

Introduction to Japanese Culture and Incarceration

Teacher Lesson Plan

Developed by: Kirby Atkins

SUBJECT
US History

GRADE LEVEL
Grades 9–12

DURATION
1 class period

FORMAT
Video + reflection

Rationale and Explanation

Students can better understand Japanese American incarceration if they first have some basic knowledge of Japanese culture and the role it played in forming Japanese American identity in the early 1900s. Introducing students to a few foundational ideas, such as Japanese immigrant naming traditions and the concept of “Wa,” can help engage them and provide a meaningful starting point for exploring Japanese incarceration. This quick introduction is then followed by several sections of a documentary video that introduces students to the topic of Japanese American incarceration. Three video options are provided.



Lesson Objectives

Reflection

Reflect upon our feelings and thoughts in relation to the incarceration of Japanese-Americans during WWII.

Arkansas State Standards

Standard	Description
H.5.USH.6	Examine the roles and perspectives of national and foreign leaders during World War II.
H.5.USH.8	Analyze the social, economic, and political effects of World War II on the American people: war efforts at home (e.g., victory gardens, rationing, defense industry towns, contributions of women and minorities); Japanese-American internment camps and Korematsu vs. United States.
H.5.USH.10	Evaluate the use of media and propaganda to influence the viewpoints and perspectives of the American people during World War II.

Preparation

Before you begin this lesson, download the [Intro to Japanese Culture Supplementary Materials.zip](#) on the Rising Above website.

Video Options

Option	Title	Details & Resources
Option A	Relocation, Arkansas — Aftermath of Incarceration	Available to rent (\$6) or buy (\$18) from Vimeo. Student worksheet available below: Relocation, Arkansas Accompanying slides (download from site): Japanese-American Culture and Intro to Incarceration (Relocation, Arkansas).pptx
Option B	A Thousand Paper Cranes — How Denver’s Japanese American Community Emerged from Internment	Free on YouTube. Student worksheet available below: Thousand Paper Cranes Accompanying slides (download from site): Japanese-American Culture and Intro to Incarceration (1000 Paper Cranes).pptx
Option C	Time of Fear	Free on archive.org via PBS Home Video. Student worksheet available below: Time of Fear Accompanying slides (download from site): Japanese-American Culture and Intro to Incarceration (Time of Fear).pptx

Lesson Outline

1. Open the PPT slides that accompany the video that you chose from the [Intro to Japanese Culture Supplementary Materials.zip](#). Introduce the Japanese immigrant naming traditions and teach students how to count to 5 in Japanese.
2. Provide context for the age of Japanese cultural development and the role “Wa” played in unifying mainstream Japanese culture.
3. Discuss the values of “Wa” and compare it to American culture via popular idioms.
4. Provide historical context for Japanese incarceration and set up the main activity of watching sections of the video and responding to prompts.
5. Go through the video, watching 3–5-minute sections followed by 2–3 minutes of individual reflection time for writing in the document.
6. End the lesson with students sharing their observations, takeaways, questions/doubts, first with a partner/small group and then as a whole group.

Student Worksheet — Option A

Relocation, Arkansas

Aftermath of Incarceration

Part 1: Intro • Start – 3:40

What are your **first impressions** from the introduction?

Part 2: Lack of Transparency • 4:41 – 7:10

What are **some words that come to your mind** after watching this part of the video? (No need to explain, just share.)

Part 3: Scott, Arkansas • 9:57 – 13:55

What was the **most interesting thing you heard/learned** about in this part? (Please explain why.)

Part 4: Kensington, Maryland • 13:56 – 16:30

What are some **feelings or thoughts** you have after seeing this part of the documentary? (No need to explain, just share.)

Part 5: Cultural Identity • 20:11 – 24:53

What was the **most impactful thing you heard/learned** about in this part? (Please explain why.)

Part 6: Clair de Lune Reflection • 25:30 – 27:23

What **grabbed your attention** from this part of the documentary? (Please explain why.)

Final Reflection

After watching the documentary, what are some of your biggest **observations, takeaways, or questions/doubts?**

Student Worksheet — Option B

A Thousand Paper Cranes

How Denver's Japanese American Community Emerged from Internment — I Am Denver

The original content is from the I Am Denver project. I have selected parts of the documentary to feature for our class activity. All credit belongs to them and the work they did on this project. [Watch the full documentary here.](#)

Part 1: Intro • 0:00 – 2:25

What are your **first impressions** from the introduction?

Part 2: Roberts Commission / Evacuate • 3:59 – 6:21

What are **some words that come to your mind** after watching this part of the video? (No need to explain, just share.)

Part 3: Relocation • 6:37 – 9:23

Compare the concept of “Wa” with how Japanese-Americans would have to live at Amache. (Please share your feelings and thoughts!)

Part 4: Proving American Loyalty • 16:27 – 19:58

What was the **most interesting thing you heard/learned** about in this part? (Please explain why.)

Part 5: Hope • 21:02 – 23:43

What are some **feelings or thoughts** you have after seeing this part of the documentary? (No need to explain, just share.)

Part 6: Redress • 27:22 – 30:37

What **grabbed your attention** from this part of the documentary? (Please explain why.)

Final Reflection

After watching the documentary, what are some of your biggest **observations, takeaways, or questions/doubts**?

Student Worksheet — Option C

Time of Fear

The original content is from PBS Home Video. I have selected parts of the documentary to feature for our class activity. All credit belongs to them and the work they did on this project. [Watch the full documentary here.](#)

Part 1: Intro • 0:00 – 2:48

What are your **first impressions** from the introduction?

Part 2: Panic from Pearl Harbor • 5:36 – 8:28

What are **some words that come to your mind** after watching this part of the video? (No need to explain, just share.)

Part 3: Issei & Nisei in the US • 9:24 – 13:53

What was the **most interesting thing you heard/learned** about in this part? (Please explain why.)

Part 4: Relocation Preparations • 16:45 – 20:05

What are some **feelings or thoughts** you have after seeing this part of the documentary? (No need to explain, just share.)

Part 5: Arriving in Arkansas • 20:43 – 23:14

What was the **most impactful thing you heard/learned** about in this part? (Please explain why.)

Part 6: Life and Controversy in Camp • 23:29 – 29:32

What **grabbed your attention** from this part of the documentary? (Please explain why.)

Final Reflection

After watching the documentary, what are some of your biggest **observations, takeaways, or questions/doubts?**