

Close at Hand

Many people in the camps passed the time by creating art to decorate their barrack rooms, give to friends, or record their experiences. While some ordered art supplies from catalogs, others made art with the natural materials they found around them.



Eaton Collection, Japanese American National Museum

Some of the camps were located on dry lake beds and incarcerated people collected tiny shells to create flower arrangements. At other camps, incarcerated people gathered wood to carve into pins, sculptures, and furniture.

Take some time to explore photographs of the Eaton Collection of artifacts from the camps on Flickr.

(link: <https://www.flickr.com/photos/jamuseum/sets/72157664893839083/>)

Discussion questions:

1. As you look at each object, think about why it may have been created. What materials can you see? What does this tell you about where it may have been created? How do you feel when you look at these objects?

2. When the camps closed, some people took their art with them and displayed it wherever they went next. Other pieces of art ended up in storage or were even left behind. Why do you think someone might choose to display or not display art made in the camps? What would you choose to do with art from the camps after the camps closed?
3. Many of these objects are very small. Why do you think this is the case?
4. Think about the geography where you live. What materials could you collect to create a memento of the place you live?

Now you are going to create a piece of art from materials gathered in your surroundings!

Take a walk in a natural area near your house or school and gather materials you could use to make a sculpture. Be sure to respect any growing plants as you gather sticks, rocks, or fallen leaves. If a natural area isn't available to you, you could look in your desk or around your house for materials.

Use the materials you've gathered to create a sculpture or other artwork. To get started, you could think about whether you want to create something realistic, like the flowers, or an abstract piece that celebrates the materials you've collected, like some of the wooden pieces in the Eaton Collection. You could take inspiration from the landscape at Heart Mountain or even the landscape where you live!

When you've finished, share your artwork with the class!