

Nihonjin Face

Education Guide (6 – 12)



Girl with Luggage, 1942; Dorothea Lange, Courtesy of the National Archives and Records Administration

***Nihonjin Face*, a one act play by Janet Hayakawa and Teresita Martinez**
Part of Broadway Center's Civil Rights Legacy Program

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Introduction

Nihonjin Face is the fourth play in [Broadway Center's](#) Civil Rights Legacy program, a series of original, all-ages theatrical works which explore the on-going story of American civil rights and liberties through the experiences of the nation's diverse peoples. Designed to bring to life crucial history and civics concepts, each play is accompanied by study guides for varying grade levels. Included in this guide are both original resources and links to high quality curricula developed by Broadway Center's partners, including [Densho: The Japanese Legacy Project](#) and [KCTS 9/PBS LearningMedia.org](#). Based on your knowledge of this chapter of U.S. history, we highly recommend exploring the Additional Resources page of this guide as your first step. There are many excellent learning resources on this topic; this guide seeks to add experiential activities and prompts for reflection and discussion.

Synopsis of *Nihonjin Face*

Ten-year old Tomiko Hashimoto and her family must leave their home in Tacoma, WA for an undetermined amount of time to an unknown destination – because of their Japanese ancestry. It's 1942, the country is engaged in World War II, and the US Government incarcerates 120,000 Japanese Americans for reasons of national security. During her three years of incarceration, Tomiko learns the impact of racial discrimination and develops empathy for others facing civil rights challenges – eventually joining Dr. Martin Luther King's efforts. Later in life, she shares her experiences with her grandson, who is also navigating the complexities of racial identity in the America of today.

Bringing Civics Concepts to Life: A Timely Exploration of Historical Events

In typical textbooks, the WWII experiences of Japanese Americans are literally a sidebar in a broader chapter. In a matter of months, 110,000+ American citizens and residents were denied protections as detailed in the Bill of Rights: forced from their homes and property, and rounded up under armed guard – all without any of the individual due process that is so central to American democracy.

The lessons of this story could not be timelier: real and perceived insecurities have begotten national conversations about sweeping policies which are based on group identity rather than individual actions. As the United States flirts with practices that would curtail civil liberties and rights in exchange for a perceived sense of security, every American – including students – needs to be part of the dialogue. What is gained and lost when American society selectively limits the rights of some in the interest of others?



Girl in front of barracks, 1942; Dorothea Lange, Courtesy

Nihonjin Face humanizes these questions through compelling characters based on actual stories from Northwest families. Furthermore, the play and this study guide seek to access civics content not only as

abstract concepts but as first person experiences.

Meet the Characters

- **Tomiko Hashimoto** (at ages 10, 14, 34 and 84): an American girl from Tacoma, Washington, born to immigrant Japanese parents (*nisei* generation)
- **Mrs. Hashimoto, “Mama”**: a Japanese immigrant (*issei* generation) in her 40s, mother of Tomiko and Kiyō, married to “Papa” who runs a store in Tacoma’s Japan Town
- **Kiyō Hashimoto**: American born 18 year old boy, older brother of Tomiko, who takes on new responsibilities when the FBI takes away Mr. Hashimoto without specific charges
- **Reginald**: thirtysomething African American organizer from the South who has come to Chicago in the mid 60s to aid Dr. Martin Luther King in the fair housing effort
- **Tommy**: contemporary 14 year old student at Lincoln High School in Tacoma, Washington who is into basketball and video games; Tomiko’s grandson (fourth generation, *yonsei*)
- **RJ**: contemporary 14 year old student at Lincoln High School; Tommy’s friend and Reginald’s grandson
- **Alice Clark**: Tomiko’s childhood friend
- **Camp Guard**: Soldier patrolling the border of the Tule Lake concentration camp

From the Playwrights, Janet Hayakawa and Teresita Martinez:

*This is a coming of age story of two parallel characters - Tomiko and Tommy. **Tomiko**, the daughter of immigrants, is born in Tacoma, WA and sees herself as an American. She is a smart, self-confident, carefree, energetic, and spirited child who, along with her family is incarcerated during WWII because of her Japanese ancestry. She becomes aware of how she is identified as “the enemy” due to her ethnicity. Experiencing this discrimination enrages her and becomes a catalyst for her participation in advocating for civil rights/liberties throughout her adult life. She ultimately shares her life experience with her grandson, Tommy.*

***Tommy** is a typical teenage boy trying to fit in with his peers, but unsure about who he really is. He hides a bit behind some bravado. He favors video games and basketball to school work. He has grown up hearing about his grandmother’s wartime experience, but somehow takes it for granted. He’s found a new friend in RJ, whose Grandma Alice was childhood friends with his own grandmother. When Tommy and RJ are asked to work together in a history project, questions about race and discrimination come to the surface. As part of the project, Tommy decides to interview his grandmother and probe her experience which allows him to become aware of how her story links to his life and identity.*

***RJ** is Tommy’s good friend who has recently moved from Atlanta to Tacoma. Like Tommy, he loves video games and basketball however; he’s a more conscientious student. Their grandmothers’ relationship has deepened their friendship. RJ is more aware of his ethnic identity than Tommy is, although he doesn’t know how to deal with the structural racism that he confronts on a regular basis.*

We hope that audience members connect with Tomiko and Tommy - and see their life journeys as inspiration for them to explore their own.

Historical Overview

February 19, 2017 will mark the 75th anniversary of Executive Order 9066, which put in motion the forced removal and incarceration of over 110,000 Japanese Americans (as well as smaller numbers of other targeted groups) in American concentration camps. Two thirds were U.S. citizens. Eventually, this displacement of U.S. families of both natural born citizens as well as immigrants was found to be a wrongdoing based on "... race prejudice, war hysteria and a failure of political leadership" in a report from the Congressional Commission on Wartime Relocation and Internment of Civilians.

Following the bombing of Pearl Harbor on December 7, 1941, the United States went to war with Japan, thus entering World War II. On the presumption of wartime security, thousands of Japanese American community leaders were taken by the FBI within weeks. By early 1942 President Franklin Roosevelt signed 9066, which allowed regional generals to forcibly remove certain American citizens and resident aliens from their homes and gather them in military-controlled camps in remote regions of the country. General John L. DeWitt of the Western Defense Command called for the removal of Japanese American families from the West Coast (ironically, the 150,000 Japanese Americans in Hawaii were left alone). In a very short time, families were forced to sell or safeguard their belongings and businesses. Taking only what they could carry they reported to makeshift assembly centers at fairgrounds and camps, where they lived in animal stalls under military guard until they could be

imprisoned in more permanent camps in unused deserts and swamplands.

Once in the incarceration camps, families lived in simple barracks with tar paper walls – through freezing winters and hot summers. Each family was assigned to a room with one lightbulb, a stove, cots and about 28 non-private toilets to 300 people. Within the camps, Japanese Americans organized civic groups, classes for children and social activities. Almost immediately, some young men were able to leave to serve in the military or attend college. Ironically, parents of soldiers fallen in battle would receive the customary American flag behind a curtain of barbed wire and armed guards. Children would recite the Pledge of Allegiance in makeshift classroom under the shadows of guard towers.



“Camp Harmony” Assembly Center at the Puyallup Fairgrounds; Courtesy of the Seattle Post-Intelligencer

The last camp was closed in 1945; each person was given a bus or train ticket and \$25 to re-start life. Those who still had property often returned to find it stolen or vandalized. Many could never re-build the lives they were forced to abandon. In some cities like Tacoma, once-thriving Japan Towns never resurfaced.

Eventually Congress passed the Civil Liberties Act of 1988, which as signed by President Ronald Reagan, finally issued a government apology and provided limited reparations to survivors still living.

This summary is compiled with resources from Densho.org and its 2008 Sites of Shame online exhibition, as well as the National Park Service. For additional video, archives and teaching resources, see page 14.

Terminology & Vocabulary

Through the years, many different terms have been used to describe the experiences of Japanese Americans during World War II. Words can be powerful in shaping our understanding of events and this was evident from the very first official government communications. This study guide uses the term **“forced relocation”** rather than “evacuation” or “relocation.” With regard to the camps, the terms “internment” or “relocation camp” do not reflect the fact that individuals were forced from their homes and property and concentrated behind barbed wire and armed guards with very controlled interaction with the outside world. Thus, the terms **“concentration camp”** and **“incarceration”** are used. For a full explanation of the rationale behind the terms, please see Densho’s Note on Terminology, [online](#) or in the Appendix of this guide.

Vocabulary: Key Concepts

GAMAN: A Japanese word representing perseverance and the resolve to try hard and not give up

SHIKATA GA NAI: A Japanese phrase meaning “It cannot be helped,” or “Nothing can be done about it”

CIVIL RIGHTS: The right to be treated equally

CIVIL LIBERTIES: Our freedoms guaranteed in the Bill of Rights

INCARCERATION: To be imprisoned

CONCENTRATION CAMP: A place where people who have something in common are forced to live together

ANCESTRY: Our family heritage, which includes not only people, but cultures, places and languages

Vocabulary: Japanese terms used in the play

HAI: “Yes”

NANI: “What?”

WAKAMARISUKA: “Understand?”

GOCHISOSAMA: Said after finishing a meal

SENSEI: Teacher

SABA & DAIKON: Mackerel and radish

MISO: Soup

NIHONJIN: Japanese, as in a Japanese person

Secondary Grades | 10-20 minutes

If Nothing Else! A Simple Pre-Discussion before *Nihonjin Face*

If time is limited before your students see the play *Nihonjin Face* and you are unable to do any of the activities in this guide, use these quick steps to orient your students.

- 1.) Brush up on your understanding of Japanese American experiences during World War II.
 - For a concise overview of the events leading up to the forced removal and incarceration of American citizens and residents of Japanese heritage, visit Denso’s [Sites of Shame](#) which includes a couple brief paragraphs on what happened.
 - Peruse the videos at the [Denso YouTube Channel](#) .

- 2.) Options for introducing the content to your students:

- Try something outrageous, like telling them that they are going to have to all serve detention because someone in the class *might* behave poorly sometime in the future. Discuss why or why not this is fair.
- Read a passage from a book in [Densho's List](#) of young adult literature.
- In a class conversation, ask students to imagine being forced from their homes, along with their families and imprisoned in a camp surrounded by soldiers, not because anyone in their family did anything wrong, but because they *could* do something wrong. Would this



Trains to Assembly Center, 1942; Courtesy of the National Archives and Records Administration

- be a reasonable rule? Why or why not? How does this relate to due process?
- Introduce the characters that the students will meet in the play.
- Use a [recent clip or article](#) related to George Takei's response on WWII policies as a "precedent" for treatment of Muslim Americans today.
- Read Amendments 4 – 6 of the Bill of Rights, then watch Densho's videos, [Looking Like the Enemy](#) or [American Concentration Camps](#)

Primary Source Timeline

Grades 7 – 12 | 45-60 minutes

In this activity students examine historical images and consult articles on the experiences of Japanese Americans during WWII to construct their own timeline using the images and their own captions. There are two options: to construct the story of Tacoma's Nihonmachi (Japan Town) leading up to incarceration, or to explore forced removal and incarceration in broader terms.

Materials

- Copies of historic images (Appendix)
- Long sheets of butcher paper or another material to hold pictures and captions
- Colored pencils or other arts supplies
- Online access to [Densho](#) and/or [HistoryLink](#) resources as described below

Note on Photos:

The Historic Images (Appendix 2) is an excel list with descriptions and links for numerous pictures. The pictures are generally uncaptioned. Print different picture sets for small groups of 3-4 students. You can choose to have each small group create their own timeline, or have groups integrate all their images in one big timeline.



Tacoma's Japan Town at 13th & Broadway, 1940;
Courtesy of theMagden Collection

Sequence

- Choose one of the following to introduce the topic: [HistoryLink](#)'s article on Tacoma's Japan Town or one of Densho's videos, [Looking Like the Enemy](#) or [American Concentration Camps](#).
- Have students begin to construct their own understanding of what happened to Japanese Americans during the 1940s.
- Divide students into work groups of 3-4 students and distribute 3-8 uncaptioned historic images to each group. Ask students to think about what clues they can find in a photo: Who are the people? What are they doing? What is the setting? (Since the instructor is the only one who knows the actual origins of each photo, s/he circulates asking questions and providing clues)
- Explain that all the pictures help tell the story in question; their job is to study the images (primary sources) and consult a secondary source (either the [HistoryLink](#) article or Densho's [Timeline](#) to each group) to place everything in sequence.
- Groups begin to sequence their images as they consult their secondary sources. Once placement of images is confirmed, they compose original captions to each image.
- Each group presents their work to the rest of the class, fielding questions about their placement of images and what they represent. If the class is creating one giant timeline, then the groups use this interaction to work out the parameters of the larger timeline.

Exit Ticket

Describe in detail one of the events connected with the WWII experiences of Japanese Americans. When did this occur?

Tomiko's Necklace

Grades 6 – 12 | Varying Time

Faced with the question of what to take with her to the camp, 10 year-old Tomiko chooses a necklace made for her by her friend Alice. When Tomiko and her family are forced to leave their home, the necklace serves as a reminder of what Tomiko holds dear: friendship and kindness. She keeps the necklace the rest of her life. This activity serves as a multi-modal learning opportunity for students to reflect on their own lives and identities.

Materials

- Necklace Activity Sheet (See Appendix)
- Colored pencils or other arts supplies

Optional Materials

- String and various beads, ephemera, symbolic objects

Sequence

- Use prompt to discuss and chart some of the things that are most important to students: the people, places, memories and objects that they would always want to hold close to their hearts.
- Next, use the Necklace Activity Sheet for students to draw and/or write their personal list of these things.
- Share or display the student work
- Optional Extension: Based on written/drawn student work, use string, beads, ephemera and symbolic objects to create actual necklaces.

Prompt

Tomiko is a girl from Tacoma, Washington who, along with her family, is forced to leave her home. This means she must leave behind her house, her friends and school, her neighborhood, her favorite foods...just about everything! One small thing she decides to take with her is a necklace that her friend Alice gave her. That necklace reminds Tomiko of her home when she is in the concentration camp.

Imagine that you and your family were forced from home and placed in a concentration camp. What are some of the things you would want to hold onto in your memory? What are the places? Who are the people? What are the foods? How about your core beliefs or favorite activities?

[Group discussion]

Next, we are going to create necklaces to help remind us of the things that are important to us – just like Tomiko’s necklace. But, our necklaces will be drawn on paper. On each paper there are large spaces that represent the beads of your necklace. What important things that we talked about will you draw/write in each section of your necklace? On the back of your paper, write a few lines explaining each drawing and the reason you included it.

[Students receive Necklace Activity Sheet and art supplies. Invite students to share their work in a whole group discussion or through a display.]