

Inside the Barracks — Life at Rohwer

Teacher Lesson Plan

Developed by: Kayla Evans-Kennard

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

Rationale and Explanation

This lesson plan uses the [Rising Above in Arkansas 3D digital reconstruction](#) of a neighborhood block at Rohwer concentration camp to help students understand the lived realities of Japanese American incarceration during WWII. By virtually exploring the 3D reconstruction and pairing it with archival sources, students practice historical analysis and learn how families adapted to constrained environments. The activity emphasizes daily life and human resilience, grounding abstract history in material spaces.



Lesson Objectives

Knowledge Identify the physical structures of barrack life, including mess halls, laundry facilities, barracks, and community spaces.	Analysis Infer what living arrangements reveal about privacy, family life, and adaptation to confinement.
Application Connect physical spaces to primary sources to evaluate how Japanese Americans experienced and reshaped camp life.	Critical Thinking Compare conditions in the barracks to students' own living environments and reflect on how incarceration reshaped daily routines.

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).

Note

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

Materials

- Windows computer to run reconstruction (.exe file)
- Student Chromebooks or similar devices for independent archive searches
- Scavenger hunt worksheet/exit ticket

Lesson Outline

STEP 1

20–30 minutes

Guided Exploration and Scavenger Hunt

Important Note

To run the Rohwer 3D Reconstruction, the .exe file needs to be downloaded and installed on a Windows computer from <https://risingabove.cast.uark.edu/visualization>. Note that administrative permissions may be required to complete the installation. Educators may choose to navigate the reconstruction on their own device, or, if time and materials allow, students may interact with the model on individual computers.

When opening the visualization, choose “Good,” “Beautiful,” or “Fantastic” for the Graphics Quality setting. If the visualization performs poorly or is glitchy, close and re-open it with a lower quality setting. Select Continue on the next screen, then select the “Guided Tour” option.

The Guided Tour takes viewers stop-by-stop through the barrack block and provides:

- A short text description of each location
- Supplemental media, including videos, audio clips, and photographs

Time Note

Viewing all materials at each stop takes approximately 90 minutes. For classroom purposes, educators are encouraged to limit exploration by using the text descriptions and selecting one supplemental video or image per stop. Educators should preview the reconstruction in advance to decide which elements fit within available class time.

As the class moves through the reconstruction, students should complete a Scavenger Hunt handout (see example on final page), either on their own or in small groups. This helps ensure students are actively engaged with the locations highlighted in the reconstruction.

Possible Scavenger Hunt Locations

- Mess Hall
- Laundry and Lavatory
- Exterior of Barracks
- Apartment Interior
- Tonari Gumi (Front Yards)
- Vegetable or “Victory” Gardens

- Public Service Hall
- “Toy Library”
- Playground

STEP 2

15 minutes

Discussion of the Reconstruction

After completing the scavenger hunt, students meet in small groups to share their observations from the reconstruction.

Guiding Questions

- What does the layout of the barrack block suggest about privacy (or the lack of it)?
- Which daily routines would be easiest to maintain in this environment? Which would be the hardest?
- What feelings or values does the space evoke — confinement, community, adaptation?

After small-group discussions, the class can come together to share their opinions and compare perspectives on daily life in the barracks.

STEP 3

15 minutes

Connect to Primary Sources

Students will now turn to the [Rising Above archive](#) to locate photographs that connect to the themes and locations they observed in the reconstruction.

Instructor Note

Demonstrate how to use the Filter dialog located in the upper right corner of the archive to help students narrow their search. Suggested filter:

- By Date(s): September 12, 1942 – December 16, 1945
- By Item Type(s): Photo
- By Topic(s): World War II → Concentration camps → Living Conditions

After the demonstration, students should search individually or in groups to find one photograph they believe exemplifies or adds to what they saw in the barrack reconstruction.

On the worksheet provided, students will:

- Describe the photograph (What do you see? Who or what is shown? What’s happening in the scene?).
- Compare to the reconstruction. Answer the Guiding Questions:
 - Do these sources confirm what you saw in the reconstruction?
 - What details do they add that the reconstruction does not capture?

Set Filters

By Date(s):
 December 31, 1899 September 12, 1942 — December 16, 1945 September 18, 2025

By Item Type(s):
 Photo

By Name(s):
 Select Name(s)

By Collection(s):
 Select Collection(s)

By Topic(s):
 World War II » Concentration camps » Living conditions

By Camp(s):
 Select Camp(s)

Select License(s):
 Select License(s)

Close Apply

STEP 4

15 minutes

Compare & Contrast

Students will reflect on what they have learned by comparing the barrack environment to their own living spaces (home, dorm, or apartment). This activity encourages students to consider how incarceration reshaped daily routines and the meaning of “normal” life.

Worksheet Prompt

- Describe two things that you have in your own living space that were missing from the barracks.
- Describe one thing that both environments share in common.
- What does this comparison reveal about how incarceration changed daily life for Japanese American families?

STEP 5

10 minutes

Discussion & Debrief

Bring the class together to reflect on what they learned through the reconstruction, archival research, and comparisons to their own lives. This final discussion allows students to synthesize their insights and consider the broader significance of remembering camp life.

Whole-Class Discussion Questions

- What does the reconstruction help us see or understand that written descriptions alone might not?
- Why is it important to preserve history through interactive projects like reconstructions and digital archives?
- What limitations should we keep in mind about reconstructions—what can they not fully capture?
- How did the combination of the reconstruction, photos, and your own comparisons shape your understanding of daily life in Rohwer?
- What new insights came from comparing the reconstruction to photos in the archive?

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Student Worksheet

Name:

Date:

Part A: Scavenger Hunt

As you move through the digital reconstruction of Rohwer, describe something you learned from each of the following locations:

Mess Hall	<i>What I learned:</i>
Laundry and Lavatory	<i>What I learned:</i>
Exterior of Barracks	<i>What I learned:</i>
Apartment Interior	<i>What I learned:</i>
Tonari Gumi (Front Yards)	<i>What I learned:</i>
Vegetable or “Victory” Gardens	<i>What I learned:</i>

Discussion Questions

Discuss the following questions with your group:

- What does the layout of the barrack block suggest about privacy (or the lack of it)?
- Which daily routines would be easiest to maintain in this environment? Which would be the hardest?
- What feelings or values does the space evoke — confinement, community, adaptation?

Part B: Connect to Primary Sources

Search the archive for a photograph related to daily life at Rohwer.

Describe the photograph: What do you see? Who or what is shown? What's happening?

Compare to the reconstruction: Does this photo confirm what you saw in the reconstruction? What details does it add that the reconstruction does not capture?

Part C: Compare & Contrast

Think about your own living space (home, dorm, or apartment) compared to the barracks.

Two things you have in your own living space that were missing or different from the barracks:

One thing both environments share in common:

What does this comparison reveal about how incarceration changed daily life for Japanese American families?