

LESSON 1

History of Japanese Americans Prior to and During World War II

8

Time

2 class periods (45 minutes per period)

Overview

Lesson 1 provides a brief overview of the complexities of the Japanese American World War II experience and encourages students to make connections between these historic events and contemporary issues.

Objectives

- Students will be able to discuss the history of Japanese Americans in the United States.
- Students will connect the World War II experiences of Japanese Americans to current events.
- Students will consider the trade-offs between safety and liberty.

Enduring Understanding

- Diversity in the United States helps democracy to function.

Essential Questions

- Is it more important to have safety or liberty?
- Who is the “We” in “We, the People”?

Materials

- *Handout 1-1: Bulleted List of the Overview of the Japanese American Experience Prior to and During World War II*

Assessments

- *Handout 1-1 Bulleted List of the Overview of the Japanese American Experience Prior to and During World War II*
- Value Line comparisons between the beginning and the end of the lesson

Background

Japanese Americans came to the United States beginning in the 1880s. Although they faced discrimination, they were still able to build successful lives in many professions. After the Japanese attacked Pearl Harbor—which then led to the United States entering World War II—Japanese Americans were viewed even more suspiciously by many of their neighbors. Suspicion flared into concern that Japanese Americans would aid the Japanese in an attack on the U.S. West Coast. As a result, more than 100,000 American-born Japanese Americans and Japanese immigrants (who were ineligible for citizenship at the time) were removed from the West Coast and detained for the duration of the war.

Additional information is available in the “Notes” section of the PowerPoint presentation. Supplemental historical overviews, timelines, and maps about the Japanese American experience are found at the beginning of this unit.

Prior to this lesson, the teacher must prepare a lecture or PowerPoint presentation about the Japanese American experience. Information about the Japanese American experience accompanies this unit’s introductory materials and Appendix:

- Overviews and timelines about the Japanese American experience
- The article “Terminology and the Japanese American Experience”
- A Supplemental Bibliography

This lecture may be divided chronologically:

- Before World War II
- Executive Order 9066
- Tanforan Assembly Center
- Topaz Concentration Camp
- After Topaz



Instructional Strategies/Skills

Day 1:

- Have students create a Value Line. Ask the following question: *Is it more important to have safety or liberty?* Then have students move their desks into line, with “total safety” on the right and “total liberty” on the left. Students may also arrange themselves in the center.
- Discuss with various students why they placed themselves where they did.
- Give students a brief background about the experience of Japanese Americans during World War II using a lecture or a PowerPoint presentation.
- Ask students to complete *Handout 1-1: Bulleted List of the Overview of the Japanese American Experience Prior to and During World War II*.

Day 2:

- Have the students, once again, move into the same Value Line as on the previous day, now taking into account any new insights and information.
- Discuss with students—especially those who have moved their positions a great deal—why their ideas have changed.
- Now have students “fold the line” by having those who voted for liberty (in various ranges) discuss their reasoning with those who voted for safety (in various ranges.)
- Discuss with students any contemporary events that might have similarities with the World War II Japanese American experience.

Extensions

- Have students write an essay responding to this Essential Question: *Is it more important to have safety or liberty?* Their essay should reference both the World War II Japanese American experience and contemporary events.
- Using the essays the students have written, conduct a Double-Circle Debate. Have students who think safety is more important sit in a circle of desks, then have

students who think liberty is more important sit in a circle surrounding those desks. Allow each group (anyone within the group) to give opinions for three minutes, then allow a one-minute rebuttal for each opinion; students from the different groups should then gather and discuss their opinions and ideas with each other.

References

- Japanese American National Museum. <http://www.janm.org/> (accessed August 3, 2009).
- Japanese American Relocation Digital Archive (JARDA). <http://www.jarda.cdlib.org/> (accessed August 3, 2009).
- National Archives and Records Administration. <http://www.archives.gov/> (accessed August 3, 2009).
- Niiya, Brian, ed. *Japanese American History: An A–Z Reference from 1868 to the Present*. Los Angeles: Japanese American National Museum, 1993.

Bulleted List

of the Overview of the Japanese American Experience Prior to and During World War II

Handout 1-1

10

Name _____ Period _____

Complete this list with details related to the Japanese American experience.

Before World War II	Executive Order 9066	Tanforan	Topaz	After Topaz
*	*	*	*	*
*	*	*	*	*
*	*	*	*	*
*	*	*	*	*
*	*	*	*	*
*	*	*	*	*

Use the space below to write two or three questions/interesting things/unusual things you have learned.
