

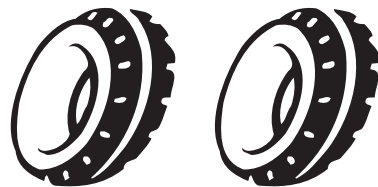
# DISCUSSION GUIDE

*They Called Us Enemy*

by George Takei

BOOK GROUP

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## AUTHOR BIOGRAPHY

George Hosato Takei is an American actor best known for his role in the TV series *Star Trek*, in which he played the helmsman Hikaru Sulu on the USS Enterprise. His baritone earned Takei recurring appearances as the announcer for *The Howard Stern Show* starting on January 9, 2006, after that show's move to satellite radio.

## BOOK SUMMARY

Long before George Takei braved new frontiers in *Star Trek*, he woke up as a four-year-old boy to find his own birth country at war with his father's—and their entire family forced from their home into an uncertain future.

In 1942, at the order of President Franklin D. Roosevelt, every person of Japanese descent on the west coast was rounded up and shipped to one of ten “relocation centers,” hundreds or thousands of miles from home, where they would be held for years under armed guard.

*They Called Us Enemy* is Takei's firsthand account of those years behind barbed wire, the joys and terrors of growing up under legalized racism, his mother's hard choices, his father's faith in democracy, and the way those experiences planted the seeds for his astonishing future.

## DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. What did you know about Japanese American incarceration during World War II before reading the book? What new information or details did you learn?
2. Are there any West Coast locations referenced in the book that are familiar to you? Did you see those places differently?
3. George Takei recounts his experience from the perspective of a small boy. How does that benefit or take away from the narrative?
4. Takei's mother smuggled in a sewing machine to make clothes for her children, even though it was forbidden. What items would you bring?
5. Readers see Takei deal with the trauma of the camps (pages 141–145). He argues with his father and questions the choices his father made during that time. What do you make of the argument? Is Takei's critique of his father fair?
6. How do you think being incarcerated at a young age shapes identity or affects someone as an adult?
7. As a teenager, Takei became curious about the internment camps but couldn't find information in history books. What historical events are tied to your family history? How and when did you learn about them?
8. After Takei's family leaves the camps, he writes that he felt longing for “those barbed-wire fences... to us, that was home.” To you: What makes a home a home?

9. What was the most powerful moment or scene from the book?
10. Takei and his father argue about American democracy (Page 195). What do you think about the following statement by Takei's father: "Despite all that we've experienced, our democracy is still the best in the world because it's a people's democracy."
11. In 1988, President Reagan apologized on behalf of the United States and signed an act granting \$20,000 to each of the surviving 60,000 internees. What are your thoughts? Can we place a price on what was done?
12. Takei has told the story of Japanese American internment camps in different forms during the years. What do you think about his decision to share this story in 2019 as an illustrated graphic memoir? Have you read other graphic novels?
13. How does Takei's story connect with issues going on in the United States today?
14. What will you take away from this story?

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