

SAMPLE LEARNING ACTIVITIES

ELEMENTARY



Second through Sixth Grade

LESSON ONE

BECOMING AWARE OF THE JAPANESE AMERICAN INTERNMENT CAMP EXPERIENCE

Objective: **To help students become aware of, and sensitive to, the Japanese American interment camp experience. They will develop a sense of empathy by simulating the situations which Japanese American children faced.**

Description: This set of lessons is divided into three parts. It requires writing and discussion.

Materials: Book, Takako Endo, et al. *Japanese American Journey*. (See Intermediate Book List) Large photos included in Guide.

Method: Prior to the lesson, give no explanation of why or what students are doing. The lessons will be most effective if no background information is given. If students are curious, tell them they will find out later. Choose a few questions from the list in each section, or assign certain questions to different sections of the class. In Part I, students will write lists of things we often take for granted—things Japanese Americans were often deprived of when they were interned. Part II calls for responses from students to situations similar to what Japanese Americans faced. Part III provides the teacher with a brief conclusion and a summary of the lesson.

PART I

WRITING EXERCISE

Without explaining the purpose of this lesson, ask the students to do the following, allowing a few minutes for answering each question:

1. Write a list of all your possessions (including things like toothbrushes, underwear, etc.).
2. Write a list, by name, all the people you enjoy spending time with, or people you see regularly (family members and other relatives, friends, classmates, etc.).
3. Describe your daily routine, things you do regularly on a weekly or daily basis. (What, where, when, with whom do you do these things?)
4. Describe your bedroom. How big is it? Do you share it with anyone? What is in it?
5. How far is it (minutes/seconds, feet/yards or number of steps, from your bedroom to: a) the bathroom; b) the kitchen; c) the dining room or place where you eat?
6. How long does it take you to get something to eat in your house? Name some of your favorite foods.
7. What do you hear/see/smell outside the front door of your house?
8. Describe your pets, if you have any. Write something funny or interesting about your pet.

PART II

DISCUSSION

Ask the students to respond to the following situations:

1. Imagine you were going away-you don't know where, how long or under what conditions. Out of the list you have made (in Question 1 of Part I), take anything you want and need, as long as you can carry them.

What would you take?

How would you feel?

Was it difficult/easy to decide what to take?

How would you feel about the things you had to leave behind?

2. Imagine that you will not be able to see any of those special people again (Question #2).

What would you do?

How would you feel?

Who will you miss the most and why?

3. You cannot take your pet with you where you are going.

What do you do with it?

How do you feel?

4. In your new "home" you smell horses and manure. You notice that a barbed wire fence surrounds the buildings you and other people like you live in. You see that you cannot get out.

What do you do or say?

How do you feel?

5. Your new "home" is one room, where all of your family must live. There are only some cots to sleep on, nothing else.

How do you feel?

How does your room feel/smell?

How do you feel about living in this room?

6. In your new "home" you cannot do any of the things you do regularly.

What things would you miss the most?

7. Imagine getting up in the morning. You have to go to the bathroom, but you have to walk about a half a block to get there.

Describe the bathroom. (100 people in your block of houses must use the same bathroom.)

How do you feel? Is it cold?

8. It's breakfast time, served exactly at 7 am. If you miss breakfast, you must wait until noon for any food. (You have no refrigerator, nor is there a store nearby.) You must walk outside your "house" again to the Mess Hall to eat. You have to wait in line, along with about half of the hundred people who live in your block of buildings. You have to eat what is served in the Mess Hall. This morning, it is the usual powdered eggs and powdered milk, or oatmeal mush.

What do you choose?

How does it taste?

PART III

READING BY TEACHER. DISCUSSION.

- Reading: Read pp. 3-11 from “The Calm is Broken” to “Again to Move” in Japanese American Journey. Also read (perhaps in another session) “The Return,” pp. 53-55. (see appendix)

Although this work is listed in the Intermediate Book List, it is quite appropriate for teachers to read to elementary students. The reading concisely and movingly tells the story of Japanese Americans being removed from their homes and put into wartime camps. It is readily available through AACCP.

Students will now likely identify with the fact that Japanese Americans were stripped of their homes, possessions, friends and sometimes, families. They didn't know where they were going, or how long they would stay. They had to adapt to a new routine and a new, restricted way of life.

- **Show large photos included in Guide.**

- **Encourage students to ask questions and discuss the event.**

Conclude the sessions by telling the students that, after close to fifty years, the U.S. government decided they had made a terrible mistake in putting Japanese Americans into camp. They decided to send an apology and a check to each of the survivors beginning in 1990. (Only half of the original camp population are now living, the majority in their late 60s and 70s.) They did so only because thousands of Japanese Americans and their friends spent over ten years persuading the government.