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# PEN PAL LESSON PLAN

## OBJECTIVE:

Students will determine the impact removal of Japanese Americans had on individuals and families. Students will be able to analyze how American Citizens were forced to leave their homes by the United States Government and how this was a violation of their Constitutional rights.

## ALIGNED STATE STANDARDS:

CSS.SS.5.7.3: Understand the fundamental principles of American constitutional democracy, including how the government derives its power from the people and the primacy of individual liberty.

CSS.SS.5.7.4: Understand how the Constitution is designed to secure our liberty by both empowering and limiting central government and compare the powers granted to citizens, Congress, the president, and the Supreme Court with those reserved to the states.

CSS.SS.5.7.5: Discuss the meaning of the American creed that calls on citizens to safeguard the liberty of individual Americans within a unified nation, to respect the rule of law, and to preserve the Constitution.

## PRE-VISIT ACTIVITY:

In preparation for your visit to the California Museum's Time of Remembrance Program, have your students read the letter below. Written by an 11 year old Japanese American boy named George Egami, this letter describes his family's journey from Pasadena, California, to the Tulare Assembly Center. George, his family, and their internment are real, and this letter is based upon real accounts provided by his mother's diary, along with other historical information about daily life in internment camps across the West Coast of the United States. Written as though to a classmate, this letter provides students an introductory look at how the lives of Japanese Americans changed following the bombing of Pearl Harbor. After reading the letter, have students complete the included worksheet.

## PROCEDURE:

1. Review the provided discussion notes with class.
2. Using a dictionary, have students define vocabulary words located on the bottom of George's letter. Alternatively, teacher can provide definitions for the class.
3. Have students read George's letter.
4. Complete provided activity sheet.

## MATERIALS:

1. Teacher notes
2. George Egami's letter
3. Activity sheet

# TEACHER NOTES

## DISCUSSION:

Review with students the history of Japanese American communities and the events that occurred leading up to the removal of Japanese Americans from the West Coast of the United States:

- The vast majority of Japanese Americans emigrated to the U.S. between 1900 and 1920. However, immigration from Japan was limited due to anti-Japanese sentiment in the United States. Anti-Japanese sentiment was expressed in newspapers' "Yellow Peril" campaigns, riots, and the passage of discriminatory laws. These laws limited immigration, barred Japanese and others from owning land, and excluded Asians from being granted citizenship.
- In 1922, Congress passed the Immigration Exclusion Act, barring all further immigration from Japan.
- Britain and France declared war on Germany beginning what is now called World War II in 1937. That same year, Japan invaded China.
- On December 7, 1941, Japan bombed the U.S. Naval Station at Pearl Harbor, Hawaii. The following day, Congress declared war on Japan; on December 11 Congress declared war on Germany and Italy.
- In the days following the attack on Pearl Harbor, thousands of prominent Japanese immigrants living in Hawaii and on the West Coast of California were imprisoned by the U.S. Government due to a fear that they were still loyal to Japan.
- The Western Defense Command was established with Lt. John L. DeWitt as commander. The West Coast was declared a "theater of war" and it was feared that there would be another attack. In February 1942, President Roosevelt signed Executive Order 9066 which authorized the removal of 120,000 Japanese citizens and aliens from their homes along the West Coast and Hawaii for the duration of the war.
- By June 5, 1942, all persons of Japanese Ancestry living in California, Washington, Oregon, and the southern third of Arizona have been successfully interned in camps across the United States.

## VOCABULARY:

**Assembly Center:** Guarded temporary centers where Japanese Americans were held until they were sent to more permanent camps during World War II.

**Barrack:** a large plain building usually used to house soldiers.

**Grandstand:** the main seating area of a stadium or racetrack.

**Sanctuary:** a sacred or holy place that is usually a part of a church or temple

Dear Friend:

Much has changed since we last saw each other! Our life before December 7, 1941, seems so long ago already. It was awful to help my parents pack up our belongings, deciding what would be left behind. Knowing that Max is safe and loved with your family has brought so much relief to us all. I hope he is being a good dog and playing fetch with you!

After a long train ride, we arrived at what they call an assembly center. But it's nothing but an old racetrack! Passing through the gate I felt very strange; I realized that we'll be stuck here until the end of the war! I wish I hadn't said it out loud because I could tell I had upset Mother. It's really different here; everyone eats the same meal in the mess hall and everyone must use the same bathroom - and there are no doors on the stalls! We live in a barrack like they have in the army - it's small and it's hot, so we don't spend much time there. On Sundays, we attend church as usual, only instead of meeting in a sanctuary, we all gather in the Grandstand! It's actually quite fun!

We are trying to keep our spirits up by staying busy with jobs and making everything as normal as possible. Mother works in the Social Welfare Division with Mr. Miura helping sort out problems among all the members of our little community. My sisters and I help with the laundry; with all of this dust it seems that we have to wash our clothes every day! Sometimes even Father helps out too as there is always so much to clean and it takes such a long time without any machines.

They have built a school too; some of the men made us desks out of old apple boxes! School is not the same without you and our friends. I was elected class secretary just as I was in Miss Pitts classroom. After school, my new friends and I play marbles under a shady tree. Yesterday as we were playing, we noticed our neighbors on the other side of the fence were picking their fruit trees. We ran over to the fence to watch and when they saw us, they started to toss them over the fence for us to eat! They were a delicious treat on a hot day!

I hope I haven't made life sound too terrible - we are getting by! Soon enough you shall see for yourself-I shall give you a tour around the center when you arrive; we shall explore the blocks of barracks together like we used to explore our neighborhood. It will feel just like home once you are here!

Sincerely,

George Egami

#### Vocabulary

Assembly Center: \_\_\_\_\_

Barrack: \_\_\_\_\_

Grandstand: \_\_\_\_\_

Sanctuary: \_\_\_\_\_

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# PEN PAL WITH THE PAST ACTIVITY SHEET

Name: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_ Class: \_\_\_\_\_

## DIRECTIONS:

After class discussion and reading George Egami's letter to his friend about his life in the Tulare Assembly Center during World War II, answer the following questions:

**1** What is significant about the date December 7 in George's letter?

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**2** How did the Egami family prepare for evacuation?

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**3** Why do the Egamis have to leave their home?

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**4** What are some of the ways George describes people spend their time in the assembly center?

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**5** In what ways do you think George's life has changed since his family was forced to move?

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**6** What questions do you have for George about his life at the assembly center?

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