

February 1, 2014

Dear Colleagues,

I am glad our team has chosen to focus on the issues surrounding Japanese American internment. As difficult as it may be to look back at the incarceration of the Japanese Americans, the event highlights so many important themes in our course: civil rights and civil liberties, immigration, war hysteria, and the negative tradition of racism. The event also has an important local component, not only because it took place in the Bay Area and was photographed by the likes of Dorothea Lange, but because it produced important activists in the fight against internment, such as local and national hero, Fred Korematsu. In addition, we have a positive tradition in Union City which should be highlighted as well. [Tom Kitayama](#), former mayor of Union City, was the first Japanese American to hold public office after World War II.

I wanted to share several of my lessons on Japanese American incarceration during World War II, especially since our students will be writing an argumentative essay on this topic. Many of these lessons were designed years ago, but several have been adapted more recently for our upcoming Common Core writing assignment.

In these lessons our students will encounter the racial epithet, “Japs,” in many headlines, photos, political cartoons and articles of the day. You will be amazed how many of our students are not aware that this is a racial epithet, like the “N” word, and so many others. So too with the racial images in these lessons, whether it is of beastly depictions of Japanese soldiers, or stereotypical images of Asians. Talk about these words and images with your students at the outset of the unit; prepare them to behave appropriately.

Our essay focus is on the reasons for internment, but don't forget to balance these lessons with the pain and suffering of those incarcerated. Be sure to help our students sympathize with the victims. As is sometimes the case, students may assume that there must have been some provocation for our government's misguided policy. So as we have students grapple with the main reasons for Japanese American internment, let's be sure to explain the historical record, repeatedly if necessary, that there was no credible evidence of Japanese American spying or disloyalty to the US.

I hope you find some of these lessons and accompanying web resources useful in your upcoming unit.

Thanks,

Dave