

Farewell to Manzanar Excerpt
Jeanne Wakatsuki Houston

In her book *Farewell to Manzanar*, Jeanne Wakatsuki Houston tells the story of what it was like to be a Japanese American in California during the 1940s. Jeanne was born in California in 1934, the youngest child of parents who had immigrated to the United States from Japan. In 1945, she started sixth grade in a new school.

That afternoon, during a reading lesson, [the teacher] finally asked me if I'd care to try a page out loud. I had not yet opened my mouth, except to smile. When I stood up, everyone turned to watch. Any kid entering a new class wants, first of all, to be liked. This was uppermost in my mind. I smiled wider, then began to read. I made no mistakes. When I finished, a pretty blond girl in front of me said, quite innocently, "Gee, I didn't know you could speak English." She was genuinely amazed. I was stunned. How could this have even been in doubt?