

# Nihonjin Face

## Gaman: Never Give Up



*Grades* 6 – 12

*Objective* To make personal connections to the Japanese concept of Gaman, or perseverance

*Materials* Gaman Activity Sheet or Paper  
Historic photos from [Densho](#) website (optional)  
Student-selected contemporary images (optional)

### Background

Tomiko learns the concept of perseverance through the Japanese word, ***gaman***, which her mother teaches her. This idea helps Tomiko to endure separation from loved ones, the challenges of camp and the difficulty of starting a new life with little money and no home. As she ages, it inspires her to use her experiences to keep pushing for better treatment of all Americans. In this activity, students reflect on the concept of ***gaman*** and reflect on experiences in their life where they have kept on trying.



Records Administration

This activity challenges us to connect with Tomiko's experiences and consider moments in our own lives where we applied a growth mindset or demonstrated persistence. It challenges us to apply ***gaman*** to the issues that affect us today.

### Lesson Procedure

#### 1.) Recall

Take a moment to recall Tomiko's challenges from the play. Some examples include:

- Being separated from her friend Alice
- Having her dad taken away
- Leaving her home and school with very few belongings
- All the challenges of living in the camps
- Starting a new life with little money and no home

#### 2.) Discuss

With fellow students or parents, reflect on how both Tomiko and Alice responded to the injustice they encountered – Tomiko as a victim of that injustice, and Alice as a witness. What types of decisions and actions did they take later in life?

### 3.) Introduce *Gaman*

Tomiko's mom taught her something to help her keep going. **Gaman** - It's a Japanese word that reminds us to try our hardest.

- What does it mean to not give up? What does it mean to keep trying, to persevere?

### 4.) Connect to Justice Today

What are some examples of social injustices today, which require us to take up a spirit of *gaman*?

- Either on the **Gaman** Activity Sheet (included) or on blank paper, name challenges of injustice today.
- Next, explain how you might apply **gaman** in how you respond to those issues. Identify at least one specific (and realistic) action you can take.  
*For example, an issue might be global warming. A "non-gaman" response would be to just resign ourselves to doing nothing. A "gaman" response might be environmental activism, changing how we consume resources, or lobbying lawmakers for policy changes.*

### 5.) Share and Reflect

Share/display your work. Consider displaying your work interspersed with pictures from the [Densho](#) website of the Japanese American community enduring the challenges of forced removal and incarceration. Or, perhaps post in social media how you work for change.

- What actions did you identify?
- If you are not a direct victim of an injustice, what is one way that you identified that you can become an ally, as Tomiko's friend Alice did?



Nisei soldiers of the 442nd; Courtesy of the Seattle Nisei Veterans Committee and the U.S. Army

#### **Tips for at home application:**

1. If you are unable to print the activity sheet, write the questions/headings on a sheet of notebook paper and then respond.
2. Secondary students could do this lesson together via phone, chat or video conference.

# Activity Sheet

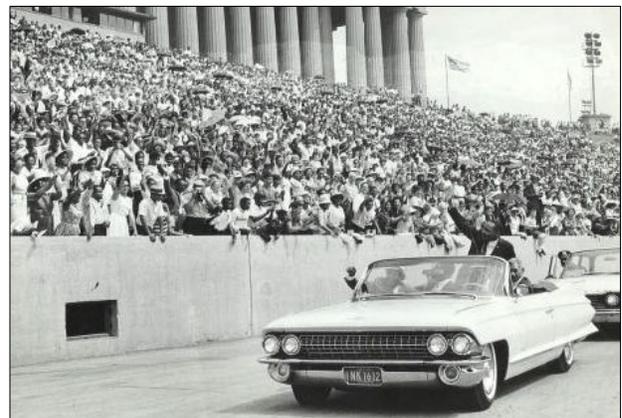
## *Gaman: Never Give Up*

*Tomiko learns the concept of perseverance through the Japanese word, **gaman**, which her mother teaches her. This idea helps Tomiko to endure separation from loved ones, the challenges of camp and the difficulty of starting a new life with little money and no home. Furthermore, as she ages it inspires her to use her experiences to keep pushing for better treatment of all Americans. Her friend Alice, though not a victim, is a witness to injustice – and this shapes her actions later in life.*

1. What is an example of how Tomiko or Alice refuse to simply accept how things are and instead work toward a more just future?
2. Like Tommy and RJ, your generation faces new issues, new instances of injustice. Give some examples of injustices in your lifetime.
3. Describe some specific and realistic action(s) you can take on an issue of today.



Japanese American leaders look on as President Ronald Reagan signs the Civil Liberties Act of 1988



Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. at Freedom Sunday rally at Soldier Field in Chicago; Chicago Urban League Records via Wikimedia Commons