

Incoming Juniors!

You have a huge, important year coming up! For the summer, I'm giving you a novel that is short in duration (only 129 pages! You're welcome!), but heavy in content.

The book is Julie Otsuka's 2011 novella, *Buddha in the Attic*. First and foremost, you are welcome to purchase your own copy, get it from the library, or you can stop in before the end of school and sign one out from me.

Please read through all of these instructions closely.

You will have a choice of three different responses to write. Those are articulated in the following pages.

\*\*\*a word about content. Otsuka writes realistically, but not gratuitously. There are a number of difficult scenes in the text. There are depictions of violence, sex, and, although not graphic, references to rape. These things represent the true experiences of "Picture Brides", but may be upsetting for some readers.

**Work will be submitted on Google Classroom within the first week of school. You will have the option to turn it in prior to the start of school as well.**

**We'll start with some background, taken from**

<https://wams.nyhistory.org/modernizing-america/xenophobia-and-racism/picture-brides-and-japanese-immigration/#>.

The 1907 Gentleman's Agreement between the United States and Japan severely limited the entry of Japanese immigrants into America. However, the federal government made an exception for the Japanese wives of current American residents. The Japanese American community, which was mostly young single men, saw this as an opportunity. If a man married a woman who was in Japan, he could bring his new wife into the country legally. Matchmakers established a system where men reviewed pictures of single women seeking husbands in America. After a choice was made, the woman could set sail for America. These women, known as "**picture brides**," made up the vast majority of Japanese immigrants between 1907 and 1924. By 1920, over 10,000 picture brides had arrived in the United States, and over 15,000 arrived in the then-territory of Hawaii. Picture brides played a crucial role in establishing the Japanese American community.

For many Japanese women, becoming a picture bride was a chance not only to fulfill the traditional obligation of marriage, but also to escape a life of poverty. But they did so at a great risk. Most picture brides did not speak or read English. Many were shocked when their new husbands were much older and poorer than they anticipated. Most picture brides worked for pay because their husbands did not make enough money to support two people, let alone any future children. Many of these women were also lured into unsafe environments, including abusive marriages or forced prostitution. Because anti-Asian sentiment was widespread at this time, many of them also faced racial discrimination throughout their lives.



*This image was taken at an immigration station in San Francisco, California, called Angel Island. The government officials (who are all white men) are reviewing the passports of newly arrived picture brides. After passing such a review, brides met their husbands for the first time and participated in a group wedding on the dock or at a nearby location. Holding an immediate wedding guaranteed the marriages and the women's arrival were legal. By 1924, Japan stopped issuing passports to picture brides, which reassured the United States of Japan's commitment to controlling immigration and closed the door to many would-be immigrants.*

### **What Are You Doing?**

As previously mentioned, you will have a choice between three different types of responses. Two choices are full, longform essays. The third will be detailed but shorter responses to the following questions.

Whichever one you choose, you should first read through the questions below and focus your reading, note taking, etc... on those items. You are strongly encouraged not to decide on a topic until you have read the book, but be sure to read over the topic choices first.

**Option 1:** Answer each of the following in responses no shorter than four sentences. Use direct quotes/references to the text in at least four of them.

#### **Things to pay attention to:**

1. POV: *The Buddha in the Attic* is narrated in the first person plural, i.e., told from the point of view of a group of women rather than an individual. Why? How does it impact the reading?
2. Title: Why is the novel called *The Buddha in the Attic*? To what does the title refer?
3. What are the women's expectations about America? What are their fears? Why are they convinced that "it was better to marry a stranger in America than grow old with a farmer from the village"?
4. Discuss Otsuka's use of italics in the novel. What are these shifts in typography meant to connote? How do they add to our knowledge of the women as individuals?
5. Otsuka tells us that the last words spoken by the women's mothers still ring in their ears: "*You will see: women are weak, but mothers are strong.*" What does this mean, and how does the novel bear this out?
6. What are the women's lives like in these early months in America? How do their experiences and challenges differ from what they had been led to expect? How are they perceived by their husbands? By their employers? Discuss the disparity between the women's understanding of their role in the American economy and what Otsuka suggests is the American perception of the Japanese women's power.

7. How is the structure of the penultimate section, called “Last Day,” different from the structure of all the sections that precede it? Why do you think Otsuka chose to set it apart?

**Option 2:** (four-five well written paragraphs)

Read the article by Bhira Backus, [“A Sikh Temple’s Century”](#). Backus’ article looks at another minority experience in California, and is also written in response to a mass killing of American Sikhs living in Wisconsin. Compare and contrast Backus’ observations to Otsuka’s in *The Buddha in the Attic*. Has America’s approach towards immigrant culture changed in the last 100 years? Why or why not?

**Option 3:** (four-five well written paragraphs)

[Elizabeth Day’s review](#) describes *The Buddha in the Attic* as “half poetry, half narration – short phrases, sparse description, so that the current of emotion running through each chapter is made more resonant by her restraint.” Do you agree or disagree with Day’s praise? Support your argument with evidence from the text.

**Expectations:**

You have all been with me for a year. You understand the expectations. Format, font, quotes, citations, works cited, spacing, heading and headers, etc.. are all to be correct according to MLA specifications. As juniors, you are past the point of making formatting errors, leaving things out, or just guessing how things should look. If you underline or quote the title of a novel instead of italicizing, it will no longer be just a warning. If you have a quote of more than four lines of text (and you probably shouldn’t), and you don’t have it in block quotation format, it will no longer be just a warning. Etc, etc...

If you need a reminder on how MLA formatting looks, consult this source.

[Owl Purdue](#)