



### Buck Suzuki

**Film Summary:** The subject of this film is Tatsuro "Buck" Suzuki, a fisher and early environmentalist on the Fraser River in British Columbia who also played a key role in the return of interned Japanese Canadians to the coast after the Second World War.

#### Curriculum Application:

Social Studies 10 and  
Social Justice 12

#### The Essential Question:

To understand how the Japanese Canadian community faced increasing racism prior to the war and what challenges they faced reintegrating back into the workforce and society.

### Summary of the Lesson Activities

1. Focus questions for the vignette provides a short lesson option. (15 Minutes)
2. Small group activity/discussion to better understand the racism faced by Japanese Canadians and the impact it had on their lives.
3. Activities to better understand the role that unions and labour organization provide for activism in social justice and environmental issues.
4. A podcast listening/research activity is provided in this lesson.

### Learning Standards

1. Assess how prevailing conditions and the actions of individuals or groups affect events, decisions, or developments (cause and consequence)
2. Explain and infer different perspectives on past or present people, places, issues, or events by considering prevailing norms, values, worldviews, and beliefs (perspective)
3. Recognize implicit and explicit ethical judgments in a variety of sources (ethical judgment)
4. Make reasoned ethical judgments about actions in the past and present, and assess appropriate ways to remember and respond (ethical judgment)

### Materials and Resources Provided

- [“Buck Suzuki” Working People – A History of Labour in British Columbia](#)
- Lesson Activity 1: Background and discussion questions.
- Lesson Activity 2: Using podcasts as research information

### Additional Suggested Materials

- [The Fishermen’s Strike of 1900](#)
- [Nikkei National Museum & Cultural Centre \(Internment Teacher’s guide](#)
- [Swimming Upstream: Japanese Canadian Struggle for Justice in BC](#) (video)
- [JapaneseCanadianHistory.net](#)
- <http://www.bucksuzuki.org/about-us/t-buck-suzuki/>
- [On the Line: A History of the British Columbia Labour a Labour Movement pages 117-119](#) password required for online version from your library

### Vignette Questions

1. What kept Japanese Canadian fishers from joining a union in the early years of the 20<sup>th</sup> century?
2. What event in 1941 ended Buck Suzuki’s attempts to harmonize the races in a United Fishermen’s Union?
3. How did the Canadian Government treat Japanese Canadians when war broke out with Japan?
4. How did Buck Suzuki demonstrate his Canadian patriotism during the Second World War?
5. In order to create a full union including Japanese Canadian fishers what pledge did they have to take with the UFU?
6. How can Buck Suzuki be considered an environmentalist for his work in the Salmon industry?

### Lesson Activities

1. Students may need a brief discussion as to why the lesson plan and student materials refer to “fishers” and the vignette yet to fishermen.
2. Students can read the brief biography (Lesson Activity 1) prior to the viewing of the vignette, Buck Suzuki and then proceed to the discussion questions contained in the lesson activity individually or in small groups.
3. In Lesson Activity 2, students can listen to all or selected passages of the podcast Episode 24, Tatsuro Buck Suzuki: Community advocate, union activist, environmentalist found at the [BC Labour Heritage Centre](#).
4. For further enrichment on the topic of the contributions of the Japanese Canadian population to the development of British Columbia have the students explore “Lesson 1: Emigration, Settlement and Aspiration” in the secondary teaching resources found on the [Landscapes of Injustice](#) website. *Note: There are additional teaching ideas on the Internment as well as lessons specifically for a Grade 5 classroom.*
5. Students can explore the foundation of the [T.Buck Suzuki Environmental Foundation](#) that was created after his death in 1977 to protect Salmon habitats along the BC coast and report back to the class on the notable achievements and struggles the organization has had to protect the integrity of the Salmon Fishing industry in British Columbia.

bctf/ufcw1518

Credit: Teaching Activities and Lesson Plan developed by Scott Parker and Wayne Axford

## Lesson Activity 1

## Lesson: Buck Suzuki

### Backgrounder

“Buck” Suzuki, a Japanese Canadian fisher, was an early environmental activist. Born on a float house on Don Island in the Fraser River, Suzuki began commercial fishing with his father on the river during the 1920s. In an era of institutionalized racism, Suzuki promoted cooperation between Japanese and non-Asian fishers to promote a non-racist union and an environmentally sustainable fishery.

The outbreak of the war against Japan Dec. 7, 1941 unleashed an ugly episode in Canadian history. 20,00 Japanese Canadians were interned in concentration camps: their houses,



cars and fishing boats confiscated and sold. “Buck” was arrested and sent east to a concentration camp. After the war and his release, he continued his environmental and social justice work.

Japanese-Canadian fishing boats seized at Annieville dike on the Fraser River-c1942  
BCA-C 07293- BC Archives

Eventually, he was prominent in the entry of Japanese Canadian fishers, as equals, into the



United Fisherman’s Union. Throughout his life, Suzuki was devoted to the preservation of fish habitat and frequently spoke out against the dumping of sewage and industrial waste into the Fraser River. He was a passionate advocate for the protection of the river. Also, he was a founding member of the Society Promoting Environmental Cooperation (SPEC) and was active in the Pacific Salmon Society. Buck died far too young, in 1977 he was just 67.

Japanese Canadian Fisherman whose boat has just been confiscated-1941- LAC-PA-134097- Library and Archives

## Working People: A History of Labour in BC

---

After watching the vignette; Buck Suzuki Working People A history of British Columbia answer the following questions. Further research on the topic may be required

1. Is there a difference between institutionalized racism and “just” racism?
2. Do you agree with the use of the term, “ugly episode” in the short biography
3. Why are Canadian unions today some of the strongest voices against racism and for environmental protection?
4. **Topic for further research:** Investigate other leaders from marginalized groups of British Columbians who were advocates for their communities and leaders in environmental or social justice causes in their communities

### Lesson Activity 2

#### **Activity: Using podcasts as research information**

You will find the podcast for this activity at [Podcast - Working People Built BC \(labourheritagecentre.ca\)](https://labourheritagecentre.ca/podcast-working-people-built-bc). Scan the list for Episode 24, Tatsuro Buck Suzuki: Community advocate, union activist, environmentalist

Note to the Teacher: A transcript of the interview is found at the end of the list of the Podcast episodes. The questions that follow can be used in whole or in part with your students. To assist in finding the segment of the podcast relating to the questions, a note with the time signature for that question is found at the end of the question. Also note that in creating the transcription of the original interview some words cannot be accurately deciphered.

From the introduction to the podcast.

“We celebrate the life of Tatsuro 'Buck' Suzuki, who spent his life advocating for the West Coast fishing community, first as a young liaison between Japanese Canadians and an industry dominated by Whites, then as a strong trade unionist, and finally, as an early environmental activist, fighting to protect salmon habitat.

Included are recordings of Buck Suzuki made by the City of Richmond Archives in the 1970s, a few years before he died. We also spoke with Lorene Oikawa. Her father was Buck's cousin, yet she called him 'Uncle Buck'. Oikawa has carried on his legacy of trade unionism and social activism.”

For more information: [T. Buck Suzuki Foundation](#)

Questions:

1. What weakened the position of the Japanese Fishers in establishing themselves as strong advocates for the Salmon fishing industry? (2:52-6:42)
2. How did the creation of the Pacific Coast Fishermen's Union counter influence of the B.C. Fishermen's Protective Association? (6:59)
3. According to Buck Suzuki what power and influence did the Cannery companies have over the Japanese Canadian fishers? (08:23)
4. Why did Buck Suzuki sell his fishing boat? (11:40)
5. How was Buck Suzuki able to work around the prohibition of Japanese Canadians returning to the coast after the Second World War? (17:44)
6. Investigate further the role that Homer Stevens of the United Fishermen and Allied Workers Union played in the organization of unionized fishers in the years following the second world war. (24:00)
7. How does Lorene Oikawa account for Buck Suzuki's involvement in the environmental protection of the salmon habitat? (29:00)