

Lessons from Topaz: Have We Really Learned Them?

Time

5–6 class periods (85 minutes per period)

Note from David Seiter, the author of this unit

Any time a teacher can link past events to the present, students are more apt to engage in the lesson. This was the case on the first day of this unit when students were presented with a fictitious “Executive Order” announcing the gathering up of anyone with an Arabic surname. Very few times in my 35 years of teaching have students questioned, debated the true merits of the action, or wanted to take action as they did at that time.

As I told students about the fictitious “Executive Order,” looks of disbelief crossed their faces. A few did not believe it at first, but as the questions, concerns, and palatable explanations continued, the disbelief changed to anger. They were angry because some of their fellow classmates would be gathered, bused to Wyoming, and separated from their families. Even students who had previously said very little in class during the year spoke out in opposition to the extent that they were ready to lead a protest at the local National Guard Armory as well as hide a student and his family. They said such things as: “Simon, you’re not going anywhere. You and your mother can stay with us. We’ll hide you.”

The discussion following the exercise was one of the best class exchanges that I have had the privilege of conducting. This was a very real experience for them, and it hit home. Because of this exercise, students felt compelled to do something to prevent an event like this from occurring ever again. As the unit progressed, they also gained more empathy for and a historical understanding of the mass incarceration of Japanese Americans during World War II.

Objectives

- Students will use primary sources to describe the physical conditions and daily life in Topaz.
- Students will examine how communities develop, endure, and change over time.
- Students will become familiar with the art and literature that was created in Topaz.
- Students will consider how the definition of “hero” may vary.
- Students will understand and evaluate the reasons for the World War II incarceration of Japanese Americans.

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 do communities endure?
- What is the process of social justice?

Materials

- Art supplies
 - Butcher paper and markers
 - Art materials to create scrapbooks and displays
- President Franklin D. Roosevelt’s Executive Order 9066 (transcript) must be downloaded from the Our Documents Web site at <http://www.ourdocuments.gov/doc.php?doc=74&page=transcript> (accessed August 4, 2009)
- Video and other media (bibliographic information is available in the “References” section, and many resources are available from Davis School District)
 - *Topaz* DVD
- Handouts
 - *Handout 1-1: Lessons from Topaz: Scrapbook Grading Rubric*

- *Handout 3-1: Desert Exile and Weedflower Graphic Organizer*
- *Handout 3-2: Web Sites for Research*
- *Handout 4-1: What Makes a Hero?*
- Books (bibliographic information is available in the “References” section, and many resources are available from Davis School District)
 - *Journey to Topaz: A Story of the Japanese American Evacuation* by Yoshiko Uchida—Chapters 11 through 15 (for a jigsaw exercise)
 - *Topaz Moon: Chiura Obata’s Art of the Internment*, edited by Kimi Kodani Hill
 - *Weedflower* by Cynthia Kadohata—Chapters 6 and 7 (one copy for each student)
 - *Desert Exile: The Uprooting of a Japanese-American Family* by Yoshiko Uchida—Chapter 3 (one copy for each student)
 - *Lost Battalions: Going for Broke in the Vosges, Autumn 1944* by Franz Steidl—Chapter 13 (one copy for each student)

Assessments

- The final assessment consists of a Topaz scrapbook, which is a compilation of the students’ assignments and thoughts. A grading rubric is provided.

Background

The teacher should become familiar with the media materials and books used in this unit, including the art and literature that was produced in Topaz, especially the books listed in the “Materials” section. Historical overviews, timelines, and maps about the Japanese American experience are included with this unit’s introductory materials.

Also, please note that there are numerous Web sites that contain helpful primary sources and oral history interviews about the Japanese American experience in Utah. The Web sites with particular relevance to this unit are listed in *Handout 3-2: Web Sites for Research*

and *Handout 4-1: What Makes a Hero?* The teacher should become familiar with these prior to teaching this unit.

Instructional Strategies/Skills

Day 1: What is Topaz?

- Start the lesson with a scenario:
 - Did you know the Department of Homeland Security elevated the threat level to “High” last night? For our protection, the President issued an Executive Order that instructed everyone with an Arabic last name to meet at the local elementary school this Saturday by 4:00 p.m. They will then be transported at government expense to a center just to check to see if they may be involved with a terrorist group. It is for everyone’s safety, and they will be returned very quickly. The process center for Utah, Idaho, and Montana is an old government facility outside of Casper, Wyoming.
 - This should elicit responses such as, “Can they do that?” Some students may sense the comparison. If they do, then say something like, “Yes, that’s what we did in World War II, and I suppose we haven’t learned anything.”
- **Make sure to tell the students that the scenario is not real.**
- Divide the class into groups of 4 to 5 students for small group discussion. Assign a recorder or have each group one. Give each group the following questions and have them summarize their responses on butcher paper. When they have finished, ask each group to put their papers up around the room and have them explain their responses.
 - Can the President do such a thing? Why or why not?
 - What rights do we have that might protect us from something like this?
 - Is it ever necessary to give up those rights? Defend your position.
 - What does an action like this do to the community?
- Distribute the downloaded transcripts of Executive

Order 9066 and show the first 20 minutes of the *Topaz* DVD. Before showing the DVD, write the following questions on the board and ask students to answer them:

- What was Topaz and where was it located?
- What is a “relocation camp”?
- What was Executive Order 9066, and why was it issued?
- Describe the conditions of the camps.
- Following the DVD, explain to students that they will be compiling their assignments into a scrapbook to document what they are learning. The discussions from this lesson will be included in their scrapbooks. Distribute *Handout 1-1: Lessons from Topaz: Scrapbook Grading Rubric* and review this grading rubric with the class.

Day 2: Building an Enduring Community

- Start by writing this question on the board: *What is a community?*
- Divide the class into pairs and give a sheet of plain paper to each pair. Have each pair define “community” on one side and draw a picture that explains the term on the opposite side. Assign each pair a number or letter, and place the drawings around the room. Students are instructed to walk around the room and write down the number/letter of each drawing and what they believe the drawing means. Pairs will then offer their meanings, with the creators explaining their drawings to the rest of the class.
- Following the pairing exercise, reorganize the students into small groups (different from the previous day), then assign a recorder and two people to present answers to these questions:
 - How do you develop a sense of community if you come from a variety of places?
 - Do people with the same cultural or ethnic backgrounds automatically form a tight community?
 - Are there any external factors, such as laws or education, that might accelerate community building?
- Have the groups report to the rest of the class. When

all of the groups are finished, have students individually respond to the same questions and place the responses in their scrapbooks.

- Distribute Chapters 11 through 15 from *Journey to Topaz*. Jigsaw the readings and have students come back together and write down similarities and differences of the characters in the book.
- Show the segment from *Topaz* regarding the community of people who lived outside of Topaz in Delta, Utah. Write the following questions on the board for students to consider during the DVD.
 - What was the Japanese American community’s view of Topaz?
 - What do you think their view of “community” was then?
 - From the interviews, what do you think their view of “community” is now?
- Write (do not type) a letter as if you were someone your age living in Topaz. This letter is to a friend in another state and should demonstrate your knowledge of the community at Topaz. This letter should be incorporated into the scrapbook at the end of the unit. Make sure to describe Topaz, your new friends, and your feelings about what community is or is not in the camp.

Day 3: Art and Literature as the Soul of the Community

- Assign six students to go to the board and write what they typically do each day. Based on the previous lesson, compare the lists on the board with what people might have done in camp all day.
- Deliver a mini-lecture (direct instruction) on camp activities, particularly emphasizing the art and literature of the camp.
- Distribute the graphic organizers and excerpts from *Weedflower* (Chapters 6 and 7) and *Desert Exile* (Chapter 3). The students will read about what happened to the Uchida and Matsuda families following the bombing of Pearl Harbor and will complete *Handout 3-1: Desert Exile and Weedflower Graphic Organizer*. This organizer assists students in identifying the main

themes of the excerpts and aids them in comparing the writings to other pieces they have previously studied.

- After completing the graphic organizer, distribute *Handout 3-2: Web Sites for Research* to provide students with a list of Web sites that will help them begin their research.
- Following the initial research, have students do one of the following or present their own assessment ideas for preapproval. These pieces will be placed in the students' scrapbooks.
 - Write a review of the art and/or literature from Topaz in the format of one that would be found in a magazine from the 1940s.
 - Create a painting or sketch with the same techniques used by Topaz artists, stressing the idea of community.
 - Write an essay or poem concerning what community was for the people of Topaz in the style of the author of *Weedflower* or *Desert Exile*.

Day 4: I Am an American

- Write the following questions on the board and brainstorm the responses as a class.
 - What makes an American?
 - What makes a hero?
- Come to a class consensus on the answers. It is important to handle these questions sensitively.
- Pose the following questions for a class discussion:
 - What is the difference between a hero and a villain?
 - Who might be considered a hero and why?
- Distribute *Handout 4-1: What Makes a Hero?* and tell students that they must use their U.S. History textbook and the Web to identify ten World War II-era individuals whom they consider to be heroes and then write a one-to-two-sentence statement about why they made their choices. Of the ten heroes, at least two should be Japanese American. This writing assignment should be included in the students' scrapbooks.
- For homework, distribute to each student a copy of Chapter 13 from *Lost Battalions* and ask them to

answer the following questions for homework.

- Who are these soldiers?
- Have you ever heard of them? If not, speculate about why not.
- Would they be considered true Americans?
- Would they be considered heroes? Why or why not?

Day 5: I Am an American (continued)

- Divide the class up into groups of four and have them discuss their homework answers. Then have each group briefly report out and write their conclusions on the board.
- Distribute butcher paper to each group. Instruct students that they are going to create a "Heroes Wall" featuring their ten individuals and individuals from their previous readings. Each group of four to five students will create their own images using pictures, quotes, and symbols that illustrate what it means to be a hero. One member of the Topaz community must be included within each group. A brief rationale must accompany each of the individuals depicted.
- Display the "Heroes Walls" around the room.

Day 6: The Enduring Community

- Explain to students that when World War II ended, many of those who were in Topaz decided to stay in Utah and then built their lives here. Show streaming video of Utahn Mr. Wat Misaka on the Japanese American National Museum's Web site: <http://www.janm.org/projects/ec/resources/curricula-media>. At the end of his interview, he discusses the businesses he remembers on Ogden's 25th Street during World War II.
- The Japanese American community in Utah has endured and grown over the years.
- Each student should respond to this prompt to compose an evaluative essay—with a minimum of five paragraphs—using supporting arguments from sources in this unit and making connections to relevant contemporary issues:
 - It was the right thing to remove Japanese Ameri-

- cans from the West Coast to Topaz during World War II. Agree or disagree.
- This essay should complete the student's scrapbook. The entire scrapbook should be submitted to the teacher for grading.

References

- Hill, Kimi Kodani, ed. *Topaz Moon: Chiura Obata's Art of the Internment*. Berkeley, Calif.: Heyday Books, 2000.
- History Underscores Belief. http://www.hubtours.org/HUB_Tours/Home.html (accessed August 18, 2009).
- Japanese American National Museum. <http://www.janm.org/> (accessed August 18, 2009).
- Kadohata, Cynthia. *Weedflower*. New York: Atheneum Books, 2006.
- Misaka, Wat. Oral history interview by Marc Stillman. In *Enduring Communities: The Japanese Americans in Arizona, Colorado, New Mexico, Texas, and Utah Project*. 2006.
- Steidl, Franz. *Lost Battalions: Going for Broke in the Vosges, Autumn 1944*. Novato, Calif.: Presidio Press, 2000.
- Topaz. DVD. Produced and directed by Ken Verdoia. Salt Lake City: KUED, 1987.
- Topaz Museum. <http://topazmuseum.org/> (accessed August 18, 2009).
- Uchida, Yoshiko. *Desert Exile: The Uprooting of a Japanese-American Family*. Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1982.
- . *Journey to Topaz: A Story of the Japanese American Evacuation*. Berkeley, Calif.: Heyday Books, 1971.

Lessons from Topaz:

Scrapbook Grading Rubric Handout 1-1

Name _____ Period _____

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 do communities endure?
- What is the process of social justice?

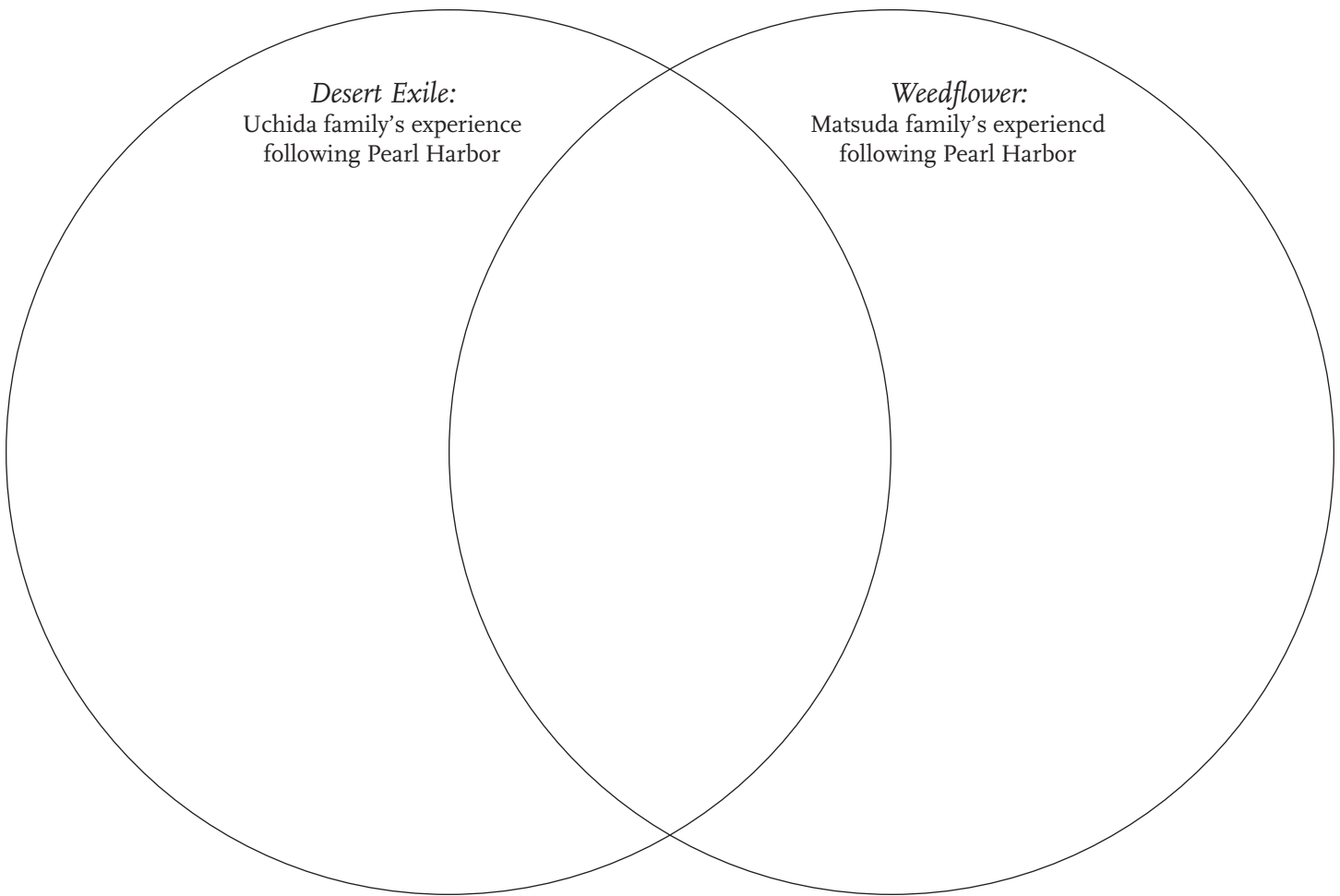
Content	26–30 points Has 15 or more pages and 20 or more different but related items that cover the topic in detail. Answers four Essential Questions.	20–25 points 11–14 pages and 15 different but related items. Answers the three Essential Questions. 1–2 factual errors.	15–19 points 8–10 pages and 11 different but related items. Somewhat answers the two Essential Questions. Few factual errors.	1–14 points Fewer than 8 pages and has fewer than 10 items that contain good information on the topic, with several factual errors. Only answers one Essential Question.
Design	13–15 points Layout is appealing and well organized. Color and text add interest and appeal. Consistency in motif, colors, text, and alignment.	10–12 points Above average visual appeal and organization but some elements are lacking. Color, motif, text, and alignment need some improvement.	7–9 points Visual appeal lacking and does not look like a scrapbook. Little consistency in the visual elements. Little visual appeal.	1–6 points A hodgepodge of unorganized items thrown together. No consistency in layout or between visual elements.
Sources	13–15 points Is complete and contains correctly referenced information for all sources, including maps, diaries, etc., in MLA format.	10–12 points 90% of information is referenced correctly for all sources in MLA format.	7–9 points 50% or more of information is included and 85% is referenced correctly using MLA format.	1–6 points Little (if any) of sources of info are included or cited. MLA format is only partially used.
Mechanics	9–10 points Very few misspellings or mechanical or grammatical errors.	7–8 points Some misspellings, some mechanical and grammatical errors.	5–6 points Much (but less than 25%) of the scrapbook contains misspellings and grammatical and mechanical errors.	1–4 points 25% or more of the scrapbook contains misspellings and grammatical and mechanical errors.

Desert Exile and Weedflower Graphic Organizer

Handout 3-1

Name _____ Period _____

Read the passages from *Desert Exile* and *Weedflower* and complete the Venn diagram below.



Web Sites for Research

Handout 3-2

15

Name _____ Period _____

Browse through these Web sites to learn more about the art and literature produced in and/or about Topaz. With this research you must complete one of the following pieces for inclusion in your scrapbook:

- Write a review of the art and/or literature from Topaz in the format of one that would be found in a magazine from the 1940s.
- Create a painting or sketch with the same techniques used by Topaz artists, stressing the idea of community.
- Write an essay or poem concerning what community was for the people of Topaz in the style of the author of *Weed-flower* or *Desert Exile*.

Denshō: The Japanese American Legacy Project

1. <http://www.densho.org> (accessed August 18, 2009).
2. Choose “Archive” from the menu at the top of the home page.
3. Choose “Enter the archive” from the menu on the left (a password is required).
4. On the left is a list of Visual History Collections. Scroll down to “Topaz Museum Collection.”
5. Browse through the nine oral history interviews.

History Underscores Belief: Day of Remembrance

1. http://www.hubtours.org/HUB_Tours/Day_of_Remembrance.html (accessed August 18, 2009).
2. Read the brief overview and listen to the podcasts.

History Underscores Belief: Topaz

1. http://www.hubtours.org/HUB_Tours/Topaz.html (accessed August 18, 2009).
2. Read the overview and listen to the podcasts.

Japanese American National Museum’s Hisako Hibi Collection

1. <http://www.janm.org/collections/hisako-hibi-collection/> (accessed August 18, 2009).
2. Read the artist’s biography and browse through the paintings from Tanforan and Topaz.

Online Archive of California’s Collection from the Bancroft Library, UC Berkeley

- <http://www.oac.cdlib.org/institutions/UC+Berkeley::Bancroft+Library> (accessed September 6, 2009).
1. Browse the collection for the “War Relocation Authority Photographs of Japanese-American Evacuation and Resettlement.”
 2. Enter “Topaz” in the search box.
 3. To narrow the search, select “Online Items.”

Topaz Museum

1. <http://topazmuseum.org/index.html> (accessed August 18, 2009).
2. Browse through the site, reading the overviews and viewing the maps and artifacts.

What Makes A Hero?

Handout 4-1

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Name _____ Period _____

Using your U.S. History textbook and the Web, identify ten World War II–era individuals whom you consider to be heroes and write a one-to-two-sentence statement about why. Of the ten heroes, at least two should be Japanese American, so the following Web sites will help you get started. This writing assignment will be included in your scrapbook.

Denshō: The Japanese American Legacy Project

1. <http://www.densho.org> (accessed August 18, 2009).
2. Choose “Archive” from the menu at the top of the home page.
3. Choose “Enter the archive” from the menu on the left (a password is required).
4. On the left is a list of Visual History Collections. Scroll down to “Topaz Museum Collection.”
5. View the Nelson Takeo Akagi and Bob Utsumi oral history interviews.

Military Experience Database on “Discover Nikkei” Web site

1. <http://www.discovernikkei.org/en/resources/military/> (accessed August 18, 2009).
2. Type in various keywords for information about Japanese Americans in the military.

Go for Broke National Education Center

1. <http://www.goforbroke.org/> (accessed August 18, 2009).
2. Browse through the site for resources, timelines, and oral history interviews.