

Nihonjin Face

Only What You Can Carry



Grades K – 5

Objective To explore and develop understanding for the experience of Japanese American citizens who were forced from their homes by the U.S. government, leaving behind nearly all of their possessions and property

Materials Suitcase Activity Sheet (included) or blank paper
Writing/drawing utensils
Transcript or image of mass removal instructions from 1942 (included)
Images of children with suitcases from Densho collection

- <http://ddr.densho.org/ddr-densho-36-32/>
- <http://ddr.densho.org/ddr-densho-151-462/>
- <http://ddr.densho.org/ddr-densho-151-288/>
- <http://ddr.densho.org/ddr-densho-151-326/>
- <http://ddr.densho.org/ddr-densho-151-8/>
- <http://ddr.densho.org/ddr-densho-151-17/>
- <https://catalog.archives.gov/id/536059>
- <https://encyclopedia.densho.org/sources/en-russell-child-1/>

Background

Imagine you, your family and everyone who looks like you was accused and punished for something you never did.

Some people were very fearful that Japanese Americans might not support the United States during World War II. Not because of anything they did, but only because of their identity – the way they looked and where their families originated. So, all Japanese American families on the West Coast were forced from their homes and imprisoned in camps, even though they had done nothing wrong.

Based on the orders issued to “persons of Japanese ancestry” in 1942, in this lesson you’ll experience the challenge of reducing all your belongings to only what you can carry. Using the text of the evacuation orders, you will need to account for the required items and make choices for anything else you can afford to bring.

This lesson intentionally challenges us to sit in the uncertainty experienced by Japanese Americans in the week between April 24 and May 1, 1942. (Some students may have emotional reactions to the concept of housing uncertainty or pet abandonment. It may be important to remind younger learners that this is a “what if” exercise and that their goal is to imagine what Tomiko, Kiyō and Momma might have felt in that situation.)

Lesson Procedure

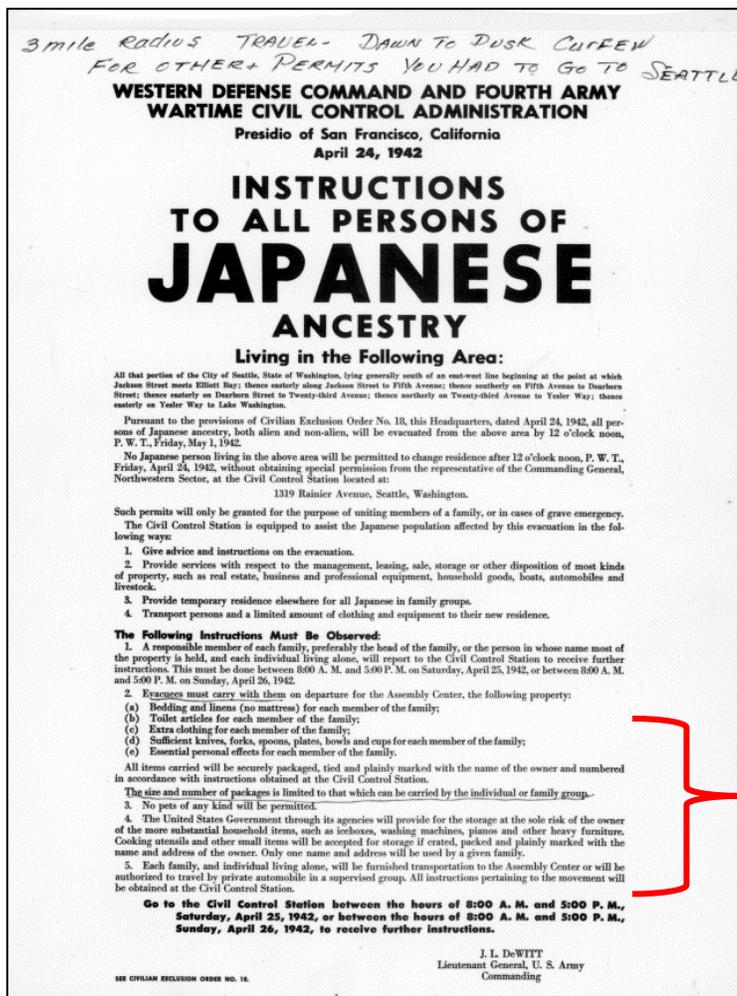
1.) Consider

What would be like if you were forced to leave your home and all your possessions suddenly, like Tomiko and her family?

- How would that make you feel?
- What would you want to bring?
- How would you decide what to take with you and what to leave behind?

2.) Utilizing a Primary (Historical) Source

Now imagine that you can only bring certain things with you. Here is the public notice and the list that Tomiko and her family received, explaining what they could and could not bring as they were forced from their homes:



Evacuees must carry with them on departure for the Assembly Center, the following property:

- a) Bedding and linens (no mattress) for each member of the family;
- b) Toilet articles for each member of the family;
- c) Extra clothing for each member of the family;
- d) Sufficient knives, forks, spoons, plates, bowls and cups for each member of the family;
- e) Essential personal effects for each member of the family.

The size and number of packages is limited to that which can be carried by the individual or family group.

- i. No pets of any kind will be permitted.

"Instructions to All Persons of Japanese Ancestry," Apr. 24, 1942, posted in Seattle, Washington. [Internet]. Densho Encyclopedia

3.) Discuss and Plan

Based on the list in the Evacuation Orders, you have one week before you must leave.

- What are some of the things you can and can't bring? How do you feel about that?
- Once you have all the required items packed, would you have room for anything else?
- What small personal item would you bring? A favorite toy? A special picture?

Using the Suitcase Activity Sheet, draw/color the contents of your suitcases. You can also pack actual suitcases, to see what it would really feel like.

Tips for at home application:

1. If you cannot print the suitcase worksheet, draw your own suitcase on a sheet of paper and fill it in.
2. Use an actual suitcase and physically pack the required items so that students can see the actual objects and how little room is left for additional items. Have students try carrying all the required items across the room.

4.) Reflect

Discuss and/or write down your responses to the following questions.

- What was it like to be forced to limit your possessions to only those you can carry?
- Describe what it would be like to carry this suitcase as you left your entire home behind?
- If you have a pet, how would it make you feel to have to leave that pet behind? What arrangements might you set up for your pet?
- Is it fair to force someone to leave their home, and sell or store all their possessions in a week, if that person has not done anything wrong?
- What's the problem with taking away the rights of certain people because of the way they look or speak, or who their parents were? Even if you're not part of that group, how can that be dangerous to you and to our country?



Girl with Luggage, 1942; Dorothea Lange, Courtesy of the National Archives and Records Administration

My Suitcase

