

**ADJUSTING**

## In Minidoka

I ordered a pair of white  
majorette boots  
with tassels from  
Montgomery Ward  
and swaggered in  
ankle deep dust.

Mitsuye Yamada

1976

Excerpt from the poem

“Minidoka, Idaho”

MITSUYE YAMADA/SHAMELESS HUSSY PRESS



“So when it rained, that dust became a quagmire of cocoa-like ...and you were knee-deep in mud. But not the kind of mud that you see where you step into it and get a pile of dirt, it was so thin that it was, you could walk through it, you don’t have to lift your feet up out of the, that mud, and it was miserable, but [I] stayed out of the mud as much as possible.”

George Morihoro

1942

DENSHŌ/GEORGE MORIHIRO COLLECTION





## "Rain"

Student Essay by Dante Tahara,  
Core II class, 1943

His essay describes the terrible Idaho rains but ends with a ray of hope as the author sees a rainbow emerge from the clouds.

DENSHŌ/HELEN AMERMAN MANNING COLLECTION

Dante Tahara  
Core II.

### Rain.

The black hovering clouds indicated rain— heavy rain. The day appeared like night; darker and darker it got. Then suddenly, like water poured from buckets, one can see the rain come. Down, down, faster, faster it came until like a waterfall it fell. It doesn't rain in Idaho! No, not much. If you don't call that rain, what do you? Then, a part in the cloud, the sun peeks out, illuminating a gigantic rainbow which people look in awe. Rain, there's always a good and bad part of things after all.



“And then we had ice, you know, snow, because the winters were real cold. And in those days, women did not wear pants we just had these skirts that came up to my knees, and bobby socks. Oh, my father used to have a fit, but we were young and we could take all that. So we’d go outside and play with our friends and I’d come in and he’d get mad, and he’d just rub me, he said, ‘Baka no koto’.”

Tekako Yokoyama Todo

Age 15 in 1942

“Baka no koto” translates to  
fool’s play

DENSHŌ/TAKEKO YOKOYAMA TODO  
COLLECTION





“...Well, when you’re that young, you’re  
having fun with all our friends.”

Tekako Yokoyama Todo  
Age 15 in 1942

DENSHŌ/TAKEKO YOKOYAMA TODO  
COLLECTION





**Kenjiro Nomura** captured life at Minidoka through his artwork. He worked as a sign painter in camp, lettering restrooms, showers, buildings, and garbage cans. He quietly painted the camp scenes while in the sign shop. He returned to Seattle after the war but did not pursue art as a career. Despite never intending to show his paintings, he still became nationally and internationally known.

Kenjiro Nomura, ca. 1943-44

TACOMA ART MUSEUM





“Tire Tracks in Snow”  
Kenjiro Nomura, ca 1943-44

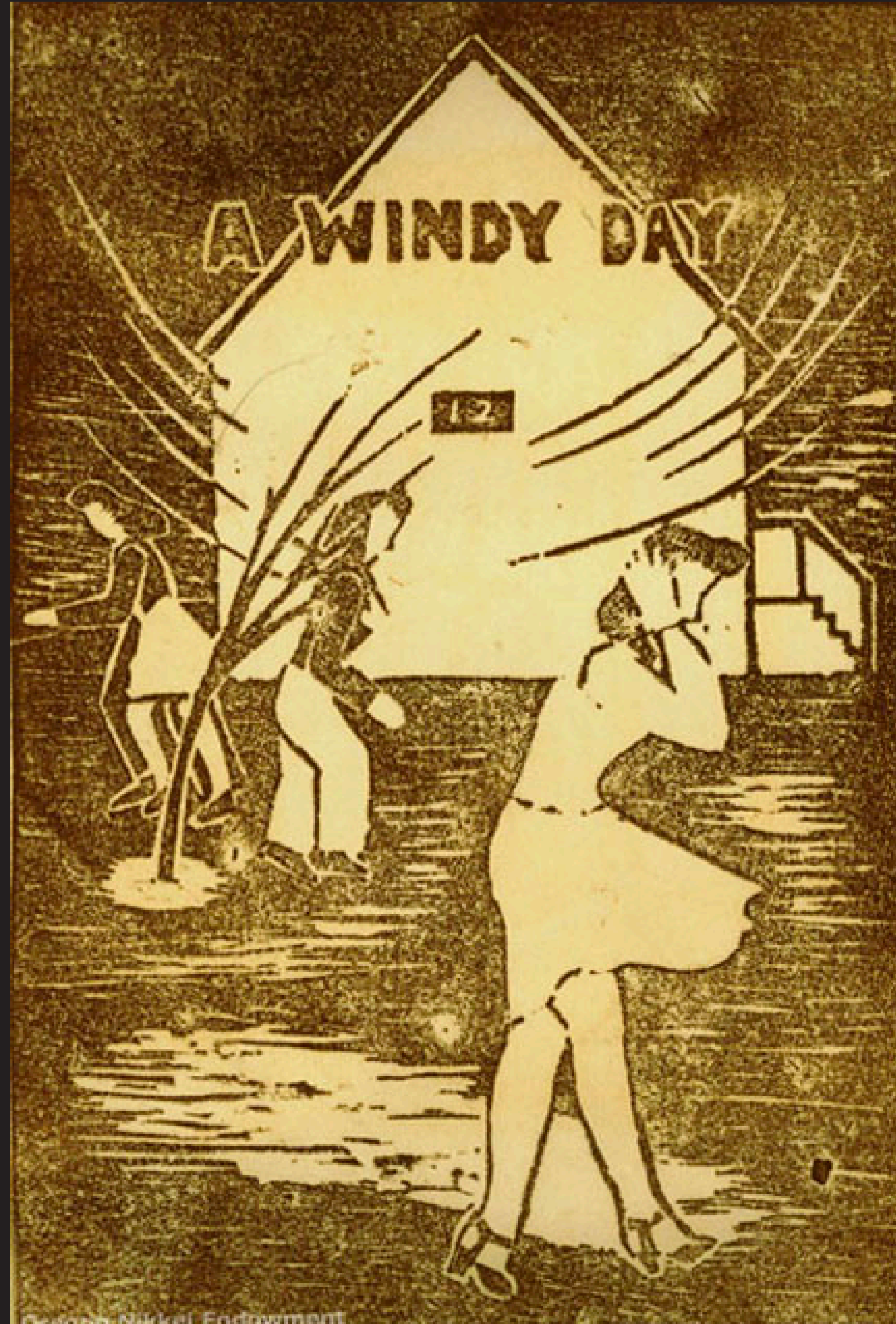
TACOMA ART MUSEUM





Blinding dust storms and layers of white dust everywhere stands out in the minds of many as their first impression on Minidoka that they never got used to.

Stripping the desert floor of its sagebrush cover to build the camp released layers of fine sand. Hot summer winds and continual construction activity kicked up swirling clouds of dust.



Block print by a student of Fumi Hairguchi Kato, Hunt High School, ca 1943.

OREGON NIKKEI ENDOWMENT/FUMI HARIGUCHI KATO  
COLLECTION



“...if you got caught out there  
when the wind blew, walk  
through the dust storm, you’d  
age in fifteen minutes. Your hair  
would turn white like the dust.”

Henry Sakamoto

Teenager in September 1942

DENSHŌ/HENRY SAKAMOTO C  
OLLECTION



Block print by a student of Fumi  
Hariguchi Kato, Hunt High School,  
ca. 1943.

OREGON NIKKEI ENDOWMENT/FUMI HARIGUCHI KATO  
COLLECTION



Residents described bitter cold nights and how the stoves were in constant use during the winter to keep the apartments warm. A coal shortage in late 1942, made the situation awful as people struggled to stay warm. Some Issei women searched the camp to collect pieces of coal. In December, Takajo Abe froze to death when he became disoriented while collecting wood outside.

OREGON NIKKEI ENDOWMENT





Guard towers and barbed wire fences were installed after occupation of the camp, incensing the incarcerated. Eventually, concessions were made to ease access to the fields beyond the fence and increased privacy.

A guard tower and fence at Minidoka are depicted in this water color by Takuichi Fujii, ca. 1943

COURTESY/SANDY AND TERRY KITA





“... but what I know is that my father and mother never made any objections about what they were forced to do. I mean they, I don’t remember their complaining...mostly their attitude was ‘shikata ga nai.’ And we gotta do what they tell us to do. But that’s [a] very Issei mental attitude.”

Ruby Inouye

1942

“*shikata ga nai*” translates to  
it can’t be helped

DENSHŌ/RUBY INOUE COLLECTION



The following excerpts are from a 1943 WRA report about the fence and guard towers. The author's insights offer a very different picture of Minidoka than what the WRA press releases reported.

### The Fence

“The fence was constructed during the first weeks of November, 1942, fully three months after the residents had entered the camp. The sudden appearance of the fence was greatly resented by the residents.”

“The fence immediately became a symbol of their confinement for the residents. The Nisei especially felt this. With a barbed wire fence surrounding them, they could only feel that the ‘Relocation Camp’ had become a ‘Concentration Camp.’ ”

“The resentment almost immediately evidenced itself in protests. Vocal protests were loud and long and covert acts against the fence followed closely. The wire was cut and fence posts uprooted. This cutting of the fence was in part due to the policy of the contractor in putting in the fence without allowing for roads and playground areas. As a result, the residents found themselves encircled by practically impenetrable fence.”



## Electrification of the Fence

“The electrification of the fence by the contractor created a furor that could easily have led to a major incident. On November 12, the contractor became so incensed by the continual sabotage of the fence by the residents that an electric generator was hooked up and the fence charged. This was done without the knowledge or consent of either Army or WRA authorities... With the Army’s cooperation, the electrification was discontinued. While the charged fence was only in operation a few hours, the news of this new development spread like a prairie fire and wild rumors circulated throughout the camp.”

“The barbed wire fence has become a symbol of forced confinement. The removal of portions of the fence in April, 1943 was occasion of deep satisfaction for the workers involved. It is reported that never on the project was a job attacked so willingly. It may be significant to note that the residents believe the fence in these areas to be permanently out. As one resident phrased it, “there will be a revolution if the fence is put back in again.”...The bitter feeling about the fence runs through the entire resident group from children in school to the oldest Issei. It crops out in school children’s themes, in art work, in letters written by the residents.

Everywhere the feeling is found that the fence has and will have a deep psychological effect on the younger people.”



## The Guard Towers

“The attitude of the residents towards the watchtowers is the same as toward the fence. When these sentry towers were first being built, feelings against them ran high. Vividly implanted in the memory of the residents’ minds are the sentry towers of the assembly centers with the guards, searchlights and mounted machine guns. Probably no other single factor has had as serious effect on the resident’s morals as the erection of the guard towers. The residents were told that these towers were to be used as fire lookouts. The local military police authorities announced that the M.P. sentries would be under strict orders not to throw searchlights into the center area. This did little or nothing to counteract the

feeling of being treated as criminals. Much of this resentment against the watchtowers was later relieved by the fact that the towers have never been used. However, as a symbol they carry the same weight as the fence – perhaps even more. The barbed wire fence can only be seen at certain points. The sentry towers are always silhouetted in the distance. It is not enough that they are not being used – to the residents they stand waiting for the day when they will be used. The eight sentry towers are ever present as a symbol of their confinement.”