**When the Emperor was Divine**

**Comprehension questions**

**Page 106-end**

**1.** After the family is released from the camp, how do they regard themselves? How does America regard them? In what ways have they been damaged by their internment?

**2.** When they are at last reunited with their father, the family doesn't know how to react. "Because the man who stood there before us was not our father. He was somebody else, a stranger who had been sent back in our father's place" [p. 132]. Why do they regard him as a stranger? How has he been changed by his experience? In what ways does this reunion underscore the tragedy of America's decision to imprison Japanese Americans during the war?

**3.** After the father returns home, he never once discusses the years he'd been away, and his children don't ask. "We didn't want to know. . . . All we wanted to do, now that we were back in the world, was forget" [p. 133]. Why do the children feel this way? Why would their father remain silent about such an important experience? In what ways does the novel fight against this desire to forget?

**4.** The mother is denied work because being a Japanese American might "upset the other employees" or offend the customers. She turns down a job working in a dark back room of a department store because she is afraid she "might accidentally remember who I was and . . . offend *myself*" [pp. 128–129]. What does this statement reveal about her character? What strengths does she exhibit throughout her ordeal?

**5.** Flowers appear throughout the novel. When one of the prisoners is shot by a guard, a witness believes the man had been reaching through the fence to pluck a flower [see p. 101]. And the penultimate chapter ends with the following sentence: "But we never stopped believing that somewhere out there, in some stranger's backyard, our mother's rosebush was blossoming madly, wildly, pressing one perfect red flower after another out into the late afternoon light" [p. 139]. What symbolic value do the flowers have in this final passage? What does this open-ended conclusion suggest about the relationship between the family and the "strangers" they live among?

**6.** **When the Emperor Was Divine** concludes with a chapter titled "Confession." Who is speaking in this final chapter? Is the speech ironic? Why has Otsuka chosen to end the novel in this way? What does the confession imply about our ability to separate out the "enemy," the "other," in our midst?