

# Blue Jay in the Desert

## Overview

This lesson introduces the history of the World War II Japanese American incarceration through the picture book, *Blue Jay in the Desert*. Lesson activities are designed to build essential vocabulary and to help students begin thinking about fair and unfair treatment of people.

## Objectives

Students will be able to:

- Name three characteristics of a friend.
- Recall key events of a story.
- Use a dictionary to learn the meaning and other features of unknown words.
- Use context clues to determine the relevant meaning of a word.
- Compare and contrast characters in a story using a Venn Diagram.

## Essential Question

- What is our responsibility to make sure we respect all people?

## Guiding Questions

- What is a friend?
- How should we treat all people, even if they aren't friends?
- What is wrong with judging people based on race, religion, and culture?

## Arizona State Standards

### Social Studies—Grade 4

#### Strand 1: American History

*Concept 8: Great Depression and World War II*

- PO 3. Describe the impact of World War II on Arizona (e.g., economic boost, military bases, Native American and Hispanic contributions, POW camps, relocation of Japanese Americans).

## Reading—Grade 4

### Strand 1: Reading Process

*Concept 4: Vocabulary*

- PO 2. Use context to determine the relevant meaning of a word.
- PO 5. Determine the meanings, pronunciations, syllabication, synonyms, antonyms, and parts of speech of words by using a variety of reference aids, including dictionaries, thesauri, glossaries, and CD-ROM and Internet when available.

*Concept 6: Comprehension Strategies*

- PO 4. Use graphic organizers in order to clarify the meaning of the text.
- PO 6. Use reading strategies (e.g., drawing conclusions, determining cause and effect, making inferences, sequencing) to comprehend text.

### Strand 2: Comprehending Literary Text

*Concept 1: Elements of Literature*

- PO 5. Describe a character's traits using textual evidence (e.g., dialogue, actions, narrations, illustrations).
- PO 8. Compare (and contrast) the characters, events, and setting in a literary selection.

## Materials

- Computer and digital projector and/or student computers with Internet access
- Book: *Blue Jay in the Desert* by Marlene Shigekawa
- Children's Dictionaries
- "A Friend to All" Student Packet
  - page 2—*Introduction: What is a Friend?*
  - page 3—*Blue Jay in the Desert* Comprehension Worksheet
  - page 3A–3B—*Optional: Blue Jay in the Desert* Story Guide
  - page 4—*Blue Jay in the Desert* Venn Diagram
  - page 5—*Blue Jay in the Desert* Vocabulary Chart
- Answer Key
  - page 5A—*Blue Jay in the Desert* Vocabulary Chart



## Background

The December 7, 1941 Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor became a day of infamy that propelled the United States into World War II. The U.S. home front response also resulted in infamy when almost 120,000 Japanese Americans were removed from their homes and businesses in the West per Executive Order 9066. The removal was billed a necessary response to the threat of espionage from Japanese Americans, and also as a preventive measure to protect Japanese Americans from anti-Japanese hostility from non-Asian Americans. (It should be noted that decades before the Pearl Harbor attack, anti-Asian legislation in the U.S., primarily on the West Coast, severely restricted freedoms for Chinese and Japanese immigrants.)

Over two-thirds of the incarcerated Japanese Americans were American by birth, and therefore due all Constitutional rights. These rights were ignored, resulting in severe social, civil, and economic losses for the Japanese American communities. The U.S. was also at war with Italy and Germany, but Italian Americans and German Americans were not removed or incarcerated based on their ethnicity in the extreme manner taken with Japanese Americans.

The picture book, *Blue Jay in the Desert*, introduces young readers to the history of the World War II Japanese American experience through the eyes of a young boy, Junior. After the Pearl Harbor attack, Junior and his family are sent to live in the Poston concentration camp, located in the scorching deserts of Arizona. Although Junior doesn't completely understand the politics behind his family's forced confinement, his story gives insight to the challenges and hardships endured by Japanese Americans.

## Opening

- Distribute "A Friend to All" Student Packets, one per student. Each student writes his/her name on the cover page. Direct students to turn to page 2 of the packet, entitled: *Introduction: What is a Friend?*
- Preview the questions by reading them aloud with the class. Instruct students to write down their answers to questions 1–3 in complete sentences. Next, ask students to share their answers with the class, discussing characteristics of a friend.
- Direct students to complete question 4: to draw a picture of what a friend looks like and to write three characteristics of a friend on the lines provided on the bottom of the page.

## Activities—Day 1

- Direct students to turn to page 3 of the packet, entitled: *Blue Jay in the Desert* Comprehension Worksheet. Read aloud questions 1 and 2, then direct students to write down, then share, their answers with a partner.
- Present the following question for discussion: "What is wrong with judging people based on race, religion, or culture?"
- Explain that the picture book, *Blue Jay in the Desert*, is a story about a young Japanese American boy, Junior, and his family who were judged based solely upon their race/ethnic background. The story takes place in 1945, right after the bombing of Pearl Harbor and the U.S. entry into WWII. President Franklin Delano Roosevelt signed a document called Executive Order 9066 which resulted in the removal of individuals of Japanese ancestry (both citizens and non-citizens) from the west coast. These families were sent to live in U.S. concentration camps, two of which were located in Arizona.
- Preview the directions for questions 3–5 which concern vocabulary words in the book. Read aloud the three vocabulary words and instruct students to raise their hands when they hear these words during the

teacher read-aloud of *Blue Jay in the Desert*.

- Proceed with a teacher read-aloud of the book. Pause after students raise their hands for the first vocabulary word and repeat the sentence in which it first appears. Discuss possible meanings for the word, using context clues that appear in the sentence. Tell students to write down a definition for the vocabulary word, using their own words. Repeat this procedure for the remaining vocabulary words. After students have written in their own definitions, ask them to consult a dictionary and record the Dictionary Definitions for the three vocabulary words onto their worksheets. Note: An online children's dictionary that students may consult is Merriam-Webster's Word Central at: <http://www.wordcentral.com/home.html> (accessed September 5, 2009)
- Allow students to discuss questions 6–8 with a partner, then record their answers on the comprehension worksheet. Reread parts of the book as needed if students need more information to complete their answers.
- Optional Worksheet (page 3A-3B): *Blue Jay in the Desert* Story Guide can be filled in while reading the story. The teacher can assist students with answering questions in a concurrent fashion during the read-aloud. Question 16 is an opinion paragraph and should be written individually. This user-friendly optional worksheet works well with lower level readers and English Language Learners.

### Activities—Day 2

- Ask students to summarize key points in the story *Blue Jay in the Desert*, then direct students to turn to page 4 of the packet, entitled: *Blue Jay in the Desert* Venn Diagram. Introduce the Venn Diagram as a means of comparing and contrasting similarities and differences between characters in a story. Help students generate examples of:
  - a characteristic that is unique to Junior
  - a characteristic that is unique to the blue jay
  - a characteristic they both share
- Have students write these examples in the appropriate circles of the Venn Diagram. Allow students time to complete the rest of the Venn Diagram individually or with a partner.
- Direct students to turn to page 5 of the Packet, *Blue Jay in the Desert* Vocabulary Chart. This assignment introduces definitions for essential vocabulary, requires students to divide the words into syllables and to compose original sentences using the vocabulary words.
- Model the correct procedure, by performing the vocabulary activities together as a class for the first vocabulary term, “internment camp.”
  - This is also an opportunity to explain to students about the terminology used to tell the history of the World War II Japanese American experience. For example, the term used in *Blue Jay in the Desert*, “internment camp,” is a euphemism: a word used by the U.S. government to downplay the forced removal and confinement of the Japanese Americans. However, in speeches and written documents, President Roosevelt himself referred to these sites as “concentration camps.” A “concentration camp” is defined broadly as a place where people are imprisoned not because they are guilty of any crimes, but simply because of who they are. (See “A Note on Terminology” in the unit map for further information.) You also might consider brainstorming with students other examples of euphemisms found in everyday speech.
- Guide students through completion of the *Blue Jay in the Desert* Vocabulary Chart. Assist students with pronunciation for the syllabication task. Write the Teacher Definitions for each word on the whiteboard for students to copy. (See page 5A Answer Key provided.) If time permits, have students use dictionaries to locate each vocabulary word, its syllabication, and definition. Ask students to share their original sentences.

## Closing

- Project photos of the actual Poston Camp Site from the Denshō: The Japanese American Legacy Project Web site at: <http://www.densho.org/sitesofshame/facilities.xml> (accessed September 5, 2009)  
Under Select a Category, click on incarceration camp, then under Select a Site, click on Poston (Colorado River)
- Share with students that the Poston Camp was actually divided up into three separate quarters, located three miles apart. The sections were known officially as Poston I, II, and III, but were nicknamed “Roasten,” “Toasten,” and “Dustin” by the internees. After looking at the photos, ask students to explain why they think these nicknames were adopted. (*the torrid heat and dust of the desert, lack of air conditioning in the barracks*)

## Extensions

- Draw a family portrait of Junior, his parents, and grandfather at the Poston camp.
- View extensive photos of the Poston Camp “then and now” at the National Park Service Web site: [http://www.nps.gov/history/history/online\\_books/anthropology74/ce10.htm](http://www.nps.gov/history/history/online_books/anthropology74/ce10.htm) (accessed September 5, 2009)

## References

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