**Kornblut Case**

George Nakashima  
Designed in 1963;  
Made in 1999.  
Walnut, rosewood, maple burl  
22 x 18 x 18 inches.  
Gift of Howard Alber  
in loving memory of  
Carolyn Fiedler-Alber

**LET’S LOOK**

What do you notice about this artwork?  
Describe the textures, colors and other details you see.  
How is contrast achieved in this piece?  
Have you ever created something out of wood?  
What did you learn about using wood as a material?  
Compare and contrast this piece with furniture in your home.  
Would you like to have this piece somewhere in your house? Why or why not?  
What might be some of the benefits and costs of having handmade functional items?

**ABOUT THE ARTWORK**

The Kornblut Case is a small cube-shaped bedside cabinet that rests elegantly on a geometric base made from interlocking wooden legs. The case is made from the wood of three different types of trees: walnut, rosewood and maple, each with their own unique coloring and wood-grain pattern. Although every side of the cabinet is smooth, a keen observer may notice that the piece opens from the front, with two planked doors that swing out from the middle. A polished burl, or rounded knotty piece of wood, is attached to one cabinet door to act as the pull, or handle. Along the top edge is a neat line of evenly-space interlocking triangles. These are dovetail joints, a type of joinery, or process of connecting two or more sections of wood together. Dovetail joinery is very strong, and has existed in woodworking traditions for thousands of years. It requires careful precision and skill to execute.

During George Nakashima’s lifetime, much furniture became mass-produced, or made in factories. Along with other craftspeople in the Bucks County area, Nakashima reacted to this trend by creating unique, custom-designed furniture that was as attractive as it was functional. His artistic voice is evident on pieces like the Kornblut Case that show off the unique grain, burls and whirling patterns in wood. He created furniture that respected a tree’s natural forms and revealed the wood’s beauty. In his workshop, the soul of the tree was celebrated. “It is an art- and soul-satisfying adventure to walk the forests of the world, to commune with trees,” Nakashima said, “to bring this living material to the work bench, ultimately to give it a second life.”
ABOUT THE ARTIST

Originally from Spokane, Washington, George Nakashima, discovered woodworking while living in a Japanese internment camp during WWII. Originally trained as an architect at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology, Nakashima met a master woodcarver who tutored him in Japanese crafting techniques. In 1943, a former employer won Nakashima’s release from the camp. He moved to New Hope, Pennsylvania, where he established a studio and a reputation as a leading member of the first generation of American studio furniture makers. He created pieces highlighting wood’s natural beauty, most notably by including the tree’s rough outer layer, or the “free edge”.

Nakashima worked throughout the world; in India, he became deeply spiritual. He developed a goal to construct wooden peace altars on every continent—the first, made of book-matched slabs of black walnut, was installed at New York’s Cathedral of St. John the Divine in 1986. Today, Nakashima’s furniture sits in the collections of the Philadelphia Museum of Art, New York’s Metropolitan Museum of Art and the Smithsonian Institution, as well as in the homes of celebrities like Steven Spielberg, Brad Pitt, Diane von Furstenberg and the late Steve Jobs.

3D ARTS

Art as a Symbol
One of George Nakashima’s wishes was to create seven large “peace tables”, each a symbol of his deep desire for global harmony, and gift one to a city on every continent. Visit the Nakashima Foundation for Peace to see photos and videos of the tables’ initial design, creation and ceremonial dedication. What is your reaction to his dream and design? Create a prototype, or small-scale model, for a symbolic sculpture that represents an important idea or hope for you. In what places in the world would you want the larger version of this to exist? What materials would you plan to use to build your design? Why?

SCIENCE

The Secret Lives of Trees
Nakashima’s furniture provides a window into the anatomy and life of trees. For instance, the young sapwood found furthest from the tree’s core – is lightest in color, and was often utilized as an accent amongst other darker planks. Find out how the following words relate to a tree: burl, grain, outerbark, phloem, cambium layer, xylem or sapwood, heartwood, earth growth, pith. Create a series of notated sketches that illustrate these things. Re-examine Kornblut Case and note where you see the evidence of these parts and processes within it. What other pieces of nearby furniture or objects can you dissect in this way?

SOCIAL STUDIES

Executive Order 9066
After the 1941 bombing of Pearl Harbor, the United States formally declared war on Japan and entered World War II. Over the next few months, almost 120,000 people of Japanese ancestry, over 60 percent of whom were American citizens, were removed from their homes, businesses and farms on the West Coast and forced to live in internment camps. Using primary sources like photographs, videos, interviews and letters or journal entries, find out more about this difficult period in US history. Why did this happen? What life was like for these people and their families? How did it affect their lives? What is the legacy of internment for them, and the nation, today? This source packet from the New York Times includes diverse starting points.