

Lesson 3: Life in the Camps

OVERVIEW

This lesson explores the daily lives of Japanese Americans incarcerated at Rohwer and Jerome.

OBJECTIVES

Students will understand the conditions of daily life in the camps by interpreting poetry, analyzing a map and photographs, and sharing their findings during class discussion.

GUIDING QUESTION

What were the experiences of Japanese Americans during WWII?

STANDARDS/ FRAMEWORKS

TCC 1.2, 1.3

PPE 1.1

SSPS 1.1, 1.4

MATERIALS

Poem - “My Youth is Buried at Rohwer” by Janice Mirikitani

Map of Rohwer Relocation Center (from CD-ROM, or copy onto overhead transparency)

Documentary video *Time of Fear*, television, and VCR

Photos of Rohwer and Jerome (reproduced following the lesson, or print from the CD-ROM for better quality – one per group of students)

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

Daily life in the Jerome and Rohwer camps was anything but ordinary. Many images of the camps depict adults and children living seemingly normal American lives. However, closer observation brings into focus the reality of the situation which these Japanese Americans were forced to endure. Barbed wire fences strung between guard towers with guards carrying loaded guns were a constant reminder of their imprisonment. The images provided portray children attending school playing sports, and pledging allegiance to the U.S. flag – activities which were quite normal for most children in the United States at this time. Cameras, however, were officially not allowed at the concentration camps, so most of the photographs were taken by official government photographers.

Other images and paintings, however, portray families living in tiny, barren quarters, working jobs which required hard labor, and eating in mess-hall type facilities. These facilities were less than inviting. Bad weather, mosquitoes, snakes, and other environmental or climatic conditions added to the harshness of camp life. Families spent less time together because meals, work, and school, were all common activities that took place outside of the family’s barrack apartment. By using numerous primary sources, this lesson is designed for

students to carefully examine the daily lives of Japanese Americans in the Jerome and Rohwer camps.

OPENING

Read the poem “My Youth is Buried at Rohwer,” by Janice Mirikitani, aloud to the students (teachers may also want to copy the poem on to the board or an overhead transparency so that students may follow along).

*My youth is buried at Rohwer;
Obachan's ghost visits Amache gate
Words are better than tears,
So I spill them,
I kill this, the silence.*

Obachan [OH-bah-chan] – Japanese word for grandmother
Amache- Japanese American concentration camp in Colorado

Ask students to speculate about the meaning of this poem.

How old do you think Ms. Mirikitani was when she was at Rohwer?

What other concentration camp is mentioned? Do you think the author's family was split apart by the forced removal of Japanese Americans from the West Coast? Why or why not?

How did World War II impact the author of this poem?

ACTIVITIES

1. Distribute copies of the map of Rohwer Relocation Center to students, or copy the map on to an overhead transparency, or project the image from the CD-ROM. Ask students to look closely at the map to point out the locations where

- a. Families and individuals live
- b. People eat
- c. Students attend school
- d. Social activities occur
- e. Camp administrators live and work

Then, ask students to list activities that were a part of daily life at Rohwer, based on the facilities seen on the map. Write their responses on the board.

Ask students to compare life in their community with life at Rohwer. If time permits, have them sketch a map of their community and compare it with the Rohwer map. What activities are the same? Which are different?

2. View the documentary video *Time of Fear* from 29:34 to 34:00. Add to the list of daily activities at Rohwer and Jerome on the board.

3. Divide students into groups of 2-3 students. Hand each group a photograph (one of those reproduced following this lesson, or one printed from the CD-ROM). Each group

should look at the photograph, making a list of people (guess approximate ages), objects, and activities they see in the photograph. Then, have them draw at least three conclusions about daily life at Rohwer and/or Jerome, based on their photograph. Sample conclusions might include – “Weather impacted daily life at the camps by making travel difficult,” or “Japanese Americans worked to support their community by growing vegetables.” It might be useful to model this photograph analysis with students, using one of the photographs on the CD-ROM copied on to an overhead transparency or projected on to a screen. If time permits, have students share their group’s photograph and findings with the entire class.

CLOSING

Have students make a list of typical activities they complete in a day. Then, compare this list of activities to the list of activities on the board (those that took place in Rohwer and Jerome during WWII). How are they similar? How are they different? What accounts for the differences?

EXTENSIONS

Read a piece of children’s literature with students, or have students choose their own story and write a book review to present to the class. Have them determine what the illustrations and text tell readers about life for Japanese Americans during World War II. Suggested works of literature include the following books (additional works are listed in the bibliography)

Eve Bunting, *So Far from the Sea*. New York: Scholastic, Inc., 2000.

Ken Mochizuki and Dom Lee, *Baseball Saved Us*. New York: Lee and Low, 1993.

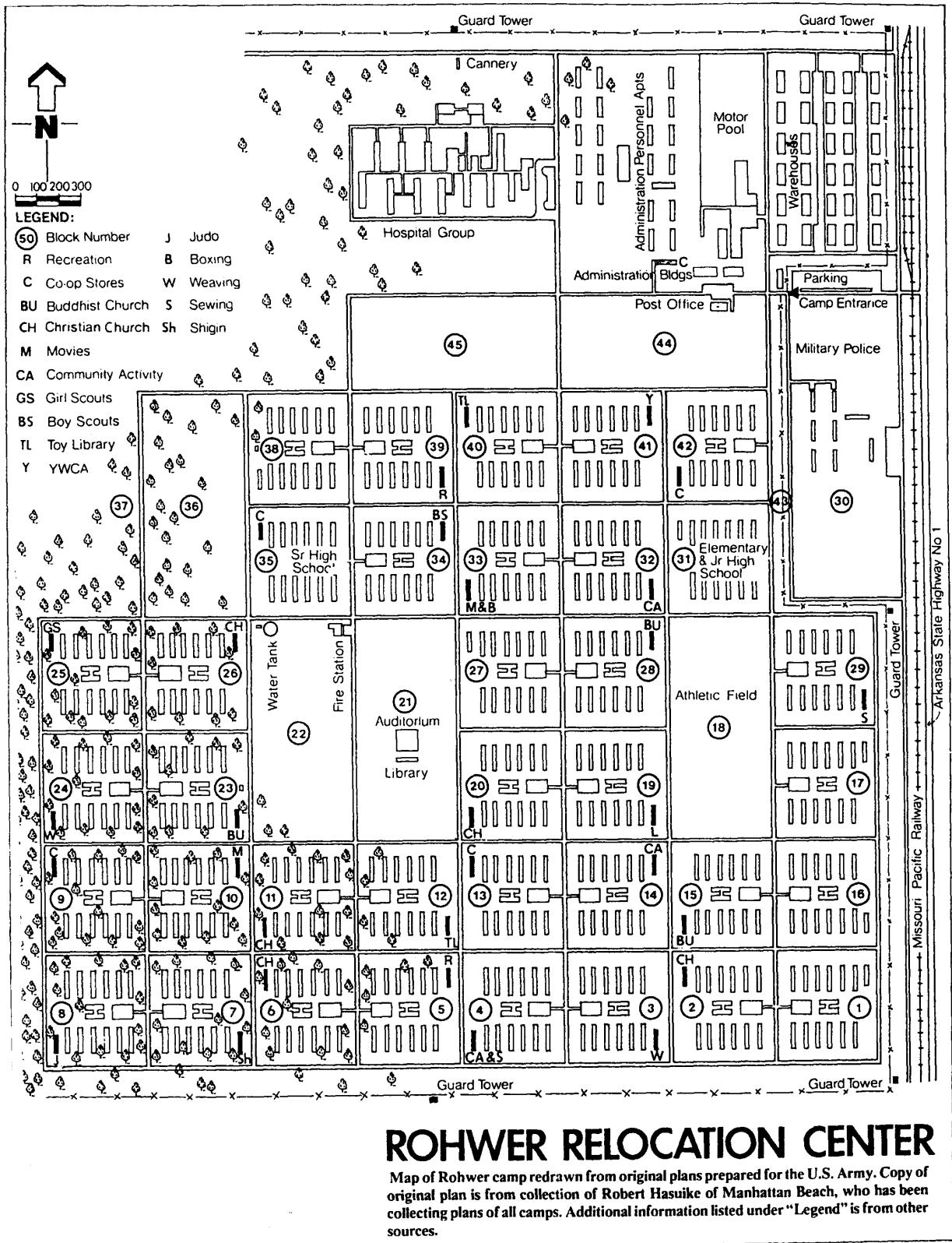
Elizabeth Parkhurst, *Under One Flag: A Year at Rohwer*. Little Rock: August House Publishing, 2004.

REFERENCES

Bearden, Russell. “Life in the Arkansas Relocation Centers.” *Arkansas Historical Quarterly* 49(1989): 169-196.

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MAP OF ROHWER CAMP (ROBERT HASUIKE COLLECTION)





Jerome Relocation Center, Denson, Arkansas. The football team coach declared so many hours a day on the woodpile for his crew as training... 11/17/1942. Photographer Tom Parker. National Archives and Records Administration.



Jerome Relocation Center, Denson, Arkansas. Loading cabbages which have been harvested during the winter season. Photographer Gretchen van Tassel. National Archives and Records Administration.