US History: World War II

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US Internment Camps
Middle School Lesson - two to three 50 minute class periods

Background: This lesson was written as a thematic unit with an English 8 class. Students read the play "The Diary of Anne Frank" while the Social 8 class studied WWII focusing on the Nazi concentration camps and made a comparison with internment camps used in the United States. I asked students to interview their parents and grandparents about internment camps and was surprised to find very few even knew internment camps existed. Many had knowledge of concentration camps, especially as more survivors are telling their stories, yet few were aware of the interment camps. I expanded my lesson to include more background on the camps and was fortunate to have a daughter of two internment camp prisoners in our faculty to provide insight and primary sources from her parent’s teen years at Tule Lake and Heart Mountain.

To provide a background about life in concentration camps, the class viewed the DVD “If You Cried, You Died.”

Source: http://sheg.stanford.edu/?q=node/39
Reading Like A Historian lesson plans-Unit 10-The New Deal and WWII
Lesson 4: WWII: Japanese Internment Camps
(I only used the first portion of the lesson plan in my activities; the other parts provide an excellent background and include critical analysis activities)

1. Students will watch the US government film created in the early 1942 about Japanese internment camps. Use the link provided in the lesson or the one below:


After viewing the video clip, ask the students to identify the intent of the video and review the following questions from the Reading Like a Historian lesson:

What were some of the reasons for internment offered in the newsreel?
How does the newsreel portray internment? Is it positive or negative?
Who do you think the audience was for this newsreel

2. To help students gain an understanding about where camps were located and the life in them, the following link contains a map and general information:

http://www.historyonthenet.com/WW2/japan_internment_camps.htm

Discuss where the camps were located and the rationale for the locations. How did war hysteria prompt the government’s actions? How did the bombing of Pearl Harbor change the lives of the Japanese Americans now because they “looked like the enemy”?
3. Next pass out copies of Executive Order 9066 available at the link below:

http://www.pbs.org/childofcamp/history/eo9066.html

As a class, discuss the rationale of the internment camps and the citizens that were impacted by the order. What would it be like to receive the order and have to abruptly leave your home with just one suitcase per person, not knowing when you would be back, and knowing that you now were viewed as a potential enemy of the US?

**For homework**, students are instructed to determine what they would pack in their suitcase and create a list. (I brought in a carry on suitcase as a visual to show them dimensions of what would be allowed. They can’t ship anything ahead since they don’t know where they are going.) Remind them, each person had to carry their own suitcase and they didn’t get much time to ponder what they could take, nor did they know how long they would be gone, where they were going, etc.

5. Start class with the discussion of the US Government video they viewed yesterday, How did the video portray the internees and their preparation? What were the camps like? Now review the class suitcase lists. Anything electrical is useless since the barracks only had one light bulb, Pets were not allowed, and anything bulky or heavy was left behind since each person would have to carry their own luggage. Bedding items would be useful since many families had to create their own mattresses and were provided with some army blankets. The internment camps were in the interior of the US and not in the same climate regions of internees Pacific coastal homes, so clothing choices may not be appropriate. The camps did have schools that were taught by the elders or by civilians who visited the camps, but lived outside the barb-wire perimeter.

What was left in their homes would have to be sold, if possible, or left for others to take. The internees had no idea when they would return and had little time to say good-byes to others. Relate the discussion back to the video clip-Did the government video include this information?

6. To gain insight in what daily life in the camps was like; students will read letters from teens who lived in internment camps by accessing the Japanese American National Museum exhibit “Dear Miss Breed” which contains letters, movies and oral histories that provide detail about life in internment camps. Miss Clara Breed was a librarian in California. There is further information about her at the website. Using the site links titled “departure for camp”, “life in camp” and “returning home” will provided students with first hand accounts from teenagers about life in the camps at the following site:

http://www.janm.org/exhibits/breed/title.htm

Discuss how the letters compare with the government video depiction of camp life.
7. Summary activities:
   A) T Chart
   In groups, students will create a T chart comparing concentration camps used by the Nazis and the internment camps used by the United States. Comparisons should include facts about the intent of the camps, where they were located, treatment of prisoners, daily life, etc.

   Discussion should center on the comparisons and contrasts between the types of camps and their intent of the camps used by the Nazis and the US as well as how prisoners were treated.

   B) Individual Reflection
   Follow up with the questions—Could this happen in the United States today? What rationale would be needed for the government to use these actions again? Use the treatment, profiling, and questioning of Arab-Americans following the terrorism at the Twin towers on September 11th as an example. Have the students respond to the question with their thoughts and reactions to the government actions.

   8. Follow up the discussion by explaining that 110,000 Japanese Americans were impacted by the Executive Order 9066. Some were also drafted and served in WWII in segregated units. The camps were closed by December 1945 and very little remains of them today. In 1988, Congress passed the Civil Liberties Act of 1988 which served as an apology and provided some reparations for the internment of Japanese-American citizens.

   To close the unit, contrast this discussion with what happened at concentration camps. Time should be given in discussion about the differences between the closing of the internment camps and the discovery of the death camps with references to the ending of The Diary of Anne Frank.

   Further reading ideas:

   http://densho.org/ -this site contains lesson plans and primary sources
   DVD-9066 to 9/11 copyright 2004-available through Social Studies School Service
   Minnesota connection:
   For students who are interested, they can research the Minnesota connection by investigating the military intelligence service language school at Fort Snelling.

   Students can also research the POW and alien internment camps that existed in MN.

   Additional recommended reading resource:
   Farewell to Manzanar by Jean Wakatsuki Houston (published in 1973) -story and TV Video (1976) based on authentic accounts of an internment camp prisoner experiences in a California internment camp.

   Research genocide today-students can research genocide that occurred in Cambodia, Bosnia, Rwanda, Sudan and those that continue even today. Relate the research to the Nazi concentration camps and US internment camps.