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 on institutionalized racism Suzuki promoted cooperation between Japanese and non-Asian fishers to promote a non-racist union and a environmental 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 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 interned-1941- LAC-PA-134097- Library and Archives Canada

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. Are there any similarities between the lives of other social/political activists and Buck Suzuki?
5. Investigate the essential question of the vignette: In small groups prepare a presentation to the class on
   1. How did the Japanese Canadian community face increasing racism prior to the war?
   2. What challenges did they face reintegrating back into the workforce and society?
   3. What actions did the Canadian government initiate in 1988 to address the Internment of the Japanese Canadians.
   4. Did the Canadian government’s 1988 apology for the Internment of the Japanese Canadians fully address the injustices of the previous action?