

Author

Jessica Medlin

Name of Unit

A Friend to All

Students Explore the World War II Japanese American Incarceration in Arizona through Children's Literature

Suggested Grade Level(s)

4

Suggested Subject Area(s)

Social Studies/Reading

6

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Forever Friends



Unit Map

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Social Studies/Reading

Number of Class Periods Required

10–12 sessions/50 minute blocks

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?

Teacher Overview

"A Friend to All" is a fourth grade Social Studies unit that focuses on American history during World War II. To complete all activities requires 10–12 class sessions. The initial class sessions, based upon teacher read-alouds of the picture books, *Blue Jay in the Desert* and *The Bracelet*, are spent in whole class instruction, introducing the theme of friendship and the historical events leading to the World War II incarceration of the Japanese Americans. The

remaining class sessions place students in cooperative groups, engaging them in student-directed reading of selected chapters in the book, *Weedflower*. Reading selections are accompanied by vocabulary building and reading comprehension activities. The final class session culminates in a whole class discussion, coupled with written reflections of the unit's essential question. Final assessment for this literature-based unit takes the form of a literary response poster, requiring written and illustrated components.

This unit examines the Japanese American World War II experience. Through children's literature, students discover what daily life was like in the desert camps of Arizona, how the camps impacted the state of Arizona, and how friendships sustained hope. Individual activity packets guide students through the unit's diverse reading activities and written assignments.

A Note on Terminology

The words and phrase used to describe this history vary considerably amongst scholars, government officials, and even those directly affected by Executive Order 9066: "relocation," "evacuation," "incarceration," "internment," "concentration camp." There is no general agreement about what is most accurate or fair.

Officially, the camps were called "relocation centers." Many now acknowledge that "relocation center" and "evacuation" are euphemisms used purposefully by the government to downplay the significance of its actions.

America's concentration camps are clearly distinguishable from Nazi Germany's torture and death camps. It is difficult to accept the term "concentration camp" because of the term's associations with the Holocaust. This educational material uses "concentration camp" not in an effort to

bear comparisons to the atrocities of the Holocaust, but to express the veritable magnitude of what was done to Japanese Americans.

It is an unequivocal fact that the government itself, including the President, used the term “concentration camp” during World War II in speeches and written documents. It is also crucial to note that 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. Many groups have been singled out for such persecution throughout history, with the term “concentration camp” first used at the turn of the twentieth century in the Spanish-American and Boer wars.

Despite some differences, all concentration camps have one thing in common: People in power remove a minority group from the general population, and the rest of society lets it happen.

