



# Dr. Kazue Togasaki

## HIDDEN HERO OF HISTORY

Listen to the story: <https://jonincharacter.com/kazue-togasaki/>

**Dr. Kazue Togasaki** was one of the first Japanese American women to become a doctor in the United States.

Born in 1897 in San Francisco, Dr. Togasaki was one of eight children, and her parents owned and operated a successful shop in the city. She was described by her family as “strong-willed” because she was determined and brave.

When she was 9 years old, the massive **1906 earthquake** happened, causing shock waves from Southern Oregon to Los Angeles. It lasted less than a minute but it destroyed many of San Francisco’s buildings and it ignited several fires that burned for three days. Many people were injured, so she helped her mother turn their community’s church into a makeshift hospital.

She and her mother helped take care of the wounded and young Kazue went to hospitals with other Japanese American women to act as their translator. These experiences inspired her and many in her family to go into medicine.

When she grew up, Dr. Togasaki received a degree in Zoology from Stanford University, but struggled to find work due to **prejudice** against Japanese Americans.

Dr. Togasaki was accepted into a nursing program at a Children’s Hospital after her time at Stanford, and finished at the top of her class. Even with this accomplishment, she still was not hired.

She decided to leave San Francisco and go to medical school in Philadelphia at the Woman’s Medical College of Pennsylvania. This was the second medical institution in the world established to train female doctors.

After receiving her degree in 1933, Dr. Togasaki moved back to San Francisco where she started a practice, bought a home, and began to live her life as a doctor.

When World War II was declared, Dr. Togasaki, like all Japanese Americans, was forcibly placed into a **Japanese American internment camp**. These were places where individuals’ rights were restricted and they were not allowed to leave. It was an unjust and unfair response to the attack on Pearl Harbor.

Dr. Togasaki was first relocated to an assembly center, which were holding areas where people waited to be placed into more permanent camps. The assembly centers did not





have livable conditions, so she set up medical facilities so that her community could receive basic medical care, vaccinations, and support while giving birth. During her first month at the center, she delivered over 50 babies.

Throughout the war, Dr. Togasaki was moved to several different centers and continued to lead and provide vital health care until she was released in 1943. She returned to San Francisco and continued to serve her community for forty years. Over the course of her career, she delivered over 10,000 babies!

She opened her home to patients that needed extra support, and she treated people even if they were unable to pay for her services. She was recognized as one of the “Most Distinguished Women of 1970” by the *San Francisco Examiner* for her good work in the community.

Dr. Kazue Togasaki was a true pioneer in the field of medicine and a role model for her sense of duty, compassion, and service to others.

## Glossary

**1906 Earthquake** – On the morning of April 18, 1906, a massive earthquake shook San Francisco, California. Though the quake lasted less than a minute, its immediate impact was disastrous. The earthquake also ignited several fires around the city that burned for three days and destroyed nearly 500 city blocks. Source: *National Archives*

**Prejudice** – Prejudice is when someone discriminates against another person or a group of people based on their race, gender, or other similar factors.

**Japanese Internment Camps** – After the Japanese attacked Pearl Harbor the United States declared war on Japan and entered World War II. Not long after the attack, on February 19, 1942, President Roosevelt signed an executive order that allowed the military to force people of Japanese ancestry into internment camps. Around 120,000 Japanese Americans were sent to the camps. Source: *Ducksters.com*, a COPPA-certified educational site

## Give it Some Thought

- Why do you think young Kazue's experiences after the 1906 earthquake inspired her to become a medical doctor?
- What important character traits do you believe best served Dr. Togasaki as she offered medical care to those in need throughout her career?
- What are some ways that you can show your community that you care?

## Use Your Imagination

From a very young age, Dr. Kazue Togasaki had a strong sense of duty and compassion for the people in her community. In this story, we can see that she worked hard to provide basic medical care to everyone who needed it.

In the opening of this story, Jonathan, Mr. Redge and the creatures of the Folktale Forest are helping Dr. Featherman the owl get ready for the “Amble Through the Bramble,” their annual walking event to encourage health and wellness in their community.

### **Now it's your turn to imagine your own community event!**

Use your journal, a separate piece of paper or the **I Care about My Community!** worksheet to write down your responses to the following:

- What's the name of your event?
- What is the theme? For example, it could be a walk, a health fair, book fair, cooking class—be creative!
- What kinds of activities will you do at your community event?
- How will your event encourage the well-being of your community?