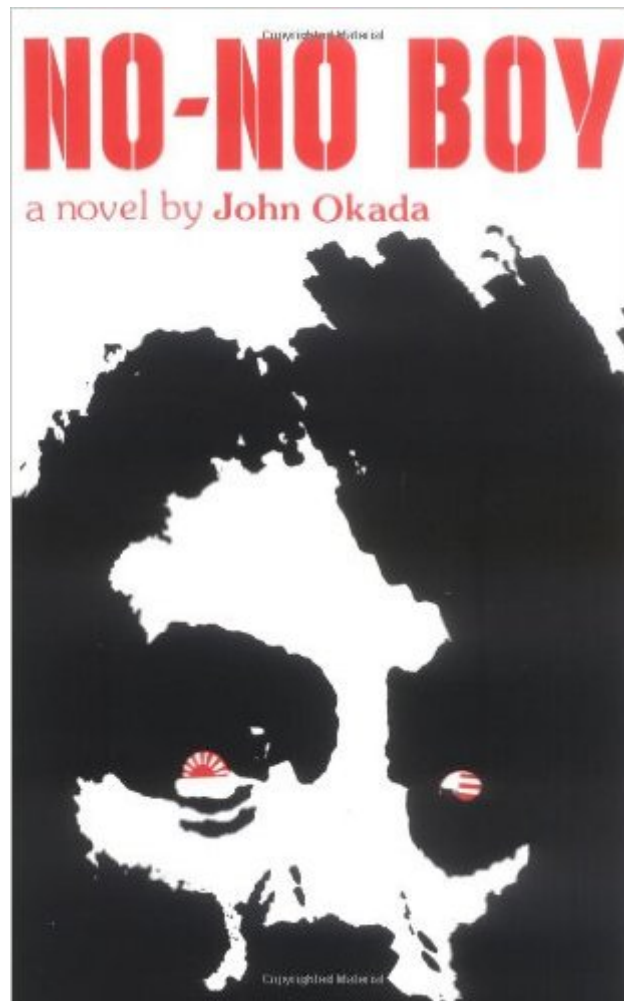


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# No-No Boy (Classics Of Asian American Literature)



## Synopsis

"No-No Boy has the honor of being the very first Japanese American novel," writes novelist Ruth Ozeki in her new foreword to John Okada's classic of Asian American literature. First published in 1956, No-No Boy was virtually ignored by a public eager to put World War II and the Japanese internment behind them. It was not until the mid-1970s that a new generation of Japanese American writers and scholars recognized the novel's importance and popularized it as one of literature's most powerful testaments to the Asian American experience. No-No Boy tells the story of Ichiro Yamada, a fictional version of the real-life "no-no boys." Yamada answered "no" twice in a compulsory government questionnaire as to whether he would serve in the armed forces and swear loyalty to the United States. Unwilling to pledge himself to the country that interned him and his family, Ichiro earns two years in prison and the hostility of his family and community when he returns home to Seattle. As Ozeki writes, Ichiro's "obsessive, tormented" voice subverts Japanese postwar "model-minority" stereotypes, showing a fractured community and one man's "threnody of guilt, rage, and blame as he tries to negotiate his reentry into a shattered world." The first edition of No-No Boy since 1979 presents this important work to new generations of readers.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

In my AP English Literature class, I had a choice of reading any novel of "literary merit" I wanted, and to complete a 25 page analysis of the novel. Of the four books I analyzed in this way this year,

No-No Boy was by far my favorite. I am caucasian, yet have always been interested in the dark side of America's role in World War II - the Japanese internment camps. This book is a vivid portrayal of one young man's suffering due to his decision not to swear loyalty to a country that had forsaken his rights as a citizen, and the consequences that result from this decision. Okada deals with a very touchy subject in this novel, for both the white and Japanese-American communities. Ichiro's self-inflicted punishment helps the reader to realize just how awful this experience was for the real No-no boys. This realistic portrayal is rather ironic, since Okada himself chose to serve the United States loyally in the army during World War II. Perhaps this novel was written from the side of him that related more to his Japanese roots than to his newfound American identity, and the guilt he himself must have carried when serving in the Pacific, telling Japanese to surrender in their own language. Okada also deals with a seemingly untouchable issue - that of the discrimination the Japanese-Americans themselves practiced toward other U.S. citizens, although they faced discrimination themselves. This adds to the truthfulness of the novel. Perhaps the only disappointing aspect to the novel is the all-American, happy ending that seems a little too contrived, although it must have been necessary for Okada to write the novel this way in order to gain any readers, because the novel's subject was so controversial at the time it was written. This novel should be taught in high schools and universities across the country, in American literature courses, and not just Asian-American literature courses. Now, multicultural education movements have succeeded in gaining the teaching of more women and African-American writers' novel, but Asian-American literature has still been neglected. The tolerance and understanding that students will gain from reading this novel should be evident immediately after one has read No-No Boy, even though the novel is enjoyable and is hardly preachy-sounding.

It is sad that John Okada wrote only one novel in his life, but it gives me great joy just to mention this book to anyone. *No-No Boy* is a novel that deals with the high emotions of those felt by Japanese Americans during the tumultuous times of the second world war. It is a time when American citizens are incarcerated into "relocation centers" without any wrong doing except that their last names were Okada, Sone, and Ikeda. However, as John Okada traces the story of Kenji, a nisei who refused to answer yes to the loyalty questionnaire, we do not feel any strong bitterness about the whole situation that could be all too common in such a text. This touching novel is ultimately about one's search for a home, for loyalty, and for acceptance into society. These themes, while prevalent in many Japanese American texts written about this time period, are universal and can be shared by anyone who has ever felt the pangs of loneliness associated with being an outcast. If anyone is

interested in reading more about fiction, good fiction on these issues, there is no book I could recommend more highly than this one. John Okada's book is the ultimate in Asian American literature and should be required reading for all those who want to read more about American history and American literature

Ichiro, the main character in John Okada's novel, "The No-No Boy", is put in a very unusual situation - because of his past decisions a lot of his peers do not accept him as Japanese or American. John Okada does a brilliant job of getting the reader to empathize with the Ichiro's struggle to find direction after being held in an internment camp (jail) for two years. His mother is happy he made the decision to refuse service in the United States Army, his brother believes him a coward, and his father has turned to whiskey for comfort from the constant tug-o-war created by war. He has friends who have sacrificed more than he, but are satisfied with his decision to not go to war, and he has friends who never tasted true battle but despise him for not doing so. At times, I was getting bored with Ichiro's constant whining about his predicament, but Okada did a good job of easing up the saga when it was almost too much and then bringing it back when necessary. It must have been difficult to try and live in a country that believed you had to prove your loyalty because people who looked like you had attacked your nation of birth. This novel does a good job of making one think about the struggles Japanese-American went through before, during, and after the war. Okada manages to create dialogue that is not so predictable it becomes a too easy of a read. He keeps the characters in this novel above the routine writing style of most authors. This book is easy to read, thought-provoking, and contains enough fictional and non-fictional information to make for an entertaining novel. See ya next review!

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