curricular learning

To conclude the third part, the overlapping areas should be a proof that Japanese American literature can be used in Czech schools. The topic of the Second World War is generally interesting for students of all ages and there are many other important issues which are dealt with in the novels and in the real world too. Specifically, Julie Otsuka's novels can definitely find their use in English classes in Czech schools. They are not difficult to understand, they have captivating stories including serious, universal topics that the students might know from their own lives.

Teachers often struggle to attract students' attention. Using literature can be a good way to make students more interested in the language itself but also in various topics. Literary texts can be used together with other kinds of authentic materials which can bring more life into English classes.

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School education plans

Masarykova základní škola, Praha 9 – Újezd nad Lesy

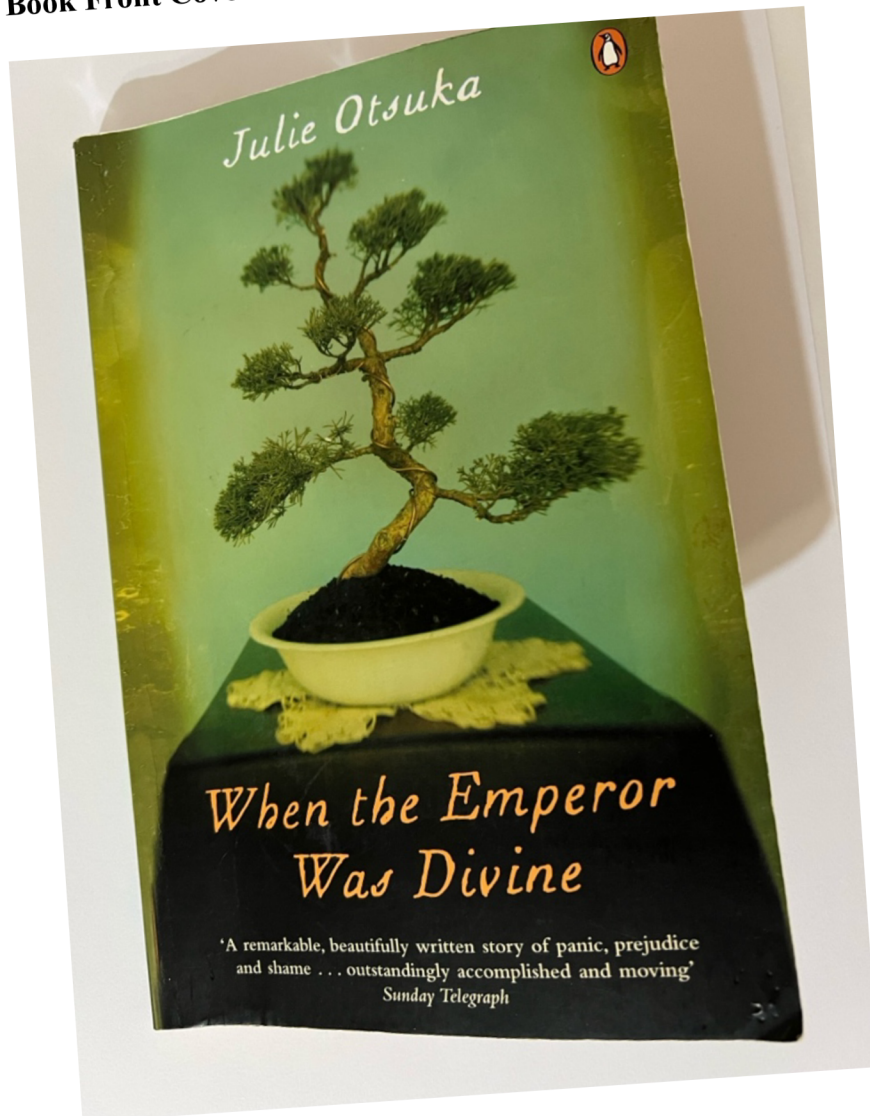
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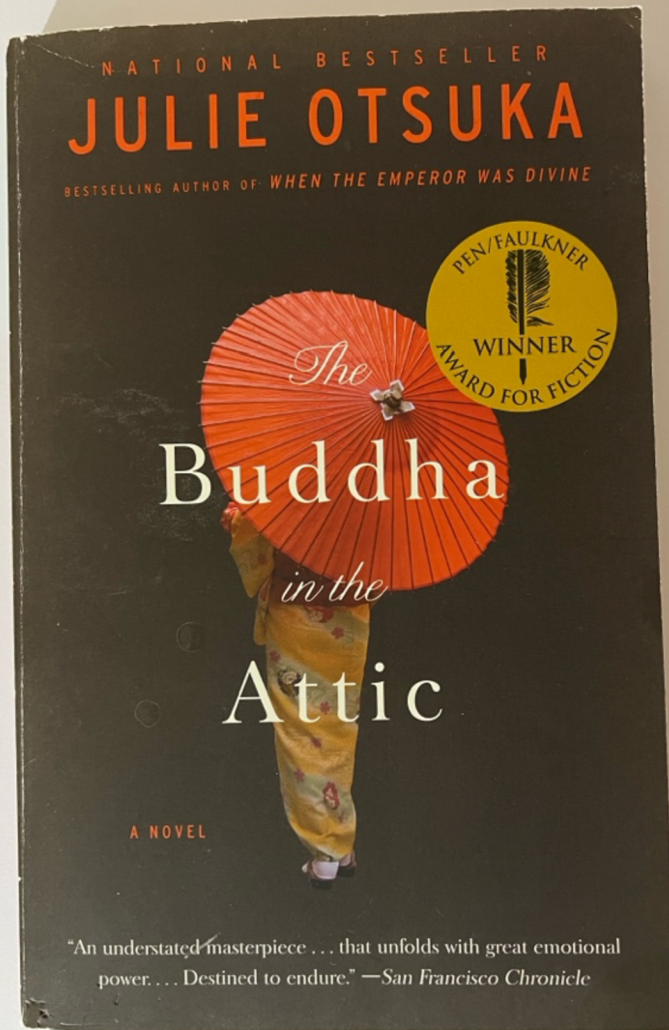
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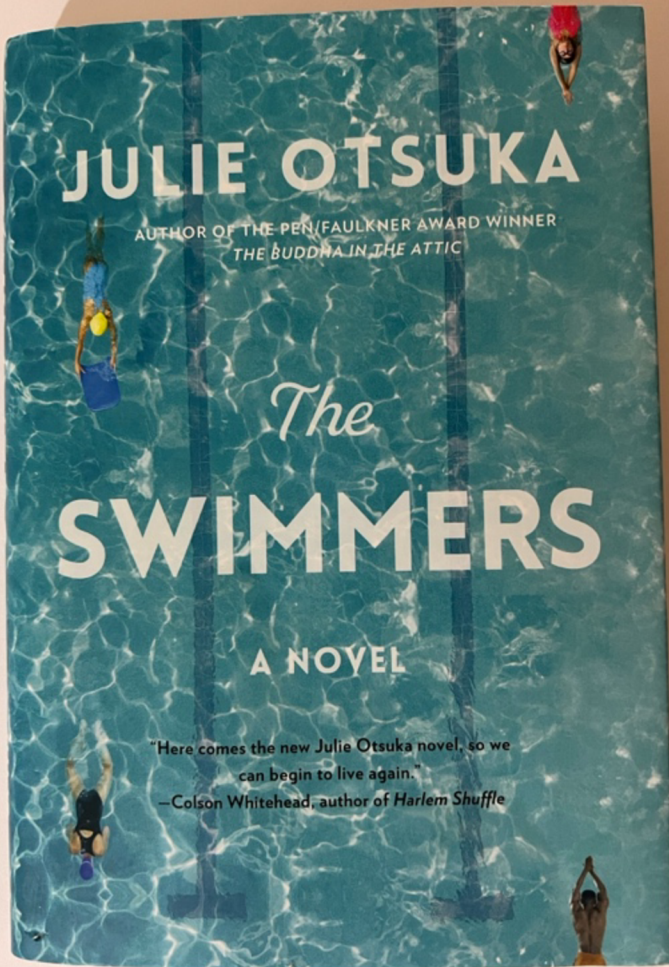
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Appendices

Book Front Covers







JULIE OTSUKA

AUTHOR OF THE PEN/FAULKNER AWARD WINNER
THE BUDDHA IN THE ATTIC

The
SWIMMERS

A NOVEL

"Here comes the new Julie Otsuka novel, so we
can begin to live again."

—Colson Whitehead, author of *Harlem Shuffle*

Extract 1: Introduction to *When the Emperor Was Divine* (pages 3, 4)

EVACUATION ORDER NO. 19

The sign had appeared overnight. On billboards and trees and the backs of the bus-stop benches. It hung in the window of Woolworth's. It hung by the entrance to the YMCA. It was stapled to the door of the municipal court and nailed, at eye level, to every telephone pole along University Avenue. The woman was returning a book to the library when she saw the sign in a post office window. It was a sunny day in Berkeley in the spring of 1942 and she was wearing new glasses and could see everything clearly for the first time in weeks. She no longer had to squint but she squinted out of habit anyway. She read the sign from top to bottom and then, still squinting, she took out a pen and read the sign from top to bottom again. The print was small and dark. Some of it was tiny. She wrote down a few words on the back of a bank receipt, then turned around and went home and began to pack.

WHEN THE EMPEROR WAS DIVINE

When the overdue notice from the library arrived in the mail nine days later she still had not finished packing. The children had just left for school and boxes and suitcases were scattered across the floor of the house. She tossed the envelope into the nearest suitcase and walked out the door.

Outside the sun was warm and the palm fronds were clacking idly against the side of the house. She pulled on her white silk gloves and began to walk east on Ashby. She crossed California Street and bought several bars of Lux soap and a large jar of face cream at the Rumford Pharmacy. She passed the thrift shop and the boarded-up grocery but saw no one she knew on the sidewalk. At the newsstand on the corner of Grove she bought a copy of the *Berkeley Gazette*. She scanned the headlines quickly. The Burma Road had been severed and one of the Dionne quintuplets—Yvonne—was still recovering from an ear operation. Sugar rationing would begin on Tuesday. She folded the paper in half but was careful not to let the ink darken her gloves.

At Lundy's Hardware she stopped and looked at the display of victory garden shovels in the window. They were well-made shovels with sturdy metal handles and she thought, for a moment, of buying one—the price was right and she did not like to pass up a bargain. Then she remembered that she already had a shovel at home in the shed. In fact, she had two. She did not need a

third. She smoothed the store.

"Nice glasses, walked through t

"You think?"

She picked up a

"Do you have an said that what sh

mer he had. She

"How's your

"I think the another leak."

"It's been a w

The woman

She walked p

out shades to d

rolls of tape an

to the register.

the bucket," sh

counter.

"Nothing w

pushed the qu

but he did no

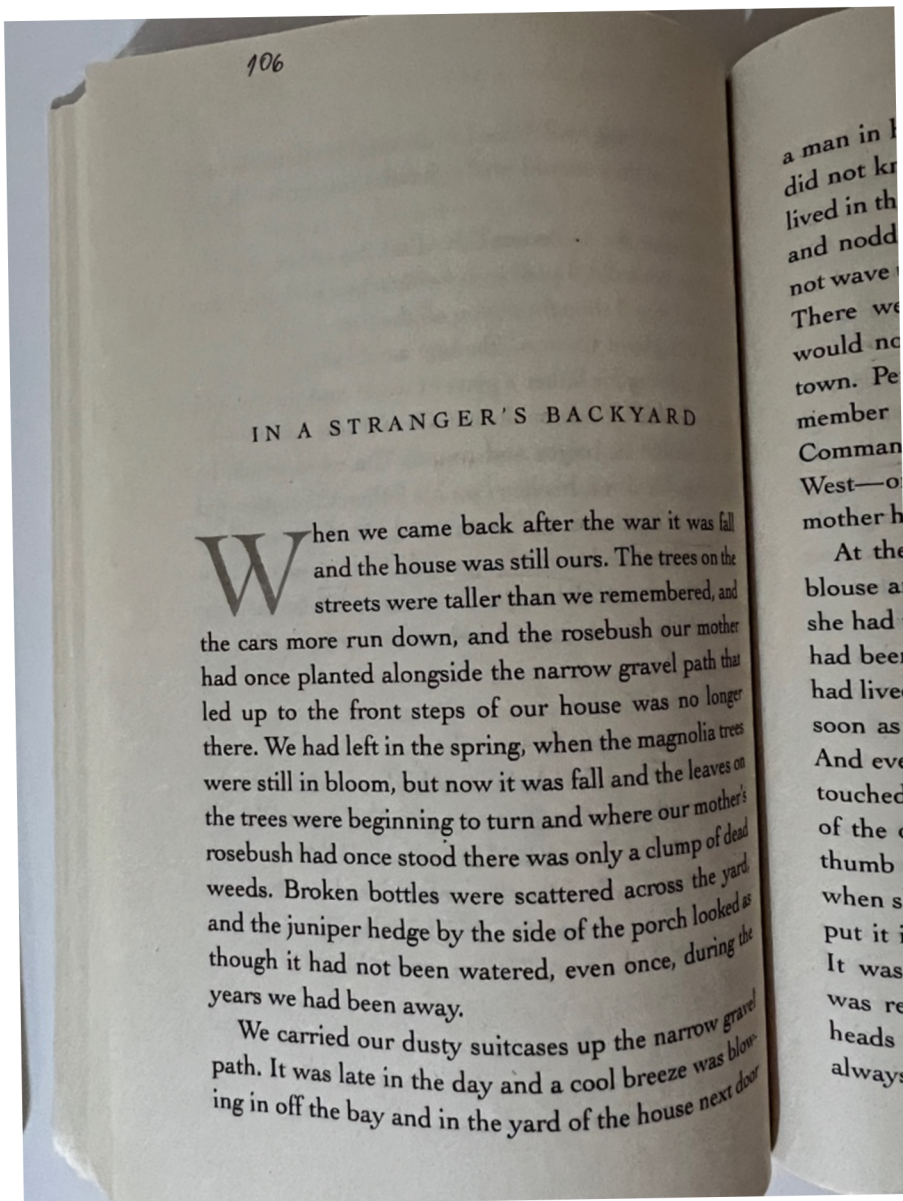
said. Then he

a rag. There

away.

"I can pay

Extract 2: Reading Comprehension of *When the Emperor Was Divine* (pages 106, 107)



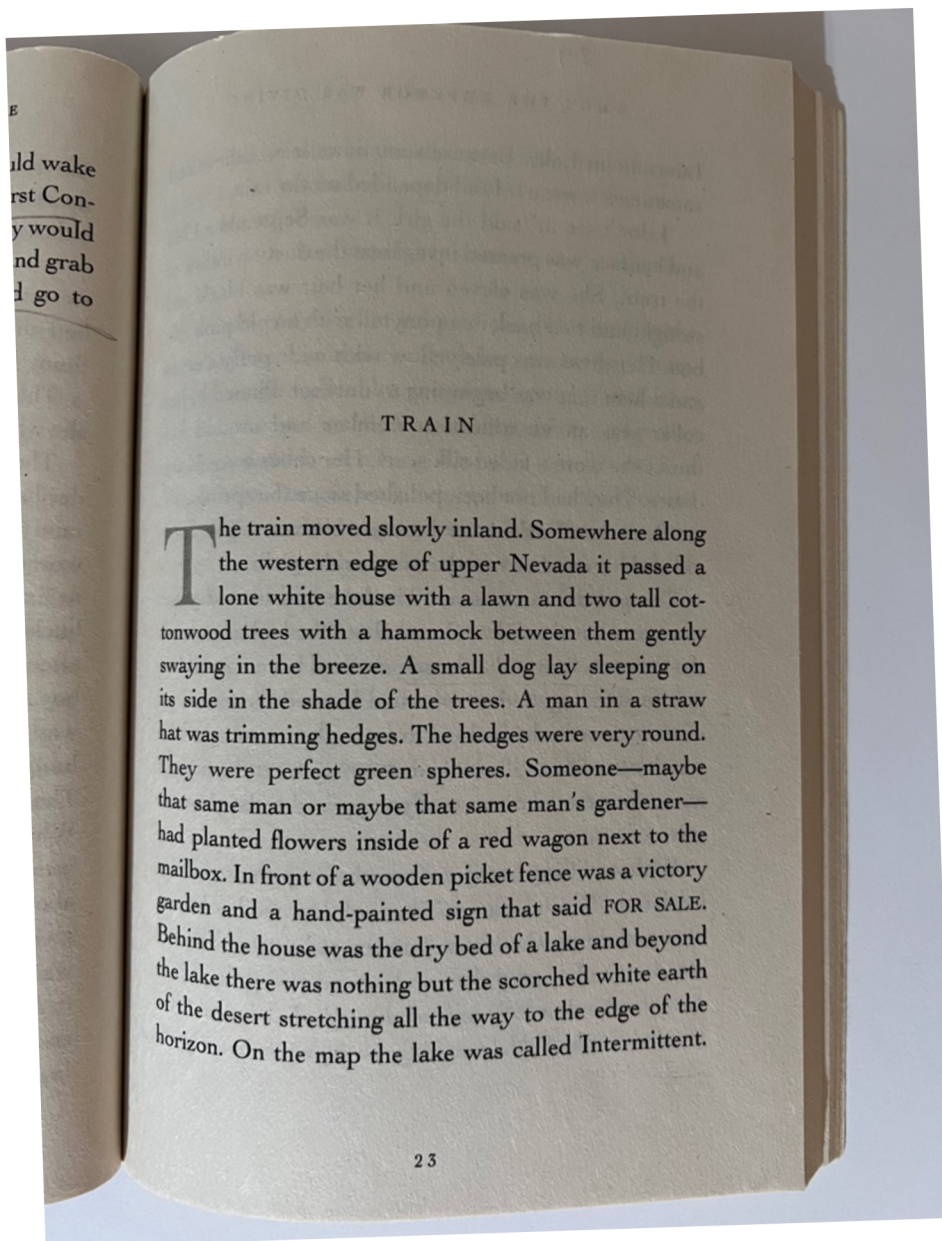
a man in his shirt sleeves was slowly raking leaves. We did not know him. He was not the same man who had lived in that house before the war. He leaned on his rake and nodded once in our direction but our mother did not wave to him or nod her head, even slightly, in return. There were many people, she had warned us, who would not be happy to learn we had come back into town. Perhaps this man was one of these people—a member of the American Legion, or the Homefront Commandos, or one of the Native Sons of the Golden West—or perhaps he was simply a man with a rake our mother had chosen not to see, we did not know.

At the top of the porch steps she reached into her blouse and pulled out the key to the front door, which she had worn, on a long silver chain, the entire time we had been away. Every morning, in the place where we had lived during the war, she had reached for the key as soon as she woke, just to make sure it was still there. And every evening, before she closed her eyes, she had touched the key one last time. Sometimes, in the middle of the day, she had stroked its jagged ridges with her thumb as she stared out the barrack window. Once, when she thought no one was looking, we even saw her put it into her mouth and close her eyes with delight. It was spring, and the air smelled of sage, and she was reading a letter from our father. We turned our heads away. The key had become a part of her. It was always there, a small, dark shape, dangling—visibly and

KYARD

war it was fall
The trees on the
remembered, and
sh our mother
travel path that
was no longer
magnolia trees
l the leaves on
e our mother's
clump of dead
ross the yard,
rch looked as
e, during the
arrow gravel
ze was blow-
se next door

Extract 3: Vocabulary in *When the Emperor Was Divine* (pages 23, 24)



Intermittent Lake. Because sometimes it was there and sometimes it wasn't. It all depended on the rain.

"I don't see it," said the girl. It was September 1942 and her face was pressed up against the dusty window of the train. She was eleven and her hair was black and straight and tied back in a ponytail with an old pink ribbon. Her dress was pale yellow with wide puffy sleeves and a hem that was beginning to unravel. Pinned to her collar was an identification number and around her throat she wore a faded silk scarf. Her shoes were Mary Janes. They had not been polished since the spring.

"See what?" asked her brother. He was eight years old and his number was the same as the girl's.

The girl did not answer. The lake had been dry for two years but she did not know that. She had never seen the desert before and although she had been a good but not outstanding student who had learned the meanings of many words she had yet to learn the meaning of the word *intermittent*. She looked down again at the map to make sure the lake was really supposed to be there. It was.

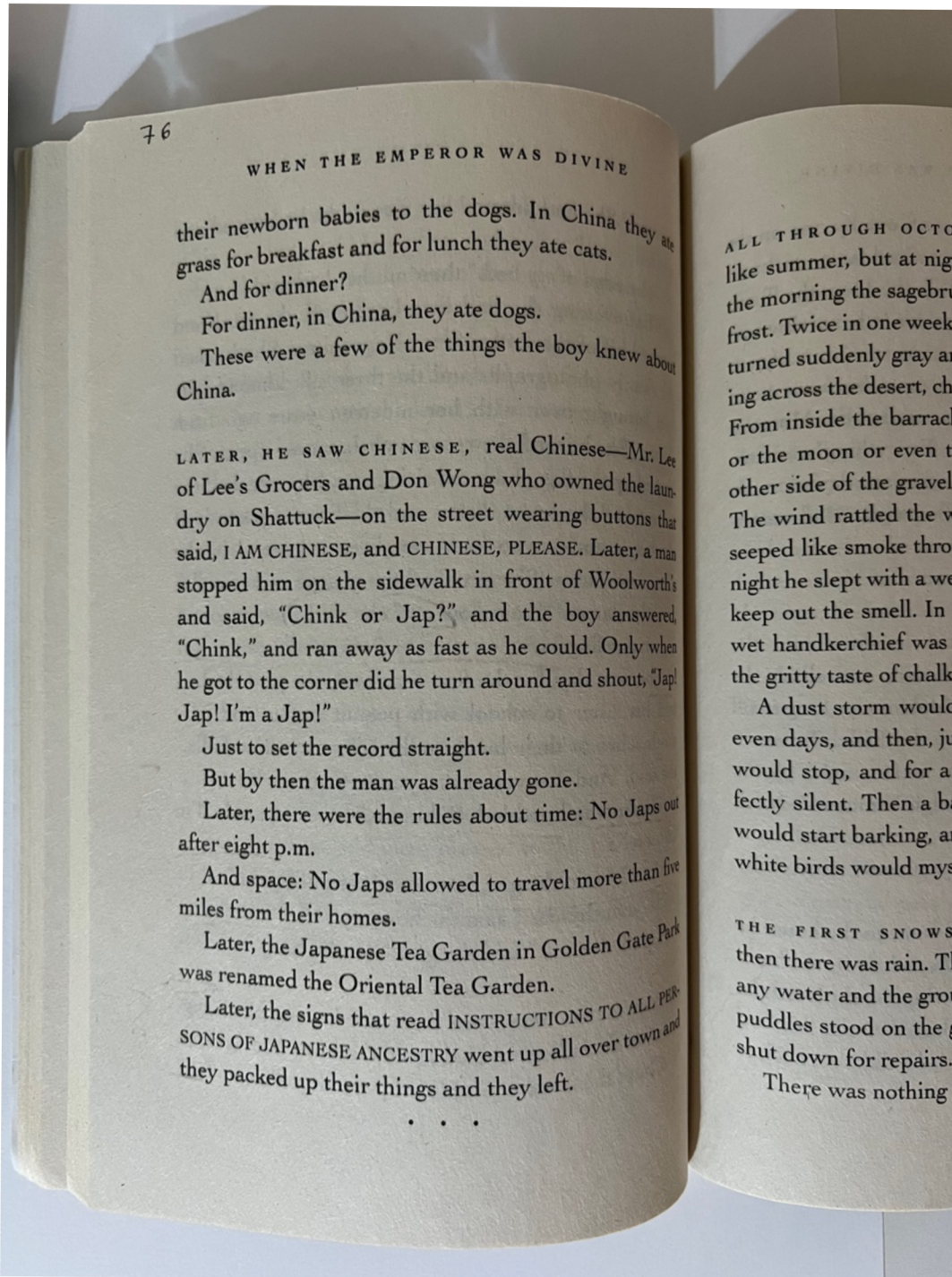
Without lifting her eyes from the map she stuck out her hand. "Lemon, please," she said. Her mother leaned over and dropped a lemon into the girl's palm. The girl stood up and opened the window and tossed the lemon out into the desert. It soared through the air and hit a gnarled trunk of blackened sage as the white house grew

smaller and smaller been the star pitch how to throw.

"Don't lose that breath.

"I wasn't planning map away in the sun. An old woman wall side, and the girl s that reminded her fine, old silk. The g eyes but she could hard and stiff and California the night California—first in a wide street not fa four and a half m Tanforan racetrack she was going to Ut old and slow and gas lamps hung fro fueled by a coal-bu were sick from the crowded compart very faintly, of ora of lemons and oran morning. The girl

Extract 4: Cross-Curricular Learning Using *When the Emperor Was Divine* (pages 76, 77)



VAS DIVINE

In China they ate
y ate cats.

s.
he boy knew about

Chinese—Mr. Lee
o owned the laun-
ring buttons that
ASE. Later, a man
t of Woolworth's
e boy answered,
ould. Only when
and shout, "Jap!

e.
e: No Japs out
more than five

den Gate Park

S TO ALL PER-
over town and

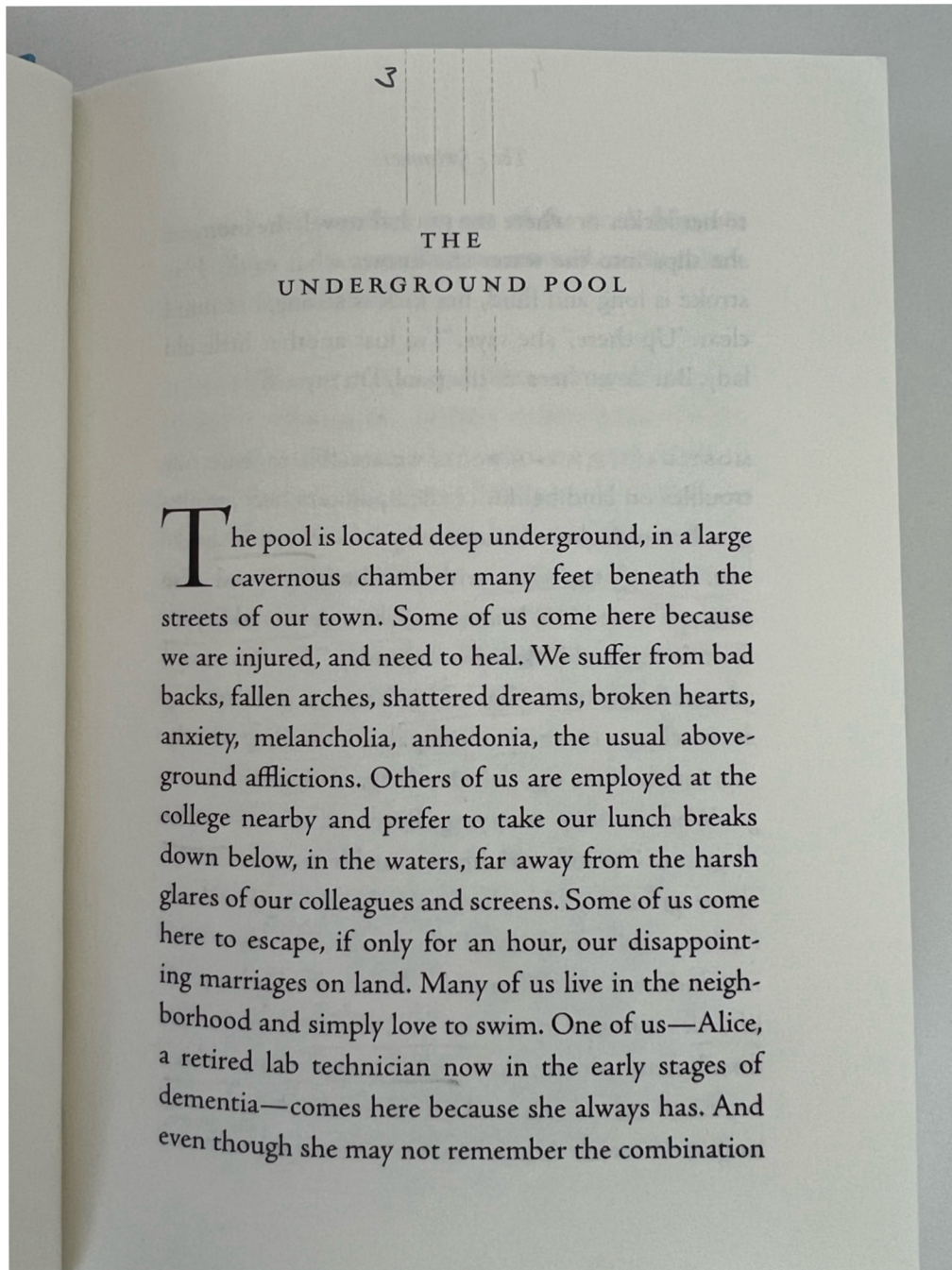
ALL THROUGH OCTOBER the days were still warm, like summer, but at night the mercury dropped and in the morning the sagebrush was sometimes covered with frost. Twice in one week there were dust storms. The sky turned suddenly gray and then a hot wind came screaming across the desert, churning up everything in its path. From inside the barracks the boy could not see the sun or the moon or even the next row of barracks on the other side of the gravel path. All he could see was dust. The wind rattled the windows and doors and the dust seeped like smoke through the cracks in the roof and at night he slept with a wet handkerchief over his mouth to keep out the smell. In the morning, when he woke, the wet handkerchief was dry and in his mouth there was the gritty taste of chalk.

A dust storm would blow for hours, and sometimes even days, and then, just as suddenly as it had begun, it would stop, and for a few seconds the world was perfectly silent. Then a baby would begin to cry, or a dog would start barking, and from out of nowhere a flock of white birds would mysteriously appear in the sky.

THE FIRST SNOWS FELL, and then melted, and then there was rain. The alkaline earth could not absorb any water and the ground quickly turned to mud. Black puddles stood on the gravel paths and the schools were shut down for repairs.

There was nothing to do now and the days were long

Extract 5: Introduction to *The Swimmers* (pages 3, 4, 5)



The Swimmers

to her locker or where she put her towel, the moment she slips into the water she knows what to do. Her stroke is long and fluid, her kick is strong, her mind clear. "Up there," she says, "I'm just another little old lady. But down here, at the pool, I'm myself."

MOST DAYS, AT THE POOL, we are able to leave our troubles on land behind. Failed painters become elegant breaststrokers. Untenured professors slice, shark-like, through the water, with breathtaking speed. The newly divorced HR Manager grabs a faded red Styrofoam board and kicks with impunity. The downsized adman floats, otter-like, on his back, as he stares up at the clouds on the painted pale blue ceiling, thinking, for the first time all day long, of nothing. *Let it go.* Worriers stop worrying. Bereaved widows cease to grieve. Out-of-work actors unable to get traction above ground glide effortlessly down the fast lane, in their element, at last. *I've arrived!* And for a brief interlude we are at home in the world. Bad moods lift, tics disappear, memories reawaken, migraines dissolve, and slowly, slowly, the chatter in our minds begins to subside as stroke after stroke, length after length, we swim. And when we are finished with our

laps we hoist ourselves up out of the pool, dripping and refreshed, our equilibrium restored, ready to face another day on land.

UP ABOVE THERE ARE wildfires, smog alerts, epic droughts, paper jams, teachers' strikes, insurrections, revolutions, blisteringly hot days that never seem to let up (*Massive "Heat Dome" Permanently Stalled over Entire West Coast*), but down below, at the pool, it is always a comfortable eighty-one degrees. The humidity is sixty-five percent. The visibility is clear. The lanes are orderly and calm. The hours, though limited, are adequate for our needs. Some of us arrive shortly upon waking, fresh towels draped over our shoulders and rubber goggles in hand, ready for our eight a.m. swim. Others of us come down in the late afternoon, after work, when it is still sunny and bright, and when we reemerge it is night. The traffic has thinned. The backhoes have quieted. The birds have all gone away. And we are grateful to have avoided, once more, the falling of dusk. *It's the one time I can't bear being alone.* Some of us come to the pool religiously, five times a week, and begin to feel guilty if we miss even a day. Some of us come every Monday, Wednesday and Fri-

Extract 6: Reading Comprehension of *The Swimmers* (pages 143, 144, 145)

drove her crazy. "These things are *awful!*" In the grocery store, whenever she saw someone who looked like herself—small, older, black-haired, slanted eyes—she made a beeline for them and asked, "Excuse me, but do I know you?" Usually, they would look at her and ask: "Do I know you?" But that was as far as the conversation went.

ALWAYS, THE DESIRE to be with "her own."

THE WOMAN ON the other side of the curtain is Vietnamese. Her face is beautiful, unlined. Her hair is jet black. She never leaves her bed. She never has any visitors. She never says a word. Mostly, she sleeps. "Ninety-three years old," the nurse tells you. "I don't think she's going to make it," your mother says. She takes two pills from a tiny paper cup and then swallows. "When I get better," she tells you, "we can go shopping at Nordstrom's. I'll buy you a new dress." Outside the window a young woman in the parking lot is pleading with her child to get out of the car. Your mother raps once on the glass pane and then turns to you. "Did you know you were fed by breast milk?" she asks.

FIVE DAYS A WEEK for four years she visited her own mother at the very same home. She flossed her teeth. She brushed her hair. She clipped her nails. She rubbed aloe vera lotion fortified with vitamin E onto her legs and feet and into the spaces between her toes. She read to her from the obituaries in the *Rafu Shimpō*. "Mrs. Matsue has died of complications of a stroke!" And every Friday, without fail, she brought her sweet bean *manju*—her favorite—from the Fugetsu-Do Bakery. "She took such good care of her," one of the aides tells you, "we didn't have to do a thing!"

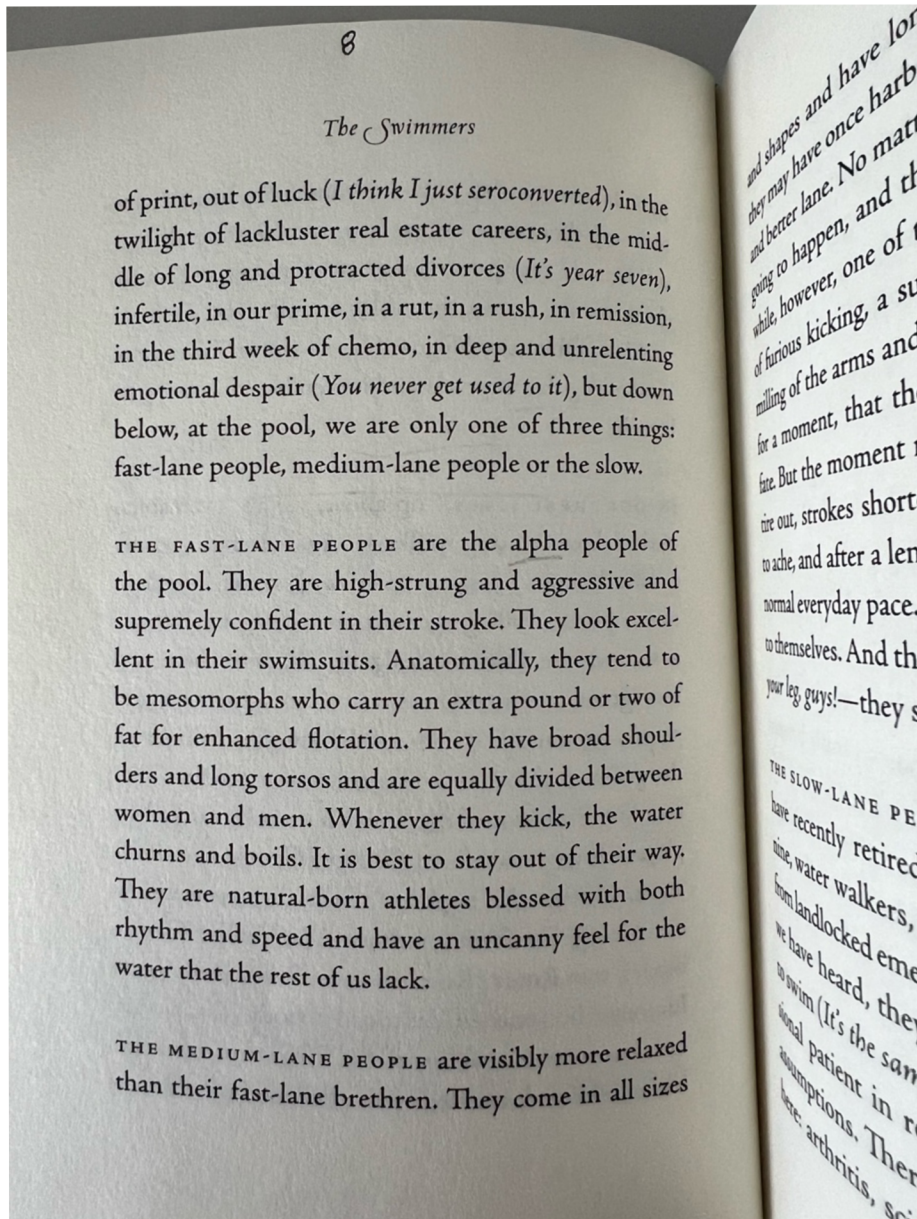
YOU NEVER ONCE invited your mother to come visit you in all the years that you were away. You never wrote to her. You never called to wish her a happy birthday. You never took her to Paris or Venice or Rome, all places she had dreamed of one day seeing—*When your father retires*, she would say, but then, late last year, when he finally did retire, he was *too tired*—and all places you yourself have been to not once but several times, for a wedding, a honeymoon, a literary festival, an award ceremony, for the opening

night of a theatrical production, in French, of your second novel, which you based on the most painful and difficult years of her life (she, on the other hand, took her then eighty-one-year-old mother on a ten-day "foliage tour" of New England the year you left for college: she bought the plane tickets, she rented the car, she booked the motels, she plotted out the long and winding route through three different states just as the leaves were beginning to peak and—even though she had never, except for once, for three years, during the war, been east of the San Joaquin River—she *drove*). When she asked you why you weren't closer you said you didn't know. You closed the door. You turned your back. You grew quiet and still, like an animal. You broke her heart. And you wrote.

AND NOW, NOW that you've finally come home, it's *too late* (your friend Carolyn just took her mother on a two-week cruise to Alaska and said it was *the best experience of her life*).

THROUGH THE DOORWAY you can see her hunched over a round Formica table in the Activities Room with some of the other residents, tracing the outline

Extract 7: Vocabulary in *The Swimmers* (pages 8, 9, 10)



and shapes and have long ago given up any dreams they may have once harbored of swimming in a faster and better lane. No matter how hard they try, it's not going to happen, and they know it. Every once in a while, however, one of them will succumb to a bout of furious kicking, a sudden and involuntary windmilling of the arms and legs as though they thought, for a moment, that they could somehow defy their fate. But the moment never lasts for long. Legs soon tire out, strokes shorten, elbows droop, lungs begin to ache, and after a length or two they return to their normal everyday pace. *That's just the way it is*, they say to themselves. And then amiably, affably—*Just pulling your leg, guys!*—they swim on.

THE SLOW-LANE PEOPLE tend to be older men who have recently retired, women over the age of forty-nine, water walkers, aqua joggers, visiting economists from landlocked emerging third-world countries where, we have heard, they are only just now learning how to swim (*It's the same with their driving*), and the occasional patient in rehab. Be kind to them. Make no assumptions. There are many reasons they might be here: arthritis, sciatica, insomnia, a brand-new tita-

The Swimmers

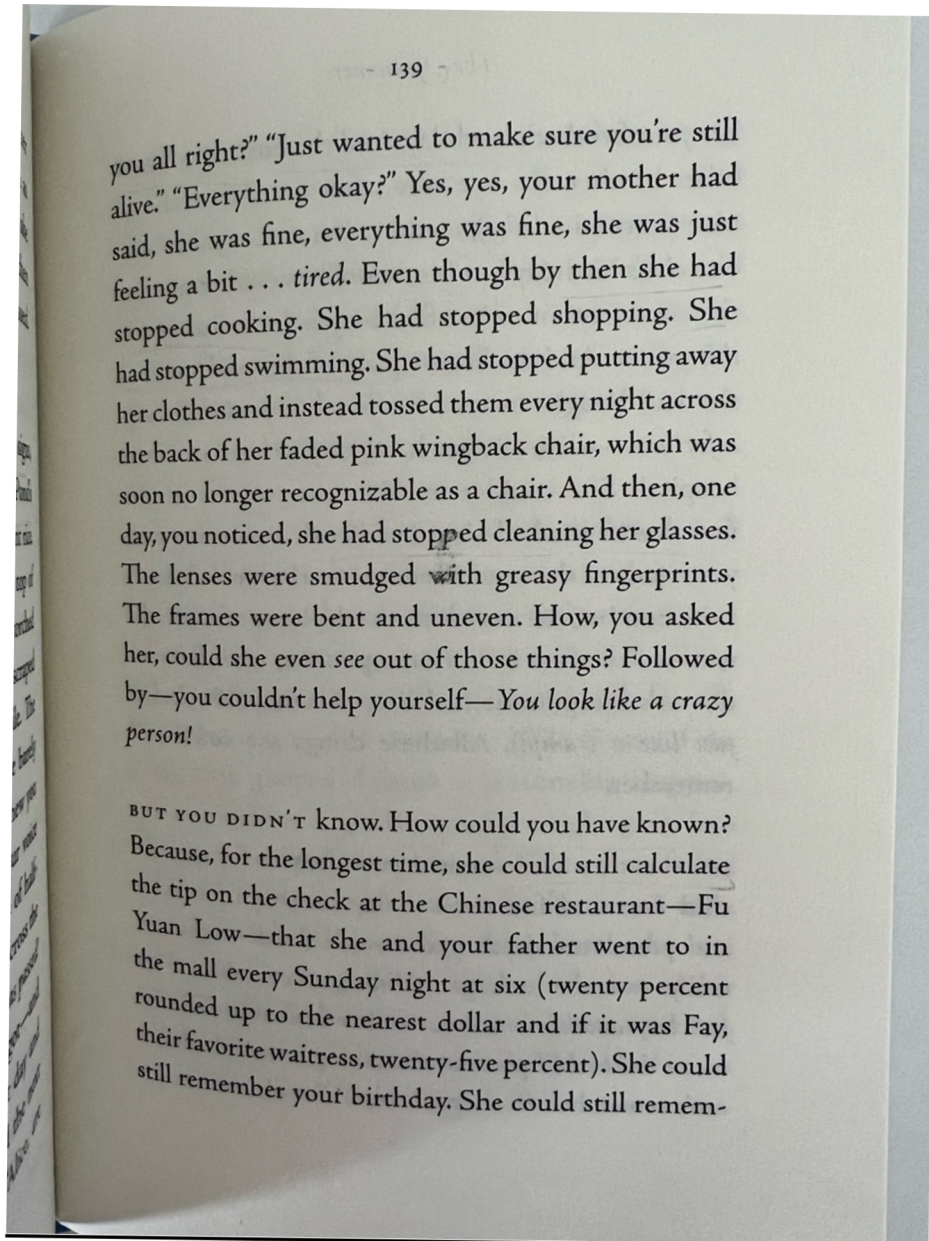
nium hip, aching feet worn out from a lifetime of pounding on dry land. "My mother told me never to wear high heels!" The pool is their sanctuary, their refuge, the one place on earth they can go to escape from their pain, for it is only down below, in the waters, that their symptoms begin to abate. *The moment I see that painted black line I feel fine.*

ABOVE GROUND MANY of us are ungainly and awkward, slowing down with the years. The extra poundage has arrived, the letting go has begun, the crow's-feet are fanning out silently, but inexorably, like cracks on a windshield, from the corners of our eyes. But down below, at the pool, we are restored to our old youthful selves. Gray hairs vanish beneath dark blue swim caps. Brows unfurrow. Limps disappear. Kettle-bellied men with knee woes on land bob daintily up and down in their bright orange flotation belts as they aqua-jog in place. Plus-sized women well past their prime grow supple and agile in the water, dolphin-sleek in their figure-slimming Spandex suits. Stomachs are flattened. Bosoms lifted. Long-lost waistlines reemerge. *There it is!* Even the most rotund of us steers her majestic bulk down her lane with ease and

perhaps as though she were
the body of mine was built
who would normally be
on land—Every year it gets
up the face—glide serenely
in our knowledge that we
blurry peripheral shape &
the foggy tinted goggles
lane.

PEOPLE TO WATCH out for
rained thrashers, oblivion
matters, middle-aged n
up the moment they ser
taken by a woman, tailg
table yankers, the pickt
of a pool), the peeper
TV host in his life abo
background for his sw
made swimmer in lane j
deserve bump: So so
with the wide, overext
the former three-time
hundred-meter me

Extract 8: Cross-Curricular Learning Using *The Swimmers* (pages 139, 140, 141)



139

you all right?" "Just wanted to make sure you're still alive." "Everything okay?" Yes, yes, your mother had said, she was fine, everything was fine, she was just feeling a bit . . . *tired*. Even though by then she had stopped cooking. She had stopped shopping. She had stopped swimming. She had stopped putting away her clothes and instead tossed them every night across the back of her faded pink wingback chair, which was soon no longer recognizable as a chair. And then, one day, you noticed, she had stopped cleaning her glasses. The lenses were smudged with greasy fingerprints. The frames were bent and uneven. How, you asked her, could she even see out of those things? Followed by—you couldn't help yourself—*You look like a crazy person!*

BUT YOU DIDN'T know. How could you have known? Because, for the longest time, she could still calculate the tip on the check at the Chinese restaurant—Fu Yuan Low—that she and your father went to in the mall every Sunday night at six (twenty percent rounded up to the nearest dollar and if it was Fay, their favorite waitress, twenty-five percent). She could still remember your birthday. She could still remem-

The Swimmers

ber your brother's birthday. And the birthday of your other brother, the one who, after more than thirty-nine years (the *baby*), could still not remember anyone else's birthday but his own. She could remember the combination of her first bicycle lock. *Six, fifteen, thirty-nine*. And the license plate of the used '49 Ford she had bought in 1954 for five hundred dollars—a *fortune*—when she got her first paycheck from the hospital. She could remember the address of the new doctor she had visited earlier that morning with your father, she could remember the new doctor's suite number, the new doctor's telephone number, the name of the new doctor's receptionist, what the new doctor's receptionist had been wearing (*She looked just like a tramp!*). All these things she could still remember.

SO WHAT IF SHE watered your father's favorite orchid four and five times a day, causing its sudden and premature death and a small flood—a puddle, really—on the mahogany dining room table? *We'll just buy another one*, your father had said (Did he mean the orchid plant or the dining room table? You can't remember. Both, probably!). So what if she in-

sisted up
I turn on
you three
underwe
the same
daughter
spelled y
anyway?

THE NE
it was A
bered th
father, c
den wit
It was t
sympto
prieate l
of inhi
asked
spoken
repute
hands
he said

sisted upon making up her own rules while driving. *I turn on red no matter what!* So what if she asked you three times in fifteen minutes if you needed more underwear (always, she was thinking of you) or told the same story five times in a row (*The Kawahashis' daughter has married a Mormon!*) or occasionally misspelled your name? What was an extra vowel or two anyway? Or a consonant gone missing?

THE NEW DOCTOR had said it wasn't Alzheimer's. If it was Alzheimer's, he said, she wouldn't have remembered the trip to Costco the week before with your father, or her upcoming lunch date at the Olive Garden with her good friend Jane ("I can hardly wait!"). It was frontotemporal dementia. FTD. Some of the symptoms: gradual changes in personality, inappropriate behavior in public, apathy, weight gain, loss of inhibition, the desire to hoard. When your father asked for the prognosis, the new doctor—a soft-spoken former violin prodigy from Israel who was reputed to be "one of the best"—had clasped his hands on his desk and then sighed. It was terminal, he said. Atrophy of the frontal lobe. "Ravel had it."