

Citizenship and Loyalty during Japanese American Incarceration

Teacher Lesson Plan

Developed by: Kayla Evans-Kennard

SUBJECT	GRADE LEVEL	DURATION	FORMAT
AR History / US History	Grades 7–12	75–80 minutes	Analysis + discussion

Rationale and Explanation

This lesson examines how ideas of loyalty and citizenship were shaped during the incarceration of Japanese Americans in World War II. Students consider how the U.S. government questioned the loyalty of its own citizens through the Loyalty Questionnaire and related policies, and how national attitudes reinforced stereotypes of “foreignness” through wartime propaganda posters. By analyzing poetry created during the war, students explore how Japanese Americans expressed patriotism in the United States and defined what it meant to be American under confinement.



Takashi Hashhimura poses in uniform, c. 1942-1945

Lesson Objectives

Knowledge Describe how citizenship and loyalty were defined and tested through the Loyalty Questionnaire, segregation policies, and wartime propaganda.	Analysis Interpret poems written by incarcerated Japanese Americans to understand how young people expressed national pride and identity amid scrutiny.
Critical Thinking Evaluate how government actions and public sentiment shaped both perceptions and personal expressions of loyalty.	Reflection Consider what these sources reveal about belonging, citizenship, and patriotism in times of fear and discrimination.

Arkansas State Standards

Course / Grade Band	Standard	Relevant Focus
Arkansas History (Grades 7–8)	H.1.AR.H.11	Investigate social, economic, and political effects of World War II on various segments of the population in Arkansas, including ... Japanese-American internment camps.
Arkansas History (Grades 9–12)	H.5.AR.H.7	Analyze social, economic, and political effects of World War II on various segments of the population in Arkansas, including ... Japanese-American internment camps (i.e., Jerome and Rohwer).

Lesson Outline

STEP 1

25–30 minutes

Background Context, Citizenship, and Loyalty

Watch: Begin with the video “Executive Order 9066 – Japanese American Incarceration” to provide context on Japanese American incarceration.

- Link: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=O-iVxs2xuYc>

Key Takeaways to Emphasize

- Two-thirds of those incarcerated were native-born U.S. citizens.
- Over 1,000 young people from the camps volunteered for U.S. military service.
- Eleanor Roosevelt stated:
 - “We must not forget this. We must realize that one cannot tell the difference between a citizen and a noncitizen by just looking at him, by seeing the color of his skin, or by hearing him talk.”

Discuss how this quote raises important questions about what it meant to be a citizen and how citizenship was visually and socially defined during this period.

Analyzing Citizenship Through Visual Media

Introduce Dr. Seuss’s wartime political cartoon “Waiting for the Signal From Home” (1942).

- Link: <https://scalar.chapman.edu/scalar/imagesandimaginings/media/waiting-for-the-signal-from-home>
- Display the image for class analysis.



Guiding Questions

- What message does this cartoon send about Japanese Americans and citizenship?
- How does it reflect national attitudes about Japanese Americans during WWII?

Explain that this climate of fear and suspicion led to the government’s creation of the Loyalty Questionnaire and the Segregation of Evacuees policy.

Exploring the Loyalty Questionnaire

- Link: <https://scalar.usc.edu/works/csujad-exhibit/interrogation?path=incarceration>

Read the short description about the Loyalty Questionnaire, then review the example filled-out document provided. Discuss how the questionnaire attempted to measure “how American” someone was. It might be beneficial to especially highlight questions 27 and 28, and clarify how these questions caused confusion and questions about identity among incarcerated:

- Many thought Question 27 meant they were being asked to enlist immediately.
- Question 28 implied dual loyalties or “foreignness,” forcing Japanese Americans to “choose” an identity when many already saw themselves as American.

Finally, read the blurb for “Segregation of Evacuees,” describing how answers to these questions were used to categorize Japanese Americans and create the Tule Lake Segregation Center for those labeled “disloyal.”

STEP 2

25 minutes

Reading and Analyzing the Poems

Explain that, after learning about how loyalty and citizenship were defined and tested by the U.S. government, students will now look at how Japanese Americans in the camps themselves expressed those same ideas through poetry. Students should read all three poems (listed at end of document), either independently or in pairs.

Guiding Questions

- What words or phrases show loyalty, pride, or faith in the U.S.?
- What emotions or perspectives do you notice in the poem?
- How does each poet describe the idea of being American?

After reading and discussing in pairs, bring the class together to compare perspectives.

STEP 3

15 minutes

Class Discussion: Defining Loyalty

Lead a whole-class discussion connecting the poems to the themes of loyalty introduced earlier.

Guiding Questions

- How do these poems reflect the government's emphasis on loyalty and military service?
- What did it mean to be "loyal" to a country that had imprisoned you?
- How might incarceration, national attitudes, and government efforts such as the Loyalty Questionnaire have influenced the way young people wrote about loyalty?
- Do you think the loyalty expressed in these poems reflects sincere patriotism, a social expectation to appear loyal, or some combination of both?

STEP 4

10 minutes

Reflection

Students write a short reflection responding to one or more of the following prompts:

- Which poem or line stood out to you most, and why?
- What do these poems reveal about how Japanese Americans understood citizenship and belonging?
- Why do you think these particular poems were preserved by officials and archivists? Do they promote a certain narrative about life and attitudes in the camps?
- How do these poems compare to how we talk about patriotism and identity in the U.S. today?

Possible Extension

Archival Research: Students locate one additional poem, letter, or newspaper article from the Rising Above archive that discusses patriotism or identity and explain its perspective.

Primary Source Poems

Student Reading — Citizenship and Loyalty during Japanese American Incarceration

Hideko Kimura

Camp: Jerome

Date: circa 1943–1944

Denson High School student Hideko Kimura's poem about the war, American soldiers, and her support for these soldiers.

Link: <https://risingabove.cast.uark.edu/archive/item/1932>

A Great Flag and a Great Nation

*A great flag flying o'er a great nation is our flag
With the everlasting colors, the red, the white, and the blue,
Along with this flag comes a great history
Of the many patriots to their nation is brave and true.
A country in which we have freedom, a freedom granted to us in no other nation
It may not seem the same during war time
But we, Americans can not complain of such things as a nation.
Many heroes have given their lives to their nation and the many brave heroes now are fighting
Are doing this so that our great flag
Will always be proudly waving.*

— Hideko Kimura, Period II, English 10-B

Sada Murayama

Date: circa 1942–1985

"Loyalty," a poem by Sada Murayama.

Link: <https://risingabove.cast.uark.edu/archive/item/2112>

Loyalty

*I am a citizen—
Let no slander
Slur my status.*

*In the other war,
I stood with countless others
Side by side
To fight the foe.
My arm was just as strong
My blood fell
As bright as theirs
In the defense of a new world
More precious far
Than any tie of land or race.*

*If in this holocaust
It be decreed
My loyalty be tested
By submission, What is the difference
If the end be the same?*

*My reason may be tested—
Not my heart.*

*O, what is loyalty
If it be something
That can bend
With every wind?*

*Steadfast I stand
Staunchly I plant
The Stars and Stripes
Before my barracks door,
Carrying defiance
To all wavering hearts.*

*I am a citizen—
I can take
The bad with good.
— Sada Murayama*

Steela Hayashida

Camp: Jerome

Date: circa 1943–1944

Denson High School student Steela Hayashida's poem/song in support of United States' troops who have gone to war.

Link: <https://risingabove.cast.uark.edu/archive/item/1902>

Our Boys Have Gone A-Fighting

*Our boys have gone a-fighting
Our boys have gone a-fighting
To keep our country still,
With liberty and justices,
To last throughout the world.*

*Our boys have gone a-fighting
To give the dictators a mind,
The life we always want to live,
A hard comparison with theirs.*

*Our boys have gone a-fighting,
To see what they can do,
Our country lasting evermore
In peace, equality and liberty.*

*Our boys have gone a-fighting
And will come back again,
With victory resting on their heads,
We should be ever thankful.*

— Steela Hayashida