

BeHere / 1942

A New Lens on the Japanese American Incarceration

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TEACHER GUIDE

The Oakland Museum of California welcomes you and your students to experience *BeHere / 1942: A New Lens on the Japanese American Incarceration*. This teacher guide will help you prepare for your students' visit and deepen meaning beyond their experience in the exhibition. We invite teachers to visit OMCA for free to plan a field trip.

Essential Question

How is our understanding of history influenced by the images we see and the people who create them?

Exhibition Content



"My aim was to peer deeply into photographs... to derive from them more than was visible on the surface."

—Masaki Fujihata

BeHere / 1942: A New Lens on the Japanese American Incarceration is an immersive installation and augmented reality (AR) experience created by the Japanese media artist Masaki Fujihata. The exhibition invites visitors to reflect on the power dynamics of image-making and how images influence our understanding of events and human experiences. While this exhibition centers photographs of Japanese Americans reporting for their incarceration during WWII, it is not a history exhibition; rather, it asks us to interrogate the role of images more broadly, allowing us to think critically about how events are documented and understood.

Exhibition Sections

The exhibition has a set path, guiding visitors through four general content areas, described below. An additional AR experience extends this exhibition to OMCA's Oak Street Plaza where staff will assist your group; *please note the limited capacity of this optional AR experience when planning your visit.*



Eyes and Reflection | The US government contracted photographers to document the forced removal of Japanese Americans from the West Coast during WWII. Among them was Dorothea Lange, whose photos humanizing Japanese Americans were kept from the public by the government. By zooming in on the portraits she took, we gain new insights into the power dynamics at play between photographer, subjects, and the government during this dark time.



LA Train Station | What appears to be a camera on a tripod is actually an AR device streaming visitors in the gallery within a recreation of Japanese Americans at the Old Santa Fe Station in Los Angeles. By placing ourselves in the role of the photographer, we consider the act of image-making. **Note:** *Limited mobile AR cameras are available to further enhance this experience. Staff will offer these cameras to teachers and chaperones only, for student groups to observe.*



Bay Area Connections | Japanese American incarceration during WWII had an enormous impact here in the Bay Area. Among those forced to leave was Mrs. Nakamoto, whose story we learn through a Dorothea Lange photo and field notes. Additional Lange photographs show local scenes, and a three-screen video features Bay Area individuals with personal or familial connections to Japanese American incarceration or connections to other immigration histories reading the local Civilian Exclusion Order documents.

Reflection Area | In this space, we invite visitors to reflect on this history and make connections to events happening today. Takeaway action cards offer tangible things we can do to fight against the recurrence of exclusion and unjust incarceration. On one wall, large graphic images showcase a contemporary satellite view of the East Bay overlaid with the boundaries and notes from the 1942 Exclusion Order maps of the same areas.

Outdoor AR Experience | A facilitated AR experience shows buses on Oak Street, within a block of the actual location—1117 Oak Street—where Japanese Americans in the area were forced to report to the Wartime Civil Control Authority for their incarceration. In the AR recreation, people move through the museum plaza, bringing the scene to life. While this experience is not included in the Student Conversation Guide, we invite groups to check in with museum staff hosting the AR experience if time and capacity allows. *(There will likely be a wait on busy days. Teachers and chaperones can use an app to join a virtual line.)*

Key Messages for Students

- Looking closely at historic photographs, and entering the moments they capture through AR experiences, changes what we see, know, and feel about the history of Japanese American incarceration.
- Interrogating Dorothea Lange's iconic photographs inspires new empathy for her subjects by highlighting the dynamics between those experiencing this history and those documenting it.
- We all participate in—and are influenced by—the powerful act of image-making and consumption that shapes our collective understanding of history and the human experience.

Understanding the Student Conversation Guide

This guide:

- Helps teachers, chaperones, and students engage more deeply during their self-guided visit to *BeHere / 1942: A New Lens on the Japanese American Incarceration*.
- Promotes student-driven inquiry by providing a variety of prompts for reflection and discussion.
- Encourages students to build connections between their exhibition experience and their own lives.

Facilitation Suggestions

- Bring printed copies of the student guide, and consider bringing writing surfaces and pencils. A limited number of printed student guides will be available at OMCA's School Group Entrance. No pens are allowed in the galleries.
- Allow students to work in pairs or small groups. If any student(s) seems to be struggling with the prompts, check in with them and encourage them to work with a peer to solve any challenges.
- Create a safe space for dialogue. We encourage students to work with a partner; however, participation in dialogue should be voluntary. Encourage students to participate however they're comfortable.
- The themes present in this exhibition can bring up big emotions, including feelings tied to historical and/or contemporary trauma. Be prepared to support students in processing these emotions by reviewing resources that help to create safe learning environments, such as this [Trauma-Informed Teaching guide](#) from the Center for Teaching and Learning at University of Georgia.

Extension

The Student Conversation Guide asks students to extend their conversations into other galleries across the museum. Consider:

- The Gallery of California History has many images with a clear perspective—often the perspective of people in power. The *Spaniards Claim This Land*, *The Railroad Brings People*, *Glorious City of the West*, and *Off to War* sections are all rich in imagery to support student conversation.
- The Gallery of California Art is full of images that communicate artists' perspectives. The *Art of the Gold Rush* section includes paintings that glorify a destructive history.
- If students have access to cameras, they can use them to crop images from the galleries in order to make the included discussion points more tangible.

Additional Resources

- **[Densho Archive](#)**: A large collection of online resources and oral history interviews focused on the WWII Japanese American incarceration, including videos and podcasts with firsthand accounts, historical images, and teacher resources that “explore principles of democracy and promote equal justice for all.”
- **[The Japanese American Incarceration Experience Through Poetry and Spoken Word—A Focus on Literary Analysis and Historical Significance](#)**: A California Educators Together curriculum with Ethnic Studies and CA HSS alignment and themes of identity and systems of power.
- **[And Then They Came for Us](#)**: A documentary about the WWII Japanese American incarceration from Facing History & Ourselves that includes the story of Japanese American activists speaking out against the more recent Muslim registry and travel ban.
- **[The Korematsu Institute](#)**: Founded by the daughter of civil rights icon Fred T. Korematsu, a local Japanese American who spoke up against the injustice of WWII incarceration, the Korematsu Institute provides educational materials on social justice issues related to this history.
- **[Artist Conversation—BeHere /1942: A New Lens on the Japanese American Incarceration](#)**: A 1-hour-25-minute video from the Japanese American National Museum featuring a conversation with artist Masaki Fujihata.
- **[Japantown Atlas - Northern California - Downtown Oakland](#)**: A map of downtown Oakland Japanese American businesses of 1940.
- ***Farewell to Manzanar***, a book by Jeanne Wakatsuki Houston and James D. Houston about the Wakatsuki family's incarceration at Manzanar.
- ***Fred Korematsu Speaks Up***, a book by Laura Atkins and Stan Yogi for readers ages 9–15.

Vocabulary

The government used euphemisms to describe Japanese American incarceration during World War II. While reviewing the words below, take time to also define *euphemism* and identify which terms are euphemisms and which most accurately describe the reality of this history. For more information on associated terminology, visit densho.org/terminology/

Assembly Center

Evacuation

Incarceration

Relocation

Concentration Camp

Forced Removal

Internment

IMAGES IN ORDER:

1. Dorothea Lange, Hayward, California, May 1942. Courtesy National Archives, photo no. 537509.
2. Detail of previous image.
3. Russell Lee, Photographers document the forced removal of Japanese Americans at the train bound for Owens Valley, Los Angeles, California, 1942. Courtesy of the Library of Congress, Prints & Photographs Division, Farm Security Administration/Office of War Information Black and White Negatives.
4. Dorothea Lange, San Francisco, April 1942 (detail). Courtesy National Archives, photo no. 536457.

BeHere / 1942

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PRE-VISIT Words from the Japanese American Incarceration

Materials

- Video: [Part Two: Looking Like the Enemy](#)
- [Looking Like the Enemy video transcript](#), printed one-sided
- Scissors
- Glue
- Writing utensils
- Construction paper or card stock
- Video: [Japanese Relocation](#)
- [Japanese Relocation video transcript](#)

Learning Objectives

- Students will understand Japanese American WWII incarceration and associated vocabulary as context for their experience in *BeHere / 1942: A New Lens on the Japanese American Incarceration*.
- Students will interrogate the narratives used by the United States government and the role of euphemisms in shaping these narratives.

Introduction

The words we use to describe events and experiences impact how we understand them. Using both first-hand oral histories from Japanese Americans and a US government-produced video, students will become familiar with vocabulary—including euphemisms—often used in connection to the WWII Japanese American incarceration. In doing so, they will also gain a foundational understanding of this history. These learning objectives will prepare them to visit *BeHere / 1942: A New Lens on the Japanese American Incarceration* by offering historical context, a familiarity with vocabulary used in the exhibition, and an understanding of the power dynamics influencing how the event was documented and depicted for the public.

Adapted in part from:

- Densho's [Ugly History: Japanese American Incarceration Camps Instructions for Classroom Activity 3 The Power of Words](#)
- Leslie Heffernan's lesson plan, [Forced Removal](#), and Pedro Uriostegue's lesson plan, [Challenging the Government Narrative on Immigration](#), both developed with the Fred T. Korematsu Institute in partnership with the Presidio Trust and funding from the National Park Service Japanese American Confinement Sites (NPS-JACS) grant program (these lessons can be used in full as extensions).

Activity

How do Japanese Americans talk about their experience during the WWII incarceration?

1. Watch [Part Two: Looking Like the Enemy](#), a 7-minute video from Densho's Introduction to WWII Incarceration.
2. Distribute the [video transcript](#), printed 1-sided, and have students read through it, underlining phrases that feel significant to them. Significance could be in how the phrase gets to the essence of this historical moment, could be something new and interesting, or could simply “speak” to the student.
3. Distill the text even further by having students choose 1–3 phrases and 2–4 single words to cut out of their text.
4. Working in small groups (2–4 students), have students reassemble their words and phrases into a poem and paste them onto a piece of construction paper.

How does the language used by the US government compare?

1. Watch [Japanese Relocation](#), a video made by the United States government in 1943. You may choose to stop at 5 minutes 14 seconds into this 9-minute video.
2. Ask students what story the government was telling with this film and how it compares to the descriptions by Japanese Americans in Looking Like the Enemy.
 - a. Introduce the word *euphemism*, its meaning, and its use.
 - b. Provide students with the [video transcript](#) and ask them to underline euphemisms. (Use only the first two pages if stopping the video after 5 minutes.)
 - c. For each euphemism they find, have students write an alternative word or phrase they think better describes the reality. For example, *relocation* or *evacuation* might become *removal* or *incarceration*. They can look back at their poems and/or you can provide them with the exhibition vocabulary list to support this activity.

EUPHEMISM	MORE ACCURATE TERM
evacuation/relocation	forced removal
Japanese	Japanese Americans
non-alien	citizen
internment	incarceration

Closing Notes

Like words, images have a profound impact on our understanding of both historical and current events.

At OMCA, students will have the opportunity to consider the role of images and their creators in documenting human experience, and will use photographs taken of Japanese Americans reporting to transportation locations to gain a deeper understanding of, and empathy for, those who experienced this history.

Additional Resources

- [Introduction to WWII Incarceration](#) from Densho is the complete series that includes *Looking Like the Enemy*. [Densho Part 3, American Concentration Camps](#) tells the story of what happened after Japanese Americans boarded buses and trains bound for camps.
- [And Then They Came for Us](#) is a 47-minute video from Facing History & Ourselves that tells the story of Japanese American WWII Incarceration alongside Japanese American response to current events.

BeHere / 1942

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POST-VISIT Creating a More Complete Picture

Materials

- Index cards
- Writing and coloring utensils

Learning Objectives

- Students will further consider how the power dynamics present in image-making feed into our understanding of historic and current events.
- Students will consider first-person experiences of the Japanese American incarceration and how they compare to media from the time.
- Students will promote actions we can take to better understand and respond to unjust events.

Introduction

In *BeHere / 1942: A New Lens on the Japanese American Incarceration*, students were asked to reflect on the power dynamics of image-making and how images influence our understanding of events and human experiences. Now they will consider first-person images created by Japanese American incarcerated and will create their own action cards to promote a better understanding of—and encourage actions we can all take in response to—this history.

Activity

Reflect on the museum visit:

- Would you have made the same choices as Dorothea Lange?
- What would you have photographed and why?
- How can we gain a more complete picture of this moment in history?

Share artists Chiura Obata and Miné Okubo's 1942 drawings of their experiences being removed for incarceration: [H74.498.1 - OMCA](#) and [2008.32.3.10 - OMCA](#)

- What do you notice? What is the same or different compared to the photographs in *BeHere / 1942*?
- Note the armed guards present in both images: Do you think these depictions would have been allowed by the US government? Why or why not?
- How can having a more complete picture of an event change the public's response to it? Use this discussion to consider the actions the public took—or might have taken—to support their Japanese American neighbors in 1942; be prepared to also help students make sense of images and actions connected to similar events happening today.

Have students create their own action card for the WWII Japanese American incarceration. On one side of an index card, they should create imagery they feel best represents the event and/or experience, and on the other side they should include an action statement, using the previous discussion to seed their ideas. They can also choose to make their action card in response to a current event if those connections were made. Share their cards with OMCA by emailing photos to groups@museumca.org.

Closing Notes

Unfortunately, unjust treatment of community members targeted by the US government continues today. It is important to learn from history in order to do better. The slogan “Never Again Is Now” has been used by Japanese Americans in response to current events and is a powerful reminder that we continue to work towards inclusive communities honoring strength in diversity. Use the [Head, Heart, Hands](#) reflection protocol to allow students a space for processing and meaning-making.

Additional Resources

To reinforce themes around documentation of Japanese American incarceration after your visit, consider using:

- [Photographs Don't Lie: Documenting the Japanese American Concentration Camps](#)
- [Densho Campu podcast episode 4: Cameras](#)
- OMCA's online [Chiura Obata](#) & [Miné Okubo](#) collections

To better understand how xenophobia existed prior to WWII and continues to impact Americans today:

- [“Other”: A brief history of American xenophobia](#)

To find examples of actions we can take against xenophobia today:

- Densho's [Promote Equity Today](#)