(Adapted from the 2010 Open Essay): **Palestinian American literary theorist and cultural critic Edward Said has written that "Exile is strangely compelling to think about but terrible to experience. It is the unhealable rift forced between a human being and a native place, between the self and its true home: its essential sadness can never be surmounted." Yet Said has also said that exile can become "a potent, even enriching" experience. Select a character from *When the Emperor was Divine* who experiences such a "rift" and becomes cut off from "home," whether that home is the character's birthplace, family, or homeland, or other special place. Then write an essay in which you analyze how the character's experience with exile is both alienating and enriching and how this experience illuminated the meaning of the work as a whole. Avoid plot summary.**

Intro:

As Edward Said pointed out, an exile from one's home can be cataclysmic. He is careful to denote that this banishment constructs an "unhealable rift" and a lamentation that "can never be surmounted." Yet, he juxtaposes this sentiment with the ideal that such an exile is capable of being a powerful and even "enriching experience." In Julie Otsuka's *When the Emperor was Divine*, two such kings encamp themselves within the heart of the father, unbearable despair coupled with a "potent," life experience.

Alienation:

Though the father is alluded to all throughout the novel, we don't see the damaging effects of his banishment until the fourth chapter. This chapter is aptly titled, "In a Stranger's Backyard," for when the patriarch returns to his long lost family he is merely a shell of the man that his children remember. Though the family is technically home, they have truly been banished eternally from their past lives or American normalcy. The literal and metaphorical weathering of this man is foreshadowed by the fact that the family learns of the father's return via a telegram "delivered on a foggy wet morning in December." Ironically, this is

supposed to be the season of celebration, a time of gift giving and humanitarian cheer. Instead, "the man who stood…before [them] was not [their] father" (131). This "gift" of the father's return from exile is immediately soiled as his family bears witness to the effects of the cruelty the father was forced to endure at the hands of government officials. Being stripped from his family, even his words stripped from the pages of his letters to the family, it is evident that the exile the father endured does indeed generate an "unhealable rift"--a dejected despondency that has physically, emotionally and spiritually broken this character. The rift from home is complete, and devastatingly profound, because though the father "always seemed happy to see [his children],…always it seemed, he had something else on this mind" (135).

Potent (Not Enriching):

And what exactly does the father have on his mind? Well, this takes us to Mr. Said's second point, that exile can instill within a character a "potent, even enriching experience." Clearly, one can set aside the notion that there was anything "enriching" about the father's ostracism. The strong, defiant father and his vitriolic tone in chapter five, "Confession," is not only gone, but it is obviously the cause of whatever heinous acts he undoubtedly endured at the hands of government officials. No, there is nothing enriching about his experience, and I think Ms. Otsuka wants that to be unabashedly clear. Nevertheless, the experience is most "potent." With the father, we are left with a character that has truly descended into the quagmire of victimhood. It is the father's profound silence upon which Ms. Otsuka longs to focus a bright light, for this is undoubtedly the silence against which the author wishes to comment. It was the silence and "pulled shades" of the American people that contributed to this calamity. Nothing acquiesces to or accentuates fear and her sister, injustice, with more persuasive fervor than that of silence. The father is Otsuka's final outcry against said silence. Whether that silence stems from those who stand idly by watching injustices accrue, or those that retreat into the false protective dignity of surrender, it is quiet and reticence that results in leaving not only a man, but also a nation just a

shell of what it can truly be. Silence and surrender is on the father's mind. The father of this novel serves as an admonishment, and for the reader, this is both "potent and enriching."

<u>Things to Keep In Mind:</u>

--Carefully dissect the prompt & be sure that you have taken note of all the key terms, concepts and phrases and that you fully understand everything the prompt is asking you to do.

--If you are provided a quote in your prompt, be sure to give a nod to the author of it and integrate *portions* of the quote into your intro--avoid using the entire quotation.

--Identify the key word/term/concept in the prompt and come up with 1-2 synonyms. For example: **Exile =** banishment, expulsion, rift

--Make your opening paragraph/introduction as perfect as possible--front load your So What?

--Avoid the mechanical 5 paragraph essay (Intro, Reason, Support, Explain, Conclusion).

--Keep quotes pithy and practice quotation integration (brackets & ellipses).

--Take risks (Rhetorical questions, personal pronouns, casual, friendly voice)

--End with a powerful, salient *So What?*

--Avoid plot summary! A little summary is necessary but you need to focus on analysis and staying in that level 2 arena.