

## **TITLE** Fairness: Incarceration of Japanese Americans During World War II

**GRADES** 4 through 8

### **SUBJECT AREAS**

- History
- Multicultural Studies

### **OVERVIEW**

The purpose of this lesson is to have students consider one of the fundamental concepts embodied in our constitution and laws, the concept of equality. At a grade-school level, equality can be interpreted as an idea of fairness, that "all people are created equal." This must be a basic operative idea in a country such as ours because of the various ethnic and racial backgrounds of our population. Of course, children do learn and understand that life is not always fair, that most of the time many things are not fair. We strive for fairness in our laws and in our day-to-day dealings with others, but we often fall short of our ideals. On the level of human rights, however, we in this country try to accord basic rights to every individual. The incarceration of Japanese Americans during World War II is now seen as a profound violation of our laws and sense of fairness. It should be viewed in the context of its 1941 wartime setting so that we can understand how such a thing could have happened in our country. We should also try to understand: Why were the Japanese Americans treated so unfairly?

### **MEDIA COMPONENTS**

Film: **Rabbit in the Moon**

[www.geocities.com/Athens/8420/main.html](http://www.geocities.com/Athens/8420/main.html)

This site has a lot of information on Japanese-American internment and links to other helpful and relevant Web sites

[www.densho.org](http://www.densho.org)

The Japanese American Legacy Project; has a section for teachers

[www.resisters.com](http://www.resisters.com)

Web site for the film Conscience and the Constitution, about the draft resisters

[www.pbs.org/tv/raceinitiative.rabbitinthemoon/index.html](http://www.pbs.org/tv/raceinitiative.rabbitinthemoon/index.html)

Web site for **Rabbit in the Moon**

[www.nara.gov/ex.hall/charters/billrights/billrights.html](http://www.nara.gov/ex.hall/charters/billrights/billrights.html)

Simple list of the Bill of Rights

[www.janm.org/nrc](http://www.janm.org/nrc)

Japanese American National Museum's Web site

<http://www.asianlawcaucus.org/>

The Asian Law Caucus Web site; click on "anti-Asian violence" for articles and statistics

## LEARNING OBJECTIVES

- Students will consider the concept of fairness as it applies to individuals and countries.
- Students will consider the difficulties of adhering to or challenging laws that might be unfair or unconstitutional.
- Students will explore fairness as it relates to stereotypes.

**TIME** Two class periods (50 minutes each)

## PRE-VIEWING ACTIVITY

**Activity 1: Before showing the film to students, ask them to look for incidents and issues about being fair.**

A. What is meant by fairness? Where do we get ideas about fairness and fair play?

1. Have the class brainstorm the concept of fairness, asking them to come up with examples of fair/unfair dichotomies from their own lives and everyday activities. Draw up examples of what our society thinks of as fair and unfair. Show how we generally have an understanding of what is fair and unfair but that it is not always clear where to draw the lines.

2. Have the students come up with situations in which they felt it was hard to decide when something was fair or unfair. For example, how do doctors decide who is more deserving of a heart transplant? When governments put budgets together, how do they decide who gets funding? Why do some schools have bigger budgets than others?

B. Are these ideas of fairness apparent in our laws, our culture, our morals and our Constitution?

1. Bring the Bill of Rights into the discussion. Show how it is part of our Constitution and how it undergirds our laws. Our country is based on some fundamental concepts of fairness. Point out that although we have our ideals and our country is based on some fundamental concepts of fairness, we haven't lived up to them. (Examples might be the treatment of Native Americans and people of African and Mexican descent.) How do the ideas in the Bill of Rights apply to our feelings about race and national origins?

2. In our country, how do we apply these concepts of fairness to different groups? How have the ideas of fairness and unfairness been used in our country in the past? Have students write an essay on the idea of fairness. If they were to imagine a world where all things were fair, what would they change?

## POSTVIEWING ACTIVITIES

**Activity 1: Break students into two groups, and have each group make a presentation to the class.**

Group 1 – Create a presentation exploring the history of Japanese Americans from immigration, through the attack on Pearl Harbor.

1. Have students research the ways in which Japanese immigrants were discriminated against from the time they first arrived in the United States. Be sure to include the 1922 case of *Ozawa v. the United States*, in which the Supreme Court ruled that Asian immigrants were not eligible for naturalization because they were not of the White race.

2. Some questions to answer: Why were Japanese immigrants treated differently from European immigrants? How did they cope with the differing laws and treatments? Were Issei (first-generation immigrants to the United States) treated differently than Nisei (second generation, U.S.-born children of Issei)?

3. Copy some newspaper headlines and articles from the start of World War II and have students examine how the enemy was depicted and by transference was projected onto the Japanese-American community.

(A good source for propaganda pictures is *War Without Mercy* by John Dower, 1986.)

Group 2 – Have students research the following and prepare for a debate in front of the whole class.

1. Students will need to take sides. One side will argue the reasons the United States felt it was necessary for national security to incarcerate Japanese and Japanese Americans. The other side will argue why it was unfair and unconstitutional, citing how other groups the United States was at war with were not incarcerated. Look at the question of why only the Japanese Americans on the mainland West Coast incarcerated.

## **Activity 2: Stereotyping**

Introduce the idea of stereotyping first in general, then in particular as applied to Japanese Americans at that time. How was it possible to think of an entire group – men, women, children – as so different and so dangerous?

A. What are our attitudes towards people who differ from us? Consider race, gender, class and economic status, religion, language, cultural and ethnic background, foods people eat, the way they speak English, and individual differences like whether a person is short or tall, fat or skinny.

B. We live in a culture that generally promotes multiculturalism and fairness in our attitudes toward other people, but most of us know that in real life we do make distinctions. Sometimes the distinctions are in traits that we perceive as "better" than other traits. How is it decided what are the good and bad ones?

1. Have students pick one ethnic group and brainstorm two lists: one containing "positive" traits and the other "negative" traits, based on stereotypical ideas about that ethnic group. Then go through the lists and ask whether every person of that ethnicity could be thought of as having each of those traits, crossing out the ones that would not apply to every member of that ethnic group. More than likely, every single trait will be crossed out. The point can be made that stereotypes don't apply to us as individuals. Refer to the film in talking about how the Japanese Americans in 1941 were perceived and treated as inferior because of something they had no control over. This brings us back to the theme of fairness.

C. Discuss how in a time of war, ideas about the enemy quickly transpose to stereotypes that come to dominate the public perception of those among us who fit the description. During World War II, the Japanese Americans were put in the category of looking like the enemy and were therefore thought to be the enemy. This happened to German Americans during World War I, but not in World War II, as distinctions were made between Nazis and other Germans.

D. Can we think of anyone or any country that is thought to be a possible enemy (for example, Iraq, China, Cuba, and many others)?

1. Have students write an essay based on today's news from TV or newspapers on countries which are being portrayed as potential enemies. Pick out stereotypical and attitudes expressed that lump whole populations together.

E. How do we overcome these ideas about other persons? How do our concepts of fairness and unfairness apply to these stereotypes that we all have? How did we pick up these stereotypes? Where do we see them? in the media? or within groups we associate with? within our own families?

## **STANDARDS**

### **History: Grade 4**

#### **SOCIAL SCIENCES**

- Understand the social, political, cultural and economic geography of California since its inception.

### **Language Arts: Grade 4**

#### **LISTENING AND SPEAKING**

- Make organized and detailed oral presentations.

#### **WRITING**

- Write multiparagraph compositions.

### **Language Arts: Grade 6**

#### **WRITING**

- Write research reports, persuasive pieces and responses to literature.

### **Language Arts: Grade 7**

#### **WRITING**

- Use structure, support and pre-writing for compositions, revise them for word choice, identify and narrow topics, and cite information correctly.

### **Language Arts: Grade 8**

#### **LISTENING AND SPEAKING**

- Deliver specific, insightful and organized oral presentations that use a variety of primary and secondary sources.