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EDUCATION

The Literature of Japanese American Incarceration

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Teacher's Guide written by Laura Reis Mayer

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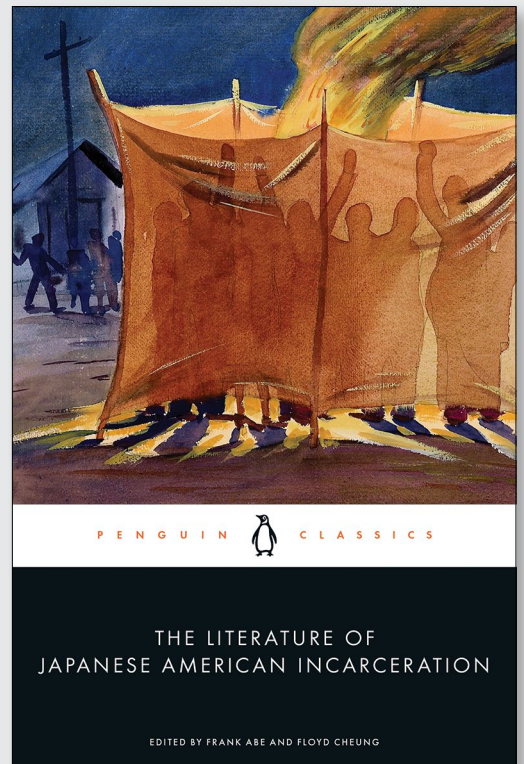
INTRODUCTION

The Civil Liberties Act Of 1988 granted reparations for the unjust exclusion and imprisonment of Japanese Americans during World War II, yet, as President George H. W. Bush acknowledged two years later, “a monetary sum and words alone cannot restore lost years or erase painful memories” (prhlink.com/mailcall). In *The Literature of Japanese American Incarceration*, editors Frank Abe and Floyd Cheung are determined to elevate the voices of those who lived those painful memories, and to illuminate the legacy of those lost years.

In today's highly charged political landscape, where racial bias and cultural scapegoating remain powerful weapons of propaganda and politics, *The Literature of Japanese American Incarceration* is not just relevant, but requisite for student readers. In letters, essays, poetry, and primary documents, the text addresses multiple contents and curriculums. Students can read the text in its entirety, or they might read selections that align with course goals. Educators can assign any combination of this guide's classroom activities, which ask students to read critically, write argumentatively, and speak persuasively. Whether teachers use the book to

Teacher's Guide

INCLUDES: DISCUSSION QUESTIONS,
CLASSROOM ACTIVITIES,
AND LINKS TO RESOURCES



INTRODUCTION

(CONTINUED)

explore history and the U.S. Constitution, or to analyze literature and the development of writer's voice, *The Literature of Japanese American Incarceration* addresses important realities and essential truths while inspiring students to advocate for equity and to learn from our nation's past and present.

**PREPARING TO
READ THE TEXT**

Before reading the text, generate interest and provide access for all students by building their knowledge around the history and legacy of Japanese American incarceration.

Concept Cloud

Create a concept cloud addressing the essential question: *What is the legacy of Japanese American incarceration?* Post the question on the whiteboard, and explain to students that they will be reading a short article introducing many of the themes central to *The Literature of Japanese American Incarceration*. Students will read the *Smithsonian Magazine* article "Eighty Years after the U.S. Incarcerated 120,000 Japanese Americans, Trauma and Scars Still Remain" (prhlink.com/smithsonian). As they read, students should annotate any big ideas that arise from the article. After reading, ask students to share a one- or two-word phrase identifying the topics they saw, and record these phrases in a word cloud generator such as Mentimeter (<https://www.mentimeter.com>). Example phrases may include "generational trauma," "lost identities," "euphemistic language," "social conscience," "racial prejudice," "restitution," and "remembrance." Project the concept cloud for all to see, and explain that these topics are central to the text the class will be reading. Encourage students to keep these concepts and the essential question in mind as they read the collection of voices found in *The Literature of Japanese American Incarceration*.

Cover Art

Generate student interest by analyzing the book's cover art. Using the Colors/Shapes/Lines protocol (prhlink.com/projectzero), students should reflect and record their impressions of the image throughout three rounds of observation.

In the first round, students reflect on the book's cover image, concentrating on color. Students should notice the reds, yellows, and oranges of the fire and the black of the camp structures and inhabitants. In round two, students look for shapes. They will note shadowed silhouettes and windswept flames. In the third round of observation, students look for lines. Here students will note the tent poles and the raised hands of the protestors.

Once students have taken time to reflect and share out, they are ready for analysis. Ask: *Why might the figures be gathered around a fire with raised fists? What tone is being set here?* Ask students to read the preface to *The Literature of Japanese American Incarceration*, annotating anything that seems to align with the tone of the cover art. Discuss the editors' assertion that the book is "pointed rather than poignant," and that "many of the voices in this volume are those of protest" (pp. xii–xiii). Discuss: *How does the cover art serve to support and enhance the book's prologue? How can art and writing serve as forms of protest?*

**PREPARING TO
READ THE TEXT
(CONTINUED)**

Station Rotation

Provide a high-level introduction to the era of Japanese American incarceration by conducting a “stations” learning experience. Explain that by briefly researching some key concepts, events, and legislation surrounding the exclusion and imprisonment of Japanese Americans during World War II, students will be better prepared to read and comprehend the book. Split students into small groups at various points around the room, designated by chart paper on the wall or tables. Each station represents a topic significant to *The Literature of Japanese American Incarceration*. Stations are set up with an image, podcast, video, infographic, or text that groups quickly research and discuss before writing a summary on the chart paper. When groups have had sufficient time at a station, they can move to the next one where they will examine the resources and add to what has already been noted. Though not every station must be visited by each group, students will eventually return to their original station, read their classmates’ notes, and synthesize them into a summary paragraph clarifying the significance of the event or legislation. For a digital version of this activity, groups can create “thin slides” on a class slide deck (prhlink.com/eduthinslide). Each slide contains one image and one paragraph clarifying the topic’s history and impact. Stations (with possible resources) might include:

- Executive Order 9066 (prhlink.com/9066)
- Issei and Nisei (prhlink.com/nisei)
- Incarceration Camps (prhlink.com/ww2incarceration)
- Fair Play Committee (prhlink.com/fairplaycommittee)
- 442nd Combat Team (prhlink.com/combattteam)
- Civil Liberties Act of 1988 (prhlink.com/civilliberties)
- Day of Remembrance (prhlink.com/remembrance)

Image Analysis

Build knowledge around the legacy of Japanese American incarceration with a documentary collection by famed photojournalist Dorothea Lange. In this collection, Lange captures images of American citizens, adults and children alike, who are forced to abandon their lives and livelihoods due to racial fear after the Pearl Harbor attack (prhlink.com/NYTphotos). Share the collection of photographs with students and ask them to reflect and respond by applying the see, think, wonder thinking routine (prhlink.com/seethinkwonder) or by using an image analysis template from the Library of Congress (prhlink.com/photosandprints). Provide time for students to share their reflections with a partner before discussing with the class. As a group, talk about surprising, ironic, or impactful images. Students may cite the irony in children pledging allegiance to the American flag and the “I am an American” sign. Or, they may question the rationale in the “All persons of Japanese ancestry” poster. Ask students: *How has Lange captured both the dignity and the distress of these individuals and families? How can her work serve as a visual narrative for the physical and emotional journey of incarcerated Japanese Americans?*

READING THE TEXT

The following classroom strategies engage students in reading, writing, thinking, and talking about *The Literature of Japanese American Incarceration*.

Close Read

Encourage student readers to “deep dive” into *The Literature of Japanese American Incarceration*. The close-reading process focuses on excerpts, or “chunks,” of text, promoting interpretation that is deep, rather than wide, and fostering critical-thinking skills through writing and speaking. Ask students to perform three reads, stopping after each to write and discuss with a partner or group:

- What is happening in the text?
- What is this text beginning to be about?
- Which words and phrases contribute to the text’s meaning and tone?

For all three questions, students must return to the text and cite evidence. One selection that works well for close reading is “Has the Gestapo Come to America?” (pp. 48–49). After the first read, students answer a simple plot question: “What is happening in the text?” Students should answer that publisher James Omura is testifying to a congressional committee. In the second read, students delve into the author’s purpose: “What is this text beginning to be about?” Here, students will note that Omura is protesting the lack of due process faced by the Nisei, and he is comparing America’s actions to those of Adolf Hitler. Finally, after the third read, students focus even deeper: “Which words and phrases contribute to the text’s meaning and tone?” By this time, students should see that Omura’s rhetorical questions and pointed language support his tone of protest. For evidence, students can reference his question, “Has the Gestapo Come to America?” as well as his assertion, “I believe that much of this distrust of citizen Japanese is based on ignorance.” For more information, view this Douglas Fisher video on close reading (prhlink.com/douglasfisherid)

Text Pairings

Ask students to consider the text’s focus on identity by analyzing its representation in two different artistic mediums. First, show students an image of child-sized geta sandals created by a father during incarceration and displayed at the Smithsonian National Museum of American History (prhlink.com/sandals). Ask students to describe what they see. Discuss the mix of Japanese style with American iconography, such as the Mickey Mouse figures painted on the shoes. Next, ask students to read Bunichi Kagawa’s “Geta” (pp. 160–164). As they read, students should annotate specific words, phrases, and passages that support symbolism. In other words, what do the sandals gradually come to symbolize in the camps? Students should trace the growing association of geta, first to protection, then to creative craft, and ultimately to cultural pride and collective identity.

During discussion, ask students to provide text support for their analysis. Students might cite evidence such as “All of us felt a closeness because we were wearing geta . . . Geta made us understand that we were Japanese . . . We all felt a sense of camaraderie . . . We were able to regain a sense of who we were” (pp. 162–163). Discuss: *How did reading Kagawa’s passage connect to or extend your*

READING THE TEXT

(CONTINUED)

understanding of the geta image? How did clothing promote collective or cultural identity in camps? Can creative crafts serve as protest? As an extension, play and discuss with students the short NPR *Morning Edition* broadcast “The Creative Art of Coping in Japanese Internment” (prhlink.com/coping).

Word Wall

Emphasize the power of language to hide or reveal truth by creating a class word wall. First, ask students to define “euphemism,” and provide familiar examples like “pre-owned” for “used,” and “enhanced interrogation” in place of “torture.” Discuss how euphemisms exist to make people less uncomfortable. Next, ask students to partner-read the National Parks article “Terminology and the Mass Incarceration of Japanese Americans During World War II” (prhlink.com/nps), which lists historic euphemisms for Japanese American incarceration and offers accurate replacements. Instead of “assembly center,” “internment camp,” and “evacuation,” the article asserts the terms “detention center,” “concentration camp,” and “forced removal.” Refer students to William Minoru Hohri’s “The Complaint” in *The Literature of Japanese American Incarceration*. In it, Hohri vows to “shed official euphemisms” like “relocation centers” (p. 254) as he details the complaint against the United States government by the National Council for Japanese American Redress (NCJAR).

As students read *The Literature of Japanese American Incarceration* and encounter euphemistic terms and their replacements, pause to add words to the class word wall. Euphemisms can be posted in one color with their replacements in a different color, emphasizing the purposeful intent to avoid misdirection. Provide time for students to discuss the different connotations in these terms. Ask: *Why do Hohri’s text and the National Parks article assert the need for discomfort when discussing this topic? How do the words we choose to use around historical or political topics inform our understanding and point of view? When can vocabulary serve as a form of protest?*

CER Analysis

Ask students to use the Claim, Evidence, Reasoning (CER) framework to analyze arguments evident in *The Literature of Japanese American Incarceration*. While there are multiple opportunities for analysis throughout the text, one entry that lends itself to CER is “Why I Refuse to Register for Evacuation” (pp. 55–59). In this section, Gordon K. Hirabayashi argues that the “miserable psychological and horrible physical atmosphere” forced upon Japanese Americans, most of whom are U.S. citizens, is a denial of their rights and civil liberties denoted by the U.S. Bill of Rights. Challenge students to record the claims, evidence, and reasoning in this section, identifying how Hirabayashi develops and refines his claims, and evaluating the effectiveness of this particular argument. Next, ask students to review the Bill of Rights and determine which specific rights and liberties are challenged by evacuation and incarceration (prhlink.com/billofrights). Ask students: *Which of these violations are evident in Hirabayashi’s argument? What can you add based on your review?*

READING THE TEXT

(CONTINUED)

Propaganda: Connect/Extend/Challenge

Ask students to apply the connect, extend, challenge protocol as they reflect on a WWII propaganda video from the War Activities Committee of the Motion Pictures Industry (prhlink.com/propaganda). As students watch the video, ask them to record any words or language about evacuation and incarceration that *connects* to what they've read in *The Literature of Japanese American Incarceration*. Discuss how the wording contrasts with the realities highlighted in the book. Students should note propaganda diction, such as “cheerfully,” “whole-heartedly,” “opportunity,” and “pioneer communities,” used to describe the process of forcible removal. Ask students: *How does this film extend our understanding of the information provided to U.S. citizens regarding the exclusion, evacuation, and imprisonment of U.S. citizens during World War II? Does the video address any questions you had as you read? Discuss the red captions added to the propaganda film by the History Channel. Ask: Why did they choose to edit the film in this way? What questions and challenges emerge as a result of these captions? How can media serve as a form of protest?*

Poetry Analysis

Challenge students to interpret one or more of the poems in *The Literature of Japanese American Incarceration* by applying the TPCASTT analysis method (prhlink.com/readwritethinkanalysis). With this close-reading tool, students use a chart to perform a rhetorical analysis of a poem. First, they examine the title and paraphrase the poem. Then, students analyze *connotation, attitude or tone, shifts, title* (again), and *theme*.

For example, students can analyze “That Damned Fence” (p. 103). The poem is of unclear origin but one attribution is to Minoru Yasui, “The Mad Mongolian” (p. 65). Students should note the protest overtones of both the title and the line, “That Damned Fence.” Students should also note the juxtaposition of national loyalty and racial typecasting in words such as “loyalty” and “patriotism,” in contrast to “committed no crime” and “because we happen to be Japs.” Students can synthesize their analysis with a summary statement at the bottom of the TPCASTT chart. A sample summary might read, “In ‘That Damned Fence,’ the poet illustrates his decreasing patience and increasing agitation due to the hypocritical imprisonment of American citizens.” The TPCASTT analysis helps students answer the question: How do a poet’s stylistic choices support overall purpose, theme, or message? As an extension, students can find supporting material in the text that provides context to the poem or extends its meaning. For example, students can read about the oil drum-fueled fire circles where “That Damned Fence” was read (p. 65) and analyze the aligned artwork on the book cover. Discuss with students: *How does applying the TPCASTT analysis deepen our understanding of a poem?*

Video Tour

Immerse students in a video tour to underscore the impact of removal and imprisonment on the personal lives and possessions of Japanese Americans. First, ask students to take a close look at the image on pages 53–54 of *The Literature of Japanese American Incarceration*. The poster declares that “All persons of Japanese ancestry” are ordered to be evacuated from their homes and businesses within

READING THE TEXT

(CONTINUED)

days, and that evacuees may bring with them only that which they can carry. Challenge students to consider line item e., “essential personal effects for each member of the family” (p. 54), and ask them to share with a partner what personal items they would consider “essential” if given similar orders today. What makes such a task difficult or impossible?

Next, ask students to read the last paragraph on page 35, where Kenji sees packed, discarded, and missing items in his family home as they prepare for evacuation. Ask students: *What stories do these items tell? What feelings can we assume Kenji's father, mother, and sister are feeling beneath their smiles, silence, and tears?* Explain that the Panama Hotel in Seattle houses a collection of personal items hurriedly stored by imprisoned Japanese Americans in 1942. Show the class the video tour showcasing these personal belongings seemingly frozen in time (prhlink.com/panamahotel). Afterward, invite students to think/pair/share about the following questions: *How does the basement serve to illuminate the lives and legacies of those impacted by Japanese American incarceration during World War II? How does the video support or extend our reading of The Literature of Japanese American Incarceration?*

Song Study

Invite students to explore the legacy of Japanese American incarceration through music. First, project on the whiteboard this line from the text: “After Camp’ now covers a three-quarter-century span that has seen citizenship for the Issei, an awakening by the Nisei . . . and work by fourth and fifth generation descendants to connect with and understand the legacy of incarceration they’ve inherited” (p. 221). As a class, listen to the podcast and read the transcript of the NPR *Code Switch* episode “Japanese American musicians across generations draw identity from incarceration” (prhlink.com/musicians). The episode includes lyrics and sound bites from several Japanese American artists across multiple genres and generations. As students listen and read the transcript, ask them to highlight interviewer or artist comments reflecting the legacy of incarceration.

After each sound clip, ask students to apply the observe/reflect/question protocol from the Library of Congress to analyze the music and lyrics (prhlink.com/recordings). Discuss in small groups or as a whole class: *How does the music of those incarcerated, as well as those who came generations afterward, tell the story of incarceration in a way that supports or extends what we have read in The Literature of Japanese American Incarceration? What struggles with identity and indebtedness are evident in modern Japanese American music, even from artists who are not directly related to those imprisoned?*

SYNTHESIZING THE TEXT

These activities provide opportunities to reflect on big ideas in *The Literature of Japanese Incarceration*, to engage in public forums, and to connect to the world in which students live.

Discussion Questions

The following questions can be used to prompt close reading, writing, discussion, and research.

1. The book is divided into three parts: “Before Camp,” “The Camps,” and “After Camp.” How does the book’s structure provide context, impact meaning, and support point of view?
2. Consider the text’s title. Why is “incarceration” used in place of the previously used “internment”? How do the words we choose to use frame or reframe this conflict impact our contextual understanding? How can the use of proper vocabulary be curative?
3. Discuss the irony of establishing Japanese American incarceration camps in light of the goals and values underlying U.S. involvement in WWII.
4. How do various writers in the text address the impacts of incarceration on mental health?
5. In what ways does the book prompt readers to reframe our understanding of race and racism in America?
6. What role does art play in the lives of those impacted by Japanese American incarceration? Consider items packed for evacuation, paintings and crafts created at camps, as well as music and other works created years after resettlement.
7. The idea of “voice” is mentioned repeatedly in the text. How is voice stolen and reclaimed from those impacted by incarceration? In what ways does this volume of collective voices serve to reframe identity, both individual and collective?
8. Consider the efforts to obtain redress for those impacted by forced removal and imprisonment. In what ways do these efforts succeed? Where do they fall short?
9. What questions does the text pose about citizenship, democracy, and the U.S. Constitution? Discuss these questions in both past and present contexts.
10. Why does the last section of the book address the fear of repeating history? How do the authors and editors support these concerns?

Socratic Seminar

To promote civic discourse and to reflect on contemporary connections to *The Literature of Japanese American Incarceration*, conduct a Socratic seminar based on the text’s “Repeating History” section (pp. 270–287). Included in the section is an excerpt from the graphic novel *We Hereby Refuse*. After facilitating a close-read of the section, discuss with students what an ideal seminar looks and sounds like, including participation, active listening, and respect of multiple viewpoints. Ask students to

SYNTHESIZING THE TEXT

(CONTINUED)

set a class goal, such as, “I will contribute to the discussion at least one time,” as well as a personal goal, such as, “I will reference a classmate’s name and extend on or disagree with their thinking.” Students should record and make their goals visible during the seminar. During discussion, take a facilitator’s role. Ask a low-risk opening question to encourage total participation in a round-robin response, such as, “What is the single most important word or phrase in this section?” This question can be provided the night before. Its purpose is to identify the text’s main ideas.

Next move to a core question for the purpose of analyzing text details, such as, “Fred Korematsu insinuates that we need to relearn the lessons of Japanese American internment. To what extent does the ‘Repeating History’ section support his claim? To what extent do you agree or disagree with him?” Here, students might elaborate on connections to the imprisonment of immigrant children and other racial or ethnic scapegoating of Asian, Jewish, and Islamic Americans.

End the discussion with a closing question that promotes personalization, such as, “How might the big ideas in this section impact or inspire you, your family, or our community?” At this point, students might expand on efforts to educate about or memorialize those who have been impacted by Japanese American incarceration. Ask students to evaluate their own and their classmates’ speaking, thinking, and listening. Did they meet their class and personal goals? What should the class do differently in the next seminar discussion? How did the seminar deepen their understanding of the text? For classes new to seminars, consider scaffolding the activity with several small-group breakouts throughout the discussion.

Culminating Product

In the preface to *The Literature of Japanese American Incarceration*, Frank Abe and Floyd Cheung assert that their anthology “reclaims and reframes” impacted individuals’ stories by elevating writers’ voices. Provide students an opportunity to elevate their own voices, both individually and collectively, and to reflect upon their own legacies by creating an online anthology. Frame the process by asking students this question: *What event, experience, or legacy has shaped your identity?* Students will respond to this question individually by creating a multimedia product. Responses should reflect individual student choice, and might include:

- A podcast using free audio recording and editing software, such as Audacity (<https://www.audacityteam.org/>).
- A TED Talk-type video speech complete with scripted narration aided by cue cards. Students can use cell phones or tablets to record their talks.
- A digital story using iMovie or Windows Movie Maker. Digital stories combine narration and still images and are easily created on student laptops.
- An infographic using Canva (<https://www.canva.com/>) or a similar platform to illustrate the topic with engaging images and text.
- A digital bulletin board or other app that showcases personal poetry, artwork, or essays.

Provide students with an upload link to the class website, Padlet, or other publishing site, and share the completed class anthology with school, family, and community audiences.

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

The following resources can be used for further background, research, writing, and discussion.

- Bearing Witness to Japanese American Incarceration (activities and resources) prhlink.com/facinghistory
- Densho (primary documents, video oral histories, a registry of names, and an online encyclopedia) - <https://densho.org/collections/>
- Frank Abe on *The Literature of Japanese American Incarceration* (interview) prhlink.com/frankabe
- “How Japanese Americans Fought for—and Won—Redress for WWII Incarceration” (article) prhlink.com/history
- “Order 9066” (podcast) prhlink.com/9066
- Japanese American Internment Camps during WWII (lesson plan) prhlink.com/lessonplan
- Japanese American National Museum (website) - <https://www.janm.org/>
- *The Legacy of Heart Mountain* (documentary film) prhlink.com/heartmountain
- Manzanar National Historic Site (website) prhlink.com/manzanar
- Righting a Wrong: Japanese Americans and WWII Poster Exhibition (images) prhlink.com/posters
- “Ugly History: Japanese American Incarceration Camps” (TED-Ed video) prhlink.com/densho
- *We Hereby Refuse* (Educator’s Guide) prhlink.com/weherebyrefuse

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