

Second Grade Lesson on Japanese American Incarceration By Noreen Naseem Rodriguez

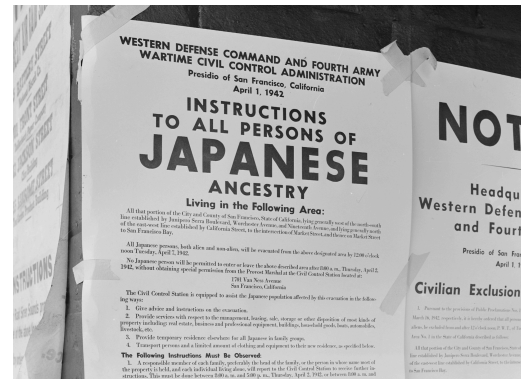
GA Social Studies Standards:

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

SS2H1 Demonstrate positive citizenship traits such as: honesty, dependability, trustworthiness, honor, civility, good sportsmanship, patience, and compassion.

Background Information:

Two months 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 who were deemed to be threats to national security could be forcibly moved and detained under the direction of the Secretary of War. While the language of EO 9066 did not specify any particular group of people, it was overwhelmingly applied to Japanese Americans who lived on the West Coast, but not to German or Italian Americans. However, in the weeks prior to the Pearl Harbor attack, President Roosevelt received an intelligence report from Curtis B. Munson which found that Japanese Americans on the West Coast had “a remarkable, even extraordinary degree of loyalty” to the United States. Roosevelt applied EO 9066 to Japanese and Japanese Americans in spite of Munson’s report.



Therefore, Japanese and Japanese Americans were targeted by EO 9066 not solely due to their ancestral homeland’s identification as an Axis nation with which the U.S. was at war - if that were the case, then German and Italian Americans would also have been impacted in much larger numbers. In fact, West Coast Japanese Americans made up only 4% of the 1,100,000 enemy nationals living in the U.S. in 1942. But EO 9066 revived the idea of East Asians as a threatening “yellow peril,” which first emerged as part of anti-Chinese rhetoric in the 1800s. Adding to the confusing application of EO 9066 was the fact that babies, the elderly, and the disabled were all subjected to military removal from their homes and imprisonment.



After the release of EO 9066, Japanese Americans living on the West Coast had a number of 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 of Arizona, Arkansas, California, Colorado, Idaho, Utah, and Wyoming, 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 to create schools, print newspapers, develop irrigation systems, plant gardens, and organize sports teams to make their lives in the camps have some semblance of normalcy until they were able to return home.

There are a wealth of resources that allow learners to take deep dives into life in the camps. Each camp had a unique physical environment in addition to its own character and resources. For example, the Amache camp in Colorado was the only one built on private land, had a silkscreen printing shop, and the camp director allowed prisoners to take day trips to the nearby town of Granada. In contrast, the Tule Lake camp in California had maximum security confinement and imposed martial law; it was the largest of the camps and considered the most repressive of them all. Some prisoners were able to leave the camps for work, college, or to serve in the military, and others moved from one camp to another. Each individual who was imprisoned in the camp had a unique experience, and offering students an opportunity to do a deep dive into some individual stories is an ideal way to teach about the camps. Historians and community members have recorded oral histories, primary sources, and collected artifacts to share these stories with the public; here are some of the richest collections available:

- Densho: <https://densho.org/>
- Campu Podcast: <https://densho.org/campu/>
- Korematsu Institute: <https://korematsuinstitute.org/>
- Ansel Adams Manzanar collection at the Library of Congress: <https://www.loc.gov/pictures/collection/manz/>
- Dorothea Lange Manzanar gallery housed at the National Park Service: <https://www.nps.gov/media/photo/gallery.htm?pg=58272&id=CA29BB4E-155D-4519-3E5456896E1C2E6C>
- Go For Broke National Education Center: <https://goforbroke.org/>
- Japanese American National Museum Camps Map: <https://eacc.janm.org/campsmap/>
- Bancroft Library at Berkeley Japanese American Confinement Sites: <https://www.lib.berkeley.edu/visit/bancroft/oral-history-center/projects/japanese-american-confinement>

The exclusion and detention orders were rescinded in December 1944, and in January 1945 Japanese Americans were finally allowed to return to the West Coast. However, as many of them had sold their belongings and property immediately after EO 9066 was executed, some had little to nothing to return to, and neighbors and friends who had promised to return items sometimes reneged on their deals after personally profiting from Japanese American incarceration. Additionally, anti-Japanese American sentiment remained in many parts of the country, even toward those who had served in the U.S. military. Consequently, some Japanese Americans opted to settle in the states where they were imprisoned, or moved elsewhere in the United States.



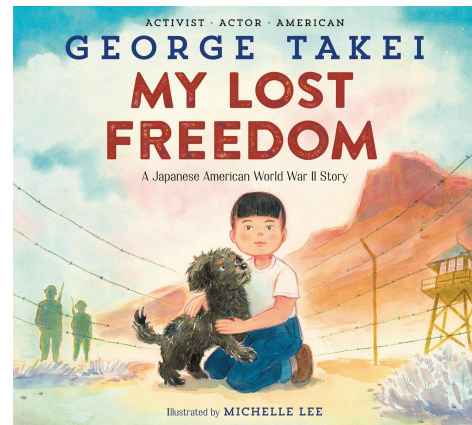
Many Japanese Americans who lived in the camps as children or adults felt too much shame about their ordeals to share them with their children, but their children and grandchildren created what became known as the redress movement, which aimed to seek financial compensation for their family’s losses and a public recognition and apology for incarceration. President Gerald Ford finally rescinded EO 9066 in February 1976 and the Commission on Wartime Relocation and Internment of Civilians (CWRIC) was

assembled in 1980 to conduct an official governmental study of Japanese American incarceration during WWII. The CWRIC found that there was no actual justification for what transpired. In fact, their report entitled *Personal Justice Denied* (1983, full document available at the National Archives website) clearly states that EO 9066 “was not justified by military necessity,” and that the “broad historical causes that shaped these decisions were race prejudice, war hysteria and a failure of political leadership” (*Recommendations*, p. 5). The CWRIC made several recommendations, including an official government policy and redress payments, which came to bear with the passage of the Civil Liberties Act of 1988 signed by President Ronald Reagan. This act paid reparations of \$20,000 to more than 82,200 Japanese Americans who survived unjust imprisonment.

Camp survivors and their relatives have shown tremendous solidarity with other groups who have been targeted for imprisonment similar to their own experiences, from communities impacted by President Donald Trump’s Muslim Ban to the caging of young immigrant and refugee children at the U.S.-Mexico border. They have organized and participated in protests, demanding that what happened to Japanese Americans during World War II never be repeated again.

Instructional Resources and Suggestions:

1. **Introduction:** Ask students if they can recall a time when someone was treated unfairly because of their appearance. If many students are eager to share, they can do so in pairs or small groups. Today students will learn about a group of people who were treated unfairly during World War II because of their ethnicity.
2. **Instructional Activity:** Prepare to read aloud *My Lost Freedom* by George Takei. You can conduct a picture walk (flip through the pages of the book and focus solely on the images to evoke ideas about the book’s subject and events), elicit student ideas about the book’s topic based on the cover, and/or describe the book’s author. George Takei is best known for playing the role of Hikaru Sulu in the *Star Trek* series and films. More recently, he has authored books about his childhood experiences at the Rohwer prison camp in Arkansas and Tule Lake in California. Takei also performed in the 2012 Broadway show *Allegiance* about Japanese American WWII incarceration.
 - a. **During Reading:** Periodically check for student understanding; for example, ask if students have heard of Pearl Harbor or World War II after the first three pages. The illustrations are very evocative - ask students how the characters appear to feel at each stage of their journey and to support their responses with evidence from the text or illustrations. If a map is available, show students the distance between Los Angeles and Rohwer, Arkansas and Tule Lake, California. If you ask students how they might respond to some of the situations presented, be sure to remind them of the circumstances of WWII incarceration and how the camps were surrounded by barbed wire and guards so leaving was not an option, as well as how the imprisoned Japanese Americans tried their best to make life “normal” despite their awful circumstances.
 - b. **After Reading:** Make sure to emphasize the injustice of Japanese American incarceration - George, his siblings, and his mother were all U.S. citizens whose constitutional rights were violated during WWII, and his father was ineligible to become a U.S. citizen due to laws that made it impossible for Asian immigrants to naturalize. While the Author’s Note



at the end of the book is lengthy and may be too long to read aloud, you can share the photos included in it with students and summarize the descriptions of the Takei family's life after the camps and how it was for Japanese Americans to find work after their release. Takei ends the Author's Note by mentioning the Civil Liberties Act of 1988 - whether you read this aloud or not, be sure to mention that Japanese Americans advocated for the U.S. government to admit that Japanese Americans were treated unjustly and that a formal apology and some restitution resulted from their advocacy.

3. **Assessment:** Students can summarize major events using familiar graphic organizers and language arts skills like summarizing, cause and effect, and "Somebody/Wanted/But/So/Then" to put them in sequence. They can also note how the family felt during each of these moments and what they learned from Takei's story.
4. **Optional Extensions:** If students enjoyed learning about Takei's experience, they might appreciate further learning about Japanese American incarceration. To make connections between the injustice of Japanese American incarceration and school segregation, consider reading aloud the short chapter book *Sylvia and Aki* by Winifred Conkling for abundant opportunities to make comparisons and contrasts between the experiences of Mexican American girl Sylvia Mendez (whose parents led the lawsuit against the State of California that ended school segregation on the basis of language) and Aki Munemitsu, whose family was imprisoned at the camp in Poston, Arizona. If students want a deep dive into another personal experience, *Fred Korematsu Speaks Up* consists of poems interwoven with primary sources and Korematsu's daughter Karen leads the Korematsu Institute, which has a wealth of resources for elementary students available free for teachers.

Images Used:

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