My Internment Experience

The poem below illustrates a real life experience from Slocan camp survivor and Japanese-Canadian, Joy Kogawa. Read the poem below and imagine that you are also a Japanese-Canadian during the time of internment in Canada.

Task: Write a one paragraph response on what your personal experiences and feelings would be like as a young boy or girl during this time.

What Do I remember of the Evacuation
by Joy Kogawa, in A Choice of Dreams,
McClelland and Stewart Limited, 1974, pp. 54-55

What do I remember of the evacuation?
I remember my father telling Tim and me
About the mountains and the train
And the excitement of going on a trip.
What do I remember of the evacuation:
I remember my mother wrapping
A blanket around me and my
Pretending to fall asleep so she would be happy
Though I was so excited I couldn’t sleep
(I hear there were people herded
Into the Hastings Park like cattle.
Families were made to move in two hours
Abandoning everything, leaving pets
And possessions at gun point.
I hear families were broken up
Men were forced to work. I heard
It whispered late at night
That there was suffering) and
I missed my dolls.

What do I remember of the evacuation?

I remember Miss Foster and Miss Tucker
   Who still live in Vancouver
   And who did what they could
   And loved the children and who gave me
   A puzzle to play with on the train.
   And I remember the mountains and I was
   Six years old and I swear I saw a giant
   Gulliver of Gulliver’s Travels scanning the horizon
   And when I told my mother she believed it too
   And I remember how careful my parents were
   Not to bruise us with bitterness
   And I remember the puzzle of Lorraine Life
   Who said “Don’t insult me” when I
   Proudly wrote my name in Japanese
   And time flew the Union Jack
   When the war was over but Lorraine
   And my friends spat on us anyway
   And I prayed to the God who loves
   All the children in his sight
   That I might be white.

Joy Kogawa