

The Incarceration of Japanese Americans during World War II

Time

1 to 2 class periods (50 minutes per period)

Overview

Because this unit is intended to investigate certain problems that arise within American democracy, the first lesson has been written to ensure that students have background knowledge about the incarceration of Japanese Americans during World War II in order to facilitate deeper levels of analysis.

Objectives

- Students will learn about the events leading up to the World War II incarceration of Japanese Americans.
- Students will become aware of political and social attitudes that prevailed in the United States at the time of the attack on Pearl Harbor.
- Students will learn about the decisions that were made by the federal government in response to those political and social attitudes.
- Students will learn about the effects of those decisions on Japanese Americans living on the West Coast.
- Students will be able to describe those effects in a constructed response format.

Essential Questions

- How do societies striving for equality come to terms with the tension between the good of the one and the good of the many?
- How is the balance between the one and the many influenced by visual language?

Guiding Question(s)

- How can the balance between safety and liberty be maintained in times of threat to the State?

Colorado Model Content Standards (2008)

- History 2: Students know how to use the processes and resources of historical inquiry.
- History 5: Students understand political institutions and theories that have developed and changed over time.
- Reading and Writing 1: Students will read and understand a variety of materials. As students in grades 9–12 extend their knowledge, what they know and are able to do includes using a full range of strategies to comprehend essays, speeches, autobiographies, and first-person historical documents in addition to the types of literature learned in previous grade levels.
- Reading and Writing 6: Students read and recognize literature as a record of human experience by reading classic and contemporary literature of the United States about the experiences and traditions of diverse ethnic groups.

Materials

- Standard United States History textbook

Background

Review the American history textbook, along with the introductory essays, timelines, primary sources, and other resources included in this unit's introductory materials and Appendix. In addition, Roger Daniels's *Prisoners Without Trial*, Chapters 10–11 in Bill Hosokawa's *Colorado's Japanese Americans*, and novels and/or memoirs may provide a more personalized account that will create greater understanding of the upheaval experienced by Japanese Americans; these materials may be integrated into this lesson (which will of course increase the amount of time spent). See "Selected Bibliography" in the Appendix for suggested reading matter.

Opening

- Provide a good overview of the difficult position of Asian immigrants in the United States in the century before World War II. One such overview can be found in *Prisoners Without Trial* by Roger Daniels.

Activities

- These will depend on the time available to devote to this topic and the aims of the specific course. If only a basic background is needed in order to provide a context for the readings (as might be appropriate in an AP English Language and Composition course), a simple lecture might be the best choice. Students do need to hone their listening and note-taking skills. The lecture should include the following ideas:
 - The pull exerted by the U.S. on Asian (primarily Chinese and Japanese) peoples;
 - The economic and social impact of Asian immigrants in the 1800s;
 - The Chinese Exclusion Act and the Gentlemen's Agreement;
 - The nature of the Japanese American community on the West Coast;
 - Reactions to the bombing of Pearl Harbor;
 - The actions and recommendations of General John DeWitt;
 - The creation of Executive Order 9066 by President Franklin D. Roosevelt;
 - The race neutrality of the proclamation in light of its racially discriminatory implementation;
 - The details of the forced removal of Japanese Americans, first to assembly centers and then to the concentration camps.
- However, if time permits and it is appropriate to the course, students might be grouped and asked to create a PowerPoint or poster presentation of text and images related to the event; there are many very useful Web sites and books readily available (also see

“Selected Bibliography” in the Appendix of this curriculum.) Logical divisions might be “Before the Evacuation,” “The Roundup,” “At the Assembly Centers,” “In the Camps,” and “The Aftermath.”

Closing

- Depending on the activities chosen and the aims of the course, this lesson might conclude with posters or PowerPoint presentations to the class, a multiple-choice and/or short-answer test, journal entries, or brief essays on the students' reactions to the treatment of Japanese Americans.

Extension/Accommodations

- For language-challenged Special Education students and ELL students, a particularly effective method to show mastery of topics such as these has been to provide background information via skills-appropriate text and discussion, then give students images of the event. Students then provide their own captions for the pictures, oftentimes asked to imagine they are the people in the pictures and describe what is going on and their reactions to the experience.
- For an additional challenge, students could examine standard high school American History texts for accuracy in the treatment the topic has received in academia. It might be particularly revealing if a variety of texts were available from different decades following World War II.

References

- Burton, Jeffrey F., Mary M. Farrell, Florence B. Lord, and Richard W. Lord. *Confinement and Ethnicity: An Overview of World War II Japanese American Relocation Sites*. Publications in Anthropology 74. Tucson: Western Archeological and Conservation Center, 1999.
- Daniels, Roger. *Prisoners Without Trial: Japanese Americans in World War II*. New York: Hill and Wang, 2004.

- Hosokawa, Bill. *Colorado's Japanese Americans from 1886 to the Present*. Boulder, Colo.: University Press of Colorado, 2005.
- Inada, Lawson Fusao, ed. *Only What We Could Carry: The Japanese American Internment Experience*. Berkeley, Calif.: Heyday Books; San Francisco: California Historical Society, 2000.
- Takahara, Kumiko. *Off the Fat of the Land: The Denver Post's Story of the Japanese American Internment During World War II*. Powell, Wyo.: Western History Publications, 2003.

Suggested Literature for Enrichment

- Houston, Jeanne Wakatsuki, and James D. Houston. *Farewell to Manzanar: A True Story of Japanese American Experience During and After the World War II Internment*. New York: Bantam Books, 1974. Reprint, New York: Bantam Books, 1995.
- Kadohata, Cynthia. *Weedflower*. New York: Atheneum Books for Young Readers, 2006. (Particularly suitable for lower-skilled readers.)