

JAPANESE IMMIGRATION TO THE UNITED STATES

Organizing Questions

- What is a diaspora?
- What are some key aspects of the Japanese immigrant experience in the United States?
- What challenges did Japanese immigrants—including Japanese war brides—face in terms of assimilation into U.S. society?
- How did the experiences of early Japanese immigrants compare with those of Japanese war brides?
- How would the experience of a war bride coming to the United States as the wife of a U.S. citizen of a different race differ from that of other immigrants?
- How did the social, political, and economic post-World War II climate in the United States affect the experiences of Japanese war brides?

Introduction

In this lesson, students are introduced to the meaning of “diaspora” and to a general history of Japanese immigration to the United States, including various waves of immigration, push-pull factors, the impact of discriminatory laws, and the impact that U.S.–Japan relations had on the Japanese American experience. Students then observe and analyze oral histories of Japanese war brides to enhance their understanding of the post-World War II social, political, and economic climate in the United States and the impact it had specifically on them. The lesson concludes with a discussion about how immigration, discrimination, and assimilation continue to be significant issues in U.S. society today.

Objectives

In this lesson, students will

- discuss the meaning of “diaspora”;
- learn a general history of Japanese immigration to the United States;
- consider the impact discriminatory laws had on the Japanese American community in the United States;
- compare the early Japanese immigrant experiences with that of Japanese war brides;
- appreciate the challenges Japanese immigrants—including Japanese war brides—faced in terms of assimilation into U.S. society;
- recognize how issues of immigration, discrimination, and assimilation are significant issues in U.S. society today;
- practice analyzing oral histories; and
- appreciate multiple perspectives.

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 5–12: Analyze the push-pull factors which led to increased immigration, for the first time from China but especially from Ireland and Germany. [Analyze cause-and-effect relationships]

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 2B, Grades 5–12: Explain the rising racial conflict in different regions, including the anti-Chinese movement in the West and the rise of lynching in the South. [Explain historical continuity and change]

Era 6, Standard 2B, Grades 9–12: Analyze the role of new laws and the federal judiciary in instituting racial inequality and in disfranchising various racial groups. [Evaluate the implementation of a decision]

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 5–12: Analyze the new immigration policies after 1965 and the push-pull factors that prompted a new wave of immigrants. [Analyze cause-and-effect relationships]

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]

Materials

Handout 1, *Japanese Immigration to the United States*, 30 copies

Handout 2, *Japanese War Brides Oral Histories*, 10 copies

Reading 1, *About Oral Histories* (from Context Setting Lesson)

[Japanese War Brides: An Oral History Archive](#)

Equipment

Laptops with Internet access; one per small groups of three students

- Teacher Preparation**
1. Instructions and materials are based on a class size of 30 students. Adjust accordingly for different class sizes.
 2. Make the appropriate number of copies of handouts.
 3. Become familiar with the content of the handouts.
 4. Become familiar with the oral histories of Japanese war brides that are available on “Japanese War Brides: An Oral History Archive.”
 5. Make sure that there are enough laptops for small groups of three students.
 6. As preparation for the lesson, instruct students to locate a news article about an immigration-related issue and bring it to the next class period for discussion.
- Time** Three 50-minute class periods
- Procedures Day One**
1. Instruct students to take out the news articles that they located for homework. Ask students to form small groups of 3–4 students to discuss their articles. Ask each group to summarize the following: a) which groups are mentioned in the articles; b) which countries are mentioned; c) any mention of why the people are seeking to immigrate; d) challenges that they are facing; and e) any other relevant information. Ask a student representative in each group to share its group summary with the rest of the class. Ask students to keep some of the immigration-related issues from the discussion in mind during this lesson.
 2. Ask students if they know the meaning of the term “diaspora.” After a short discussion, introduce the following dictionary definition: a) the breaking up and scattering of a people; migration; b) people settled far from their ancestral homelands.
 3. Explain that throughout U.S. history, groups of people have been welcomed to the United States, forcibly brought, and sometimes excluded. Encourage students to share some specific examples of diasporas represented in the United States, factors that have contributed to their presence in the United States, and challenges that they have faced.
 4. Point out that migration and diasporas are inherently linked concepts, but that diasporas are not synonymous with immigrants. Migration is the process by which people become part of a diaspora, but there are many reasons why people migrate. Thus, there are many reasons why people become part of a diaspora. Because of this, one could say that there are many different types of diasporas.
 5. Have the class brainstorm a list of reasons why someone (adults and/or children) might leave their homeland. Record the reasons on the whiteboard. Inform students that people seldom migrate for one reason alone. Rather, it is often a combination of factors that “push” an individual from one place while “pulling” him/her toward another. Scholars who study migration refer to these as “push-pull” factors. Some examples that students may brainstorm include:

- to seek or start a new job
 - to get married
 - to escape war
 - to have an adventure
 - to leave a home destroyed by a natural disaster
 - to attend college
 - to fight a war
 - to fulfill or avoid military draft/conscription
 - to conduct business
 - to oversee diplomatic affairs
 - to be safe
 - to be adopted
 - to take care of a sick family member
6. Discuss the reasons why adults may migrate versus the reasons why children might migrate. Use the following questions as a guide:
 - Is there a difference between the reasons why adults migrate and the reasons why children migrate?
 - What are some examples of children migrating alone?
 - How much of a choice do children have?
 - Do children of immigrants embrace or reject the heritage of their immigrant parents? How much of this depends on the perception of the community, of other kids, of other parents, toward a particular immigrant group? For example, one son of a Japanese war bride did not like being part Japanese because it made him a target of bullying. Later, as an adult, he embraced that heritage.
 - Discuss the reasons why women migrate versus the reasons why men might migrate.
 7. Next, draw a Venn diagram on a whiteboard, labeling one circle “Voluntary” and the other circle “Involuntary.” (The circles should overlap in the middle.) Referring to the brainstormed list of reasons, fill in the Venn diagram as a class, according to which reasons are voluntary, which are involuntary, and which could be both. Many of the reasons could be both, so be sure the circles overlap considerably.
 8. Once you have completed the diagram, ask students to share real-life examples of people who have left their homelands in these ways. They could be people from their immediate community, family, or news stories from the past and present. Students might even wish to use themselves as examples, if they feel comfortable doing so. Record the answers on the whiteboard. Be sure to lead the discussion in a way that respects the potentially sensitive nature of the topic.
 9. Inform students that although many immigrant groups experienced discrimination in the United States, the Chinese were the first group to be formally excluded by U.S. law (Chinese Exclusion Act of 1882) based on their nationality. Point out that the Chinese had immigrated

to the United States in large numbers to work in the gold mines in California and on the Central Pacific Railroad in the mid-19th century. Some of the “push” factors were high taxes, floods, and droughts that created economic hardships in parts of China; and some “pull” factors were potential wealth and perceived “freedom.” With the exclusion of Chinese to the United States, labor shortages resulted in areas such as agriculture in states like California and once-U.S. territories such as Hawaii. This was a main factor that contributed to early Japanese immigration to the United States. That is, they would help to fill a labor shortage.

10. Point out to students that they will be first introduced to a general history of Japanese immigration to the United States through a reading. This reading will provide important historical context for the students’ in-depth look at Japanese war brides who immigrated to the United States following the end of World War II, from the late 1940s through the 1950s.
11. Distribute one copy of Handout 1, *Japanese Immigration to the United States*, to each student. Instruct students to read the handout and respond to the questions. Allow the rest of the class period for students in small groups of three students to read the handout and answer the questions.

Procedures Day Two

1. Divide the class into the same small groups as in day one and instruct groups to discuss their responses to the questions at the end of Handout 1, *Japanese Immigration to the United States*. You may also want to discuss the questions as a class.
2. Inform students that they will now be looking in depth into one of the major periods of Japanese immigration to the United States—that is, Japanese war brides who immigrated to the United States following the end of World War II. Point out that their examination will be through the viewing and analysis of oral histories. You may want to review Reading, *About Oral Histories*, from the Context Setting Lesson with the students.
3. Assign two of the oral histories from “Japanese War Brides: An Oral History Archive” to each group. Distribute one copy of Handout 2, *Japanese War Brides Oral Histories*, to each group. Point out that the Japanese war bride immigrant experience is often left out of general histories of the Japanese American experience, and that through the oral histories, students will begin to see how they are an integral part of Japanese American history.
4. Allow students the rest of the class period to watch the oral histories and to complete Handout 2.

Procedures Day Three

1. Allow each group to present a 5-minute summary of its discussion and project.

2. Conclude the lesson with a class discussion about immigration, discrimination, and assimilation today, using the following questions as a guide.
 - What is the current U.S. government's stance on immigration? How has it changed over time?
 - What are your thoughts on current immigration-related issues concerning the United States? Explain.
 - Can the media create and reinforce positive and/or negative perceptions of immigration-related issues? If so, how? What are some examples?
 - Do you consider yourself to be part of a diaspora? Why or how?
 - What do you think are some misperceptions of your diaspora?
 - How do you think these misperceptions are perpetuated?
 - What are some ways that these misperceptions can be dispelled?

Assessment

The following are suggestions for assessing student work in this lesson:

1. Evaluate student responses to Handout 1, *Japanese Immigration to the United States*.
2. Assess student responses to Handout 2, *Japanese War Brides Oral History Guiding Questions*.
3. Assess student participation in their small-group presentations, evaluating students' ability to:
 - clearly state their opinions, questions, and/or answers;
 - provide thoughtful answers;
 - exhibit sensitivity toward different cultures and ideas;
 - respect and acknowledge other students' comments; and
 - ask relevant and insightful questions.

JAPANESE IMMIGRATION TO THE UNITED STATES

The first Japanese came to the United States as the result of shipwrecks in the Pacific Ocean during the mid-19th century. Two of the most famous were Manjiro Nakahama and Hikoza Hamada. In 1868, an American businessman sent a group of about 148 Japanese contract laborers to Hawaii. A year later, 23 Japanese established a silk and tea farm in California. This group, the Wakamatsu Colony, is often cited as the first Japanese settlement in the mainland United States.

After the 1868 Meiji Restoration, Japan began a period of Westernization and modernization—in large part to protect itself from U.S. and European imperialism. The costs of financing modernization had a negative impact on farmers. In prefectures like Hiroshima, Yamaguchi, Fukuoka, and Kumamoto, farmers were hit especially hard by government taxes. In 1885, the first group of 944 government contract laborers from Japan arrived in Hawaii. With the overthrow of the Hawaiian monarchy and the annexation of Hawaii by the United States in 1898, emigration companies assumed the role of recruiting and transporting Japanese laborers to Hawaii and the U.S. mainland.

Between 1885 and 1924, approximately 200,000 Japanese immigrated to Hawaii and the U.S. mainland. By 1900, there were already about 60,000 Japanese in Hawaii and about 24,000 Japanese on the U.S. mainland. In addition to the challenging economic situation in Japan, there were a couple of other reasons for this large increase in numbers of Japanese immigrants to Hawaii and the U.S. mainland. First, the 1882 Chinese Exclusion Act stopped immigration from China to the United States, resulting in a labor shortage in the western United States. California farmers, for example, needed laborers to work in the fields. Thus, there was an increase in demand for Japanese immigrants who would work as farm laborers. Second, the Emigrants Protection Act was passed by the Japanese government in 1896 to regulate the activities of emigration companies. This law required each Japanese emigrant to have someone responsible for his/her financial support in the country of destination. Through the Emigrants Protection Act, the Japanese attempted to protect its people going abroad.

Like the Chinese immigrants before them, for many Japanese immigrants or issei (literally, first generation) the stories they heard about the wealth and comfort of the United States were exaggerated. Most encountered tremendous hardships upon arriving in the United States. The types of employment found by Japanese were primarily in farming, railways, factories, canneries, plant nurseries, and fisheries.

Most of the immigrants were young men. In the 1900 census, only 1000 of the approximately 24,000 Japanese in mainland United States were women. As a result of this, a practice that became known as “picture bride” marriage developed. Most young Japanese immigrant men couldn’t afford to travel back to Japan for a bride, so requests were made to their parents, relatives, or friends in Japan to find prospective brides for them. Since these types of marriages often involved the exchange of photographs between the Japanese men in the United States and Japanese women in Japan, the practice was referred to as “picture bride” marriages. There was much U.S. resentment of the practice, criticized as an uncivilized custom, and the Japanese government stopped issuing passports to Japanese picture brides in 1920.

Japanese and all other Asian immigrants were not allowed to become citizens of the United States. They were “aliens ineligible to citizenship.” This meant that Japanese in the United States could not vote or work in occupations requiring U.S. citizenship. The Naturalization Act of 1790 granted naturalization privileges to “free white” immigrants. In 1868, this was extended to

“people of African nativity or descent.” The 1790 Act would deny citizenship to Japanese and most other Asian immigrants until 1952. As a result of China’s assistance during World War II, Chinese became eligible to citizenship in 1943.

On October 11, 1906, the San Francisco School Board of Education ordered the segregation of 93 Japanese and Japanese American school students into an “Oriental School” with Chinese and Korean students. Many leading educators in California and throughout the United States protested this decision, including President Theodore Roosevelt, who himself was for restricting Japanese immigration but was aware of Japan’s military power and didn’t want to anger Japan. This segregation met with severe protest by the Japanese government. At the heart of the segregation of the Japanese students was exclusion of Japanese broadly. The school board decision was revoked in 1907. Following this, Roosevelt issued an executive order that prohibited the re-migration of Japanese immigrants from Hawaii to the U.S. mainland. He also began to negotiate a limit on Japanese immigration with Japan.

In 1908, Japan, under pressure from the United States, agreed to restrict further emigration of Japanese laborers to the United States. This was known as the Gentlemen’s Agreement. The agreement contained loopholes that allowed for immigrant’s family members from Japan and “picture brides” to enter the United States. The large increase in the number of Japanese women immigrants changed the make-up of the Japanese immigrant community from one of primarily Japanese male laborers who might later return to Japan to one of families seeking permanent residence.

In 1913, the California legislature passed a law prohibiting Japanese from owning land. This law was called the Alien Land Law. Japanese were not directly mentioned in the law. However, the law specified that aliens ineligible to citizenship were prohibited from purchasing land. Farming represented the path to becoming Americans for many European immigrants, and farming was critical to the success of the Japanese immigrants. There were loopholes in the law, however. Japanese immigrants were able to purchase or lease land in the name of their American-born children, the nisei (literally, second generation) who were U.S. citizens. In fact, by 1920, there was a dramatic increase in Japanese owned and leased land. In 1920, the agricultural production of Japanese farms was valued at \$67 million—approximately 10 percent of the total value of California’s crops. Important to keep in mind is that the Alien Land Law sent a clear anti-Japanese message to the Japanese immigrants.

A 1920 law attempted to close these loopholes—prohibiting aliens ineligible to citizenship from leasing and sharecropping land. This resulted in a decrease in land owned and leased by Japanese. Similar alien land laws were enacted in Washington, Arizona, Oregon, Idaho, Nebraska, Texas, Kansas, Louisiana, Montana, New Mexico, Minnesota, and Missouri.

The Immigration Act of 1924, which was passed by Congress, prohibited aliens ineligible to U.S. citizenship—including the Japanese—from immigrating to the United States. Japanese immigration to the United States stopped until 1952 except for a few isolated cases of Japanese entering the United States for family or special occupational reasons, and after the end of World War II in 1945 when some Japanese brides of American servicemen were permitted entry.

Following the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor on December 7, 1941 and the U.S. declaration of war on Japan on December 8, 1941, Japanese immigrants and their U.S.-born children were suddenly thrust into a very difficult situation. The Japanese immigrants were Japanese nationals who were ineligible to U.S. citizenship and their U.S.-born children were U.S. citizens. In 1941, there were approximately 158,000 people of Japanese descent in Hawaii and approximately 127,000 people of Japanese descent on the U.S. mainland.

From 1942 to after the end of World War II in 1945, approximately 120,000 people of Japanese descent (mostly *issei* and *nisei*) from the West Coast and some from Hawaii were incarcerated in internment camps—without due process—by the U.S. government. After they were released, some returned to the West coast and others moved to other regions of the United States. During World War II, approximately 33,000 Japanese Americans served in the U.S. military, mostly in Europe but also in the Pacific War (Military Intelligence Service), and during the Allied occupation of Japan, 1945–1952.

The War Brides Act of 1945 allowed American servicemen who married abroad to bring their wives home following the end of World War II. Japanese brides could not initially take advantage of this law because they were ineligible to U.S. citizenship. 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 citizenship. More than 45,000 Japanese brides came to the United States from the late 1940s through the early 1960s. At that point, this was the largest group of Asian immigrant women to enter the United States in U.S. history. They immigrated to various regions of the United States, and some faced tremendous hardships, including language and cultural barriers and racism.

U.S. views toward Japan changed with the Communist takeover in China in 1949, and the Korean War, which began on June 25, 1950 during the Allied occupation of Japan. Japan played a key role as a rear base for the supply and transit of soldiers and materials and equipment. This was significant as Japan established itself as an ally of the United States and its efforts to fight communism in Asia.

With the passage of the Immigration and Nationality Act of 1952 and later the Immigration and Nationality Act of 1965, which replaced the 1952 Act, Asians were able to come to the United States in larger numbers.

Questions

1. What impact did discriminatory laws and practices have on the Japanese American community?
2. How did the status of being “aliens ineligible to citizenship” affect the lives of Japanese immigrants?
3. What are some ways that U.S.–Japan relations impacted the Japanese American experience?
4. How has your family or someone you know been affected by U.S. naturalization or immigration laws?
5. How did the World War II climate in the United States affect people of Japanese descent who were living in the United States?
6. How is the Japanese immigrant and Japanese American experience similar and different from that of another immigrant group with which you are familiar?
7. Considering the social, political, and economic post-World War II climate in the United States (following the Japanese surrender), what might it have been like for Japanese war brides, who married a former enemy, to experience a new life in the United States? This question will be explored further in the next class period.

JAPANESE WAR BRIDES ORAL HISTORIES

You will be watching two oral histories of Japanese war brides from the website, “Japanese War Brides: An Oral History Archive” that can be accessed here:

<<https://www.warbrideproject.com>>

1. While watching each oral history, please keep the following questions in mind. Not all of the questions will be relevant to the oral histories that you watch.
 - What insights did you gain about World War II based on the oral history?
 - What were some of the feelings that the Japanese war brides expressed about the men whom they would eventually marry?
 - What were some of the initial reactions of the Japanese war brides’ family members, including parents, toward their prospective American husbands?
 - What types of conflicts were expressed by the Japanese war brides and/or their American boyfriends/husbands?
 - What were some of the challenges the brides faced in terms of assimilation to U.S. society? What were some “push-pull” factors that were mentioned?
 - What comments did the Japanese war brides make about issues of identity?
 - What insights did you gain in the area of cross-cultural communication through this oral history?
 - How were the experiences of the Japanese war brides similar and different to the early Japanese immigrants to the United States?
2. Discuss the questions among the students in your group.
3. Choose one of the following activities and prepare a 5-minute presentation of your project to share during the next class period.
 - a. Write and design a one-page textbook supplement on Japanese war brides for your U.S. history book. What information would you include? Whose voices would you highlight? What quotes could you use from the oral histories? What images would you include?
 - b. Research other war brides who came to the United States in large numbers. Some examples may be brides from Germany, Italy, South Korea, Vietnam, and the Philippines. Prepare a two-page report.
 - c. Design a two-page graphic novel of a Japanese war bride based upon one of the oral histories.
 - d. Develop lyrics to a song or write a poem based on the experience of one of the Japanese war brides.
 - e. Imagine that you were given the opportunity to design a room at or a webpage for the National World War II Museum that captures the experiences of Japanese war brides. What information would you include? Whose voices would you highlight? What quotes could you use from the oral histories? What images would you include?
 - f. Develop an imaginary 2-minute dialogue between two of the Japanese war brides meeting for the first time. You can choose the year and place of the meeting.