

# Teaching history from DIVERSE PERSPECTIVES: Second Grade Lesson on Japanese American Incarceration

## GA Social Studies Standards

**SS2CG1 Define the concept of government and the need for rules and laws.**

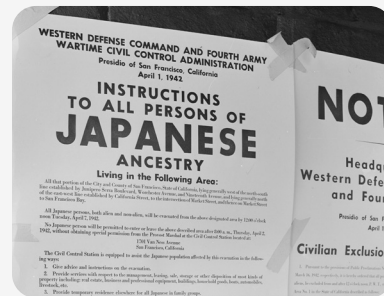
**SS2HI Demonstrate positive citizenship traits such as: honesty, dependability, trustworthiness, honor, civility, good sportsmanship, patience, and compassion.**

The United States brands itself as the land of the free and the home of the brave. But during World War II, it imprisoned nearly 80,000 of its own citizens due to what the government later admitted to be “racial prejudice, wartime hysteria, and a failure of political leadership.” To better achieve our democratic principles, young learners need to learn the difficult but important history of Japanese American incarceration.

After the bombing of Pearl Harbor, President Franklin D. Roosevelt issued Executive Order (EO) 9066 in February 1942. EO 9066 gave the military authority to create areas where people deemed to be threats to national security could be forcibly moved and detained. While EO 9066 did not specify any particular group of people, it was overwhelmingly applied to Japanese Americans, but not to German or Italian Americans.

Japanese Americans living on the West Coast had days to sell their property and belongings before reporting to one of 16 assembly centers, bringing only what they could carry with them. Between May and October 1942, they were transferred to ten hastily-built prison camps, with no sense of what the future held for them. The camps were located in isolated and inhospitable areas, each holding between 7,000–18,000 Japanese Americans. Camp barracks were crowded with little privacy, but families were innovative and salvaged what they could to make their miserable conditions feel more like home. They worked together and with support from nearby communities and friends created schools, printed newspapers, developed irrigation systems, and organized sports teams to make their lives have some semblance of normalcy until they were able to return home beginning in January 1945.

Perhaps this sounds familiar, but you’ve heard these camps described in a different way – with the term internment. That’s technically incorrect!



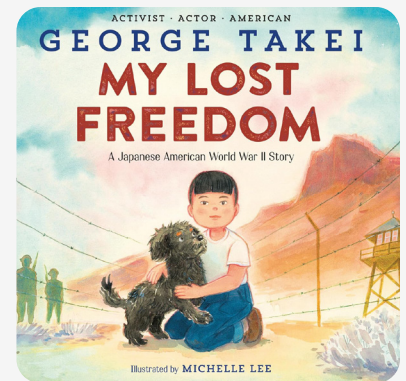
Internment is a term legally reserved for foreign nationals of a country with which the United States is at war since the War of 1812. Two-thirds of the 120,000 Japanese Americans who were forced to live in the camps as a result of EO 9066 were U.S. citizens, so internment cannot be applied to them. Instead, these citizens were imprisoned without due process, which was a violation of their Constitutional rights. Due to this clear injustice, historians and critical scholars of U.S. history have used the word incarceration to more accurately describe what happened to Japanese Americans during World War II. To use internment or terms like removal or relocation that soften the inhumane treatment of Japanese Americans during WWII does an injustice to their experiences.

While many Japanese Americans who lived in the camps as children or adults felt too much shame about their ordeals to share them, the generations that followed have advocated for justice and sharing their stories so that the awful injustices they endured are not repeated. This led to federal reparations, a wealth of youth literature and primary sources to teach this history to the next generation, and an impressive legacy of cross-racial solidarity. Share firsthand experiences from camp survivors and their relatives with books like these:

- My Lost Freedom by George Takei
- Love in the Library by Maggie Tokuda Hall
- It Began with a Page by Kyo Maclear
- The Bracelet by Yoshiko Uchida
- Baseball Saved Us and Heroes by Ken Mochizuki



Many examples from the experiences of Japanese Americans incarcerated during WWII resonate with recent events, from the highly publicized protests of athletes Colin Kaepernick and Megan Rapinoe to the so-called Muslim Ban implemented by the Trump administration. Today there are many other child-friendly resources about Japanese American incarceration, so there's no need to wait until high school to teach this important history!



### Complete Article and Lesson Plan



#### Photo credit:

(Top to Bottom, Left to Right)

1. Map of WWII incarceration sites - Public Domain
2. Instructions to All Persons of Japanese Ancestry - Public Domain
3. Dorothea Lange Collection, Courtesy of the National Archives and Records Administration (Public domain via Densho)
4. Dorothea Lange Collection, Courtesy of the National Archives and Records Administration (Public Domain via Densho)
5. George Takei, My Lost Freedom: A Japanese American World War II Story (Penguin Random House, 2024)
6. Maggie Tokuda-Hall, Love in the Library (Candlewick, 2022)

Ready to implement multi-perspectives in your classroom?

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