



## Baseball Saved Us

*Ken Mochizuki , Dom Lee (Illustrator)*

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Shorty and his family, along with thousands of Japanese Americans, are sent to an internment camp after the attack on Pearl Harbor. Fighting the heat and dust of the desert, Shorty and his father decide to build a baseball diamond and form a league in order to boost the spirits of the internees. Shorty quickly learns that he is playing not only to win, but to gain dignity and self-respect as well.

Baseball Saved Us is the ultimate rite of passage story. It will appeal again and again to readers who enjoy cheering for the underdog.

## **Baseball Saved Us Details**

Date : Published March 1st 1993 by Lee & Low Books

ISBN : 9781880000199

Author : Ken Mochizuki , Dom Lee (Illustrator)

Format : Paperback 30 pages

Genre : Historical, Historical Fiction, Childrens, Picture Books, Sports and Games, Sports, Cultural, Baseball

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## From Reader Review Baseball Saved Us for online ebook

### Michael says

Text Set: Social Tragedy

Subject Matter: Interment Camp / Discrimination

Published: 1993

Book 5

This book deals with an often overlooked social tragedy in United States history, the interment of Japanese citizens during WWII.

In *Baseball Saved Us* Ken Mochizuki uses a young boy nicknamed Shorty, because of his size, as a vehicle to show different groups of people were treated poorly during WWII. More than that, though, this is a story of resilience and how triumph is possible in the most difficult and unlikely of times.

The story starts with Shorty and his family being taken to an interment camp. His father explains to him what is going on and the injustice of the situation. After being moved around and squalling in the desert prison Shorty's father decides it is time to build a baseball field. The community rallies around the sport to boost moral and it works. Shorty is not very good but practices to get better. He is oddly motivated by a guard who is constantly watching them from atop his watch tower. In a dramatic scene when Shorty is in a game winning situation he looks at the guard and feels anger, and resolves to hit the ball all the way to the tower. He does, and his team wins the game.

My favorite part of this book is what happens next. He finds himself alone in a school cafeteria dealing with the prejudice towards Japanesees that followed WWII. It would have been easy for Mochizuki to end the book with the home-run, but there was more to this injustice that must be shared. So the story continues and Shorty experiences isolation, racial slurs and mocking by many around him. Then at the end of the story he is again up to bat, facing a game winning situation. The crowd is heckling him but he remembers that guard in the tower and blocks out the noise. Again, Shorty comes up big for his team.

*Baseball Saved Us* shows the reader the difficult time Japanese-American citizen had during and after WWII, but Mochizuki uses baseball as vehicle to show the battle one wages in finding their spot in society. His team is behind him but he still has prove himself to the crowd and ultimately that is who he is trying to show his skills to.

The illustrations by Dom Lee are brilliant and truly bring this book to life. His use of frames and space bring so much more to this book. This text describes the painful reality of this dark moment in American history in a frank, perhaps understated way. This frank approach is necessary because it's a story that is often overlooked, especially when the focus of much of WWII literature is on what happened in Europe. It is an uplifting story of resilience but one that teaches lessons on racism, prejudice, and discrimination.

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### Greg Eyman says

A brief note: This Historical Fiction children's book was listed as "challenged, restricted, removed, or banned in 2006–2007 as reported in the Newsletter on Intellectual Freedom from May 2006 through May

2007."

This story follows a young Japanese-American boy and his family as they make their way in an Internment Camp in the U.S. During WW2. The boy watches as his father organizes members of the camp in order to create a baseball field for the prisoners. Everyone imprisoned in the camp chips in -- uniforms are made from mattress covers, fields are irrigated and bleacher created from cast-off scrap wood. The prisoners gain community and some comfort from this uniquely American game, while, as Americans, they struggle to survive in this terrible situation.

In general, I think this chapter of American History gets forgotten or glossed-over, and it is important that at any age, we continue to teach the truth about our country's past mistakes. On a closer level, this book would be a good companion piece to any discussions concerning bullying. The main character deals with his own peers in the camp teasing him about his short stature, and the teasing ramps up to bullying when he is attending school again after the war. There are many points throughout the story that in a Read-Aloud, a teacher could ask some very difficult but important questions on how we should treat each other. This book could also open up a discussion when a class is creating a Social Contract.

As an added bonus, the way in which the prisoners Engineer a baseball field using the materials available to them could tie into several Engineering Challenges, or introduce the Engineering Design Process itself.

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### **Jessica Meyers says**

I absolutely loved *Baseball Saved Us* by Ken Mochizuki and Dom Lee. I listened to the audio version, narrated by Nate Connelly.

"One day my dad looked out at the endless dessert and decided then and there that he would build a baseball field..."

This story takes place a time when America was at war with Japan. As the dad explains in the story, the government placed Japanese Americans into internment camps because the government assumed they could not be trusted. The Japanese were torn from their homes and thrown in horse stables before moving into camps. The place was small and had no walls, babies screamed at night, and it was freezing at night. People started losing their sanity and became angry and tense. Dad decided to build a baseball field so that the Japanese prisoners could be distracted from their pain and suffering and find some sort of happiness and excitement again!

I would recommend this book for 1st through 6th graders. It is a 3rd grade reading level. Before students read the story, you might want them to discuss one of the following questions as a motivation for reading. Prior to reading, I would teach students about Japanese internment camps. I would explain how the Japanese Americans did not do anything wrong, but they were forced away from their homes. I would ask a "before reading" discussion question, such as "Do you think it was fair the government to take them from their home and make them move far away? How would you feel if this happened to your family?" I would also discuss themes of tolerance and equality.

Awards:

Lee & Low Books Award Winner

Best Multicultural Title - Cuffies Award- Publisher's Weekly

Choices- Cooperative Children's Book Center (CCBC)

Editor's Choice- San Francisco Chronicle

Not Just for Children Anymore Selection- Children's Book Council

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### **Lindsay says**

I read this book during an undergraduate children's literature class and have always thought it was a really great story. The illustrations are powerful and play a big part in the telling of Mochizuki's story, which is actually based on his own parents experiences in a Japanese internment camp. An activity that really turned me on to this story was the "in their shoes" activity where the students take on the role of a story character and answer questions asked by their peer audience. The challenge is that the students have to think like their character and answer as that person might actually answer. The audience is just as engaged because they are challenged to come up with questions that might stump the actors and also bring up issues and ideas from the story.

I also enjoy way the illustrations occupy each page in a different way. Some illustrations are a full page with a white border, others are a series of three illustrations separated by the same thick white border, and even others cover both pages of a two page spread, but are slightly off balance. When I first read this book I thought the illustrations were some kind of Japanese woodblock print due to the scratched surface and lack of detail. However, after I looked further into it I found that the illustrator actually created these rough images by applying encaustic beeswax onto paper, then scratching out images, and adding oil paint for color. This technique definitely added a somber tone, which went well with the story.

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### **Ashley Rhodes says**

Genre: Historical Fiction

Grade Levels: 2-5

Special Notes: Challenged Book (New Milford, Conn. Schools, 2006); Published in 1993 (this book is my one exception to the contemporary rule!)

"Baseball Saved Us" is a great book to read to children when discussing Pearl Harbor. We often neglect to look at how Japanese-Americans were affected by this event. In this story, a Japanese American child was living in a Japanese internment camp because what had happened at Pearl Harbor. He described the conditions and hardships faced at the camp. As an escape, the people in the camp worked together to build a baseball field. It was neat to see how the characters used baseball as a way to escape what was going on. It was very upsetting when the child was released from the camp and still called names by his peers, who did not look like him.

This book allows for us to get a first hand look into how Japanese Americans were treated and how they might have felt as others looked down upon them and felt as they were a danger just because of the way they looked. Written from the perspective of a child, I think it allows students to easily imagine what it would have been like to be the kid in the internment camp. Students can further relate to the book because of baseball (or sports in general.) Students see that no matter your ethnicity/situations, you may have more in common than you think. I think it is very important as a teacher to teach from many different perspectives

and this book gives an awesome way to do that. This book also introduces the idea of treating everyone the way we want to be treated. If we are playing sports and do not want to be called names, we shouldn't call others names.

This is a challenged book because of the few racial slurs when characters use "Jap" as a taunt. For example, they say "The Jap's no good!" Because the book itself is not promoting that language use and is actually showing how it is hurtful, I do not believe that the book should be challenged or banned. It truly shows what might have been said during the time of tension after Pearl Harbor, and I think it is important for students to learn about the realities of that. I think this book also opens up the discussion of why books are challenged/banned and if students think it should be banned or not.

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### **Irene says**

I was excited to see a picture book about the Japanese internment. On the one hand, I am thrilled that there is a book at this level that addresses this topic, but on the other hand, the story felt disconnected, and I didn't feel it had a clear message.

The book starts with a short paragraph introducing the Japanese internment. It sets just a little bit of context, enough for young audiences.

The opening scene is from within the internment camp. At first the book is like a non-fiction presentation of Japanese internment camps. Being narrated in the first person by a Japanese-American boy, there are glimpses into the past that show how the narrator felt different and picked on in school, before being sent to the camp. Even though he's just a boy, I didn't quite like how he happened to be smaller than all his classmates, and not very good at sports, perpetuating the "emasculated Asian man" stereotype.

At one point, there is a scene in which the narrator's older brother shockingly talks back to his father. This moment is meant to be the catalyst for the creation of the baseball field, but the connection isn't explained, and the story feels disjointed.

Just as the story starts to get into how everyone in the camp is getting into baseball, it suddenly jumps to after the war. The narrator is back to playing baseball with his white teammates, and the events of a particular game parallel a dramatic game he played inside the camp. There is a climactic moment - and then the book ends. I didn't get a good sense of closure.

I did appreciate the sepia-toned illustrations. I thought the images of the barren desert, long lines outside of barracks, barbed-wire fences, and armed guards were poignant and accurate depictions of Japanese internment camps.

I also think any young baseball fan would really enjoy this book. It's perhaps less of a book about Japanese-Americans playing baseball in internment camps, and more about a Japanese-American boy who learned to play baseball while in an internment camp, which later on helped him to fit in better with his white classmates.

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### **Alex (not a dude) Baugh says**

When *Baseball Saved Us* was published 25 years ago, it was described by reviewers as being about an important but neglected part of American history. Well, times have changed and more books for children about the internment of Japanese Americans during WWII have been written about this shameful period in our country's history. Yet, *Baseball Saved Us* is as important a book today as it was when it was first published.

The story is told in the first person by a young boy in an unnamed internment camp, whose father has decided to make a baseball field in the desert where the camp is located to give people something to do. Not particularly excited about that, the boy recalls that in school before being order to leave his home with his family, he was never picked to play on any sports teams when the other kids were choosing sides because of he was so much shorter and smaller than the other kids.

Everyone pulls together and soon the baseball field is finished, mattress ticking is turned into uniforms, teams are forms and it's time to play ball. Playing on one of these teams is easier for the boy because the other kids were pretty much the same size, but it didn't really help his game much.

During one game, he notices that the soldier in the guardhouse is watching him. Taking a few practice swings, the boy puts all his resentment and anger into his next swing, and sure enough, he made his first home run.

After the war, when the Japanese Americans who were held in internment camps are finally released and allowed to return home, the narrator finds himself once again alone at school. But when baseball season comes around, this time he proves himself a pretty good player, earning the nickname "Shorty." At a game, when it's his turn at bat, Shorty can hear the crowd screaming and calling him names. Thinking about the guard in the watchtower and how he took his anger out on the bat, Shorty once again calls on the feeling as the crowd jeers him and putting it all into his swing, sends the ball over the fence, saving the day for his team.

Of course, this isn't really a story about baseball, but it is one about racism and offers a constructive way of dealing with feelings of anger and resentment, while gaining a sense of dignity and self-respect. It's interesting that the narrator has no name until the boys at school after the war give him a nickname. It's as though he had lost his identity until he began believing in himself.

*Baseball Saved Us* is not just a good story with an important message. It is also a good book for introducing the whole history of Japanese American internment to young readers without overwhelming them. In the course of the story, Shorty says that he was taken out of school by his parents one day, and that his family soon found themselves living in horse stalls before moving to the camp in the desert, where they were subjected to dust storms and sand everywhere. He also points out that people were forced to live in barracks without walls, to wait in line to eat or to use the bathroom, where there was no privacy. His older brother ate with his friends, but soon was refusing to do what his parents requested - a big problem with older kids in the internment camps. This offers a wonderful opportunity to expand on how people perceived to be an enemy of the United States can be treated so badly.

Supporting Shorty's narration and done in somber shades of brown and tan with splashes of color, Dom Lee's realistically detailed illustrations really bring this story, that has its roots in the author's parent's internment experiences, to life.

This is a book that many kids will find resonates in today's world even though it was written 25 years ago about the racism and prejudice that was so prevalent in WWII more than 70 years ago.

This book is recommended for readers age 7+

This book was borrowed from the NYPL

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### **Luisa Knight says**

Definitely not a shining moment for America; but it is something that needs to be remembered so that it never happens again.

Ages: 7 - 12

Cleanliness: the word "Jap" is used twice. A boy gets angry and disrespectful to his dad.

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### **Breanna Jones says**

Baseball Saved Us by Ken Mochizuki was written about how the main character Shorty and his family were sent away to internment camp after the attack on Pearl Harbor. During their time at the camp Shorty and his dad decided to create a baseball field, with the help of other people at the camps. This allowed them time to do something they wanted, and distracted them from life at the camp. "Baseball Saved Us" helps tell the story of life before, during and after the time at the camp while showing the negatives of the camp.

Throughout Shorty's time playing baseball, he was always thought to be the little guy who was not very good. Overtime, Shorty was motivated to play really well because of the guard that was always watching him. After camp, Shorty was being made fun of at school because he was being called "Jap," which he knew was rude from his classmates. Towards the end he was playing baseball and everyone thought that he was not going to do well, but he hit a homerun to help win the game. This proves how perseverance can help you get through tough situations in life, and help prove who you are to other people.

This book is often controversial because it includes some touchy subjects that many teachers do not want to elaborate on if they do not need to. In Baseball Saved Us, there are many different topics that many teachers do not know how to deal with. It is often not their place, to talk about racism and the history of the Japanese internment camps after Pearl Harbor, and is often overlooked in classrooms.

I think that I would use this book in my classroom because it shows a different story of life post Pearl Harbor, that also show determination and perseverance. Throughout the book, Shorty was always the underdog but continued to show his strong will to win the game as well as determination through the tough battles of bullying. This book would be a beneficial book to introduce students to WWII, and the internment camps that are too often overlooked. I think that students would be able to connect to this story because of the baseball aspect and how Baseball Saved Us is from a child's perspective.

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## Patty says

Reading Level: Intermediate

This book describes how baseball helped the Japanese who were in internment camps during World War II find meaning and worth during their struggle.

This book is a wonderful asset to the Social Studies curriculum. It allows students to see that different groups of people were treated poorly during World War II. It also shows students that everyone can achieve great things no matter what their race is.

The illustrations also allow children to notice that the characters could be anyone. The facial features are not very distinct. The textures of the drawings also enhance the setting -- the camps were in deserts.

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## Valerie says

Summary/A Thoughtful Review:

*Baseball Saved Us*, appropriate for upper elementary readers, tells the story of a young boy's experience while imprisoned in the Japanese internment camps in the early 1940s. The illustrations and text work together in beautiful harmony as they create images of the dismal, desolate, conditions of this "camp" in the American desert. A place with "dry, cracked dirt," dust storms blowing sand everywhere, public bathroom facilities, and the small, wall-less barracks where "babies cried at night and kept [everyone:] up," all fenced in by barbed-wire fences and armed soldiers to make sure everyone stayed there. As a reader, you are taken to this unpleasant residence through the eyes of a young Japanese boy as you follow his experiences and journey of emotions. It begins with his confusion as he asks his father, "why are we here" and his disbelief as cultural and family dynamics have changed at "camp" (elders sitting/standing around, children disrespecting parents). We experience the intense desperation and depression of these Japanese American prisoners, until the young boy's father proposes a change: baseball! The entire community of prisoners finds a new purpose and sense of hopefulness as they build the field and bleachers, sew uniforms, and practice/play together! Through practice and determination, baseball helps the boy to find courage and true skill within himself. Ken Mochizuki draws an interesting parallel between the game of baseball and that of life as we experience this boy's struggle to be a part of the "team" (both baseball and society) and find a "position" where he feels confident and successful. Through his emotional journey of confusion, pain, hopefulness, and determination, we see this young boy find his true strength within himself. What a deep message! It is also interesting to read about this unpleasant time in American history, as it is not commonplace in textbooks or historical fiction works. Mochizuki, again, does a dynamite job drawing readers into this time period, however uncomfortable it may be.

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## Gary Anderson says

I'm forever amazed at the number of poignant stories swirling around the great game of baseball. Has any other game ever provided as many life lessons? *Baseball Saved Us* involves a Japanese-American boy whose

family is part of the internment camp program during World War II. As he becomes aware of the hatred aimed at him and his race, he channels his emotions into baseball.

This picture book is an excellent choice for helping young readers better understand many topics and issues: prejudice, World War II, governmental mistakes, emotional self-control, etc. *Baseball Saved Us* would work well for a read-aloud, book group discussion, or stand-alone text.

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### **Vianey Sanchez says**

Baseball Saved Us by Ken Mochizuki

Genre: Historical Fiction

Interest level: Grades 3-5

Guided reading: O

Lexile level: 550L

Main Characters: "Shorty"

POV:

Summary: This is the story of a boy who describes his time in a Japanese internment camp in the United States during World War II. He talks about how boring it was in the camp and one day, the adults and kids decided to make a baseball field in the dirt to help pass the time. It took a while, but when they were done, they would play. The boy wasn't very good at baseball and frequently struck out which caused the other kids to make fun of him. One day he came up to bat at a crucial time in the game, he was down to his last strike when he saw an American soldier looking over the camp and watching the game, which made him mad. That energy helped him swing as hard as he could and win the game for his team. After he was out of the internment camp, he faced the same situation in another baseball game. He was made fun of again, but this time for being Japanese. The book ends with him hitting a homerun and winning the game for his team.

Classroom use: This is a great story because it uses the point of view of a child during a difficult time in history. I think kids would be able to connect with since it's from a boy's point of view and incorporates baseball, something they're familiar with. Despite this book's interest level, I would use it as part of an introduction to a unit on World War II for older students. Japanese internment camps in the United States is an aspect that is frequently looked over, since it's such a shameful time for the country. I think this book would bring a focus to that time and the experiences of innocent people in our own country and how we treated them out of fear. Also, this book can serve as a way to bring about the equally important Pacific side of the war since the European side is what is often focused on when World War II comes up.

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### **Josedelacruz says**

My favorite part of the book "Baseball Saved Us" was when the Japanese people were in the camp playing baseball and were clowning on the player and then he proved that he was good at playing baseball. This book is about the Japanese war. The Japanese people were being sent to concentration camps because they were not trusted because they thought that they were gunna be connections to the Japanese soldiers.

Well I think that this book should be like for 2nd- 4th graders because in my prospective I think it will show them how you can always move forward and ignore most of all of the bad comments that are being said about them.

I think that a parent would want to choose this book for their child because it will show their son/daughter how life is going to be while there growing up. The theme of this book is that even if you're different from others you can still be someone in life.

Well what I mostly enjoyed about this book is that the boy never gave up even though people were talking about him and saying bad thing to him he got to believe in himself and move ahead.

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### **Courtney Ennis says**

In this picture book, a boy named Shorty is one of the main characters. He is given that nickname because of his size. They year takes place in 1942 during World War II. Shorty and his family are sent to an internment camp after the Japanese attack Pearl Harbor. During the camp, Shorty and his father decide to have the whole camp build a baseball diamond and form a league. They make uniforms and find equipment that will work. His father believed that people needed to take their mind off of the current situation and find something to do. It was a good distraction for everybody. One day during the game Shorty got mad about being a prisoner and got so mad that it gave him the motivation to hit a game winning home run. The war soon ends and he is able to return home. He continues to play baseball and channels his anger towards what happened to them through baseball.

I liked this book because it had a lot off good aspects in it. I liked how it talked about the war and what happened to the Japanese people. I thought it was a great way to teach about the internment camp and why they did what they did. I also liked how they used baseball as a distraction. This is a sport that a lot of fathers and sons can relate to because they play it so much. They were able to act normally even when there are bad things surrounding them. It is a very inspiring story and I think kids should really read it. It teaches kid about the history and gives them a good story to go with it. I also thought the illustrations were good and kept the book interesting. I would definitely recommend this to other people.

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