

Sumiko's Life

Time

2 class periods (30 minutes per period)

Overview

Lesson 1 covers Chapters 1 through 4 (43 pages) in the book *Weedflower*. These chapters provide an overview of Sumiko's life and insight into some of the prejudices that Japanese Americans faced in pre-World War II California.

Objectives

- Students will know that even though there is commonality in American society, there are also cultural differences within various cultural groups.
- Students will know how Sumiko's life is similar to and different from their own.

Essential Question

- Why is it important to treat everybody—including those who may seem different from me—fairly?

Guiding Question(s)

- Prior to World War II, how did Japanese Americans assimilate into society while maintaining cultural elements from their previous homeland?

Colorado Model Content Standards (2008)

- History 3: Students understand that societies are diverse and have changed over time.
- History 5.3: Students know how political power has been acquired, maintained, used, and/or lost throughout history.

Materials

- A copy of the young adult novel *Weedflower* by Cynthia Kadohata
- Chart or butcher paper
- Markers

Background

- Read the overviews and timelines about the Japanese American experience found in the introductory materials accompanying this unit.
- Read the article “Terminology and the Japanese American Experience” found in the introductory materials accompanying this unit.
- Japanese vowels are pronounced differently than vowels in English; their pronunciation is similar to vowels in Spanish.

a = ah, as in *father*

e = short e, as in *Fred*

i = long e, as in *see*

o = long o, as in *go*

u = oo, as in *soon*

Sumiko is pronounced: Soo-mee-ko

- All vocabulary words are introduced and explained in the text. As passages in the book containing Japanese vocabulary words are read aloud to the class, have students speculate on the meanings of the Japanese words before giving them the actual meaning. Use a piece of chart paper to record words along with their meanings as they come up in the text. (This will be an ongoing activity in each lesson.)
 - *Nikkei* (Chapter 2, page 14): Japanese emigrants and their descendants
 - *Gaman* (Chapter 4, page 43): an expression roughly meaning “We must bear it.”

Opening

- Introduce the book *Weedflower* by Cynthia Kadohata and tell the class that the book they will be listening to is about an American girl whose life has some similarities to theirs but also has some notable differences.
- Ask students to make mental notes of these likenesses and differences as they listen because they will be important in later discussions.

Activities

- Read Chapter 1 aloud.
- Use a T-chart (sample below) or Venn diagram to track a guided discussion about Chapter 1 with the students. This chart will be used again throughout the unit. Pose the following two questions to students and record their responses on the chart:
 - In what ways is Sumiko's life similar to yours?
 - What things make her life seem different because of her Japanese heritage?
- Sample entries:

Similar	Different
US Citizen	Japanese parents
Wants to be included in birthday parties	Prepared the bath water for the family

- Read Chapters 2 through 4 aloud.
 - Go over vocabulary words, adding them and their meanings to the vocabulary chart.
 - Continue to chart ways that Sumiko's life is similar to students' lives as well as the things in her life that reflect her Japanese heritage. During the discussion, emphasize that Sumiko and her cousins are American-born citizens.
- Discuss the following:
 - What rumors worried the Japanese American community in the days before the bombing of Pearl Harbor?
 - How did anti-Japanese American sentiment personally affect Sumiko?
 - Was Sumiko treated fairly by her classmates?

Closing

- At the end of each class period, have students write about one way in which Sumiko's life is similar to theirs and one way in which her life is different. Collect their writing and save it for use in Lesson 2.

Extension

- After reading Chapter 2, discuss why Jiichan came to America, then read aloud *Grandfather's Journey* by Allen Say. This story about a man's immigration to America from Japan is similar to Sumiko's family's story.

References

- Asian American Curriculum Project, Inc. "The Japanese American Journey: The Story of a People." Appendix in *A Lesson in American History: The Japanese Experience*. N.p.: Japanese American Citizens League, 1996.
- Kadohata, Cynthia. *Weedflower*. New York: Atheneum Books, 2006.
- Say, Allen. *Grandfather's Journey*. New York: Houghton Mifflin, 1993.

