

## SETTING THE CONTEXT

### Organizing Questions

- What are oral histories?
- What was the Allied Occupation of Japan?
- What are some key aspects of the Japanese experience in the United States?
- What are Japanese war brides?

### Introduction

The five lessons developed for the *Japanese War Brides Oral History Archive* suggest ways for teachers to engage their students with the broad themes that emerge from the individual experiences of Japanese war brides. In these multiple oral histories, Japanese immigrant women reflect on their lives in postwar Japan, their experiences immigrating to the United States, and their experiences living in the United States.

The titles of the five lessons are as follows:

- Lesson One: Setting the Context
- Lesson Two: Japanese Immigration to the United States
- Lesson Three: The Transmission of Culture
- Lesson Four: Notions of Identity
- Lesson Five: Conflict and Its Analysis

Lesson One is divided into three parts. In part one, students are introduced to oral histories and analyze two oral histories from the *Japanese War Brides Oral History Archive*. In part two, students are introduced to basic information about the Allied Occupation of Japan, the Japanese immigrant experience in the United States, and Japanese war brides. This information is important background information for students to have as they examine the *Japanese War Brides Oral History Archive* and engage in Lessons Two through Five. Finally, in part three, students are given the opportunity to conduct their own oral histories.

### Connections to Standards

United States History (from National Center for History in the Schools)

This lesson has been designed to meet certain national U.S. history standards. They are:

Era 4, Standard 2C, Grades 7–12: Explain how immigration intensified ethnic and cultural conflict and complicated the forging of a national identity. [Interrogate historical data]

Era 6, Standard 2A, Grades 7–12: Distinguish between the “old” and “new” immigration in terms of its volume and the immigrants’ ethnicity, religion, language, place of origin, and motives for emigrating from their homelands. [Analyze multiple causation]

Era 6, Standard 2A, Grades 5–12: Assess the challenges, opportunities, and contributions of different immigrant groups. [Examine historical perspectives]

Era 6, Standard 3A, Grades 9–12: Account for employment in different regions of the country as affected by gender, race, ethnicity, and skill. [Formulate historical questions]

Era 10, Standard 2B, Grades 9–12: Identify the major issues that affected immigrants and explain the conflicts these issues engendered. [Identify issues and problems in the past]

Objectives	<p>In this lesson, students will:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• learn about oral histories;</li><li>• be introduced to basic information about the Allied Occupation of Japan, the Japanese experience in the United States, and Japanese war brides; and</li><li>• conduct their own oral histories.</li></ul>
Materials	<p>Handout 1, <i>Oral Histories</i>, 10 copies Handout 2, <i>The Allied Occupation of Japan</i>, 10 copies Handout 3, <i>The Japanese Experience in the United States</i>, 10 copies Handout 4, <i>Japanese War Brides</i>, 10 copies Handout 5, <i>Conducting Oral Histories</i>, 30 copies <a href="#">Japanese War Brides: An Oral History Archive</a></p>
Equipment	<p>Laptops with Internet access</p>
Teacher Preparation	<ol style="list-style-type: none"><li>1. Instructions and materials are based on a class size of 30 students. Adjust accordingly for different class sizes.</li><li>2. Make the appropriate number of copies of handouts.</li><li>3. Become familiar with the content of the handouts.</li></ol>
Time	<p>Three class periods</p>
Procedures Day One	<ol style="list-style-type: none"><li>1. Inform students that they will be exploring the oral histories that are included in the <i>Japanese War Brides Oral History Archive</i>. Ask students to define “oral history.” After soliciting answers, share the following: An oral history is a first-person account of one’s personal experiences. As such, an oral history can be considered a type of primary source. They are conducted like interviews, where one person asks a question and prompts the other person to talk about a certain period of their life or an event in which they participated. The interviewer is not always visible in the recordings. Sometimes, we simply hear their voice as they ask questions to their subject(s).</li></ol>

2. Ask students for examples of oral histories that they have studied. Also ask if they have ever conducted oral histories.
3. To introduce the *Japanese War Brides Oral History Archive* and to provide more details on oral histories, assign Handout 1, *Oral Histories*, to small groups of 3–4 students. Allow each group to work on the activity during the remaining class period and/or for homework.

### Procedures Day Two

1. Allow each small group to present a five-minute summary of its small-group activity from day one. After each presentation, allow a short question-and-answer period with the class.
2. Mention to students that they will be receiving one of the following three handouts. Distribute one handout to 10 students.
  - Handout 2, *The Allied Occupation of Japan*
  - Handout 3, *The Japanese Experience in the United States*
  - Handout 4, *Japanese War Brides*
3. Have students with Handout 2 meet together, Handout 3 meet together, and Handout 4 meet together. Point out to students that the content on the handouts is important background information as students explore Lessons Two through Five. Ask each group to prepare a 10-minute group presentation of the content for the next class period. Emphasize the importance of creativity and interactivity in their presentations. They may want to prepare visual presentations.

### Procedures Day Three

1. Allow each small group to present a 10-minute presentation based on the content of Handouts 1, 2, or 3. After each presentation, allow a short question-and-answer period.
2. Handout 5, *Conducting Oral Histories*, can be issued as a homework assignment. It is an abbreviated form of an oral history. It can also be used after students have been introduced to one or more of the lessons, 2 through 5. If you decide to have students share their oral histories in class, you may want to ask the following about the process of the interview itself.
  - How did you feel asking questions and learning about another person?
  - How did your interviewee feel during the interview? (Was she/he comfortable? Did your questions allow her/him to recall memories that she/he had forgotten about? Had she/he ever spoken about the topic before?)

## ORAL HISTORIES

Instructions: After reviewing the information on this handout, work on the activity described below.

### **What is the Japanese War Brides Oral History Archive?**

The [Japanese War Brides Oral History Archive](#) is an online collection of 40 stories (3 to –10-minute audio stories with photographs) of Japanese women who married American servicemen after World War II and came to the United States. The narratives are told by the Japanese war brides—now in their late 80s and 90s—and their families to a daughter of a Japanese war bride, journalist Kathryn Tolbert. She interviewed more than 100 people—war brides, their husbands, children, grandchildren, in-laws—in 20 states from 2015 to 2019. The interviews were conducted in person, with a digital recorder. Kathryn scanned family photos at the interview and later combined parts of the interview with photos to create short stories for the archive, which combines journalism and traditional oral history.

Together, they unravel stories—of race and immigration, gender and equity, culture and identity—in Japan and in the United States. The topics resonate with many of the challenges that we face in the United States today—including immigration policies, gender equity, and intercultural communication—more than 75 years after the end of the Second World War.

### **What are oral histories?**

An oral history is a first-person account of one’s personal experiences. As such, an oral history can be considered a type of primary source. They are conducted like interviews, where one person asks a question and prompts the other person to talk about a certain period of their life or an event in which they participated. The interviewer is not always visible in the recordings. Sometimes, we simply hear their voice as they ask questions to their subject(s).

Interviews with subject matter experts such as historians, are secondary sources. Oral histories offer nuanced and multi-dimensional perspectives of the past that add to our understanding of history from public records, photographs, maps, letters, journals, etc. First-person accounts of history often “makes more sense” since they are told by someone who was witness to an event or lived during a particular moment in time. Oral histories can help build connections between people from different countries, of different generations, and with different lived experiences.

### **Why are oral histories important?**

Oral histories are important because they often document the lives of lesser known individuals whose experiences have been overlooked or are altogether absent from mainstream narratives found in history books, textbooks, and Hollywood movies. Stories told by women, immigrants, ethnic minorities, or other historically stigmatized groups can introduce exceptions to broad generalizations and can provide a critical lens to other perspectives that have yet to be examined. An individual account can dispel misrepresentations of the historical record that we have, thus far, accepted as fact.

Oral histories can also uncover the disconnect between policies and practice, and can reveal human subjectivities that have been obscured over time. Sometimes, oral histories can be the only existing record or testimony of certain moments in history. When individuals share their unique perspectives and experiences, they provide us with a new lens through which we can examine history more critically and perhaps more empathetically.

### How are oral histories made?

Oral histories can be made using a video camera, a smart phone, or other recording devices. The audio or video recordings allow viewers to hear the language used and sometimes see the facial expressions and gestures of the speaker(s). Oral histories are often recorded so their voices, narratives, and memories can be shared with others in the future.

### Activity

Work on the following activity during the remaining class time and/or for homework. Prepare a five-minute summary of your activity to share with the rest of the class during the next class period.

1. Select two oral histories from the *Japanese War Brides Oral History Archive*, and view both.
2. Compare the experiences of the two Japanese war brides.
  - What are some cross-cultural challenges (in their marriages and lives in the United States) that they faced?
  - What are some examples of Japanese culture that were transmitted and not transmitted in their lives in the United States?
  - How were their identities affected by their marriages and lives in the United States?
  - What types of conflicts did they experience in their marriages and lives in the United States?
  - How did they adapt? And how successfully?
  - How are the experiences of the two Japanese war brides similar and different?
3. Compare the interviewing techniques used in the two videos.
  - How does the interviewer begin each oral history?
  - What kinds of non-verbal, audio-visual methods (including background music and use of family photographs or artifacts) are used to enhance the telling of the stories?
  - If additional family members are interviewed, how do their perspectives help to expand the central narrative?
  - How does a war bride's English ability affect the interview, if at all?

## THE ALLIED OCCUPATION OF JAPAN

Instructions: Your handout includes important background information for Lessons Two through Five. After reviewing the information on this handout, develop a 10-minute group presentation of the content to share with the students in other groups. Consider the importance of creativity and interactivity in your presentation. You may want to prepare visual presentations.

### **Who fought in World War II?**

The United States officially entered World War II in December 1941 after Japan's attack on the U.S. fleet in Pearl Harbor. Japan surrendered two weeks after the United States dropped atomic bombs on the Japanese cities of Hiroshima and Nagasaki in August 1945. World War II was fought between two major, military alliances: the Allied powers (led by the United States, Great Britain, and the Soviet Union) and the Axis powers (Germany, Italy, and Japan) between 1939 and 1945.

### **What was the purpose of the Allied Occupation of Japan?**

Japan's postwar reconstruction by the Allied forces was led by U.S. General Douglas MacArthur, the Supreme Commander of the Allied Powers, from 1945 to 1951 and General Matthew Ridgeway from 1951 to 1952. The United States wanted to protect its own military interests while preventing Japan from threatening the national security of its Asian neighbors. The Allied Occupation forces drafted a new constitution for Japan to introduce political, economic, and social reforms and establish democracy in the aftermath of World War II. Article 9 of the new Japanese Constitution forbids the use of force to settle international disputes. It also forbids Japan from maintaining an army, navy, or air force.

### **How many American troops were stationed in Japan during the Occupation?**

Within the first four months of the Allied Occupation, General MacArthur ordered nearly half a million American troops (accompanied by tens of thousands of civilians and family dependents) to be sent to Japan. Over the course of the Occupation, nearly one million Allied servicemen were deployed to Japan for tours of duty. While in Japan, these servicemen, most of them in their late teens and early 20s, met and in many cases socialized with Japanese women. Thousands of the young men petitioned to bring home Japanese brides despite a ban on Asian immigration. Some were admitted into the country by private legislation sponsored by a member of Congress. Others received visas during short periods when exceptions were made for them as a group. All that changed with the passage of the Immigration and Nationality Act of 1952, which allowed Asians to apply for naturalization, thus making them eligible for immigration. More than 45,000 Japanese brides came to the United States through the 1950s and early 1960s. However, an estimated 100,000 Japanese mothers and their mixed-race babies are believed to have been abandoned by American soldiers. These figures, as well as couples who chose to stay in Japan with their Japanese brides, are not included in the figures associated with Japanese war brides.

**Who were these American soldiers?**

For many young American soldiers, enlisting in the military was an opportunity to leave their small towns and serve their country. Recruitment posters, wartime films, and Hollywood movies were shown across the United States and portrayed the war overseas as an adventure of a lifetime. Young men from all over the country—from poultry farms in upstate New York, logging towns of northern Wisconsin, and farming communities in North Dakota—were deployed to military stations throughout Japan after its surrender.

**How did American perceptions of the Japanese change in the postwar era?**

U.S. policymakers wanted to use Japan as a bulwark against communism in Asia. After the Communist takeover in China and the Korean War, American portrayals of the Japanese changed from being “subhuman villains” to “industrious” and “friendly allies,” practically overnight. The U.S. government crafted the positive image of Japan to shape U.S. public sentiment towards a former wartime enemy.

**Are there still U.S. military bases in Japan?**

There are about 50,000 U.S. military personnel on bases in Japan, more than half of them in the southern islands of Okinawa, which was a U.S. military territory until 1972. More than 25,000 servicemembers, nearly 2,000 civilians, and close to 20,000 dependents are based in Okinawa today.<sup>1</sup> Many Japanese protest the continued U.S. military presence in their country.

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<sup>1</sup> <https://dc-office.org/basedata>

## THE JAPANESE EXPERIENCE IN THE UNITED STATES

Instructions: Your handout includes important background information for Lessons Two through Five. After reviewing the information on this handout, develop a 10-minute group presentation of the content to share with the students in other groups. Consider the importance of creativity and interactivity in your presentation. You may want to prepare visual presentations.

### **When did Japanese immigration to the United States begin?**

The first official Japanese immigrants arrived in Hawaii in 1868. Hawaii became a territory of the United States in 1898 and a state in 1959. The earliest immigrants were known as the *Gannenmono* (“the people of the first year”) and consisted of 153 Japanese men, women and children who worked in the sugar cane fields. By 1900, more than 60,000 Japanese people made the journey from Japan to Hawaii. Many later emigrated to the U.S. mainland and settled in California, Oregon, and Washington where they worked in fruit farming and fish processing, as well as in logging, mining, and railroad construction. In 1910 the Japanese population in the United States was more than 70,000.

### **Why was Japanese immigration to the United States restricted in 1907?**

Japanese became the target of anti-Asian sentiment after Chinese immigration halted with the 1882 Chinese Exclusion Act. An increasing number of Japanese immigrants arrived in California in the early 1900s. In San Francisco, the press and the local labor movement began a campaign of fear-mongering about the “Japanese Menace” and “The Yellow Peril.” In 1906, the San Francisco Board of Education ordered the 93 Japanese students in public schools to attend the segregated Chinese school. Reports of the action were published in Tokyo newspapers and then in the U.S. press, becoming an international incident.

### **What was the Gentleman’s Agreement?**

The 1907 Gentleman’s Agreement was an informal agreement between Japan and the United States. Japan agreed to restrict the emigration of its nationals to the United States in exchange for San Francisco revoking its segregation order, allowing Japanese students to attend public schools. There was one exception in the restrictive agreement: the parents, wives and children of laborers who already resided in the United States were allowed entry. Single Japanese men in the United States saw this as an opportunity to return to Japan to get married or send for wives and legally invite them to the United States.

### **Who were the “picture brides”?**

The loophole in the Gentlemen’s Agreement led to a steady increase of Japanese immigrants—mostly women—to Hawaii and the West coast. Between 1907 and 1923, approximately 24,000 Japanese women emigrated to the United States to marry Japanese laborers. Potential spouses were introduced via matchmakers through the exchange of photos. After an agreement was made, they were officially married by proxy. Unfortunately, in many cases, the photographs



neither revealed the true character nor the harsh reality that awaited many picture brides in the United States.

### **Why was the immigration of Japanese to the United States banned in 1924?**

The 1924 Immigration Act limited the number of immigrants to the United States through a national origins quota. These ethnic quotas favored immigrants from Western Europe and restricted immigrants from southern and eastern Europe. It barred immigrants from Asia.

### **What was the War Brides Act of 1945?**

The War Brides Act of 1945 allowed spouses from Europe, Australia, and New Zealand to emigrate to the United States but excluded brides from Asia. An amendment made to the War Brides Act in 1947 allowed a few Japanese war brides to enter the United States. Beginning 1948, large numbers of U.S. soldiers began to lobby their hometown local congressmen to allow their wives entry into the United States. John F. Kennedy was among the congressmen who filed private bills that allowed a constituent to bring home a Japanese fiancée or bride.

### **When did Japanese war brides become eligible to U.S. citizenship?**

The Immigration and Nationality Act of 1952—also known as the McCarran-Walter Act—repealed the ban on Asian immigration. It eliminated race as a barrier to naturalization and enabled Asians to emigrate to the United States in large numbers. More than 45,000 Japanese war brides emigrated to the United States between 1947 and the early 1960s, the largest Asian immigration to the United States since 1924. The Immigration and Nationality Act of 1965 abolished the quota system based on national origins.

### **What are “anti-miscegenation” laws?**

Anti-miscegenation laws enforce racial segregation in marriage, making interracial marriage illegal. More than half the states had such laws in place when World War II ended and servicemen sought to bring home foreign brides. Marriage to a Japanese woman was illegal in those states, except when the groom was a Japanese American. More than a dozen states repealed the laws in the following years, and the rest were invalidated in 1967 by the Supreme Court ruling in *Loving vs. Virginia*.

## JAPANESE WAR BRIDES

Instructions: Your handout includes important background information for Lessons Two through Five. After reviewing the information on this handout, develop a 10-minute group presentation of the content to share with the students in other groups. Consider the importance of creativity and interactivity in your presentation. You may want to prepare visual presentations.

### **How do Japanese “picture brides” differ from Japanese “war brides”?**

“Japanese war brides” are often mistaken for “Japanese picture brides.” While both refer to young Japanese women who emigrated to the United States because of marriage, the two groups arrived under completely different circumstances and historical periods, and with drastically different expectations for their new lives.

The majority of Japanese picture brides emigrated to the United States between 1908 and 1920, marrying Japanese laborers residing in the United States. Most couples raised their children in a Japanese-speaking or bilingual household, often within a larger Japanese American community. The story of Japanese war brides begins after the end of World War II. They married American soldiers from a variety of races and backgrounds, and joined their husbands in communities across the country with the intention of living in the United States permanently. Often they were the only Japanese in their community.

### **Why is the term, “Japanese war bride” controversial?**

Many Japanese war brides remain uncomfortable with the term “war bride,” a term broadly stigmatized in the Japanese media and society at large with unflattering associations of “gold digger” or prostitute. Other misrepresentations and stereotypes of Japanese women—as submissive women and wives—are shattered in the Japanese War Brides’ oral histories which exhibit ambitious, adventurous, and resilient young women who left their families and lives in Japan to marry American servicemen and emigrate to the United States.

### **What was Japan like for Japanese women in the wake of World War II?**

World War II left nearly three million Japanese people dead and nine million Japanese homeless, wounded, or seriously ill. The food shortage quickly spread to Japan’s countryside, resulting in a disorganized national rationing system and a black-market for anything that could be sold or bartered. Even families who were affluent before the war found it difficult to earn a living. With so many men dead or disabled by the war, many young women took on the responsibility of supporting their families by finding work outside the home. The better employment opportunities that existed in the postwar period were those associated with the Allied Occupation of Japan, 1945–52.

### **How did Japanese war brides challenge the stereotype of a “submissive woman”?**

Eager to help themselves and their families to escape destitute conditions, young, ambitious, and resourceful Japanese women found work on and around the military bases where tens of

thousands of American soldiers were stationed. There, Japanese women were able to earn two to three times the average pay in the rest of the economy and grasped the opportunity to improve their English communication skills. Some Japanese women placed ads in the English-language newspapers to find language exchange partners with U.S. personnel whom they thought might be equally eager to learn Japanese.

Young Japanese women found work as housemaids and nannies in the homes of military families. They took care of children and homes, washed and pressed uniforms, and learned to prepare sandwiches and set dining tables with silverware for Western meals. Having taken care of family members and siblings at home, childcare responsibilities, food preparation, and other household duties were nothing new; their domestic and administrative skills were transferable in a Western setting.

### **How did Japanese women and American soldiers meet?**

Japanese women and American soldiers met at U.S. military installations, where many women were employed as clerks, typists, and waitresses, as well as through chance encounters in dance halls and on city streets. Relationships developed into romance despite cross-cultural differences and language barriers. Many faced opposition from family members and the Allied Occupation administration that instituted anti-fraternization laws which made dating and marriage challenging. These rules, however, were eliminated when they proved too difficult to enforce. By the end of the Occupation, about a thousand GI's navigated the obstacles to receive permission for marriage, and thousands of others were trying. With the passage of the McCarran-Walter Act in 1952, the legal barriers to immigration for Asians were lifted and by the early 1960s, more than 45,000 Japanese women accompanied their servicemen husbands to the United States.

## CONDUCTING ORAL HISTORIES

Instructions: The following are suggested steps for conducting your own oral history. These can be modified in consultation with your teacher.

1. Conduct a 5-minute oral history with one of the following:
  - someone who has experienced war
  - a woman who has overcome an obstacle
  - someone who has migrated from one country to another
  - someone else (check with your teacher)
2. As you think of questions for the oral history, you may want to think of some of the following:
  - What are some topics that are meaningful to the interviewee that I would like to explore?
  - What kinds of secondary sources (textbooks, newspaper articles, etc.) can I review to prepare for the interview?
  - What kinds of primary sources—if any—can I use during the interview?
3. Streamline your questions for the interview (limit to five) and write a follow-up question for each.
4. Conduct the oral history.
5. Write a one-page summary of the oral history.