
Sample Lesson 20: The Japanese American Incarceration Experience Through Poetry and Spoken Word—A Focus on Literary Analysis and Historical Significance

Theme: Identity, Systems of Power

Disciplinary Area: Asian American and Pacific Islander Studies

Ethnic Studies Values and Principles Alignment: 1, 4, 5, 6

Standards Alignment:

CCSS for ELA/Literacy: RL.9–10.1; RL.9–10.10; RI.9–10.1; RI.9–10.2; W.9–10.1; W.9–10.9; SL.9–10.1; L.9–10.5, RH.9–10.1; RH.9–10.2

HSS Content Standards: 11.75, 12.2.1

CA HSS Analysis Skills (9–12): Chronological and Spatial Thinking 1; Historical Research, Evidence, and Point of View: 1, 2; Historical Interpretation: 1

LESSON PURPOSE AND OVERVIEW:

The unjust and unconstitutional incarceration of Japanese Americans during World War II is a significant moment in American history with a profound effect on the lives of individuals, a community, and our nation. In the short term, it uprooted Japanese American families and individuals, including immigrants and American citizens, from their homes on the West Coast to be incarcerated in American concentration camps throughout the nation. During this incarceration, Japanese Americans suffered family separation, the loss of homes and businesses, harsh day-to-day living conditions, and the denial of basic civil rights guaranteed in the United States Constitution. After the war the camps were closed, but Japanese Americans continued to grapple with the legacy of that experience and how it impacted their lives as individuals, as families, and as a community. Even though the nation itself eventually apologized for what it had done, marking a turning point for the Japanese Americans, the horrors of incarceration remain and generations of Japanese Americans and the country as a whole still grapple with its legacy.

This lesson begins with an overview of the history of the incarceration and the findings of a 1983 congressional report that led to an apology issued to the Japanese American community by the United States government. The report concluded the incarceration was an injustice fueled by “race prejudice, war hysteria, and a failure of political leadership.” However, it was not until 2019 when the mass incarceration of Japanese Americans was found to be unconstitutional by the US Supreme Court.

Students will then employ the historical analysis skills of working with evidence and historical empathy to investigate how the incarcerated used poetry and other art forms to illuminate the incarceration's profound impact on their individual and family lives. Students will also investigate contemporary poetry and spoken word pieces that retell the stories of what happened to Japanese Americans during World War II for a new generation and address the import of those stories for us today as we grapple with government policies and rhetoric that echo that dark time in American history.

Key Terms and Concepts: Japanese America, Issei, Nisei, Sansei, Yonsei, Executive Order 9066, American concentration camp, resettlement, mass incarceration, redress, forced eviction, incarceration camp

See the vocabulary list in the Materials and Resources section at the end of the lesson for additional terms.

Lesson Objectives (Students will be able to ...):

- Use a variety of sources, including text, poetry, and videos, to analyze the basic history of the Japanese American incarceration
- Analyze and read poetry as a literary form and as a historical source document
- Analyze how the historical context of their World War II incarceration shaped and continues to shape the perspectives of Japanese Americans

Essential Questions:

1. What does the poetry and art produced by Japanese Americans during their World War II incarceration reveal about the impact of this experience on their lives as individuals and family members? What is the legacy of these experiences?
2. What were the causes that led up to the mass incarceration of all people of Japanese ancestry during World War II? What was the impact of incarceration on individuals, communities, and the nation?
3. What can we learn from poetry written during the incarceration and poetry written today about the impact of incarceration on individuals, communities, and the nation?
4. What evidence do you see that supports the argument that incarceration was a significant moment in history and peoples' lives?

Lesson Steps/Activities:

Day 1

Materials and Resources:

Notetaking paper, pens, Historical Overview of the Japanese American Incarceration handout, time line, incarceration sites map

1. Community Builder/Cultural Energizer: Students will view photographs and art documenting the mass incarceration of all people of Japanese ancestry on the West Coast. Teachers may begin the lesson by modeling how to use an image as a source. After showing the first photo teachers might share what they noticed and thought about the photo. This would include:
 - a. A photo of a white woman pointing to a large sign hanging from the roof of a house that reads “Japs keep moving—This is a White Man’s Neighborhood.” She has a stern look. The sign is hostile to Japanese Americans and suggests racism and prejudice toward them.
 - b. The caption informs that the two signs in the window of the house read “Japs Keep Out” and “Member Hollywood Protective Association.” The woman really does not want to have Japanese Americans in her neighborhood.
 - c. “Member of Hollywood Protective Association” suggests that there was an organized effort to keep Japanese Americans out of neighborhoods. It suggests racism toward Japanese Americans in that time.
 - d. The date on the photo is 1920. That’s two decades before World War II. Why is it included in this slideshow about the incarceration of people of Japanese ancestry in World War II?
 - e. The teacher models how to work with the essential questions (presented in step 2) by working with essential question 2: What were the causes that led up to the mass incarceration of all people of Japanese ancestry during World War II? The teacher presents the theory that racism was one reason Japanese Americans were incarcerated.
 - f. After modeling, teachers have students silently examine additional photos and documents. Following this, students can share their thinking with a partner before a short class discussion.
2. Teachers will present the essential questions and inquiry questions.
3. Students will read and then discuss the Historical Overview of the Japanese American Incarceration handout and time line, annotating the overview with overlapping dates from the time line that reinforce and inform the arguments

framed in the overview and noting questions that the time line raises. This gives students the opportunity to begin developing an argument about the causes and impact of the incarcerations. The two secondary sources provide historical context that allows students to better understand what they viewed in the primary source photographs and art created by incarcerated (see step 1). Students may also consult the map.

4. To close and to prepare for day 2, the class reads aloud selected poems, pausing after each one so the language of the incarcerated resonates with students. This allows students to experience empathy with the poets. For each poem, students should briefly answer the following questions in the context of what happened during the removal and incarceration:
 - What events or experiences led the poet to write the poem?
 - What does the poem reveal about the impact of the incarceration on individuals, families, and communities?
 - What words and phrases in the poem support your response to the previous question?

Homework:

Minidoka: An American Concentration Camp

<https://www.cde.ca.gov/ci/cr/cf/ch4.asp#link190>

View “Kenji” from Fort Minor

<https://www.cde.ca.gov/ci/cr/cf/ch4.asp#link191>

Note to Teachers and Students:

To learn more about the constitutional and civil rights related to the mass incarceration go to <https://www.cde.ca.gov/ci/cr/cf/ch4.asp#link192>.

Day 2

Materials and Resources:

Day 2 Handout, The Power of Primary Source Poetry handout, pens, markers, and chart paper

1. Students do a ten-minute quick write (with bullets) to review the basic overview of the incarceration.
 - Writing Prompt: Why were people of Japanese ancestry incarcerated during World War II? What was the impact of the incarceration on individuals, families, and the community?

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- Students should informally cite evidence as much as possible (for example, lesson sources including the historical overview, time line, images and art, poems, and videos).
 - One or two students share their writing with the class.
2. The teacher introduces inquiry questions for the day.
 - a. What can we learn from poetry written during the incarceration and poetry written today about the impact of incarceration on individuals, communities, and the nation?
 - b. What evidence do you see that supports the argument that incarceration was a significant moment in history and in peoples' lives?
 - o To help students respond to this question, they can consider the following questions that focus on criteria for identifying historical significance:⁷
 - i. Who was affected by the event? Why was it important to them?
 - ii. Was the experience profound, deeply affecting people's lives?
 - iii. Did the experience affect many or few people?
 - iv. Was the impact of the event long lasting or only short lived?
 - v. Is the event relevant to our understanding of the past and/or present?
 3. Students will dig deep into the historical and contemporary poems and interpret them to answer the inquiry questions. Teachers will pass out The Power of Primary Source Poetry handout and review directions with class.
 4. Individual Work (10 minutes):

Individual students or the teacher scans the poems then selects two to three, including both poems written while in camp and a contemporary poem. After the poems are selected, write the name of each poem at the top of the handout, and then students respond to the questions provided.
 5. Directions for Group Work (20 minutes):

Share your poems. Then make a poster of a word drawing using words and drawing to show the impact of the incarceration on Japanese Americans and the nation. Think about why this experience is significant today. Include lines and words in the graphic from both the historical and the contemporary poems. Your

⁷ Adapted from: Stéphane Lévesque. 2008. *Thinking Historically: Educating Students for the Twenty-First Century*. Toronto, Canada: University of Toronto Press, 45–52.

drawing, lines, and words are your evidence. Have fun! Post and share your word drawing for a gallery walk.

6. Gallery Walk and Discussion:

If possible, work as a whole group during the gallery walk. As students look at the posters, they consider the inquiry questions and discuss how the posters address them.

7. Final Reflection:

Students consider the materials studied in this lesson and explain why the incarceration of Japanese Americans during World War II is a significant moment in American history and an important story to include in an ethnic studies course. The teacher may ask students to write a one-page reflection as homework and for assessment.

Making Connections to the *History–Social Science Framework*:

Chapter 14 of the framework includes a section (pages 294–297) on California’s involvement in World War II and specifically mentions the breach of civil rights for Japanese Americans. The chapter highlights using sources including literature, art, and music to understand the experiences of AAPI communities. Two guiding questions for this chapter include:

How did World War II impact California?

What external forces shape people’s lives and make them who they are?

Assessment, Application, Action, and Reflection:

- Embedded in the lesson: quick write, group poster, final reflection

Materials and Resources:

- Historical Overview of the Japanese American Incarceration reading handout (see below)
- Chart paper and marking pens
- The Power of Primary Source Poetry handout (see below)
- Day 2 Handout (see below)
- Japanese American National Museum Previsit Resources: Fact Sheet, Timeline, and Vocabulary List <https://www.cde.ca.gov/ci/cr/cf/ch4.asp#link193>

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- Japanese Incarceration photos, art, and poems
 - Map of American Concentration Sites <https://www.cde.ca.gov/ci/cr/cf/ch4.asp#link194>
 - Two student poster samples (see below)

Historical Overview of the Japanese American Incarceration

Between 1942 and 1945, the US government forced more than 120,000 Japanese Americans from their homes, farms, schools, jobs, and businesses, in violation of their constitutional civil rights and liberties. Within hours after the attack by the imperial forces of Japan on Pearl Harbor, Hawaii on December 7, 1941, Japanese community leaders, language school instructors, Buddhist and Shinto priests were rounded up as “enemy aliens.” The United States soon entered World War II. Three decades of anti-Japanese prejudice culminated into hate and suspicion. All people of Japanese descent in Hawaii and the West Coast were looked upon as saboteurs, spies, and scapegoats for the attack in Hawaii.

On the West Coast, in the aftermath a hysteria of fear against Japanese Americans as “the enemy within” was created by inflammatory journalism, pressure groups, agricultural interests, politicians, and the US Army. This suspicion of Japanese Americans quickly led to cries for their expulsion. On February 19, 1942, President Franklin D. Roosevelt signed Executive Order 9066, which called for the mass exclusion and incarceration of all Japanese Americans from the West Coast—where the majority of Japanese Americans lived, outside of Hawaii.

Mass exclusion and incarceration of Japanese Americans began in March 1942. Some communities like Terminal Island were given only 48 hours’ notice. During the first phase, incarcerated were transported on trains and buses under military guard to the hastily prepared temporary detention centers.

Twelve temporary detention centers were in California and one was in Oregon. They were set up on race tracks, fairgrounds, or livestock pavilions. Detainees were housed in horse stalls or windowless shacks that were crowded and lacked sufficient ventilation, electricity, and sanitation facilities. Food was often spoiled. There was a shortage of food and medicine. The War Relocation Authority, or WRA, was established to administer the centers.

The second phase began midsummer and involved moving approximately 500 incarcerated daily from the temporary detention centers to permanent concentration camps. These camps were located in remote, uninhabitable areas in the interior of the US. In the desert camps, daytime temperatures often reached 100 degrees or more. Subzero winters were common in the northern camps.

Japanese Americans filed lawsuits to stop the mass incarceration, but the wartime courts supported military necessity. The US Supreme Court ruled in *Hirabayashi v. US*, *Yasui v. US*, and *Korematsu v. US* that the denial of civil liberties was based on military necessity. In a later ruling in *Endo v. US*, the Supreme Court decided in 1945 that a loyal citizen could no longer be detained, but not until the war was winding down. Tule Lake camp closed in 1946.

The American concentration camps were surrounded by barbed wire and guard towers. Armed guards patrolled the perimeter and were instructed to shoot anyone attempting to leave. The barracks consisted of tar paper over two-by-sixes and no insulation. Many families were assigned to one barrack and lived together with no privacy. Meals were taken communally in mess halls and required a long wait in line. A demonstration in Manzanar over the theft of food by personnel led to violence in which

two died and many were injured. The attempt at screening for loyalty and registering inmates for military induction with the WRA's questionnaire "Application for Leave Clearance," was conducted in a manner fraught with such confusion and distrust that violence broke out at both California camps.

Through the incarceration program, the Japanese Americans suffered greatly. They first endured the shock of realizing they could not return to their communities, but were imprisoned behind barbed wire without due process without charges, hearings, or a trial. They lost their homes and businesses. Their education and careers were interrupted and their possessions lost. Many lost sons who fought for the country that imprisoned their parents. They suffered the loss of faith in the government and the humiliation of being confined as "enemy aliens" and prisoners in their own country.

Many young Japanese American men fought for the United States while their families were imprisoned. The segregated, all-Japanese American 100th Battalion/442nd Regimental Combat Team that fought in Europe and became the most highly decorated unit for its size and length of service in US military history is one example of this irony. Other Japanese Americans also served secretly and with distinction in the Military Intelligence Service in the Pacific theater, becoming America's "secret weapon."

Throughout World War II, not a single incident of espionage or sabotage was found to be committed by Japanese Americans. Japanese Americans living in Hawaii were spared en masse removal because of the logistical difficulty of transporting a third of the state's population to the mainland. With their numbers exceeding the entire Japanese population on the mainland, Japanese Americans in Hawaii proved an essential part of the state's labor force and defense.

On December 17, 1944, President Roosevelt announced the end of the exclusion of Japanese Americans from the West Coast, thus allowing the return home of the incarcerated. Resettlement after incarceration was difficult, especially since prejudice still ran high on the West Coast. Many Issei (first generation Japanese Americans) never regained their losses, living out their lives in poverty and poor health.

On July 31, 1980, Congress established the Commission on Wartime Relocation and Internment of Civilians (CWRIC) to investigate causes of the Executive Order 9066. The commission concluded "the promulgation of Executive Order 9066 was not justified by military necessity and the decisions which followed from it—detention, ending detention, and ending exclusion—were not driven by analysis of military conditions. The broad historical causes which shaped these decisions were race prejudice, war hysteria, and a failure of political leadership."

In October 1983, in response to a petition for a writ of error Coram Nobis by Fred Korematsu, the Federal District Court of San Francisco vacated his 1942 federal conviction based on new evidence that revealed the government knew about unconstitutional race-based rationale behind military necessity, and intentionally covered it up all the way up to the Supreme Court.

After two decades of civic engagement and public advocacy, a petition for redress was won, an incredible milestone in American constitutional history. On August 10, 1988,

President Ronald Reagan signed into law the Civil Liberties Act of 1988, which offered an apology on behalf of the nation and monetary restitution to the former incarcerated still living. Nearly half of those who had been imprisoned died before the bill was signed and monetary compensation was issued. The federal Civil Liberties Public Education Fund was created by the passage of the Civil Liberties Act of 1988 to educate the public on the issues surrounding the wartime incarceration of individuals of Japanese descent and to publish and distribute the hearings, findings, and recommendations of the CWRIC. After its expiration, in 1998, the California State Legislature passed a bill to create the California Civil Liberties Public Education Program, which would support the development of educational resources about WWII incarceration and the importance of protecting civil liberties, even in times of national crisis.

–National Japanese American Historical Society

Handout: The Power of Primary Source Poetry

Inquiry Questions:

What can we learn of the experience of Japanese American incarceratedees from poetry?
How can poetry be a primary source?

You will work in a group. First individually scan the poems, then read a poem or several short poems (15 minutes). Be sure to read poems written while in camp and contemporary poems. Consider what events the writer experienced that would have led them to write the poem. What led you to this conclusion? How does the poet seem to feel about the event? What key words and phrases led you to this conclusion? Write down the line or phrase (or word) that you find most powerful. What do you like about that line or phrase? What question does the poem prompt you to ask (either about the poet or life in general)?

*Poetry Written in American Concentration Camps by People of Japanese Ancestry*⁸

Haiku and Senyo

In this desolate field
Where only weeds have grown
For millions of years,
We mournfully bury
Three comrades
Who died in vain.
Sojin Takei

When the war is over
And after we are gone
Who will visit
This lonely grave in the wild
Where my friend lies buried?
Keiho Soga

There is no fence
High up in the sky.
The evening crows
Fly up and disappear
Into the endless horizon.
Sojin Takei

8 Jiro Nakano and Kay Nakano, eds. 1984. *Poets Behind Barbed Wire: Tanka Poems*. Honolulu, HI: Bamboo Ridge Press.

Barracks Home

This is our barracks, squatting on the ground,
Tar papered shacks, partitioned into rooms
By sheetrock walls, transmitting every sound
Of neighbor's gossip or the sweep of brooms
The open door welcomes the refugees,
And now at least there is no need to roam
Afar: here space enlarges memories
Beyond the bounds of camp and this new home.
The floor is carpeted with dust, wind-borne
Dry alkali, patterned with insect feet,
What peace can such a place as this impart?
We can but sense, bewildered and forlorn,
That time, disrupted by the war from neat
Routines, must now adjust within the heart.

Gain

I sought to seed the barren earth
And make wild beauty take
Firm root, but how could I have known
The waiting long would shake

Me inwardly, until I dared
Not say what would be gain
From such untimely planting, or
What flower worth the pain?

9 <https://www.cde.ca.gov/ci/cr/cf/ch4.asp#link195>

That Damned Fence¹⁰

They've sunk the posts deep into the ground
They've strung out wires all the way around.
With machine gun nests just over there,
And sentries and soldiers everywhere.
We're trapped like rats in a wired cage,
To fret and fume with impotent rage;
Yonder whispers the lure of the night,
But that DAMNED FENCE assails our sight.
They've sunk the posts deep into the ground
They've strung out wires all the way around.
With machine gun nests just over there,
And sentries and soldiers everywhere.
We're trapped like rats in a wired cage,
To fret and fume with impotent rage;
Yonder whispers the lure of the night,
But that DAMNED FENCE assails our sight.
We seek the softness of the midnight air,
But that DAMNED FENCE in the floodlight glare
Awakens unrest in our nocturnal quest,
And mockingly laughs with vicious jest.
With nowhere to go and nothing to do,
We feed terrible, lonesome, and blue:
That DAMNED FENCE is driving us crazy,
Destroying our youth and making us lazy.
Imprisoned in here for a long, long time,
We know we're punished—though we've committed no crime,
Our thoughts are gloomy and enthusiasm damp,
To be locked up in a concentration camp.
Loyalty we know, and patriotism we feel,
To sacrifice our utmost was our ideal,
To fight for our country, and die, perhaps;
But we're here because we happen to be Japs.
We all love life, and our country best,
Our misfortune to be here in the west,
To keep us penned behind that DAMNED FENCE,
Is someone's notion of NATIONAL DEFENCE!
Anonymous

10 <https://www.cde.ca.gov/ci/cr/cf/ch4.asp#link196>

Be Like the Cactus

Let not harsh tongues, that wag
in vain,
Discourage you. In spite of
pain,
Be like the cactus, which through
rain,
And storm, and thunder, can
remain.

Kimii Nagata

Plate in hand,
I stand in line,
Losing my resolve
to hide my tears

I see my mother
In the aged woman who comes
And I yield to her
My place in line

Four months have passed
And at last I learn
To call this horse stall
My family's home
Yukari

Contemporary Poems and Spoken Word

Kenji¹²

(Spoken word poem: <https://www.cde.ca.gov/ci/cr/cf/ch4.asp#link198>)

My father came from Japan in 1905
He was 15 when he immigrated from Japan
He worked until he was able to buy respect and build a store
Let me tell you the story in the form of a dream,
I don't know why I have to tell it but I know what it means,

11 <https://www.cde.ca.gov/ci/cr/cf/ch4.asp#link197>

12 <https://www.cde.ca.gov/ci/cr/cf/ch4.asp#link199>

Close your eyes, just picture the scene,
As I paint it for you, it was World War II,
When this man named Kenji woke up,
Ken was not a soldier,
He was just a man with a family who owned a store in LA,
That day, he crawled out of bed like he always did,
Bacon and eggs with wife and kids,
He lived on the second floor of a little store he ran,
He moved to LA from Japan,
They called him "Immigrant,"
In Japanese, he'd say he was called "Issei,"
That meant "First Generation In The United States,"
When everybody was afraid of the Germans, afraid of the Japs,
But most of all afraid of a homeland attack,
And that morning when Ken went out on the doormat,
His world went black 'cause,
Right there; front page news,
Three weeks before 1942,
"Pearl Harbour's Been Bombed And The Japs Are Comin',"
Pictures of soldiers dyin' and runnin',
Ken knew what it would lead to,
Just like he guessed, the President said,
"The evil Japanese in our home country will be locked away,"
They gave Ken, a couple of days,
To get his whole life packed in two bags,
Just two bags, couldn't even pack his clothes,
Some folks didn't even have a suitcase, to pack anything in,
So two trash bags is all they gave them,
When the kids asked mom "Where are we goin'?"
Nobody even knew what to say to them,
Ken didn't wanna lie, he said "The US is lookin' for spies,
So we have to live in a place called Manzanar,
Where a lot of Japanese people are,"
Stop it don't look at the gunmen,
You don't wanna get the soldiers wonderin',
If you gonna run or not,
'Cause if you run then you might get shot,
Other than that try not to think about it,
Try not to worry 'bout it; bein' so crowded,
Someday we'll get out, someday, someday.
As soon as war broke out
The FBI came and they just come to the house and

“You have to come”
“All the Japanese have to go”
They took Mr. Ni
People didn’t understand
Why did they have to take him?
Because he’s an innocent laborer
So now they’re in a town with soldiers surroundin’ them,
Every day, every night look down at them,
From watchtowers up on the wall,
Ken couldn’t really hate them at all;
They were just doin’ their job and,
He wasn’t gonna make any problems,
He had a little garden with vegetables and fruits that,
He gave to the troops in a basket his wife made,
But in the back of his mind, he wanted his family’s life saved,
Prisoners of war in their own damn country,
What for?
Time passed in the prison town,
He wondered if they would live it down, if and when they were free,
The only way out was joinin’ the army,
And supposedly, some men went out for the army, signed on,
And ended up flyin’ to Japan with a bomb,
That 15 kilotonne blast, put an end to the war pretty fast,
Two cities were blown to bits; the end of the war came quick,
Ken got out, big hopes of a normal life, with his kids and his wife,
But, when they got back to their home,
What they saw made them feel so alone,
These people had trashed every room,
Smashed in the windows and bashed in the doors,
Written on the walls and the floor,
“Japs not welcome anymore.”
And Kenji dropped both of his bags at his sides and just stood outside,
He, looked at his wife without words to say,
She looked back at him wiping tears away,
And, said “Someday we’ll be OK, someday,”
Now the names have been changed, but the story’s true,
My family was locked up back in ’42,
My family was there it was dark and damp,
And they called it an internment camp
When we first got back from camp ... uh
It was ... pretty ... pretty bad
I, I remember my husband said

“Are we gonna stay ‘til last?”
Then my husband died before they close the camp.
Mike Shinoda

SILENCE ... NO MORE¹³

Silence, forty years of silence
Forty years of anger, pain, helplessness
Shackled in the hearts of Issei, Nisei, Kibei.

Many died in silence
Some by their own hands
Some by others.

Today
The survivors Stood tall, strong, proud
Issei, Nisei, Kibei, all vowed
No more enryo, giri, gaman
Shattering the silence.

Today
the survivors
Cried out redress, restitution, reparations

for a father detained in five
prisoner-of-war camps in America
for the crime of being Japanese
and joined his loved ones
in yet another barbed wire compound
then returned home to die at seventy-three
in San Francisco

for a mother whose demons drove her
to hammer her infant to death
now skipping merrily after butterflies
in the snow

for a brother, honor student,
star athlete, Purple Heart veteran
now alone in a sleazy Seattle hotel room
sitting on the edge of a cot rocking, rocking
for
a girl of fourteen

13 Kiku Hori Funabiki. 1992. “Silence No More.” *U.S.–Japan Women’s Journal* 2:56–62.

mother to the Japanese American children
in Petersburg
orphaned by the FBI seizure
of all Japanese adults
now agonizing in guilt
at having detoured the jailhouse
too ashamed at the sight of her father
waving desperately to her
for
a baby whose whimpers
were silenced forever
in a camp hospital
the Caucasian doctor who never came
was a father of a son killed
in the Pacific

Silence
Silence, no more
... no more
Kiku Funabiki

We Came Back for You¹⁴

We came back for you because ... we know mass incarceration.
We came back for you because ... we know family separation.
We came back for you because ... we know deportation.
Because ... we know barbed wire.
Because ... we know indefinite detention.
We came back for you because ... we care.

Some say, "It's not our fight, it's not the same."
But we say incarceration of innocent people is inhumane,
we say mothers and children are not to blame.
Back in 1942, we disappeared.
Empty chairs in the classroom,
empty homes, shops, and farms.
America turned their backs on us.
No one marched, no one protested,
there were no petitions, there was no outrage.
Silence filled the empty spaces of our invisibility.

14 Satsuki Ina. "We Will Come Back for You." Lion's Roar, August 1, 2019. <https://www.cde.ca.gov/ci/cr/cf/ch4.asp#link200>.

Silence was the scourge of our trauma.
Silence filled our hearts, our homes, our community so ...

We came back to let you know that we will not forget you.
We came back to drum our message loud and clear.
We came back to hang paper cranes of hope and caring.

We didn't know there would be a healing for us.
We didn't know that you would cry listening to our stories.
We didn't know that the power of our shared voices
would be like shards ripping away the scabs of silence.
We didn't know that the small act of folding a paper crane
would speak to so many people in our community.

In protest we chanted, we raised our fists,
we sang in Spanish, "De colores."
We held hands,
we sang in Japanese, "Kutsu ga Naru."
We sang for our grandmothers and grandfathers,
We sang for our mothers and fathers,
And we sang for you.
And in return you reached into your brown paper bag
and tied a string bracelet to my wrist,
You pushed a tortilla through the chain-link fence,
You welcomed us wearing ties and hats,
You even saved a rock from the old swimming pool,
placed it in my hand, saying
You had been waiting years for me to come back.
Your big brown eyes stared up at me as tears welled up in mine.
Little child, you are me. I am you.
We will not forget you.
We will not be silent.
We will come back for you.
And we will bring others until you are free!
Satsuki Ina

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Day 2 Handout

- I. Quick write: Using what you learned yesterday, write a brief response to the following questions.

Why were people of Japanese ancestry incarcerated during World War II? What was the impact of the incarceration on individuals, families, and the community?

Which sources of information viewed and read yesterday most informed your response? Identify specific images, dates and events, words and statements, and poems.

II. Returning to the poetry

Poems to Consider:

What events or experiences led the poet to write the poem?

What does the poem reveal about the impact of the incarceration on individuals, families, and communities?

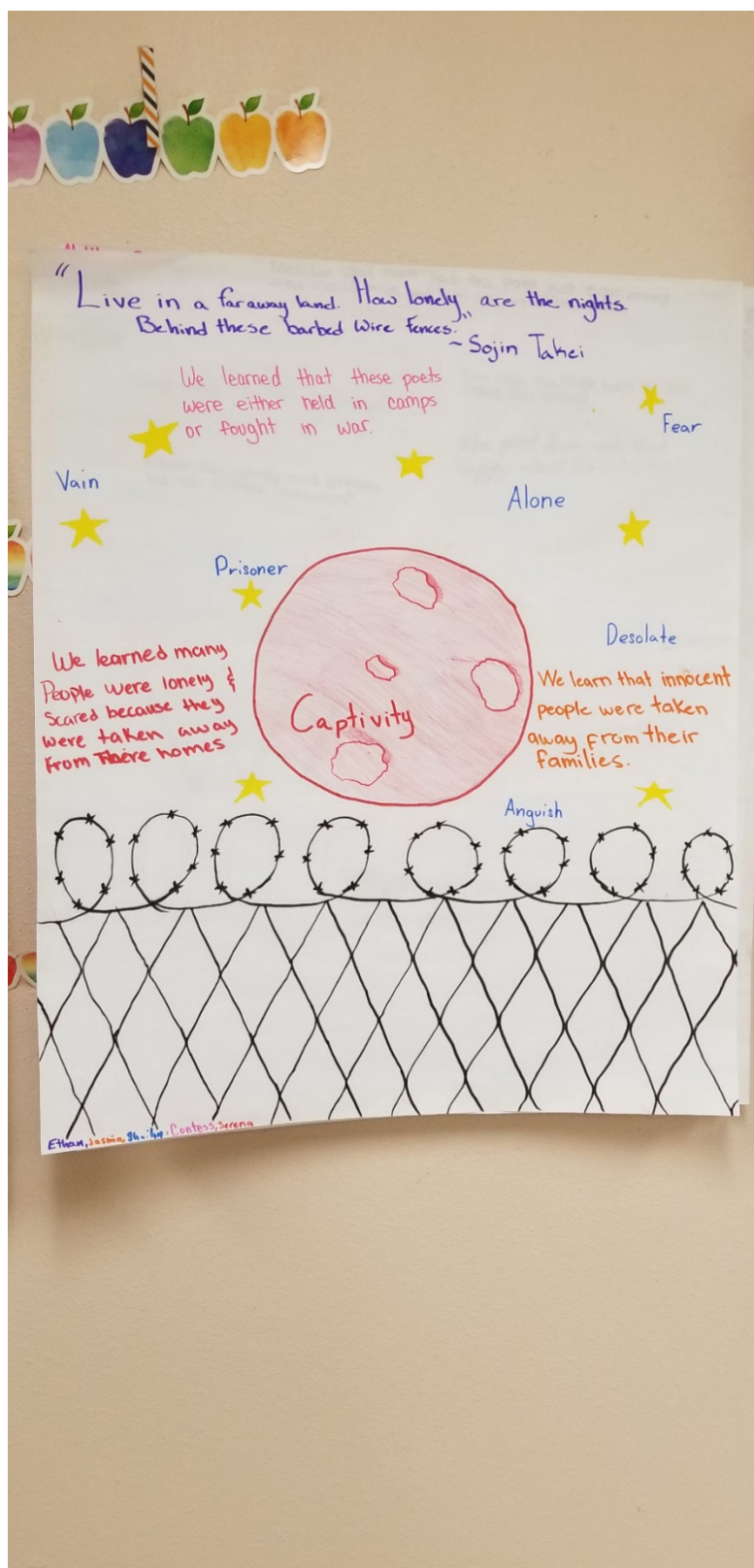
What words and phrases from the poem support your response to the previous question?

What else do you want to say about this poem and what it reveals about the incarceration of Japanese Americans during World War II?

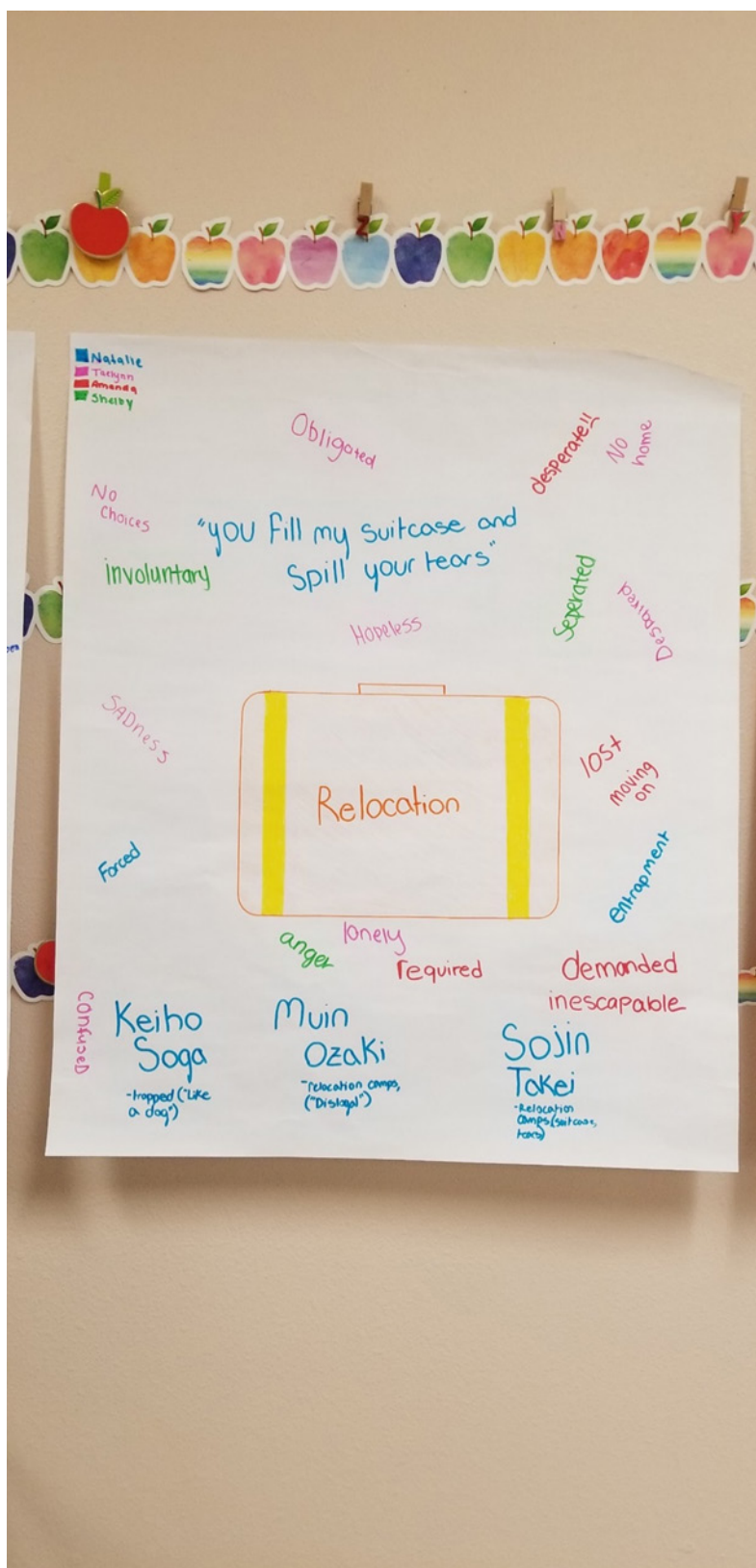
Final reflection: Considering the materials you studied in this lesson and the criteria for establishing historical significance, write a brief response to the following question.

Why is the incarceration of Japanese Americans during World a significant moment in American history and an important story to include in an ethnic studies course?

Student Poster Sample 1



Student Poster Sample 2



Lesson Materials and Resources:

Angel Island Immigration Station

<https://www.cde.ca.gov/ci/cr/cf/ch4.asp#link205>

Asian American Curriculum Project

<https://www.cde.ca.gov/ci/cr/cf/ch4.asp#link206>

Densho: Japanese American Legacy Project

<https://www.cde.ca.gov/ci/cr/cf/ch4.asp#link207>

Fred T. Korematsu Institute

<https://www.cde.ca.gov/ci/cr/cf/ch4.asp#link208>

Go For Broke National Education Center

<https://www.cde.ca.gov/ci/cr/cf/ch4.asp#link209>

Japanese American Museum of Oregon

<https://www.cde.ca.gov/ci/cr/cf/ch4.asp#link210>

Japanese American Museum of San Jose

<https://www.cde.ca.gov/ci/cr/cf/ch4.asp#link211>

Japanese American National Museum

<https://www.cde.ca.gov/ci/cr/cf/ch4.asp#link212>

Japanese American National Museum Timeline of
Japanese American History and Vocabulary List

<https://www.cde.ca.gov/ci/cr/cf/ch4.asp#link213>

National Japanese American Historical Society

<https://www.cde.ca.gov/ci/cr/cf/ch4.asp#link214>

PBS Learning Media

<https://www.cde.ca.gov/ci/cr/cf/ch4.asp#link215>

<https://www.cde.ca.gov/ci/cr/cf/ch4.asp#link216>

Smithsonian National Museum of American History

<https://www.cde.ca.gov/ci/cr/cf/ch4.asp#link217>

<https://www.cde.ca.gov/ci/cr/cf/ch4.asp#link218>

Smithsonian Asian Pacific American Center

<https://www.cde.ca.gov/ci/cr/cf/ch4.asp#link219/>