
Author

Lynn Galvin

Name of Unit

Investigating the Japanese American Experience

Students Use Lessons of Inquiry and Understanding in Reading, Writing, and Analytical Activities to Explore the Japanese American Experience

Suggested Grade Level(s)

8/Adaptable 7–12

Suggested Subject Area(s)

Social Studies/English

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The *Enduring Communities* team would like to thank Mr. Masaji Inoshita and his family for generously sharing their stories with the students and teachers of Arizona.

Mr. Masaji Inoshita at Gila River, 2003.

Photo courtesy of Lynn Galvin



Unit Map

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Number of Class Periods Required

10 class periods (50 minutes/period)

Essential Question

- What are the responsibilities that every American must follow in order to protect the rights of other Americans?

Guiding Questions

- What was the true reason for the World War II incarceration of Japanese Americans by the U.S. government?
- How did most people in the U.S. react to the Japanese American incarceration?
- How did Japanese Americans react to the incarceration?
- What cultural background helped Japanese Americans endure the experience?

Teacher Overview

This unit is designed for Social Studies classes. It can be used in U.S. History, World History, or Arizona History classes, in Civics classes, or in Reading classes. Ideally, this unit would be taught with a thematic/cross curricular approach in conjunction with an English class.

The unit is aimed so that the teacher may select lessons singly, or combine a few, in the interests of time.

Reading and writing exercises are used throughout the lessons and are designed to involve the reader. Most of the lessons deal with actual historical experiences, although the activity “How Racial Discrimination Feels” is designed to help students understand that discrimination is unearned and unfair. If that activity is used, the teacher should budget time afterwards to discuss how class members felt during the exercise so they can be debriefed. It can be an emotional experience. Student respect for those who pull ballots that designate them as discriminated against, and the challenges they face, must be enforced.

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.

