



MEDIA RELEASE

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NEA Big Read Comes to Highline College Community Invited to Attend Free Events

DES MOINES, Wash. — Starting this month, the Highline College community will participate in the [National Endowment for the Arts' \(NEA\) Big Read](#), a reading initiative that's in partnership with the King County Library System and Seattle Pacific University.

This “community literacy endeavor” provides students an opportunity to read and discuss a book that matters to Pacific Northwest history and culture. This year, that book is “When the Emperor Was Divine” by Julie Otsuka.

To kick off Highline’s series of three events, a panel discussion on local Japanese American internment, and how it relates to today, is set to take place Monday, Jan. 27. The panel will be made up of Rachel Endo, author of *The Incarceration of Japanese Americans in the 1940s: Literature for the High School Classroom*; Sarah Mattox, composer of “Heart Mountain Opera” (an opera based on Japanese American internee writing and poetry); Bill Woodward, SPU professor emeritus of history; and former Highline faculty member Mira Shimabukuro, author of “Relocating Authority: Japanese Americans Writing to Redress Mass Incarceration.”

Then, in February, a book discussion on “When the Emperor was Divine” is planned before Otsuka visits Highline in March to do a reading and answer questions about her New York Times bestseller.

Otsuka’s book “is an accessible and engaging novel that humanizes the experience of Japanese American internment by the U.S. government during World War II,” Highline College Reference Librarian Karen Fernandez said. “Topics in the book resonate with current events.”

Thanks to the Highline College Foundation, 50 free copies of “When the Emperor was Divine” will be available for students at the Library beginning Jan. 21.

In cooperation with SPU and the King County Library System, Highline College helped secure a \$15,000 grant for NEA Big Read: King County, specifically to bring Otsuka to the greater Seattle area. It is the first time Highline will host a Big Read author event.

In past years, Highline has hosted two Big Read book discussions. Both were in conjunction with Asian Pacific American Heritage month in May 2013 and 2018, and both were a success, according to Fernandez.

“This grant is a wonderful opportunity to partner with other local colleges, public libraries and community organizations,” Fernandez said, noting Highline’s strong commitment to equity, diversity and inclusion. “... One of our core themes is ‘integrate and institutionalize diversity and globalism throughout the college.’”

[View NEA Big Read Events at Highline College](#)

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Links within this release:

- <https://www.arts.gov/national-initiatives/nea-big-read>
- <https://library.highline.edu/c.php?g=943816&p=6803260>

Founded in 1961 as the first community college in King County, Highline College annually serves more than 16,500 students. With over 70 percent students of color, Highline is the most diverse higher education institution in the state. The college offers a wide range of academic transfer, professional-technical education, basic skills and applied bachelor’s degree programs. Alumni include former Seattle Mayor Norm Rice, entrepreneur Junki Yoshida and former Washington state poet laureate Sam Green.