

**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:

How did the Japanese Canadian community face increasing racism prior to the war and what challenges did they face 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.

Learning Standards

1. To be able to describe the consequences of social injustice based on race and ethnicity. (**cause and consequence**)
2. To analyze the role of individual citizens in promoting social justice in Canada. (**significance**)
3. To understand how Japanese internment impacted lives during and after the Second World War. (**continuity and change**)
4. To be aware of how individuals can provide leadership as agent for change in such matters as environmental policy. (**significance**)

Materials and Resources Provided

- [“Buck Suzuki” Episode 3- Working People – A History of Labour in British Columbia](#)
- Lesson Activity 1: Backgrounder and discussion questions.

Additional Suggested Materials

- [The Fishermen’s Strike of 1900](#)
- [Nikkei National Museum & cultural centre](#)
- [JapaneseCanadianHistory.net](#)
- <http://www.bucksuzuki.org/about-us/t-buck-suzuki/>
- <http://gulfofgeorgiacannery.org/learn/resources>
- On the Line: A History of the British Columbia Labour Movement pages 117-119

Vignette Questions

1. What kept Japanese Canadian fishers from joining a union in the early years of the 20th 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. The teacher may wish to create an extended activity around the Essential Question of the Vignette exercise. Question 5 of the Lesson Activity provides 4 possible inquiries into this investigation.

Credit: Teaching Activities and Lesson Plan developed by Scott Parker

Working People: A History of Labour in BC

Lesson Activity 1

Lesson: Buck Suzuki

Background

"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 a 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 Anniesville 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

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. 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
 - a. How did the Japanese Canadian community face increasing racism prior to the war?
 - b. What challenges did they face reintegrating back into the workforce and society?
 - c. What actions did the Canadian government initiate in 1988 to address the Internment of the Japanese Canadians.
 - d. Did the Canadian government’s 1988 apology for the Internment of the Japanese Canadians fully address the injustices of the previous action?