

# JAPANESE AMERICANS AND WORLD WAR II



## Japanese Americans and World War II

### Introduction

After Japan attacked Pearl Harbor on December 7, 1941, the United States formally entered World War II. In February 1942, President Franklin D. Roosevelt issued Executive Order 9066, which authorized the secretary of war to turn certain areas into military zones. The 9066 order also enabled the US government to relocate and incarcerate certain groups considered to be a threat to national security. One such group were Japanese Americans, over 80% of whom lived on the West Coast. Japanese Americans were forced to leave their homes and move to ten internment camps built across the United States. Between 110,000 and 120,000 Japanese Americans, the majority of whom were American citizens, were incarcerated in the ten camps. Two of them were built in Arkansas. The Rohwer Relocation Center was located in Desha county and the Jerome Relocation Center in sections of Chicot and Drew counties. Nearly 16,000 Japanese Americans were incarcerated in the two Arkansas camps from October 1942 to November 1945, when they existed.

In this activity, you will examine 12 photos from the Jerome and Rohwer Relocation Camps. These photos can help us understand how Japanese Americans lived in relocation centers and what they did to cope with their situation. All photos in this activity come from the Life Interrupted Collection, 1903-2005.

**This activity contains 12 photos from the Rohwer and Jerome Relocation Centers. Examine and analyze all photos. Pay attention to:**

1. Natural environment, if a photo is taken outside (landscape, trees, flowers, weather, animals, etc.);
2. Built environment (buildings, structures, interiors, etc.);
3. People (age, gender, clothes, mood, occupation, relationship to each other, etc.);
4. Objects (indoor and/or outdoor);
5. Activities (What are people doing?).

## JAPANESE AMERICANS AND WORLD WAR II



CENTER FOR ARKANSAS  
HISTORY AND CULTURE  
UNIVERSITY OF ARKANSAS AT LITTLE ROCK



Photo 1: An aerial view of the barracks and the surrounding land at Rohwer Relocation Center, ca. 1942-45 (Life Interrupted Collection, 1903-2005)



Photo 2: Three men build a porch cover for a barracks doorway at Rohwer Relocation Center, ca. 1942-45 (Life Interrupted Collection, 1903-2005)

## JAPANESE AMERICANS AND WORLD WAR II



Photo 3: Mrs. T. Arima tends to her doorstep garden in Block 7 at Jerome Relocation Center, 1942 (Life Interrupted Collection, 1903-2005)



Photo 4: A group of Japanese Americans stand inside the camp market, Jerome Cooperative Enterprise, at Jerome Relocation Center, ca. 1942-44 (Life Interrupted Collection, 1903-2005)

## JAPANESE AMERICANS AND WORLD WAR II



CENTER FOR ARKANSAS  
HISTORY AND CULTURE  
UNIVERSITY OF ARKANSAS AT LITTLE ROCK



Photo 5: Japanese American school children sit around a table coloring while Japanese American teacher looks on at Jerome Relocation Center, 1943 (Life Interrupted Collection, 1903-2005)



Photo 6: Second grade class in Thanksgiving Day costumes at Rohwer Relocation Center, 1942-45 (Life Interrupted Collection, 1903-2005)

## JAPANESE AMERICANS AND WORLD WAR II



Photo 7: Denson High School Band at Jerome Relocation Center, 1944 (Life Interrupted Collection, 1903-2005)



Photo 8: Home economics class at Rohwer Relocation Center, ca. 1942-1945 (Life Interrupted Collection, 1903-2005)

## JAPANESE AMERICANS AND WORLD WAR II



CENTER FOR ARKANSAS  
HISTORY AND CULTURE  
UNIVERSITY OF ARKANSAS AT LITTLE ROCK



Photo 9: An art class draws portraits of a model in the recreation hall at Rohwer Relocation Center, 1942 (Life Interrupted Collection, 1903-2005)



Photo 10: A young Japanese American folk dancer, performs at an outdoor entertainment event at Rohwer Relocation Center, 1942 (Life Interrupted Collection, 1903-2005)

## JAPANESE AMERICANS AND WORLD WAR II



CENTER FOR ARKANSAS  
HISTORY AND CULTURE  
UNIVERSITY OF ARKANSAS AT LITTLE ROCK



Photo 11: Cemetery at Rohwer Relocation Center, 1943 (Life Interrupted Collection, 1903-2005)



Photo 12: Japanese Americans see their friends and neighbors off as they go to Camp Granada by train due to the closing of Jerome Relocation Center, 1944 (Life Interrupted Collection, 1903-2005)

## JAPANESE AMERICANS AND WORLD WAR II



### Based on your analysis of all 12 photos, answer the following questions:

1. How did Japanese Americans live in the relocation centers? What institutions did they establish? What activities did they organize?
2. Why do you think Japanese Americans engaged in so many activities in the relocation centers? Why did they establish schools and businesses? Why did they organize art and performance events?
3. What does the photo of a boy at the cemetery tell us about the experience of Japanese Americans in Arkansas? Note that nearly all of them did not live in Arkansas before the war.
4. These places were officially called “relocation centers” but historians call them “internment camps.”
  - What does “relocation” mean and what does “internment” mean? If you are not sure, check definitions in a dictionary.
  - When you think of the word “camp” in the context of World War II, what comes to your mind?
  - What difference does it make to call a place “a relocation center” versus “an internment camp”?