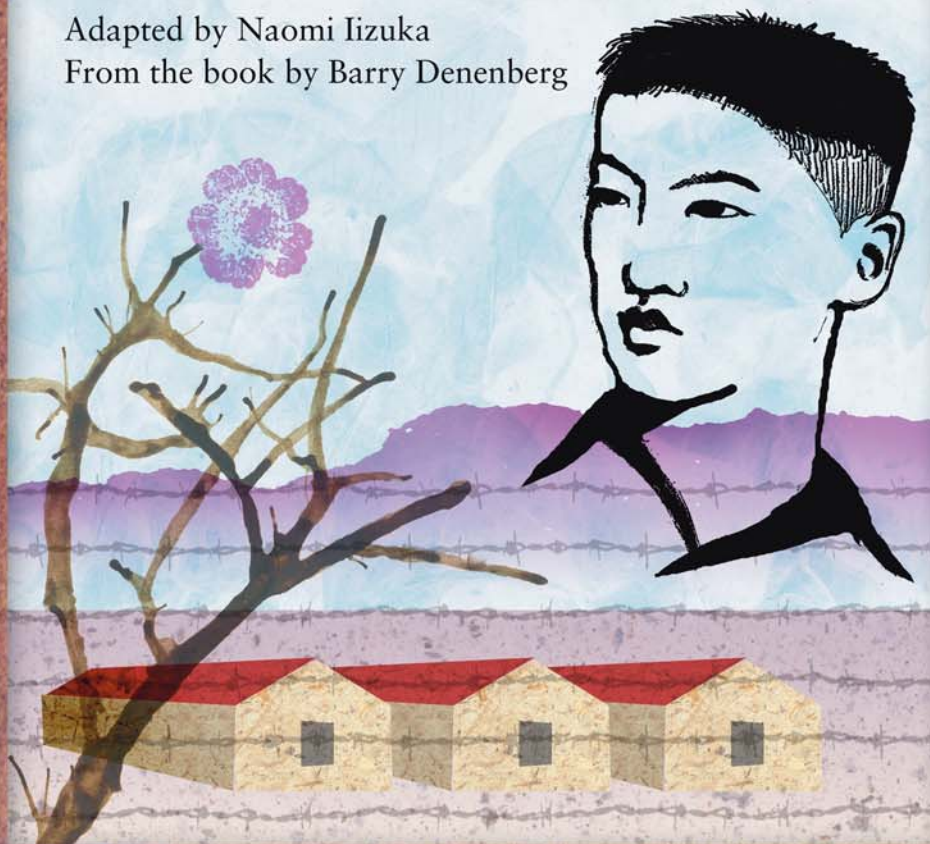


# CITIZEN 13559: The Journal of Ben Uchida

Adapted by Naomi Iizuka  
From the book by Barry Denenberg



Cue  
sheet  
FOR STUDENTS

Welcome to *Cuesheet*, a performance guide published by the Education Department of the John F. Kennedy Center for the Performing Arts, Washington, D.C. This *Cuesheet* is designed to help you enjoy the performance of *Citizen 13559: The Journal of Ben Uchida*.



A journal marks topics for discussion or activities you may want to do with other students, friends, or family.

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# What Happens in the Play?

## Setting the Scene

### Main Characters

**Ben Uchida,**  
a twelve-year-old boy

**Mr. Uchida,**  
Ben's father

**Mrs. Uchida,**  
Ben's mother

**Naomi,**  
Ben's older sister

**Miss Kroll,**  
Ben's teacher at  
the internment camp

The play begins in 1941, in San Francisco, California, where Ben's family lives. The Uchida family is happy and successful. Ben's father believes strongly in the ideal of the American Dream: "You can be anything you want in this country," he tells Ben.

For Ben's birthday, his father gives him a leather-bound journal. "Write everything down," Mr. Uchida tells Ben. "You're history in the making."

Suddenly, the Uchidas's peaceful life takes a terrible turn. The Japanese military has bombed the U.S. naval base at Pearl Harbor, Hawaii. The following day, the United States declares war on Japan, entering World War II.

The Uchidas soon find themselves the victims of anti-Japanese **prejudice**. Because of their Japanese **ancestry**, many Americans suspect them of spying for Japan. The Uchidas's neighbors—and even newspapers, radio, and magazines—call Japanese-Americans hateful names. Ben's own classmate and teacher question whether Ben is a "real" American.

The Uchidas are ordered to go to an **internment camp** with thousands of other Japanese American families.

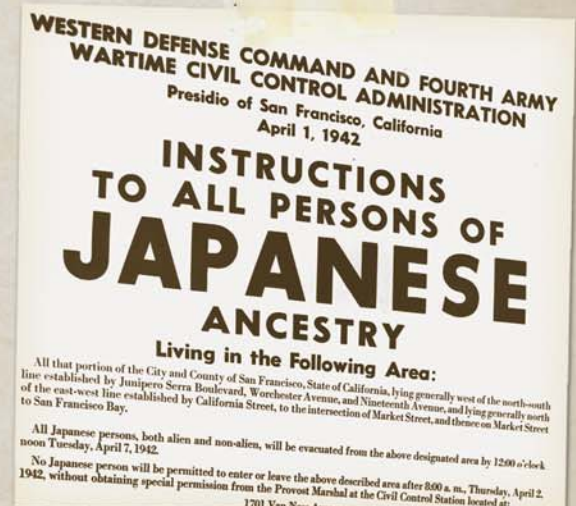
With only a few days to prepare for the move—and no idea where they are being sent or for how long—the Uchidas wrestle with painful decisions about what to bring with them and what to do with their business, home, and treasured possessions. As they get ready to board a train to the camp, military personnel pin tags on the Uchidas. The tags say, "13559." The Uchidas's identities have been replaced by a number.

Life in the internment camp proves extremely difficult. Following his father's advice to "write everything down," Ben tries to make sense of his experiences by recording them in his journal. Years later, he realizes that he must tell his story about the war—not a story about battles, but a story about people.

**prejudice**—a strong, negative feeling or opinion formed without knowledge, thought, or reason

**ancestry**—the roots and origins of a family

**internment camp**—a prison where people are confined by a country's government



An official "Exclusion Order" posted on a street in San Francisco. Listen for the scene in the play where language from this order is quoted.



*A family's luggage is searched as they arrive at a camp. Notice the man in the middle, who is wearing a numbered tag like the ones the Uchidas wear in the play.*

## *A Special Note*

This play deals with a disturbing time in American history. You will hear harsh language and see upsetting events represented on the stage.

## *What's Real?*

Ben is a fictional character, but he represents many real Japanese Americans who were confined in internment camps during World War II. Like Ben, the Mirror Lake Internment Camp, where the Uchidas are sent, is fictional, but it is based on the ten real camps that housed Japanese Americans from 1942 until 1946.



## **Your Life in a Suitcase**



Imagine that you are told you must leave your home, your school, and your friends, and move to an internment camp. You do not know where the camp is or how long you will have to stay there. Will your family be split up? Will you ever be allowed to go home? You are allowed to take only one suitcase with you, and you must be able to carry it by yourself. What would you put in it, and why? List the things you would pack. Beside each item, write why you would bring it.

## **Same Experience, Different Response**



In the play, Ben, his sister, and their parents share the same experiences, but each reacts differently. After the play, discuss the following questions with your classmates:

- How do Ben, Naomi, Mr. Uchida, and Mrs. Uchida respond to their experiences?
- Were any of their reactions surprising to you?
- How do you feel about Mr. Uchida's response to life in the internment camp?
- Why do you think Mr. Uchida made the decision he did?

*Photographer Toyo Miyatake sneaked a camera into his suitcase when he and his family were sent to the Manzanar camp. He took many photographs, including this one, "Boys Behind Barbed Wire," which inspired the cover illustration for this Cuesheet.*

# The History Behind the Play

## Travel Back in time

### Even Before the War...

**T**here was racial prejudice against Japanese Americans long before World War II. Laws prevented Japanese immigrants from owning land and holding certain types of jobs.

### America Goes to War

When Pearl Harbor was bombed on December 7, 1941, longstanding prejudice against Japanese Americans turned into panic. Many Americans feared that people of Japanese ancestry were helping Japan plan more attacks against the United States.

### “I hereby further authorize...”

On February 19, 1942, President Roosevelt issued Executive Order 9066, which allowed the government to define areas that would be under military control. “Any and all persons” thought to be a threat to the security of the United States would be relocated to internment camps, which were isolated, fenced, and guarded.

### Moving Day

Starting in April 1942, the U.S. military forced 110,000 people of Japanese descent to leave their homes and move to internment camps. People lost their houses, land, businesses, freedom, and dignity. More than two-thirds of the people interned were American citizens. Roughly half were children.



*A newspaper headline announces the internment of California residents of Japanese descent. Newspapers, radio broadcasts, and magazines helped spread fear with anti-Japanese stories.*

### How Would It Feel?



Stereotypes are oversimplified thoughts or images about an entire group without considering their individual differences. When we stereotype people, we unfairly assume that they think or act a particular way because of their shared gender, race, religion, backgrounds, or other characteristics. Believing in stereotypes of people can lead to prejudice.

When you watch the play, notice how stereotyping and prejudice affect the Uchidas. Then, write a journal entry as if you were Ben or Naomi reacting to an event that happens in the play.



*The dusty “Main Street” at the Tule Lake camp. Each barrack block included a bath house, laundry facility, dining hall, and toilet building. Residents typically had to wait in line to use the bathrooms and laundries. In the early days, meals were unappetizing and sometimes poorly prepared, causing many residents to become sick.*

# Life Behind Barbed Wire

## West Coast, U.S.A.

**T**he internment camps were located in isolated desert areas of Arizona, California, Utah, Idaho, Colorado, and Wyoming, where summers were very hot and winters were very cold. Some people were imprisoned for as long as four years.

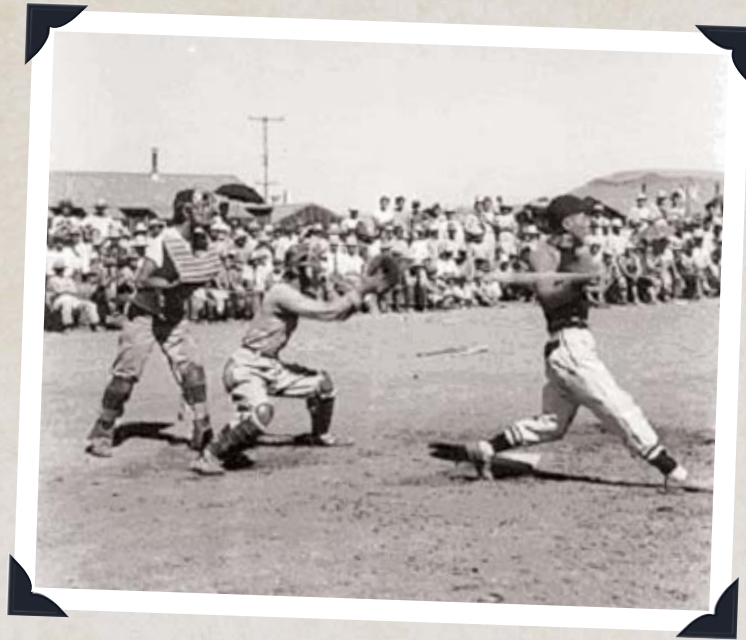
## Rows and Rows of Houses

The housing consisted of rows of drafty, tarpaper-covered barracks. There was neither indoor plumbing nor cooking facilities of any kind. A family of five or six might occupy a single room. The only furnishings provided were standard Army cots and blankets and small heating stoves.

## Making the Best of It

Much of the work of running the camps fell to the residents, who worked in food service, construction, teaching, clerical jobs, farming, and police work. Despite working hard inside the camps, residents were denied the opportunity to earn decent incomes; many also lost the jobs, businesses, and homes they had before they were interned.

Residents tried their best to make the camps feel like home. They decorated their barracks, planted gardens, held town meetings, and had holiday celebrations and festivals.



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*Children were forced to leave their schools and friends from home, but their parents and the government tried to make their lives as normal as possible. After an initial delay, schools were built. Children were allowed to participate in Boy Scouts and Girl Scouts and play sports such as baseball and volleyball. Sports and other leisure activities helped them cope with their internment.*

## Look Back, Look Forward



The American Civil Liberties Act of 1988 recognized that “a grave injustice was done” to Japanese Americans who were interned. To make amends, a letter of apology with a payment of \$20,000 was awarded to each survivor of an internment camp.

Divide your class into two groups. One group will discuss whether official apologies and payments are a good way to make amends with people who have been treated unjustly. Why or why not? The other group will suggest ways to make sure that what happened to Japanese Americans during World War II never happens again. Each group will present its views to the entire class.

# Bringing the Play to Life

## Script to Stage

**P**laywrights write scripts containing dialogue, the words spoken by the characters. They may also provide notes about how the stage should look, important stage objects, lighting and sound effects, music, and stage directions that help tell the story.


In the script of *Citizen 13559*, playwright Naomi Iizuka includes many such instructions. For example, the script starts with this note: “On the stage are scattered chairs. Some of them are toppled over, some of them are on their sides.” Later, the playwright gives a lighting instruction: “Light shift. Night. The backyard of the Uchida house. Stars twinkle in the sky.”

## Keep a Watch Out

There are many interesting stage effects used during the play. Watch carefully how simple objects, creative lighting, and actors changing characters can make you believe in the story. For example,

- watch how chairs are used to create different settings like a kitchen, a train, or a graveyard.
- notice the lighting effects that create various moods and make some characters appear different from others.
- see how the appearance of fallen snow is created onstage.
- observe how main characters become a chorus or group of Americans.

## Favorite Things

 Props are objects used by actors onstage. Some are set props—objects that are part of the set like a telephone or radio. Others are hand props—things that are carried by actors, but are not part of their costumes. In *Citizen 13559*, props play a very important role in our understanding of the characters.



Look for the following props during the performance: teapot, baseball mitt, telescope, broom, and journal. After the performance, write a sentence about what each prop means. Are there any props listed that mean different things to different characters? If so, discuss them with your class.



## Telling Time Onstage

During the 1940s, big band music was popular in America. Memorable melodies and regular rhythms performed by such large bands as the Glenn Miller Orchestra helped keep dancers moving to the beat. Listen for how Glenn Miller's famous song "Stardust" is used to set the clock back to the 1940s.

## The Playwright's Choice

Naomi Iizuka wrote seven lines of dialogue spoken in Japanese by Ben's parents.

There is no translation for the audience. Watch closely when Mr. Uchida reads a letter he receives at the camp. After the performance, discuss the following questions in class: What do you think Ben's parents said? Why is the dialogue spoken in Japanese only?

*This is the Japanese dialogue spoken between Mr. and Mrs. Uchida during the play. Pay careful attention to their facial expressions and body language during this conversation.*

## The Stars of the Play



The **constellation** Cassiopeia (pronounced kass-ee-o-PEE-ya) plays an important role in *Citizen 13559*. The legend of the constellation says that Queen Cassiopeia thought herself more beautiful than the daughters of a sea god. She was punished for her pride by being sent to live in the sky, where she had to sit upside down for half the year, her head hanging downward, in disgrace. The constellation is thought to look like a queen on a throne.

Research Cassiopeia and draw the constellation. What do you think the constellation means in the play? Do you think it means the same thing to Ben and his father?

**constellation**—a formation of stars that are shaped somewhat like animals, people, or objects and were named for them.

My name is  
Ben Uchida  
My number is  
13559

(SOLDIER exits. Enter MR. UCHIDA reading a letter.  
Enter MRS. UCHIDA. MR. UCHIDA puts away the letter.  
BEN watches them.)

MRS. UCHIDA:  
Maseo? Nan desu ka?

MR. UCHIDA:  
Ee wa yo.

MRS. UCHIDA:  
Kore wa shigoto no koto desu ka -

MR. UCHIDA:  
Dai jubo.

MRS. UCHIDA:  
Maseo -

MR. UCHIDA:  
Kyotskette yo, kodomo wa -

MRS. UCHIDA:  
Maseo, doshite sore o shimashita -

# More About the Play

## Writing the Play

**N**aomi Iizuka is a successful playwright who was asked to write a script for *Citizen 13559* based on a book by the same name. For Iizuka, the hardest part was turning a book written as one boy's personal journal into a script that many people could perform.

Because the play is based on real events, Iizuka felt a responsibility to write a play that would be accurate and would "do justice" to survivors of internment. Furthermore, Iizuka is Japanese American. She says her heritage affected how she thought about the play: "Had I been born in another place and time, I would have been sent to an internment camp."

## "Sometimes Memories are Like Photographs"



During the play, listen for the line above. What does it mean to you? After the play, think about a past experience from your own life. Try to remember how you felt, what you saw and heard, what you might have tasted or smelled. Draw a picture based on your memory. Share it with your class, your family, or both. Explain why you chose this memory.

## Resources

### You may want to...

#### read:

Denenberg, Barry. *My Name Is America, The Journal of Ben Uchida, Citizen 13559*. New York: Scholastic, Inc., 2003.

Mochizuki, Ken. *Baseball Saved Us*. New York: Lee & Low Books, 1993.

#### go online:

[memory.loc.gov/ammem/aamhtml/aamhome.html](http://memory.loc.gov/ammem/aamhtml/aamhome.html)

[americanhistory.si.edu/perfectunion/experience/jainternment.org](http://americanhistory.si.edu/perfectunion/experience/jainternment.org)

[pbs.org/childofcamp/history/](http://pbs.org/childofcamp/history/)

#### listen to:

Miller, Glenn. *Best of Glenn Miller and His Orchestra*. Castle/Pulse, PLSCD113, 1998.

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