

Nihonjin Face

Only What You Can Carry



Grades 7 – 12

Objective To explore and develop understanding for the experience of Japanese American citizens who were forced from their homes by the U.S. government, leaving behind nearly all of their possessions and property

Materials Only What You Can Carry worksheet (included)
Transcript or image of mass removal instructions from 1942 (included)
Images of children with suitcases from Densho collection

- <http://ddr.densho.org/ddr-densho-36-32/>
- <http://ddr.densho.org/ddr-densho-151-462/>
- <http://ddr.densho.org/ddr-densho-151-288/>
- <http://ddr.densho.org/ddr-densho-151-326/>
- <http://ddr.densho.org/ddr-densho-151-8/>
- <http://ddr.densho.org/ddr-densho-151-17/>
- <https://catalog.archives.gov/id/536059>
- <https://encyclopedia.densho.org/sources/en-russell-child-1/>

Background

Imagine you, your family and everyone who looks like you was accused and punished for something you never did.

Some people were very fearful that Japanese Americans might not support the United States during World War II. Not because of anything they did, but only because of their identity. So, all Japanese American families were forced from their homes and imprisoned in camps, even though they had done nothing wrong.

Based on the orders issued to “persons of Japanese ancestry” in 1942, in this lesson you’ll experience the challenge of reducing all your belongings to only what you can carry. Using the text of the evacuation orders, you will need to account for the required items and make choices for anything else you can afford to bring.

This lesson intentionally challenges us to sit in the uncertainty experienced by Japanese Americans in the week between April 24 and May 1, 1942.

Lesson Procedure: Simulation Experience

1.) Choose Your Identity

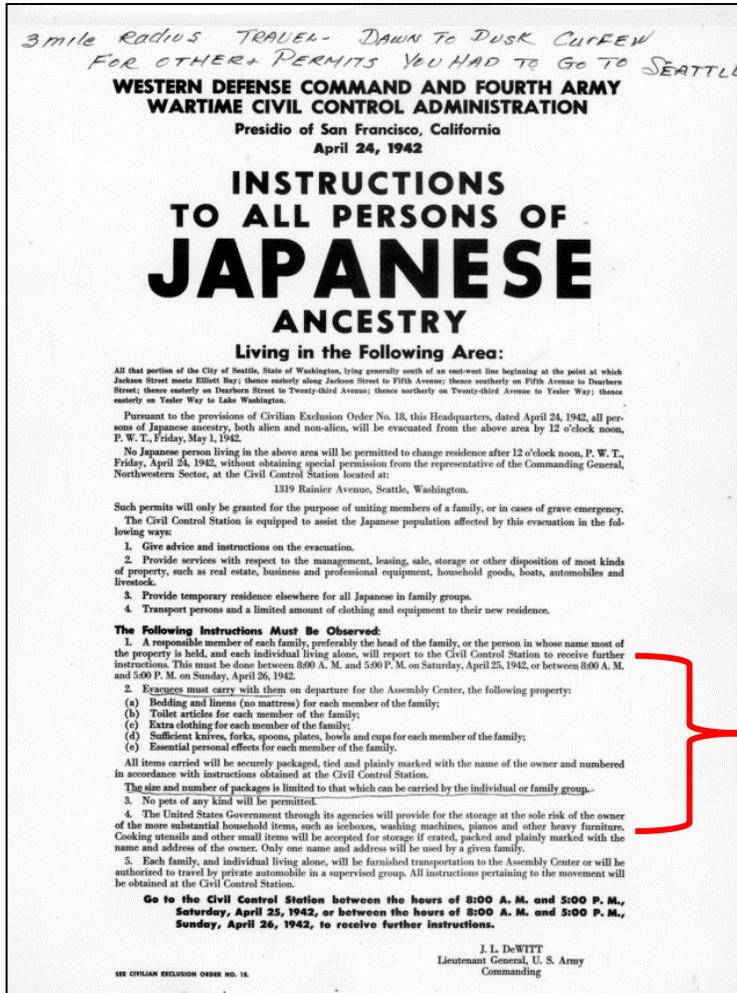
You will assume the identity of a Japanese American head of household on April 24, 1942. You have one week – until May 1st – to close down your home and work, sell or arrange storage of all your belongings and pack only as many suitcases as you and your family can carry, then report to the train station.

- a. Select the number of people and ages in your family. Do you have pets?
- b. Select your job/income source (grocer, field hand, farmer, lawyer, teacher, restaurateur, banker, engineer, mechanic, cleric, etc.)

Write a short “back story” of your person, where they live in Tacoma (Tacoma’s Japan Town ran from approximately Tacoma Ave. South to Pacific Avenue, from South 11th to South 21st). Make sure to include the details you’ve selected above when describing who lives with you (ages, roles such as spouse, son, grandchild, etc.) and provide details about your home and its belongings, based on the income of the job you chose.

2.) Utilizing a Primary (Historical) Source

It’s April 24th, 1942 and you have just seen the following order posted in your neighborhood. You now have a week to reduce your entire household and property to only as many bags as your family can carry, being sure to include the required items listed in the order. Read the text below in detail.



Evacuees must carry with them on departure for the Assembly Center, the following property:

- a) Bedding and linens (no mattress) for each member of the family;
- b) Toilet articles for each member of the family;
- c) Extra clothing for each member of the family;
- d) Sufficient knives, forks, spoons, plates, bowls and cups for each member of the family;
- e) Essential personal effects for each member of the family.

The size and number of packages is limited to that which can be carried by the individual or family group.

- i. No pets of any kind will be permitted.

3.) Activate: Use the “Only What You Can Carry” Worksheet (end of this document) to:

- Create a packing list based on the requirements in the order and an estimate of how many suitcases/packages you’ll be able to bring based on the number of people in your family.
- Make plans for larger property (cars, appliances, houses, land, and businesses) as well as pets. Will you try to sell everything off at reduced prices or arrange for someone to act as custodian of their property? Will you entrust it to government storage scheme? What will you do with your pets?
- If you think you’ll still have room in your suitcase, select a handful of personal items you will want to take with you. Heirloom jewelry? Deeds? Photographs? Diaries?

Tips for at home application:

1. If you cannot print the worksheet, make your own on a sheet of paper or in a notebook.
2. If you have no paper, utilize the list or notes app in your phone.
3. Use an actual suitcase and physically pack the required items so that students can see the actual objects and how little room is left for additional items. Have students try carrying all the required items across the room.

4.) Reflect

- What was it like to have to reduce all your possessions to only those you can carry and to see your “family” go through this?
- You had to make a lot of decisions in this activity. Which ones were the most challenging and why?
- What were the emotions you experienced as you imagined yourself and your family in this scenario?
- In 1942, the War Department issued “evacuation” orders and referred to Japanese Americans as “evacuees,” “migrants” or “pioneers” as they were forced into camps in remote parts of the country. Now the term “forced removal” is considered more accurate and terms like “detainees” or “incarcerated” are used for those sent to the camps. Why do you think the War Department used the terms it did?
- The forced removal and incarceration of Japanese Americans happened in the 1940s, under the justification of “wartime security,” but a Congressional report 40 years later found that this targeted, mass policy was a result of “... race prejudice, war hysteria and a failure of political leadership”. What lessons can we apply to today?
- How is it dangerous to all of us if we allow a racial or ethnic group to be treated unfairly, even if we’re not a member of that group?



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

“Only What You Can Carry” Worksheet

Family Group Members:

Family’s business or source of income:

(This will be important in anticipating
the property you will need to leave behind)

INSTRUCTIONS

Based on your family’s source of income, you have determined the material property and home belonging to your family. Today a military order has been issued that gives your family one week to reduce your ownings to only that which you can carry. The bags you will carry must include the items required in the orders and must not include any contraband items.

As a family, review the instructions in the military order.

- What are you required to bring?
- What are you forbidden from bringing?
- Based on your family size, how many bags will you be able to carry?
- After you pack required items, will you have room for any personal effects? If you have room for one or two personal items, what will you choose from among all your possessions?
- What types of property will you have to leave behind?
- What arrangements will you make for that property or land?*
- What will you do with your pets?*

*Keep in mind that these military orders are for **mass incarceration according to identity**. You will not have any extended family that will be able to care for any of your things or pets. They are being forcibly removed as well.

Number of bags for our family:

Our Family Packing List:

Property/Pets we must leave behind:

Arrangements for those pets/property:

Small personal items (list each family member and their 1-2 items)