

# **Nihonjin Face**

## Photo Analysis & Camp Diary



*Grades* 6 – 12

*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 young person in camp

*Materials* Pencil and paper for optional diary writing  
Images of children at camp from Densho collection (links below)  
Online access to the Densho Digital Repository and the National Park Service Map & Description of Tule Lake from the National Park Service (link below)

### **Background**

In the 1940s, thousands of American youth were forced into prison camps, not because anything they or their families did, but because they had Japanese ancestry. Later this was found to be unfair and illegal, but many young people had already spent years growing up in the camps. Using old photos and video footage, we'll reconstruct what it was like to grow up in the camps.

In this activity, you'll 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 youth. Finally you'll synthesize these observations by composing a first person diary entry describing the incarceration camp experience from the perspective of a young person.

### **Lesson Procedure**

#### **1.) Watch and Explore**

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.) Going Deeper with Secondary Sources

Consult oral histories from the [Densho Digital Repository](#), the camp description from the [National Park Service](#), Tomiko's camp monologue from the play (below), and/or a passage from a [relevant young adult 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!"

### 4.) Write in First Person

Compose a diary entry as if you were a young person in the camp, using descriptive language to explain what 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 barbed wire – and not having done anything?

### 5.) Share and Reflect

Read aloud your writing.

- 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 young person?

#### **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>