

Teacher's Guide



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Barbed Wire Between Us

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Published by Red Comet Press

About The Book

Barbed Wire Between Us is a spare, powerful picture book that uses a reverso poem—the same lines read forward and backward—to illuminate how history can repeat itself. Set at Fort Sill, Oklahoma, the story draws a haunting parallel between the incarceration of Japanese Americans during World War II and the more recent detention of immigrant children at the same site. Through lyrical text and evocative illustrations, the book explores unjust imprisonment, family separation, resilience, community care, and the enduring hope that light can return even after great darkness.

Before Reading

Setting Context (Teacher Support):

This book addresses difficult historical and contemporary realities. Consider letting students know that the story explores real events in U.S. history and invites reflection, empathy, and discussion. Emphasize that questions and feelings are welcome.

Invite students to connect their own personal family traditions with larger historical and cultural narratives.

Discussion Starters

- What does the word **belonging** mean?
- What does it feel like to be separated from people you love?
- Why is it important to learn about history—even when it is painful?

Vocabulary Preview

- **Internment**—the confinement or detention of people, often during wartime, without criminal charges
- **Detention**—being held in custody
- **Injustice**—unfair treatment
- **Resilience**—the ability to endure and recover
- **Reverso poem**—a poem that tells two different stories when read forward and backward

Genre: Juvenile
Nonfiction / Asian-
American History / Latino-
American History / Poetry

Interest Level:

Ages 8-12
Grades 3-7

Guided Reading: N

Themes:

Injustice and civil liberties
/ Immigration and
Incarceration / Family
Separation and Resilience
/ Kindness and
Community Care /
Historical Parallels





During Reading and Guiding Questions

Read the book slowly, allowing time to study the illustrations and the repetition of language.

- What details show how life was difficult behind barbed wire?
- How do the illustrations change as the poem is read in reverse?
- What moments of kindness do you notice in the story?
- How does knowing this is a real place affect your understanding of the book?

Invite students to notice how some words take on different meanings depending on context.



After Reading

- Who are the two groups of people represented in the story?
- What experiences do they share, even though they lived in different times?
- How does the reverse poem structure reinforce the book's message?
- What does the story suggest about hope and change?

History & Social Studies Connection

Explain that Fort Sill served multiple roles over time, including:

- A World War II incarceration site that held for Japanese Americans and Japanese nationals during the war.
- A detention center for immigrant children decades later
- A prison for Geronimo and nearly 500 Chiricahua Apaches in the 19th and early 20th centuries

Discuss:

- How governments make decisions during times of fear
- Why protecting civil rights matters
- How learning from history can help prevent harm in the future

Language Arts Focus

Exploring the Reverso Poem:

- Reread the text forward and backward.
- Identify lines that change meaning when reversed.
- Discuss why the author chose this structure.

Writing Activity

Have students write a short poem or paragraph that can be read in two ways:

- One meaning hopeful
- One meaning challenging

Younger students may dictate ideas or work collaboratively.



Social-Emotional Learning

The story invites reflection on empathy and courage.

Discuss:

- How characters show strength in difficult conditions
- Ways people help one another during hardship
- How students can stand up for fairness and kindness in their own communities

Art & Visual Literacy Activity

Invite students to:

- Create an illustration showing the same scene in two different moods (dark/light, fear/hope).
- Use color, perspective, and symbols to communicate emotion.

Connect this to how the illustrations shift throughout the book.

Extension Activities

- **Timeline:** Create a simple timeline comparing the two historical moments in the book.
- **Research:** Learn about Japanese American internment during World War II.
- **Discussion Circle:** Talk about what justice and fairness look like today.

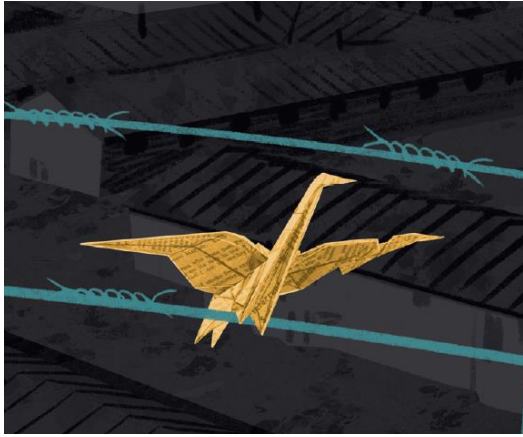
Common Core Connections

Reading Literature

- **CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.3.1–5.1:** Ask and answer questions to demonstrate understanding of a text, referring explicitly to details and examples.
- **CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.3.2–5.2:** Determine themes, central messages, and lessons conveyed through details in the text.
- **CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.3.4–5.4:** Determine the meaning of words and phrases as they are used in a text, including figurative and poetic language.
- **CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.3.5–5.5:** Explain how the structure of a poem contributes to meaning and effect.
- **CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.4.7–5.7:** Analyze how visual elements contribute to tone, meaning, and beauty in a text.

Reading Informational Text

- **CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RI.3.3–5.3:** Explain relationships among historical events, ideas, or concepts.
- **CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RI.3.6–5.6:** Distinguish point of view and consider how perspectives influence understanding of events.
- **CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RI.4.9–5.9:** Integrate information from multiple texts on the same topic to speak or write knowledgeably.



Common Core Connections continued . . .

Writing

- **CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.W.3.3–5.3:** Write narratives that develop real or imagined experiences.
- **CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.W.3.4–5.4:** Produce clear and coherent writing appropriate to task and audience.
- **CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.W.3.7–5.7:** Conduct short research projects to build knowledge about a topic.
- **CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.W.3.8–5.8:** Gather information from print and digital sources and summarize findings.
- **CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.W.4.9–5.9:** Draw evidence from literary and informational texts to support analysis and reflection.

Speaking and Listening

- **CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.SL.3.1–5.1:** Engage effectively in collaborative discussions with diverse partners.
- **CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.SL.3.4–5.4:** Report on a topic or text, recount experiences, and present ideas clearly.
- **CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.SL.4.5–5.5:** Include visual displays and multimedia components to enhance presentations.

Language

- **CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.L.3.4–5.4:** Determine or clarify the meaning of unknown and multiple-meaning words and phrases.
- **CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.L.3.5–5.5:** Demonstrate understanding of figurative language and nuances in word meanings.

Social Studies Connections (C3 Framework)

- **D2.His.1.3-5:** Create and use chronological reasoning to explain historical events.
- **D2.His.4.3-5:** Explain why individuals and groups differed in their perspectives during historical events.
- **D2.Civ.4.3-5:** Explain how groups and institutions work to protect individual rights and promote the common good.
- **D2.Civ.12.3-5:** Explain how rules and laws can support or limit freedom, equality, and justice.



Additional Resources

1) **Barbed Wire Between Us** original song and music video:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=8wZieLAYEXA>

2) **Free Online Geography Game to View Japanese Internment Sites** matched with **Children's Books:**

<https://www.pragmaticmom.com/2025/10/fortune-cookies-for-everyone-geography-game/>

3) **How to Fold an Origami Crane** Video:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=gwZ4mGhL6Nw>

Also, diagram here:

<https://www.pragmaticmom.com/2026/05/how-to-fold-an-origami-crane-activity-for-barbed-wire-between-us/>

4) **Reverso Poem Picture Book List:**

<https://www.pragmaticmom.com/2026/04/5-reverso-poem-picture-books-5-signed-barbed-wire-between-us-giveaway/>

5) **Origami Crane Children's Book List:**

<https://www.pragmaticmom.com/2026/05/11-childrens-books-featuring-origami-cranes-5-signed-book-giveaway-of-barbed-wire-between-us/>

6) **Interview with Unbreakable Author and Barbed Wire Between Us Author in Publishers Weekly:**

<https://www.pragmaticmom.com/2026/05/unbroken-and-barbed-wire-between-us-interview-in-publisher-weekly/>

7) **Q and A Interview with Violeta Encarnación**

<https://www.pragmaticmom.com/2025/11/meet-illustrator-violeta-encarnacion/>

8) **IG Live Read Your World Interview with Violeta Encarnación:**

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=T6BDiKhbU2k>

