

---

IN RESPONSE TO EXECUTIVE ORDER 9066:  
ALL AMERICANS OF JAPANESE DESCENT  
MUST REPORT TO RELOCATION CENTERS

*Dwight Okita*

*During World War II President Franklin D. Roosevelt signed Executive Order 9066 that mandated people of Japanese ancestry on the West Coast be confined in internment camps. Dwight Okita's parents were among the 120,000 Japanese-American citizens forced to go to such camps. His father was released to fight in Europe with the Japanese-American 442nd Regiment, the most decorated Army brigade in United States history, while Okita's mother remained in the camp. This poem shows how experiences of internment are still vivid for many Japanese-American families.*

DEAR SIRS:  
Of course I'll come. I've packed my galoshes  
and three packets of tomato seeds. Denise calls them  
"love apples." My father says where we're going  
they won't grow.

I am a fourteen-year-old girl with bad spelling  
and a messy room. If it helps any, I will tell you  
I have always felt funny using chopsticks  
and my favorite food is hot dogs.  
My best friend is a white girl named Denise—  
we look at boys together. She sat in front of me  
all through grade school because of our names:  
O'Connor, Ozawa. I know the back of Denise's head very well.  
I tell her she's going bald. She tells me I copy on tests.  
We're best friends.

I saw Denise today in Geography class.  
She was sitting on the other side of the room.  
"You're trying to start a war," she said, "giving secrets away  
to the Enemy, Why can't you keep your big mouth shut?"  
I didn't know what to say.

I gave her a packet of tomato seeds  
and asked her to plant them for me, told her  
when the first tomato ripened  
she'd miss me.

FOR DISCUSSION AND WRITING

1. Why does the speaker in the poem have no response to Denise?
2. Do you think the seeds are an appropriate gift? Why or why not?
3. To whom is this poem written? Is the poem effective in letter form?
4. Do you think that a situation like the Japanese internment could happen today in the United States? Who might be targeted as enemies of the United States? What could you do to prevent such an incident?



*Photographer unknown, Japanese-American Neighborhood, Sienege, California, 1932*