

A Letter from Manzanar

This activity is designed to help students understand what the internment camps were like for those incarcerated. Students gather details from a series of Dorothea Lange photos taken of the Manzanar internment camp. Their job is to write a letter to a friend back home, describing the camp experience. The letter is designed to help students gain sympathy for those behind the barbed wire and guard towers. For this reason, the letter from Manzanar assignment not only asks students to describe the camps, but also to share the feelings that a Japanese American teenager might have during his or her incarceration.

Lesson Steps:

1. Handout the [Internment Letter Organizer](#) to students.
2. Show the [Dorothea Lange Photos from Manzanar](#) . Show the first slide and model how to pull details from this slide.
3. Show each successive slide, giving students a chance to write down details before moving to the next slide. (Students with Chromebooks may access the slideshow online and view each slide at their own pace.)
4. Once students have pulled the details from the slides, pass out the [Manzanar Letter Template](#). Students write their own letter based on the details from their internment letter organizer.

Extension Activities:

There are many resources available for students to learn more about the internment experiences of those incarcerated. The [Densho.org](#) website has gathered hundreds oral histories of Japanese Americans who lived through the camps. This legacy project has recorded their stories. In addition, there are several powerful films on the camp experience, including *Unfinished Business* and *Of Civil Rights and Civil Wrongs: The Fred Korematsu Story*. Finally, there is a rich camp literature including memoirs such as *Farewell to Manzanar*, or fiction, like *Journey to Topaz*, written by Berkeley author and internee, Yoshiko Uchida. You might consider excerpting one of these pieces of writing for your students.