

A Moment in Time: Forced Removal Activity

Overview and Purpose

In this activity, students will analyze photographs of Japanese Americans gathering for forced removal from their homes on the West Coast. Based on their observations, teachers will lead a discussion about forced removal and its effects on the Japanese American community.

Curriculum Standards

- **CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RH.6-8.2** Determine the central ideas or information of a primary or secondary source; provide an accurate summary of the source distinct from prior knowledge or opinions.
- **CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RH.6-8.7** Integrate visual information (e.g., in charts, graphs, photographs, videos, or maps) with other information in print and digital texts.
- **SS12.4.5** Using primary and secondary sources, apply historical research methods to interpret and evaluate important historical events from multiple perspectives.

Materials

- “A Moment in Time” worksheet
- Optional: “Forced Removal Photographs” presentation

Directions

Prepare students for the activity by providing background about the events leading up to forced removal (Anti-Asian racism on the West Coast, Pearl Harbor, backlash against Japanese Americans).

Tell students that they will be looking closely at photographs of Japanese Americans gathering for forced removal from the West Coast and pass out the “A Moment in Time” worksheet.

Give students several minutes per photograph to write their observations. Beginning with the first photograph, ask students to share what they have observed. Build off their observations to lead a discussion about forced removal. Below, you’ll find a list of questions to prompt discussion.

1. What can you infer about the people in the photograph? (Prompt students to notice their ages, clothing, etc. What do these attributes mean?)

2. What expressions do you notice on people's faces? What emotions do you think they're feeling?
3. What do you notice around them? What can you infer from the size of their luggage?
4. Who do you think took these photographs? What can you infer about the photographer's position on forced removal?

Next, read the original captions for the photographs aloud to the class. Prompt students to share how the caption changes their perception of the images. Note that the captions include euphemistic language about forced removal and incarceration.

Photograph 1: "Hayward, California. Members of the Mochida family awaiting evacuation bus. Identification tags are used to aid in keeping the family unit intact during all phases of evacuation. Mochida operated a nursery and five greenhouses on a two-acre site in Eden Township. He raised snapdragons and sweet peas. Evacuees of Japanese ancestry will be housed in War Relocation Authority centers for the duration."

Photograph 2: "Hayward, California. Writing a letter to a brother in Texas as an evacuee family awaits evacuation bus. Evacuees of Japanese ancestry will be housed in War Relocation Authority centers for the duration."

These photographs were taken by photographer Dorothea Lange, who is famous for her photographs of the Great Depression in the 1930s. Lange had been hired by the US government to document the forced removal and incarceration of Japanese Americans. Lange opposed incarceration but thought that documenting it would be important in the future. She took pictures of Japanese Americans preparing and gathering for forced removal and at the Manzanar Camp in California. The government was not happy with her photographs, which they felt communicated her opposition to the incarceration, and many of the images were censored during the war.

1. Why do you think Dorothea Lange wanted to document forced removal?
2. Are these photographs primary or secondary sources? Why is it important to look at primary sources like these photographs?

A Moment in Time Worksheet

In the spring of 1942, signs went up all over the west coast ordering Japanese Americans to show up on an assigned date and time for forced removal. Most people only had 7 to 10 days to pack, figure out what to do with the things they could not take, and say goodbye to their homes.

Take a minute to observe each photograph of Japanese Americans reporting for forced removal. What do you see? Write down your observations.



Courtesy of the National Archives and Records Administration

My observations:



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My observations:
