

A CONVERSATION WITH THE ARTIST

FELICIA HOSHINO

Q: What do you like about illustrating children's books?

A: The most enjoyable part is creating a believable environment for the characters. I strive to make each spread as interesting and distinct as I can from page to page by playing with perspective, and by using foreground and background elements to create depth.

Q: What made illustrating *A Place Where Sunflowers Grow* different from your other projects?

A: The experience I had while illustrating this book differed not so much in terms of the style or process, but in my personal connection to the story. The Japanese American internment is part of my own

“The Japanese American internment is part of my own family's history.”

family's history. My father, Ed Arikawa, was just two months old when he, his two older siblings, and my grandparents, Minoru and Chizuko Arikawa were forced to leave everything they knew. They were interned at the Poston Relocation

Camp in Arizona, where they lived for three years until the end of the war. Although my mother, Alice, was born after the war, her parents Teruji and Dorothy Umino and her older brother were relocated to Idaho, to the Minidoka Internment Camp.

Q: What resources did you use to create the art for *A Place Where Sunflowers Grow*?

A: My family actually had a “yearbook”-like booklet entitled *Mobaveland*, which contained snapshots of internees at the Poston Relocation Camp. I also did a lot of research at the public library and on websites such as the Smithsonian's National Museum of American History “A More Perfect Union.” Living in San Francisco, I was able to visit the National Japanese American Historical Society, where they let me examine their collection of photographs on internment camp life. Other books I found extremely helpful were collections of artists' work from when they were interned, such as *Peaceful Painter*:

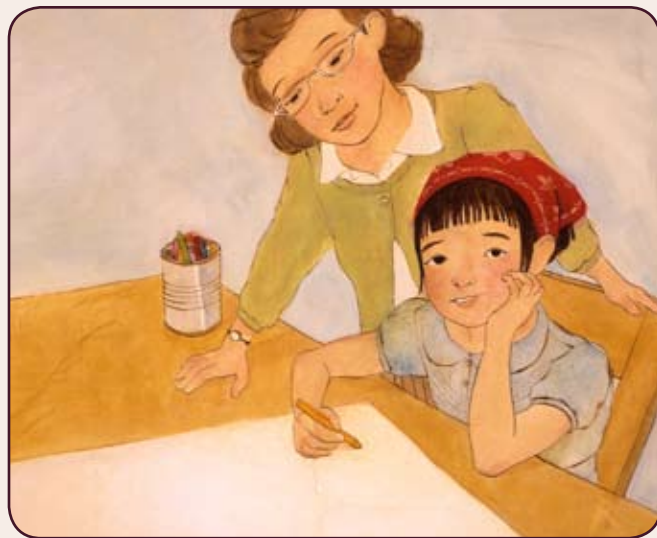
Hisako Hibi, Topaz Moon: Chiura Obata's Art of the Internment, and *The Children of Topaz*. But the most inspiring resources came from the author's mother, Ibuki Hibi Lee, who kindly lent me photo albums of her own mother's (Hisako Hibi's) artwork, as well as a collection of actual sketches.

Q: The characters are so expressive and Mari's emotions are very tangible. How were you able to capture so much?

A: Once the thumbnail sketches were approved, a young friend of mine was a perfect model for most of Mari's poses and expressions. Even her mother was a sport, and at times stepped in to pose for me.

Q: What did you take away from this project?

A: After researching and learning more about internment life, and most especially about the art schools, I was so inspired by Hisako Hibi and others like her who continued to express themselves despite their extremely difficult and oppressive surroundings. Mari was able to turn to art during a time when justifiable emotions of confusion, uncertainty, sadness, anger and helplessness could have overwhelmed her. I am so grateful for the opportunity to practice and share my art, and hopefully it will inspire others.



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