

Lesson 3: “A Long and Weary 3-Day Train Ride”

OVERVIEW

This lesson is designed to examine the experiences of Japanese Americans during World War II as they were forced to leave their homes on the West Coast and imprisoned, first in assembly centers, and secondly, in ten concentration camps throughout the United States, including two in Arkansas. This lesson explores this forced migration through the geographic theme of movement, using an article written by a Japanese American reflecting on his experience during his forced relocation to Rohwer. It also uses scale and map reading skills.

OBJECTIVES

Students will be able to describe and map the journey of a group of Japanese Americans from California to Arkansas.

GUIDING QUESTION

What were the experiences of Japanese Americans during World War II?

FRAMEWORKS

TCC 1.2, 1.3, 1.4

PPE 1.4, 2.5, 2.6

PAG 1.5

SSPS 2.2, 2.3

MATERIALS

Copies of the article, “A Long and Weary 3-Day Train Ride to Rohwer Camp” for each student

Class set of outline map of the United States (reproduced following the lesson plan)

BACKGROUND

President Franklin Roosevelt signed Executive Order 9066 on February 19, 1942, seventy-four days after the bombing of Pearl Harbor in December 1941. Lieutenant General John L. DeWitt, Military Commander of the Western Defense Command, issued Civilian Exclusion Order 108. This order instructed persons of Japanese ancestry, both citizens and non-citizens, to prepare for forced relocation. The Japanese Americans were taken to assembly centers to prepare for forced relocation to one of the ten concentration camps. Two of these camps were in Arkansas. Homes, businesses, and personal possessions were sold at pennies on the dollar. Japanese Americans were forced to make quick decisions concerning which few personal possessions they would take with them. The Japanese Americans en route to Arkansas had a long, exhausting, three-day journey over unfamiliar territory to reach the camps.

OPENING

Tell students that they will be reading a non-fiction account of a Japanese American’s journey today entitled “A Long and Weary 3-Day Train Ride.” Have them speculate as to

where the journey would start and end. Have students think about how far one could travel by train over the course of three days. What would it be like to ride on a train for three days?

ACTIVITIES

1. Distribute copies of the article (or copy on to an overhead transparency) “A Long and Weary 3-Day Train Ride to Rohwer.” Read the article out loud as a class and have students underline or highlight the names of towns, cities, and states mentioned in the article. After the reading, ask the students to describe the journey from California to Arkansas. Write student responses on the board.
2. Watch a short clip from the documentary *Time of Fear* from 20:30 until 22:00, in which Japanese Americans discuss their forced migration from California to Arkansas during World War II. Discuss the video clip. What did students find interesting? How was it similar to and different from the account in the article?
3. Hand out copies of the blank outline map of the United States to students. Use the article and the map to draw the migration route to Arkansas. Using a map with a scale, determine the distance the train traveled on the 3-Day journey. Compare the students’ maps to Mr. Kurushima’s map (from lesson 2), pointing out similarities and differences.
4. Based on their reading of the article, ask students to identify people, information, goods, and services (PIGS) that moved from the West Coast to the camps. Sample responses might include the following:
 - People – Japanese Americans
 - Information – How did the news story about the train ride travel? — through the people’s retelling of the story, letters, etc.
 - Goods – personal possessions, belongings
 - Services – What transportation service moved the people? — a train

CLOSING

Read the following short poem written by Senbinshi Takaoka, an inmate at Rohwer:

*Frosty night
Listening to rumbling train
We have come a long way
(from May Sky, p. 167)*

Ask students what they think the author meant in this poem. Have students draw a picture to go along with Takaoka’s words or write a short poem of their own about the Japanese American experience of forced migration.

EXTENSIONS

Have students work in groups or pairs to read one of the autobiographies on the CD-ROM:

Ike Kiyoko, Lillian Hanansushi, Mari Shibata, Teacher's Collected Thoughts, Chiyeko Narasaki, Mary Sato, My Voice, Lillian Fujimoto, Kimiyi Yokoyama, Kumeko Akiyama, Sami Murishi.

As they are reading, they should write down any references to migration routes mentioned in these individuals' trips from the West Coast to Rohwer. Then, using their U.S. outline map, they can label places mentioned in the autobiographies on their map and draw the individual's route to Arkansas. You may wish to display these migration maps on a bulletin board and have students identify examples of types of movement (i.e. train, automobile, etc.) on their maps.

Have students research Indian Relocation and the Trail of Tears, another forced migration in U.S. history. Have them identify similarities and differences as compared to the Japanese American experience.

REFERENCES

Kazue de Cristoforo, Violet. *May Sky – There is Always Tomorrow: An Anthology of Japanese American Concentration Camp Kaiko Haiku*. Sun and Moon Press, 1997.

Takei, George. *To the Stars: The Autobiography of George Takei, Star Trek's Mr. Sulu*. New York: Pocket Books, 1994, pages 11-73, discusses Mr. Takei's journey from California to Rohwer, where his family was relocated during World War II.

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MAP ACTIVITY

Directions: Using the article, “A Long and Weary 3-Day Train Ride to Rohwer,” draw the route of the train from California to Arkansas.



1. Through what states did the train travel?
2. How do you think the land changed on the journey east?
3. Using the scale on the map, calculate the distance the train traveled from California to Arkansas.

A Long and Weary 3-Day Train Ride to Rohwer Camp

At the huge Santa Anita assembly center, where more than 18,000 Japanese were interned, trainloads of internees were leaving almost every other day to concentration camps during late August and early September, 1942, to such destinations as in Colorado, Wyoming, and Arizona. It was a guessing game as to where anyone was going to end up. Notices were delivered to the families in the barracks and within a week, they were on the train for a long trip to their next camp. Since they were allowed to bring into the camps only what they could carry, which were the bare essentials of items needed to live daily in a concentration camp, it didn't take long for the people to pack their belongings and board the trains.

Unlike Santa Anita, the entire population of the Stockton Assembly Center was headed for the Rohwer concentration camp. The 4,271 persons were transferred over a period from September 14 to October 17, 1942, when the camp was officially closed. It took eight trainloads of internees, about 500 persons per train, to empty out the Stockton camp.

From the Santa Anita camp, the first trainload of internees left for the Arkansas concentration camp on September 25, 1942. Eventually, about 4,200 persons were sent to the Rohwer camp from

Santa Anita, which was about equal in numbers to the entire population of the Stockton camp.

FIRST TRAIN RIDE FOR NISEI

For most of the young Nisei, it was their first train ride and also the first time they had ever left the state of California. The Issei, on the other hand, had ridden on trains and buses in both Japan and the United States, and even steamships as they crossed the Pacific Ocean to immigrate to the West Coast. In fact, a lot of the Issei men had worked on the railroads and mines in the Rocky Mountain area and as far east as Nebraska. So it was old hat to the Issei men with the exception now they were riding the rails as "enemy aliens" and being transferred from one concentration camp to another with their families. And it was no "free" ride.

The trains from both camps took the southern route through the states of Arizona, New Mexico, Texas, Louisiana and finally to southern Arkansas, where the Rohwer camp was located. It was a slow and long three-day trip with many stops along the track sidings to allow faster trains to pass by.

There was a war going on, and it was evident that every rolling stock in the country which had wheels was in service because the trains the internees rode were vintage cars with gas lamps and

"A Long and Weary 3-Day Train Ride to Rohwer Camp" from The First Rohwer Reunion, published by the First Rohwer Reunion Committee, Los Angeles, CA 1990. Edited by Kango Kunitsugu. (pp. 12-14)