

Museum Exhibits about the Japanese American Experience

Time

Before beginning, teachers should carefully review and assess these instructions, the availability of class curriculum time, and interest on the part of the school community. In addition, prior to embarking upon this project the teacher must identify and secure the commitment of a community partner, such as a local museum or historical society. A specific timeline for the teacher is included.

Teachers may also consider entering these projects in the local History Fair and/or the National History Day competition. More information about and instructions for National History Day can be found at the Web site www.nationalhistoryday.org (accessed August 3, 2009).

Overview

In Lesson 5, students will work with a community partner to demonstrate their understanding of the Japanese American experience in Utah by researching, constructing, and presenting museum exhibits. The exhibits may be in the form of artwork, photography, oral histories, video, group performances, or literature.

Because the scope of this project may seem daunting, words of encouragement from one of the unit's authors and the community partner with whom she worked are included at the end of this unit. In addition, selected comments from the Syracuse Junior High School students who participated in this project in Winter 2007 are also included.

Objectives

- Students will work with each other and with a community partner to demonstrate their understanding of the unit's Enduring Understanding and Essential Questions by researching, constructing, and presenting a collection of museum exhibits.

Enduring Understanding

- Diversity in the United States helps democracy to function.

Essential Questions

- What is the Topaz "Relocation Camp"?
- Is it more important to have safety or liberty?
- How does racism affect the American experience?
- How do communities endure?
- Who is the "We" in "We, the People"?
- What is the process of social justice?

Materials

- Suggested Teacher Timeline
- *Handout 5-1: Student Assignment Sheet and Timeline*
- *Handout 5-2: Museum Exhibit Grading Rubric*
- *Handout 1-1 Bulleted List of the Overview of the Japanese American Experience Prior to and During World War II (from Lesson 1)*
- *Handout 5-3: Ideas to Projects*
- *Handout 5-4: How to Create a Museum Exhibit*
- Copies of the Selected Bibliography found in the Appendix
- Materials with which to construct museum exhibits

Assessments

- A grading rubric is provided to assess the quality of the collaborative research, construction, and presentation of museum exhibits

Instructional Strategies/Skills

- Use the previous lessons in this unit to introduce students to the World War II Japanese American experience.
- Explain to students that they will be working with a community partner to create museum exhibits about the Japanese American experience in Utah.
 - Introduce the community partner.
 - Determine whether students will work individually



- or in groups to complete the activity.
- Distribute and review *Handout 5-1: Student Assignment Sheet and Timeline*.
- Distribute and review *Handout 5-2: Museum Exhibit Grading Rubric*.
- Ask students to begin thinking about their research topic.
 - They should refer back to *Handout 1-1: Bulleted List of the Overview of the Japanese American Experience Prior to and During World War II* from Lesson 1 of this unit.
 - Distribute and review *Handout 5-3: Ideas to Projects* to help students narrow down their topic.
 - Before proceeding to the next step, research topics must be approved by the teacher.
- Once the topics have been approved, students must follow the project timeline to research and construct their exhibits.
 - Distribute *Handout 5-4: How to Create a Museum Exhibit*.
 - Distribute copies of the Selected Bibliography found in the Appendix.
- In accordance with the timeline, mount and display exhibits with appropriate community participation and celebration.

Words of encouragement from Jennifer Baker, one of the authors of this unit

Working with a community partner to produce museum exhibits demonstrating students' understanding of the Japanese American experience in Utah is a very fun—if exhausting—and rewarding experience for students. There are several reasons why this project presents a high-quality learning opportunity for students.

First of all, students generally put a great deal of effort into their projects—much more so than they would a normal school project—because they know that the community at large, including family members, peers,

community leaders, and others, will be viewing their projects. My classroom saw a great deal of friendly competition about whose projects would be selected for display in the community museum.

The second benefit to students is that the amount of research and work involved in the project requires that the students become experts on their specific subject matter. If the topic being studied is of local interest, the students can become local resources; this is extremely satisfying for students as they teach friends, family, and others about their learning. Another fantastic benefit for students is the opportunity to meet community members who have experienced the event or who have personal knowledge about the subject. This ties students more closely to their communities.

For the community partners, the partnership brings increased attendance and interest to their institutions as students and their families and friends come to view the exhibits. This also may serve as an introduction to the institutions for some families, who will return to visit at other times.

Finally, this project is very touching for the local community members involved because their stories are told and recognized. As a result, the community members feel more connected as well. When the student exhibits were displayed in Winter 2007, many members of the Japanese American community attended, and they were very supportive and complimentary. It was gratifying to see how excited they were to have their stories told. The project gave parents and other adults the opportunity to connect to the school in a truly meaningful way, which is a tremendous benefit to all concerned.

However, to successfully complete this project, a great deal of planning, support, and work are required. The following pages include suggested timelines,

resources, and information that can assist in assembling this ultimately rewarding project.

Words of encouragement from Nancy Nakae, Director, Syracuse Museum and Cultural Center (the community partner)

[In 2006] I was searching for an theme for an upcoming exhibit scheduled for February 2007. Japanese American people have been very much a part of our community, especially during the 1920s and 1930s when they were busy working the farms in the area. Masaru and Kiyoko Yamada, my Japanese American neighbors, lived in Syracuse all their lives and farmed many acres. Mr. Yamada turned 80 years old in the summer of 2006. He and his wife have contributed much to our community, especially in the area of farming. They have also donated many items for the museum's permanent Japanese American display. As a result, I decided to focus on Syracuse's Japanese American community as our exhibit theme. The Yamadas and many of their friends were very supportive of this idea.

A few months later I received a phone call from Jennifer Baker, a history teacher at Syracuse Junior High School. She informed me that her classes were going to be studying the Japanese American World War II experience in Utah, Davis County, and Syracuse, and she wondered if I would allow the students to display their projects at the museum. I was very happy about this opportunity. I mentioned to her that our museum exhibit for the coming year was going to be about the Japanese Americans in Syracuse, and she was happy to hear that. She told me about her plans and how I might be able to help her, and the idea began to take shape. Her students were very excited about the project and jumped into it with lots of enthusiasm.

I went to her classroom and explained to the students how to develop museum exhibits; they also visited the museum to see what we already had on display. They did the research and came up with about 23 high-quality museum exhibits!

The open house for the exhibit took place on February 3, 2007, at the Syracuse Community Center. I arranged a special program of entertainment and refreshments. The bleachers were filled, and many people were standing on the side. Someone counted heads and said that there were about 250 people in attendance. Mr. Mas Matsumoto and his wife came all the way from California to see the exhibit.

After the open house, the student projects were on display for three more weeks. There were many positive comments, and people continued to comment for weeks afterwards. It was a wonderful experience to work with Jennifer and her students, and I hope that more of these types of projects will happen in the future.

Selected comments from the Syracuse Junior High School students who participated in the project in Winter 2007

In my opinion [the] most important thing I learned from this exhibition was [that] the power of prejudice is so strong that it can destroy the spirits of others. Prejudice has been present since the dawn of time, and it will never go away. The point is that we learn from the mistakes of others.

—Delaney

It was fun being a docent. It was cool telling people information they didn't know. It made me feel smart. You also got some time to look at the different posters. My friends think I'm smart because I answered a lot of questions.

—Michelle



The most important thing I probably learned about the Japanese Americans is that they went to Topaz for no real importance. I actually didn't know anything about this until I learned about it in class and while my group and I were working on the exhibit. I also learned that when the Japanese [Americans] were in Topaz, they tried to make it as normal as possible. And probably the saddest thing I learned is that the children thought it was a normal life, in barracks, eating in mess halls, and sharing bathrooms and almost everything.

—Keilee

The coolest, awesomeist, most interesting fact is that Topaz was in Utah. I had no idea before that this whole experience happened, so knowing that Utah had a part of it made me feel a little proud and a little disgusted.

—Daniel

Suggested Teacher Timeline

16 weeks before project due date: Clear the project and a museum field trip with school administrators. Reserve a large part of the school building, such as the library, for the exhibits to be displayed and shared with the school community.

16 weeks before project due date: Contact a local community partner such as a museum, library, or community center. Identify one representative from the partner organization who will make a commitment to shepherd the project from the other end. This may include such tasks as organizing publicity, reserving facilities, setting up tables, and securing supplemental funding.

16 weeks before project due date: Determine one or two appropriate venues to display the student exhibits and make reservations: a school and a community center might be two possibilities.

School: If possible, display the exhibits at your school before taking them to an off-site venue. This allows for other classes to view the exhibits and gives students the opportunity to teach their peers about what they have learned. A display at your own school also provides an opportunity to troubleshoot as needed.

Community center, etc: If an off-site venue is selected, it is ideal to have the exhibits on display for at least two weeks so that students may bring their families. Hosting an opening event at a community center is a great community builder and nice media event. Entertainment and/or food related to the exhibit theme could be provided.

16 weeks before project due date: If possible, schedule a field trip to a local museum so that students can observe examples of museum-quality work. This field trip is ideally scheduled about six weeks prior to the project due date.

12 weeks before project due date: Continue to stay in contact with the community partner. Discuss with them the appropriate look for the project, including such details as appropriate tables, lighting, backdrops, etc. If possible, ask the partner to come to class and provide students with tips about creating an effective exhibit.

12 weeks before project due date: Begin publicizing the project to parents and students. A slide show about the project and the venue will both inform and excite the students, parents, and the wider school community. Coordinate with the school's parent organization to arrange for chaperones for the museum field trip.



7 weeks before project due date: Distribute project parameters. To keep students organized with a project of this scale, you may want to put up a poster or other visual reminders of what should be done by certain benchmark dates. These can be either be graded or simply be suggestions, depending on your preference. Students can then make sure that they are on track to completing their projects on time.

6 weeks before project due date (1 to 2 days prior to the field trip): Have the community partner come to school to answer any questions. Review the field-trip logistics and be sure all questions are answered.

6 weeks before project due date: Go on a field trip to a museum with the purpose of learning more about what makes a good exhibit. Students should focus on exhibit construction, display of objects and photographs, text panels, and who they think the exhibit's audience is.

Day after museum field trip: Brainstorm with students about what they observed at the museum. After the discussion, have students write an essay about what makes a good museum exhibit.

1 to 2 days after museum field trip: Consult with your community partner to select primary sources for students to use to begin their research; these can be both Web-based and print resources. If the resources are Web based, link them to your class Web site so that they may be more easily accessible. Explain that students will have a week to determine the focus of their projects. Allow at least 2 to 3 class periods for students to review and become familiar with the resources.

5 weeks before project due date: Project proposal is due and must include a preliminary list of primary sources. As time permits, begin scheduling occasional work days or research days.

4 weeks before project due date: Begin checking the students' progress.

1 week before project due date: Check with students to see if they will need special equipment for their exhibits, such as electricity, a TV/DVD player, easels, etc.

Project due date: Display exhibits either at school or at an off-site venue and have students share their exhibits with the school community. A suggested grading rubric is attached.

Student Assignment Sheet and Timeline

Handout 5-1

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Name _____ Period _____

You will be putting together museum exhibits for a display on “The Japanese American Experience in Utah and Northern Davis County. At least three primary sources must be used as part of your project. These sources must be cited in MLA format. See www.citationmachine.net (accessed August 3, 2009) for instructions.

The exhibits can be done in many different ways, so if you have an idea not listed below, see the teacher to make appropriate arrangements.

Group Exhibit: The exhibit must be on display board and include at least one three-dimensional object placed in front of the board. Citations of the primary sources that inform the exhibit must be included. Each member of the group must be able to talk about the project and answer questions. Groups cannot be larger than four people.

Single Exhibit: See above.

Artwork: Any medium (paint, charcoal, sculpture, etc.) is acceptable. Two-dimensional artwork should be at least 8½ by 11 inches or consist of several smaller artworks that total that size. Citations of the primary sources that informed the artwork must be included. This may be done individually or in pairs. Each member of the group must be able to talk about the project and answer questions.

Photography: At least four photographs must be printed on quality paper and displayed. Citations of the primary sources that informed the photographs must be included. This must be done individually, with students able to talk and answer questions about the selection of composition and subject matter.

Oral History: Consult with the teacher for suggestions on who to interview. A transcript and a summary of the oral history must be included. This must be done in pairs, with each person able to talk about the oral history and answer questions.

Video: The video must be at least 15 minutes in length and include primary sources, such as interviews, photographs, and artifacts. This may be produced in pairs or individually, with each person able to talk about the project and answer questions.

Performance: This category includes original music or drama performances, about five minutes in length. A script or written music must be included, and costumes are highly encouraged. Citations of the primary sources that informed the performance must be included. This must be done individually or with up to four people. Each student must be able to talk about the project and answer questions.

Literature: Short stories (about three pages), descriptive essays (about three pages), or poetry (3 to 10 poems, depending on their length) are acceptable. The finished works should be neatly typed and displayed. Citations of the primary sources that informed the piece must be included. This must be done individually, with the student able to talk and answer questions about the piece.

Timeline (fill in dates)

_____: Field trip to museum.

_____: Exploration of primary resources and online databases.

_____: Project proposal due, with possible primary sources and list of group members.

_____: Work on project on your own time.

_____: Class time given to work on project. This is NOT the time to start the project, but to put finishing touches on the project and get assistance on finishing.

_____: Finish projects on your own time.

_____: **PROJECTS DUE!!!!**

_____: “School Museum” displays, with students as docents. A representative from the community partner will attend to select the exhibits that will be on display at the community partner’s site.

_____: Opening event at community partner’s site, with selected exhibits displayed. Students whose exhibits are selected will have the (optional) opportunity to act as docents in their exhibits.

_____: School or County History Fair. Exhibits may be entered in the Fair for MASSIVE extra credit!

Grading Rubric

Museum Exhibit

Handout 5-2

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Name _____ Period _____

50 points possible

Sources (15 points possible)

_____ Three or more primary sources are present (7 points)

_____ Sources are correctly cited (8 points)

Exhibit (25 points possible)

_____ Exhibit fits theme of “The Japanese American Experience in Utah and Northern Davis County” (10 points)

_____ Exhibit meets appropriate length or size requirements (5 points)

_____ Students can talk comfortably about the project and sources (10 points)

Presentation (10 points possible)

_____ Project is neat and eye-catching (10 points)

Extra Credit

_____ Exceptional effort (up to 10 points)

_____ Selected for display at Museum (15 points)

_____ TOTAL (out of 50 points)



Ideas to Projects

Handout 5-3

By Howard Adams (2006)

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Name _____ Period _____

Start with a general idea:

--

Brainstorm more specific topics from your general idea:

Choose one specific topic that interests you:

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How to Create a Museum Exhibit

Handout 5-4

By Nancy Nakae, Director, Syracuse History Museum (2006)

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Name _____ Period _____

Main types of people who will visit a museum:

1. Adults—Intelligent people who read and understand everyday language and concepts; they enjoy sense stimulation and creativity. Some will read all the information you provide; others will only read the large print. All will enjoy pictures and artifacts.
2. Teenagers—Intelligent people with less experience than adults; they are looking for more mental and sensory sense stimulation, as well as some entertainment. Most will only glance at the large print but will pay attention to the pictures and artifacts.
3. Older children, ages 8 to 12—Young people prefer hands-on experiences to help them learn; they will rarely read anything but will enjoy pictures and artifacts.
4. Younger children, ages 3 to 7— Parents are usually with them to explain things; they need visual stimulation, bright colors, and hands-on experiences. They will like pictures that are big and colorful.

At the very beginning, ask yourself:

1. Which type of person will visit my exhibit?
2. What main ideas do I want to present?
3. What main ideas do I want people to learn?
4. How do I want them to learn?
5. What do I want them to remember?

When writing the text, keep these ideas in mind:

1. Make main titles catchy and short.
2. Keep subtitles brief but informative, bringing out the main ideas.
3. Give the reader the main ideas quickly and easily.
4. Other information may be added for those who want to read more.

When selecting artifacts, keep two things in mind:

1. Artifacts need to be displayed with a backdrop and short, easy-to-read labels.
2. Backdrops can be easels with fabric, sheet metal, decorated cardboard displays, framed art, wooden “sets,” or other creative ideas.

When selecting lettering and fonts, keep these things in mind:

1. Use no more than three fonts for your exhibit.
2. Use typed lettering, vinyl letters, or other peel-and-stick letters.
3. Use rulers and make sure all letters are placed correctly. Make sure that all words are spelled correctly and that punctuation is accurate.
4. Keep colors to a minimum so you do not detract from the message of the exhibit.
5. Make sure the size of the lettering is large enough to read easily.

