

LESSON

Monuments to Japanese American Incarceration

Overview

About This Lesson

In this lesson, students will work with partners to explore different monuments to Japanese American incarceration during World War II, or what has historically been referred to as “internment.” Students will consider the monuments’ design, emotional impact, and purpose. They will also draw connections to George Takei’s young adult memoir *They Called Us Enemy*.

Guiding Questions

- Why do we create monuments to historical events?
- What impact can monuments have on the people who visit them?

Learning Objectives

- Analyze the messages that monuments communicate.
- Consider the impact that monuments can have on survivors, their descendants, and the general public.

What’s Included

This lesson uses the following student material:

- **Handout: Analyzing Monuments to Japanese American Incarceration**
- **Handout: Photos of the Japanese American Memorial to Patriotism During World War II**

Lesson Plan

Activities

1. Connect to *They Called Us Enemy*

Begin by asking students if they have ever visited a monument before. If students have, ask them to share examples. If students have never visited a monument, consider searching for images of monuments that you can quickly share with them. Some examples include the Washington Monument, the Statue of Liberty, and Chichén Itzá. Assess for any misconceptions that students might have about monuments. Ask: “Why do people create monuments?” Invite students to reflect on this question in a [Think-Pair-Share](#) format.

Refer students to page 204 of *They Called Us Enemy*. Ask: “Why do you think George Takei chose to end his memoir with an image of the Rohwer Incarceration Camp monument?” After a brief full-class discussion, explain that today, students will be looking at three other examples of monuments to Japanese American incarceration.

2. Compare Three Monuments to Japanese American Incarceration

Preview for your students the three monuments. Explain that the Ireichō [ee-RAY-cho], is a giant book of names that lists every person forcibly removed from their home and detained during Japanese American incarceration. Guests are invited to open the book and stamp a small blue dot next to a name within it. The monument’s goal is for every one of the over 125,000 people in the book to be acknowledged with a stamp placed by a contemporary visitor.

The second monument, the Japanese American Memorial to Patriotism During World War II, consists of large slabs of stone inscribed with the names of the incarceration centers and the number of incarcerated people at each one. A series of stone walls lists the individual names of formerly incarcerated people who served in the military to fight during World War II. There are also a number of quotations from political figures, some of them former incarcerated people, discussing the injustice of incarceration and the honor of those who still fought for the United States despite the way they had been treated. The monument also features a large bronze sculpture of two Japanese cranes entangled in barbed wire.

The third monument, Bainbridge Island Japanese American Exclusion Memorial, honors the Japanese American residents of Bainbridge Island, Washington, who were initially sent to Manzanar Relocation Center and were among the first in the country to be incarcerated.

Create three stations, one for each monument, and make sure that the stations are equipped with laptops loaded with the links provided below. Ask students to choose one of the three stations to learn more about a monument and to complete the associated worksheet. If time allows, consider having students rotate after a few minutes to learn about all three sites.

Station #1 – Ireichō: Book of Names

- Image and Context: [A project collects the names of those held at Japanese internment camps during WWII](#) (NPR)
- Video: [Irei: National Monument for the WWII Japanese American Incarceration Launch](#) (Japanese American National Museum)

Station #2 – The Japanese American Memorial to Patriotism During World War II

- Image and Context: [The Japanese American Memorial to Patriotism During World War II](#) (National Park Service)
- Additional Images: **Photos of the Japanese American Memorial to Patriotism During World War II** handout

Station #3 – Bainbridge Island Japanese American Exclusion Memorial

- Image and Context: [Bainbridge Island Japanese American Exclusion Memorial](#) (National Park Service)
- Additional Images: [Bainbridge Island Japanese American Exclusion Memorial photo gallery](#) (National Park Service)

Give students time to read about their respective memorials and to answer questions on the **Analyzing Monuments to Japanese American Incarceration** handout.

If students only studied one monument, have them move into triads with peers who studied different monuments. They can then use the [jigsaw](#) strategy to share information with their group. Explain that each triad member is an “expert” on a different monument and is responsible for giving their peers a “tour” of that monument by teaching them about the monument and its design. Students can use

their worksheets and laptops to help them teach their peers. Allow about three minutes for each monument expert to teach their peers.

3. Reflect and Conclude

Once students have had time to learn about the three monuments, put the two quotations below on the board. Ask students to reflect on and respond to each one in their journals.

Quote #1	Quote #2
<p>Satsuki Ina, a survivor of Tule Lake Camp, has said:</p> <p><i>"Healing comes from speaking our truths, being seen and heard in the safety and company of those who are open and empathetic to our experiences."¹</i></p> <p>How can the monuments that you studied today contribute to the healing of survivors and their descendants?</p>	<p>Author Clint Smith has observed:</p> <p><i>"For many people, history is . . . about a story that they have been told. And it is a story that they tell, it is an heirloom that is passed down across generations, across family, across community."²</i></p> <p>What stories do these monuments tell about Japanese American incarceration? How might these stories contribute to an understanding of our nation's identity? How might they shape an understanding of our nation's responsibility to the past?</p>

When students are ready, debrief the quotations with a full-class discussion.

¹ Phil Do, Jennifer Lu, and Aida Ylanan, "[The 'No-Nos' of Tule Lake](#)," *Los Angeles Times*, March 20, 2021.

² Interview with Clint Smith, "[How the Word Is Passed: A Conversation with Clint Smith](#)," National Trust for Historic Preservation, Savingplaces.org, accessed October 18, 2023.