

Nihonjin Face

Photo Analysis & Camp Diary



Grades 2 – 5

Objective To explore what life was like for children in US concentration camps and compose a diary entry from the point of view of a child your age in camp

Materials Pencil and paper for optional diary writing/crayons & paper for younger students
Images of children at camp from Densho collection (included)

Background

In the 1940s, thousands of American children were forced into prison camps. The only reason they were forced into camps with their families is because they had Japanese ancestry. Later this was found to be unfair and illegal, but many children had already spent years growing up in the camps. Let's do some detective work and examine old photos to understand what it was like to be a child in that time and place.

In this activity, you will review photos from concentration camps at various locations around the United States during the 1940s, a short video from Densho, and Tomiko's monologue from the play. Using these resources, you will piece together an idea of what life at camp might have been like for Japanese American children. You will put together these observations by composing a first person diary entry describing the incarceration camp experience from the perspective of a child.

Lesson Procedure

1.) Watch and Explore (Grades 4, 5)

Preview the short Densho video, [American Concentration Camps](#) and the historical photos included at the end of this lesson.

2.) Analyze and Note

Discuss the images and make a list of what you can observe about camp life, activities and living conditions. (Links to images from Densho's historical collection on the next page)

- What is happening in each picture??
- Where might it have been taken
- What do you see in the picture that gives you clues? (The people, the buildings, objects, the background, any words or signs...)
- How is the experience that these families had similar or different to your own?

3.) Explore Through Text (Grades 2 and up; Read aloud or individually)

Read aloud Tomiko's camp monologue or a passage from a [relevant children's book](#).

Tomiko's Camp Monologue

Tomiko shares these frustrations after being yelled at by a guard.

"Look at this crummy little room - the wind blows through all of the cracks in the wall and the floor. It's so hot in the summer and freezing in the winter. Those horrible toilets. You have to walk for blocks to get there and there's no walls, no doors! We have to eat at the mess hall - and the food is disgusting - especially those Vienna sausages! Why can't we get a little miso soup once in a while? I feel dirty all the time because the dust is everywhere - inside, outside, in my clothes, in my hair! Why do we have to be surrounded by barbed wire and armed guards? I'm not a criminal. Why am I stuck in this place? I haven't done anything wrong!"

- How do you think Tomiko feels about living in the camp? What makes you think that?
- How would you feel if you were forced to live in one of these camps?

4.) Write Your Own! (Grades 2-5)

Compose a diary entry as if you were a child in the camp, using descriptive language to explain what their life in camp is like. What are your daily activities? Who from your family share a room with you. Based on the pictures or video you observed, describe the details of your family's room. How are you feeling living the life of a kid behind barbed wire, surrounded by armed guards – and not having done anything?

*Learners who do not write yet can draw a picture of what they would be doing if they were in one of the camps.

5.) Share and Reflect

Read aloud your writing or share your drawing.

- What details did you include?
- How did you use descriptive language to communicate the feeling of camp life?
- How did it feel to imagine the camp experience from the perspective of a child?

Resource Images from Densho's Collection:

<http://ddr.densho.org/ddr-densho-37-377/>

<http://ddr.densho.org/ddr-hmwf-1-444/>

<http://ddr.densho.org/ddr-densho-93-46/>

<http://ddr.densho.org/ddr-densho-151-33/>

<http://ddr.densho.org/ddr-densho-151-253/>

<http://ddr.densho.org/ddr-densho-151-280/>

<http://ddr.densho.org/ddr-densho-151-339/>

<http://ddr.densho.org/ddr-densho-151-360/>

<http://ddr.densho.org/ddr-densho-151-377/>

<http://ddr.densho.org/ddr-densho-151-403/>

<http://ddr.densho.org/ddr-densho-151-416/>

<http://ddr.densho.org/ddr-densho-151-368/>

<http://ddr.densho.org/ddr-hmwf-1-15/>

<http://ddr.densho.org/ddr-hmwf-1-559/>

<http://ddr.densho.org/ddr-densho-93-21/>

<http://ddr.densho.org/ddr-densho-151-66/>

<http://ddr.densho.org/ddr-densho-151-258/>

<http://ddr.densho.org/ddr-densho-151-330/>

<http://ddr.densho.org/ddr-densho-151-354/>

<http://ddr.densho.org/ddr-densho-151-363/>

<http://ddr.densho.org/ddr-densho-151-378/>

<http://ddr.densho.org/ddr-densho-151-405/>

<http://ddr.densho.org/ddr-densho-151-441/>

<https://catalog.archives.gov/id/538075>