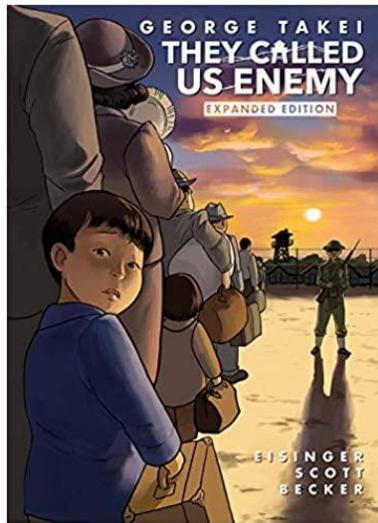


Second Reaction: The Mistreatment of Humans on American Soil

George Takei, Justin Eisinger, Steven Scott. *They Called Us Enemy*. Illustrated by Harmony Becker. Marietta, GA: Top Shelf Productions, 2019. Print.

Kayla J Wiggins



I remember buying a copy of this book as soon as it was published because our local children's museum had a guest lecture with George Takei and also had several books on display. My partner is also an avid comic book and graphic novel reader, so this was easily added to our home library. In light of the recent events of some school boards banning Art Spiegelman's Pulitzer Prize winning graphic novel *Maus*, my partner and I decided that now would be a great time to introduce our child to this aspect of history.

Knowing that a bit of George Takei's childhood was spent in Japanese internment camps on U.S. soil during World War II was enough to motivate me to grab a copy of a book that is geared towards teaching young readers. It is through that lens that I approached my family with this book.

They Called Us Enemy is written and illustrated in the format of a graphic novel. I think this particular format lends itself very well to the story being told, as well as being readily

available to its audience of younger children. My 7-year-old loves graphic novels, and I think the illustrations help in telling the story and depicting emotional content. The illustrations are also in the style of anime, which I loved for its choice to include that aspect of Japanese culture. My first grader read this book in about an hour, so it is easily digestible in a time frame appropriate for elementary age.

I started our discussion by giving him a basic overview of the mistreatment of other human beings during World War II in Germany and how Japan bombing our country created a lot of fear in people. Then we discussed the more specific elements covered in the book, the involuntary internment of Japanese American citizens by our government. He easily sympathized with the protagonist having a difficult childhood in internment camps with little basic amenities and no real toys or books to enjoy. He was mostly shocked that people could be forced out of their homes and that the place they were expected to live did not have a TV.

We talked for a long time about how some people could mistreat other people just because of their ethnic group or country of origin. That seemed to be the topic that was most difficult for him to understand. I still have no good explanation for why some people choose to be so cruel.

With the recent push to gloss over the messier aspects of world history, particularly some parts of the United States history, I think now is the best time to explore history books geared towards teaching children an honest assessment of events. George Takei's autobiography does a great job of introducing elementary age kids to a difficult and complex topic. My first grader enjoyed the storytelling and said he really liked the illustration style. I would recommend this graphic novel to any teacher or family of elementary age kids as an age-appropriate introduction to important historical events. It's both interesting and entertaining.

About the author

Kayla Wiggins (She/Her) holds a bachelor's degree in theater and women's studies from St. Mary-of-the-Woods College. She is also a mom with three kids ranging in age from seven years to seven months. She enjoys knitting and crocheting, gardening, baking, and reading. She is especially proud that her 7-year-old has become an avid reader.