

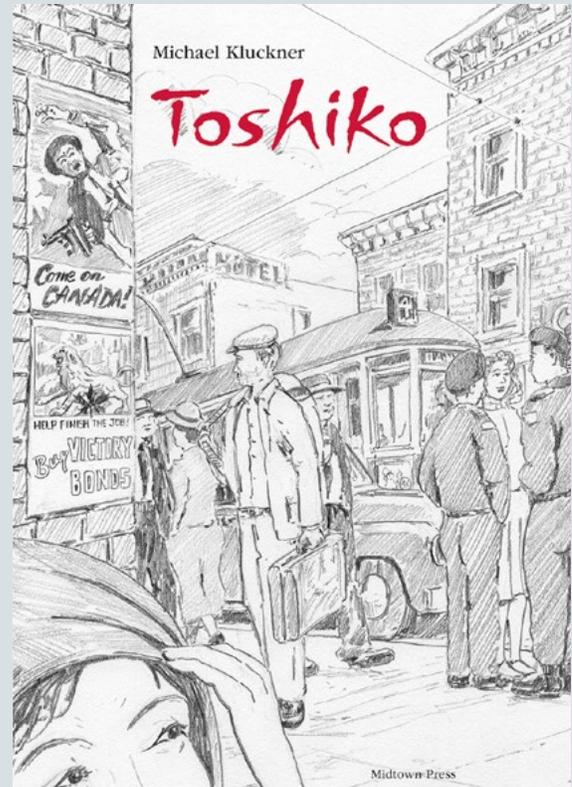
# Toshiko: A Guide for Teachers

By Michael Kluckner

## Recommended for ages 14–15 and up

- There is a review in the BC Books for BC Schools 2015–16 list from the Association of BC Book Publishers in the “Secondary” section.
- A review by Patricia Roy appears in *BC Studies*, 2016.
- Other reviews and a preview are at: [www.michaelkluckner.com/toshiko.html](http://www.michaelkluckner.com/toshiko.html)

This book can provide both an entertaining story of two young people, Toshiko and Cowboy, caught up in the crises of wartime British Columbia, while imprinting on the reader a basic understanding of the history of the period and the issues of human rights and discrimination, something that could recur to some group, some day, in Canada. These themes and links may be useful for a teacher wanting to put together lesson plans around the book.



## Main themes

1. Human rights and racial prejudice, explained through the Japanese-Canadian experience in World War II.
2. History of British Columbia during World War II.
3. The triumph of individual aspirations in a conformist society.

### 1. Human Rights and Racial Prejudice

- “Jap” and “Japtown,” in the early part of the book, are examples of the demeaning language of the period. Hostility toward Japanese Canadians in the small towns of the BC Interior is explored on pages 8 and 18–19, and by Cowboy’s mother and father on pages 23–4 (see fig. 1) and 65–6.
- The forced evacuation of Japanese Canadians from the West Coast, explained in detail in the Historical Note below, and referenced on pages 6–9, 20–1, and 95.

- The confiscation of Japanese-Canadian property, referenced on pages 95 and 101 (fishing boats).
- Identity cards for Japanese Canadians, page 77.
- Different treatment of Chinese Canadians, referenced on pages 36, 69–70, 85 and 94. Chinese were banned from immigrating to Canada from 1923–47, and prior to that had paid a head tax, whereas



Fig. 1

Japanese could immigrate to Canada (with some controls on total numbers) throughout the pre-World War II period.

- Treatment of Aboriginals, pages 76 (see fig. 2) and 87–8.

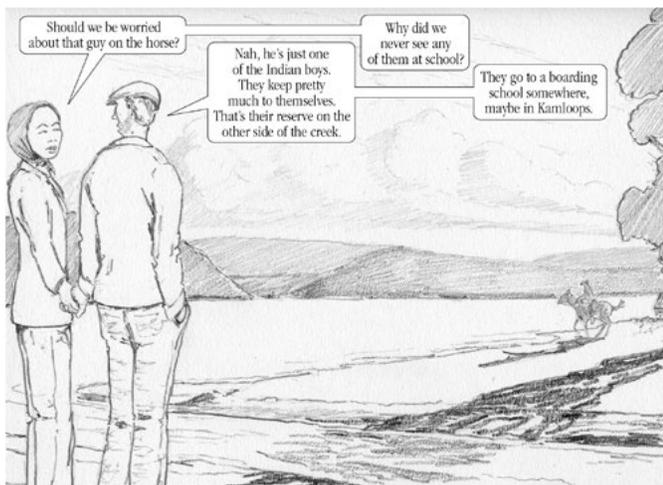


Fig. 2

- The interracial marriage protocol, reclassifying Japanese Canadians as “white” if they married Caucasians, page 70. One estimate is of 100 “mixed marriages” involving Japanese-ancestry people in BC in 1942.
- Post-war exclusion: Toshiko and family move to Toronto due to the policy, in effect until 1949, to keep Japanese Canadians from returning to the West Coast (pages 121–2) (see fig. 3).

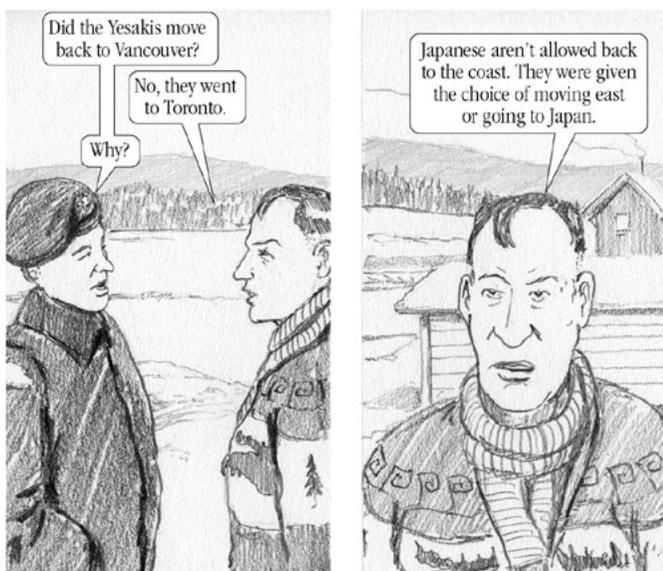


Fig. 3

## 2. History of British Columbia during World War II

- The basics are sketched on pages 7–8; the narrator Cowboy is subject to the National Resources Mobilization Act, but as a farm worker is exempt from conscription. He struggles with the issue on pages 30, 42, 69, 98–100 and 104–5.
- Local reaction to the D-Day invasion of June 6, 1944, pages 40–2.
- Hostility to non-combatants, pages 54–56, including the use of the word “zombie” for soldiers refusing to go overseas, and eventually for all non-military able-bodied.
- Shipyard work in Vancouver, a big wartime industry, on pages 11–12 and 98–9 (see fig. 4).

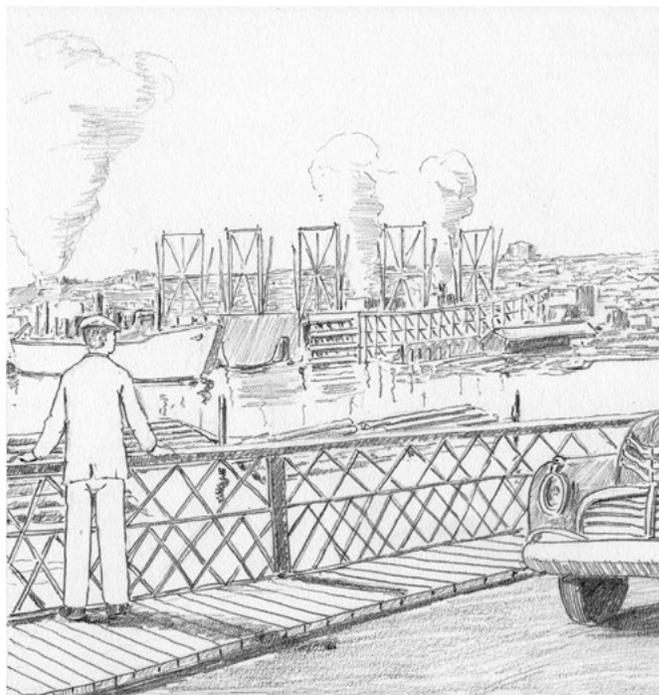


Fig. 4

- The government’s chaotic “home front” response to the war; an on-line source is [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/National\\_Resources\\_Mobilization\\_Act](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/National_Resources_Mobilization_Act)
- The hard-working poverty of BC farm families during the period, explored on pages 9–12 and 119–21.

## 3. Triumph of the Individual

- Three-quarters of the interned Japanese Canadians were born in Canada and exposed to the Canadian

school system; Toshiko and her cousin Fiko are two of them, pages 63 and 77. Toshiko insists that she is Canadian, not Japanese, “trapped by her culture” as she suggests wryly on page 21. The wartime internment is, to her, temporary bad luck, as it is standing in the way of her plan to study literature and become a teacher, pages 29 and 97.

- Toshiko is not a character representing a “victim” archetype. Her middle-class upbringing in Vancouver makes her mildly rebellious, as many young women were in the 1930s and 1940s. She and her family would have been more worldly than the farm families, including Cowboy’s, with whom she interacts in the Salmon Arm area. Post-war, she marries outside her race, following her dreams of teaching literature and her interest in theatre, pages 122–3 (see fig. 5) and 125; Japanese-ancestry people are the most racially intermarried group in North America.

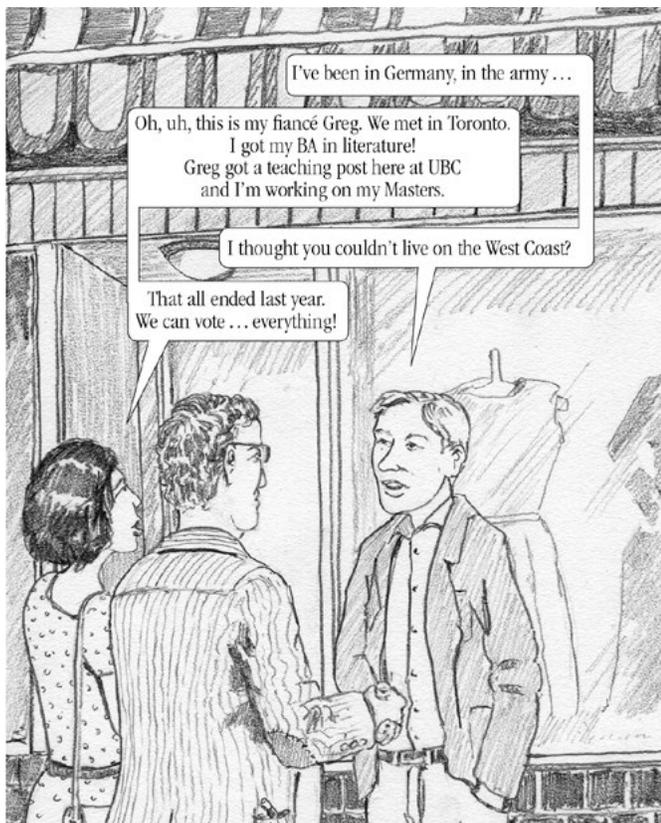


Fig. 5

- Toshiko and Cowboy reflect the general change in personal morality triggered by the stresses of wartime (“Everything’s changed. There’s no going back”) pages 96 and 125. Cowboy gradually realizes

(pages 70, 97, 106, and 122–3) that she won’t marry him (see fig. 6), not because of his race but because she is smarter and more ambitious than he is; when their relationship begins, she is the disadvantaged one due to her race and the wartime regulations, but it is only temporary (pages 31 and 122).



Fig. 6

- Cowboy is part of the post-war migration from rural to urban areas characteristic of North America; he climbs out of his rural background to become the owner of a small garage in the suburbs.

An interview on-line: <https://soundcloud.com/thisislotusland/episode-4-michael-kluckner-and-the-graphic-novel>

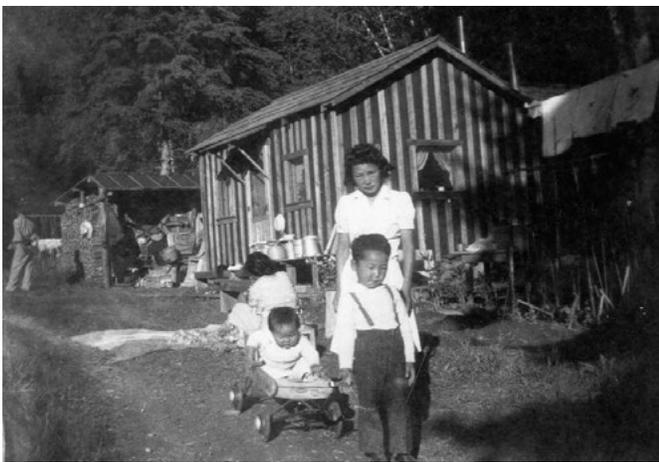
### Historical Note

(Page 127 of *Toshiko*)

Although the attack on Pearl Harbor on December 7, 1941, was the trigger for the removal of Japanese-Canadians from the BC coast, discrimination against them had been increasing for more than 30 years. Following the lead of the American government in 1907, the Canadian government limited Japanese immigration with the Hayashi-Lemieux “Gentlemen’s Agreement” in 1908. As Japan and Great Britain were Allies

at that time, Canada could not act as British Columbia had done with would-be Chinese immigrants, by levying a head tax on them. The federal government resisted BC's desire to halt all Japanese immigration but did pass an act in 1923, alluded to by Toshiko on page 80, that prevented any more Chinese from immigrating. Canada's Chinese and Sikhs were only able to become full citizens and vote beginning in 1947.

Japan's aggressive moves against Korea and China in the 1930s presaged a Pacific war, turning the European battle against Nazi Germany into a world war. The threat from Japan prompted the federal government to order the 22,000 Japanese Canadians in BC to register and carry identity cards with their thumbprint and photo (like Toshiko's, page 77) as of August 12, 1941. Race was the sole criterion, as more than three-quarters of them were born in Canada. As of February 26, 1942, "all persons of Japanese Racial Origin" were ordered to leave the "protected" or "defence" area and reside at least 100 miles from tidewater. On March 4th, an order from the newly created British Columbia Security Commission ordered coastal people to turn over their belongings to the Custodian of Enemy Alien Property.



Fumiko Fukuhara with her young family in 1944 in front of their shack on the Calhoun Farm – the setting for *Toshiko*. Photo courtesy of Kathy Upton.

The story of the internment of the coastal Japanese-Canadian population, initially in Hastings Park in Vancouver in the spring of 1942, is well-known (pages 20–1); 12,000 of them spent the war in the ghost towns and purpose-built towns of BC's Kootenay region, while almost 3,000 were moved to sugar-beet farms in Alberta, Manitoba and Ontario. About 1,750 were



Japanese-Canadian mothers and children at their log cabin near Shuswap Lake during WWII – the setting for *Toshiko*. Photo courtesy of Kathy Upton.

given special permits to live independently, like the family in "Toshiko," which is based on the Nagata extended-family of Mayne Island. During that first year of internment, "depreciable property" such as fishing boats was sold off cheaply (page 101); however, it was generally believed that land and buildings owned by Japanese Canadians were being held by the federal custodian and would be returned following the war, such as the Yesakis' house (page 95). However, in order to preclude the re-establishment of a Japanese population on the West Coast, the authorities got rid of the property at fire sale prices and little if any of the proceeds ever reached the interned owners.

After the war, Japanese Canadians were given the option of "repatriating" to Japan – a country most had never seen, as Fiko suggests on page 63, or resettling "east of the Rockies," alluded to on pages 121 and 122. Japanese Canadians only received full citizenship rights, including the ability to vote and move back to the west coast, on April 1, 1949. Redress for survivors of this scandalous experience – the only forced expulsion of a population since the banishment of the Acadians from Nova Scotia by the British in colonial days – finally occurred in 1988 with a formal apology and compensation from the federal government.

For further information (and possible classroom presentations), contact:

Michael Kluckner  
mkluckner@gmail.com  
(604)251-3353

or Midtown Press  
www.midtownpress.ca



Midtown Press