

## Author

Diane L. Ball

## Name of Unit

A Teacher's Journey to Increasing Student Knowledge and Comprehension About the Japanese American World War II Experience

## Suggested Grade Level(s)

11

## Suggested Subject Area(s)

U.S. History, Advanced Placement U.S. History, or can be adapted for a Special Education Core class

Ms. Ball's students in Denver, Colorado, at the Japanese American National Museum's 2008 National Conference "Whose America? Who's American? Diversity, Civil Liberties, and Social Justice."

Photo by Tracy Kumono



# Unit Map

[Note: This unit, unlike the others created for the *Enduring Communities* project, is written as a journal, capturing one teacher's journey as she creates and teaches curriculum about a little-known topic: the Japanese American World War II experience. The emphasis of this unit is on the reflections of the teacher and her students as they explore this content; the instructional strategies have been de-emphasized.]

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## Number of Class Periods Required

6 to 7 class periods for full project (60 minutes per period); can also be used as 5 one-day units of instruction depending on the focus of the teacher

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## Essential Questions

- *Content-Related:* How did the U.S. government treat Japanese Americans during World War II? Why were American citizens seen as the enemy?
- *Pedagogical:* How do my students respond when they encounter material about which they have no previous knowledge?

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## Objectives, Guiding Questions, and Assessment

The calendar on the following page is an at-a-glance reference for the content and pedagogical components of this unit.

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## New Mexico Content Standards

- History Strand 1-A: Analyze the role and impact of New Mexico in World War II
- History Strand 1-B: Analyze the role of the United States in World War II to include movement from isolationism to involvement following Pearl Harbor, and activities to support the war effort on the home front.

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## Purpose/Context of Unit

While there are comprehensive curriculum units on the Japanese American experience during World War II, the New Mexico experience is vastly different from those states with War Relocation Authority camps. The focus of this unit is for an eleventh-grade U.S. History class and is connected to my belief in using primary source documents. This was a natural fit given that there are only four sentences about the Japanese American World War II experience in our textbook. In addition, as a teacher in the Gallup-McKinley County Schools, I was able to bring in local historical connections related to Gallup's situation during the World War II period and the unique experience of local Japanese American families.

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## Goals for Student Understanding

The overarching pedagogical question for this unit is, *How do my students respond when they encounter material about which they have no previous knowledge?* My students had no prior knowledge of the incarceration of Japanese Americans during World War II, and their time spent learning about the period had been relatively brief: the topic was discussed in World History at the tenth-grade level. To that effect, I wrote this unit with three overarching goals in mind:

- To walk students through the content knowledge relating to the incarceration of the Japanese Americans during World War II;
- To help students improve reading comprehension; and
- To guide students as they examine the larger issues of civil liberties during wartime.

Consequently, I formulated seven guiding (pedagogical) questions as I approached this unit:

- Are students able to make comparisons between America's concentration camps and the death camps of the Holocaust?
- How do students respond to visual images of this topic?
- Are students able to make sophisticated comparisons about the Japanese American experience in New Mexico versus their experiences in other states?
- How do students respond to literature about this topic?
- Are students able to develop an understanding about the racial prejudices of the time that led to this experience?
- Are students able to grasp the importance of New Mexico in the World War II effort?
- Are students able to grasp the dichotomy of Japanese Americans' incarceration and their patriotism?

It is not intended that students walk blindly into this topic, but rather that they gradually increase their knowledge of this time period as their exposure to a variety of texts is expanded. There is also an attempt in this unit to elicit the students' own personal reactions to the history being presented. The exercises were written to provide opportunities for cooperative learning and provide hands-on activities to help English Language Learners (ELL), encompass the various learning styles of the students' multiple intelligences, encourage higher-order thinking, and provide an increasingly sophisticated framework for students to analyze primary source documents and then draw conclusions about what they have seen and read.

### Reflections at the Conclusion of the Unit

Overall, I have been extremely pleased with this unit and the outcomes achieved by the students. They demonstrated a willingness to embrace new knowledge and examine artifacts they had never seen before, ask questions, and generally get involved in the unit. Their constructed responses demonstrated knowledge about the subject that was more than surface material. The students responded very well to the children's books and wanted to listen to "story time" more often.

However, there are still several areas for improvement. First, the students need time to discuss the photographs and shorter documents. These portions could be expanded to include students generating their own constructed responses about the documents. Also, as the teacher, I need to help them "read" a photograph for what is there and what is not there. This is a large component that needs to be added for their understanding.

I also realize that I need to employ more graphic organizers as part of some basic brainstorming activities. This is a proven ELL strategy, and I think it will help students focus more on their learning rather than taking their cues from me. I did find that adding just a short page of notes was effective to create context and a basic understanding, while using primary documents—especially pictures—provided an added dimension.

In conclusion, I would say that the students responded well to new material, especially in the presented format. They were able to move from concrete to more abstract thinking, although some connections may have been somewhat superficial. Also, their understanding of racial prejudice was increased—prior to this we had covered other subjects that addressed racial prejudice, including the Indian wars, the rise of the Ku Klux Klan in the 1920s, and anti-immigration laws.



# A Teacher's Journey to Increasing Student Knowledge and Comprehension About the Japanese American World War II Experience

**Essential Questions (Content-Related):** How did the U.S. government treat Japanese Americans during World War II? Why were American citizens seen as the enemy?

**Essential Question (Pedagogical):** How do my students respond to new material about which they have no background information?

Lesson Title	Objectives (Content-Related)	Guiding Questions (Pedagogical)	Assessments
<b>STOP #1:</b> Orders to Go: Packing Your Things	Students will learn about the World War II experience of Japanese Americans who, under the authority of Executive Order 9066, were removed and excluded from the West Coast.	How do students respond to literature about this topic?  Are students able to develop an understanding of the racial prejudices of the time that led to this experience?	Students will chart basic necessities and nonbasic necessities.
<b>STOP #2:</b> Home Was a Horse Stall: Why Are We Living Here?	Students will learn about how Japanese Americans adjusted to their lives in the temporary assembly centers.	How do students respond to literature about this topic?  Are students able to develop an understanding of the racial prejudices of the time that led to this experience?	Students will create an acrostic using the word "confinement" to describe life in camp.
<b>STOP #3:</b> Camp: What Did It Look and Feel Like?	Students will examine primary and secondary sources to learn more about life in the camps.	Are students able to make comparisons between America's concentration camps and the death camps of the Holocaust?  How do students respond to visual images of this topic?  How do students respond to literature about this topic?  Are students able to develop an understanding of the racial prejudices of the time that led to this experience?  Are students able to grasp the dichotomy of Japanese Americans' incarceration and their patriotism?	Students will work as a group to describe the positive and negative aspects of camp life.  Students will create a collage about life in camp using images and five words.



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World War II Experience**

Lesson Title	Objectives (Content-Related)	Guiding Questions (Pedagogical)	Assessments
<b>STOP #4:</b> We Are Americans: Civil Liberties During Wartime	Students will examine the civil liberties issues raised by the World War II Japanese American experience.	Are students able to make comparisons between America's concentration camps and the death camps of the Holocaust?  How do students respond to visual images of this topic?  Are students able to develop an understanding of the racial prejudices of the time that led to this experience?	Students will look at resources for evidence of racial prejudice against Japanese Americans during World War II.
<b>STOP #5:</b> The New Mexico Response: Are These Friends Now Our Enemies?	Students will examine the local experiences of Japanese Americans in New Mexico during World War II.	Are students able to make sophisticated comparisons about the Japanese American experience in New Mexico versus their experiences in other states?  Are students able to grasp the importance of New Mexico in the World War II effort?	Students will compare and contrast the experiences of Japanese Americans in Santa Fe and Gallup, New Mexico, during World War II.
<b>FINAL STOP:</b> Final Assessment	Students will synthesize the lectures, resources, and discussions to respond to the Essential Questions.	Are students able to make comparisons between America's concentration camps and the death camps of the Holocaust?  How do students respond to visual images of this topic?  Are students able to develop an understanding of the racial prejudices of the time that led to this experience?  Are students able to grasp the dichotomy of Japanese American incarceration and their patriotism?	Students will respond to these questions: <i>How did the American government treat Japanese Americans during World War II? Why were American citizens seen as the enemy?</i>