

Beyond the Biography

Teacher Lesson Plan

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SUBJECT	GRADE LEVEL	DURATION	FORMAT
AR History / US History	Grades 7–12	65–70 minutes	Research + discussion

Rationale and Explanation

This lesson encourages students to move beyond reading a biography by engaging with archival materials that add depth and context to their understanding of significant individuals connected to the Japanese American incarceration camps in Arkansas. By comparing written narratives with primary sources, students gain a fuller understanding of each person's experiences, choices, and historical context.

Through this process, students practice comparing sources, evaluating evidence, identifying perspective/bias, and recognizing gaps or contradictions in the historical record. They also consider how biographies and historical narratives are created from available evidence, how certain stories are preserved or emphasized, and how other experiences may be overlooked, excluded, or difficult to recover because of the limitations of the archive.



Yada family, c. 1938-1940

Lesson Objectives

Knowledge Identify the roles and experiences of selected individuals connected to the Rohwer and Jerome camps.	Analysis Compare biographical information with archival sources to understand how each shapes historical interpretation.
Critical Thinking Evaluate whose perspectives are represented in the archive and whose are missing.	Communication Construct a short evidence-based explanation using information from both a biography and primary sources.

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).
United States History Since 1929 (Grades 9–12)	H.5.US.H.8	Analyze the social, economic, and political effects of World War II on the American people, including Japanese-American internment camps.

Note

Previous lessons provide an introduction to the Japanese American incarceration. This lesson assumes background knowledge from those lessons or another source.

Lesson Outline

STEP 1

10–15 minutes

Introducing Japanese Incarceration Camps and the “Connections @ Rohwer” Feature

Introduce students to the [Rising Above in Arkansas website](#). Next, show students the [Connections @ Rohwer page](#). Zoom in on the graph and explain that this interactive graph visualizes relationships between people through shared archival materials.

Explain how the feature works:

- Blue dots represent people connected to the Rohwer incarceration camp.
- People who appear closer together are more closely connected through shared archival materials (such as letters, photographs, or administrative records).
- The larger the dot, the more archival materials are connected to that person, indicating a greater presence in the archive.
- Each listed source includes a “View in Archive” button that takes students to the original material.

Explain to students that while the Connections @ Rohwer visualization helps make relationships in the archive visible, it also reveals patterns about whose lives and experiences were most often recorded. Emphasize that the archive itself is not neutral—it reflects historical power, access, and decision-making about what was preserved.

Key Understanding to Guide Students Toward

Historical archives do not preserve all voices equally. In the case of the Rising Above archive, most individuals with extensive documentation are white Americans who worked in the camps rather than the Japanese Americans who lived there. This activity introduces students to the historical thinking skill of evaluating whose stories are preserved, whose are limited or missing, and why.

To support this understanding, facilitate student exploration of the Connections @ Rohwer visualization. As students examine the size and proximity of the dots, guide discussion using questions such as:

- Who appears to have the most information connected to them?
- Which dots are the largest? Why might that be?
- What patterns do you notice about who is most represented in the archive (e.g., administrators, teachers, clergy, government officials)?
- Whose voices might be missing or less documented?

STEP 2

5 minutes

Choose a Person

Students will form groups and select one of the four featured figures.

- **Homer M. Adkins** – Governor of Arkansas (1941–45) who opposed using incarcerated Japanese Americans for labor and enacted exclusionary state policies.
- **Sam Yutaka Yada** – Mechanic and teacher at Rohwer who later helped commemorate Japanese American soldiers through a monument.

- **Joseph Boone Hunter** – Minister and Project Director for Human Services at Rohwer, known for promoting social justice and friendship across communities.
- **Mabel Rose “Jamie” Vogel** – Art teacher at Rohwer who preserved student artworks and advocated for recognition of the injustice of incarceration.

STEP 3

30 minutes

Dive Into the Archive

Students will now explore archival materials connected to their chosen person using the Connections @ Rohwer interface. Students can find their person in the graph by using the Search bar at the top right.

Students should begin by clicking “View Biography” to read the short overview provided and then explore the list of connected archival items. Ask each group to select 1-2 sources that provide additional insights on the person of interest. Encourage them to find sources that support or refute what they read in the biography. While students are encouraged to select sources that interest them, the example records below may serve as helpful guides for students who need support navigating the archive.

Figure	Archival Record Descriptions
Homer M. Adkins	https://risingabove.cast.uark.edu/archive/item/724 Governor Homer Adkins tells John H. Tolan, Chairman of the House Committee Investigating National Defense Migration, that Arkansas would not be a good location for any Japanese-Americans after forced removal. https://risingabove.cast.uark.edu/archive/item/778 This letter, written by Governor Homer Adkins, was in response to a letter from Edward Meeman, editor for the Memphis Press-Scimitar. Meeman had previously written asking if the Y.W.C.A. could hire a young incarcerated Japanese-American woman as an arts and craft teacher. Governor Adkins’ response explains that the rules do not allow incarcerated people to leave the concentration camps, and that he has refused all requests for employment of Japanese-Americans outside the camps. https://risingabove.cast.uark.edu/archive/item/736 Homer Adkins, Governor of Arkansas, tells Assistant Secretary of War John McCloy that allowing Japanese-American students into Arkansas colleges would present major problems, expressing concern that it would be used as grounds for integrating colleges reserved for white students.
Sam Yutaka Yada	https://risingabove.cast.uark.edu/archive/item/1862 Sam Yada writes to potential donors to the Rohwer Center Memorial Fund asking for contributions toward the \$10,000 needed to erect a granite monument in the Rohwer concentration camp cemetery and to maintain the site. https://risingabove.cast.uark.edu/archive/item/1225 Newspaper article describes event dedicating a new marble monument at the cemetery of the Rohwer concentration camp for Memorial Day service.
Joseph Boone Hunter	https://risingabove.cast.uark.edu/archive/item/1869 Joseph Boone Hunter wrote this piece about his time living and working at Rohwer concentration camp as an assistant director of the camp, including a request for donations to the Rohwer Center Memorial Fund for cemetery upkeep and monument construction.

	https://risingabove.cast.uark.edu/archive/item/2152 Joseph Boone Hunter shares his thoughts on the injustice and costs of Japanese American incarceration during World War II. Several pages of the original piece are missing.
Mabel Rose “Jamie” Vogel	https://risingabove.cast.uark.edu/archive/item/237 Regarding the Smithsonian’s possible interest in artifacts from an art teacher at Rohwer concentration camp. https://risingabove.cast.uark.edu/archive/item/235 Letter written for attendees at a reunion for Rohwer concentration camp’s former incarcerated. https://risingabove.cast.uark.edu/archive/item/258 Letter requesting large maps to be displayed in the high school relocation room at Rohwer concentration camp.

Guiding Questions

- What does this item reveal about the person’s daily life, responsibilities, or viewpoint?
- Does this primary source confirm the biography? Add nuance? Challenge it?
- What does this item show about the broader incarceration experience?

STEP 4 10–15 minutes	Class Share-Out
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Groups briefly share:

- Their person
- One archival item they found
- One insight from comparing the biography with the source

STEP 5 10–15 minutes	Output / Reflection
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Students complete a short written response:

Written Response Prompt

Using evidence from both the biography and at least one archival source, explain one new insight you gained about your chosen person. Describe what the primary source adds to the biography and what it reveals about their role or experience in the Arkansas camps.