

When the Emperor was Divine

Julie Otsuka

Reviewed by: Ananya Ganesh, 16

Teen Star Book Reviewer of the Be The Star You Are! Charity

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It's a normal summer day in California, and a housewife works on clearing out her house. She runs errands, cooks, cleans, and does everything as she would in a normal day. But this time, it's different, because that's the last day she'll spend in her house for a while. Tomorrow, she'll be getting on a train with her children. She doesn't know where she's going, but she trusts her government to take care of her.

Though this was a dark story that shows dehumanization and distrust of Japanese people during internment, I found this novel very interesting and hard to put down. It discusses the tragedies of internment, as well as touching on arrests and deportations of Japanese people solely based on the distrust of their race at the time. I really enjoyed the way the author wrote each chapter from a different perspective. This way we can see how different people reacted to internment. It was difficult to read how each character refused to distrust the government as the story progressed and they were forced to live through less humane conditions. I also enjoyed the author's style because we were made to infer each of the character's true feelings based on their actions. The settings wildly contrasted the horrors of internment, which contributed to that idea that the government was going to take care of them.

The book talks about a lot of dark themes, which made some parts hard to read, however, it is important that we understand what happened during this time period and that we acknowledge this particularly dark part of history. 15-18 year olds could handle this book and understand its themes. It is not a particularly enjoyable read, however it is necessary. To history buffs, this book would be interesting and an amazing way to read about a lesser known part of history. This is the kind of book that should be found in every library, accessible to all people.

Recommended Titles

Night — Elie Wiesel

There There — Tommy Orange

The Kite Runner — Khaled Hosseini