

TEACHING AMERICAN HISTORY PROJECT
Japanese American Internment: The Art of Gaman

By Kristen DeBona

Grade: 9-12

Length of class period: One 50 minute class period

Inquiry:

- What does the Art of Ghaman reveal about the life and experiences of Japanese Americans within relocation and internment camps?

Objectives:

- Students will be able to examine the relocation process and what life was like for Japanese Americans in relocation and internment camps.
- Students will be able to evaluate life inside the relocation and internment camps.

Materials:

- PowerPoint Lecture
- *The Art of Gaman* by Deliphine Hirasuna (optional but highly recommended book – comes with huge colored photographs of the artwork as well as student friendly descriptions of the internment and relocation process)
- “The Artists and Their Materials” Reading
- “The Artists and Their Materials” Guiding Questions (optional)
- The Art of Gaman Analysis Packet
- Reflection Homework Assignment

Activities:

I. Introduction/Grabber (6 minutes)

- Teacher will welcome students, go through slides 1 and 2 of the PowerPoint, and introduce students to the topic of the day by showing them a 5 minute video clip (embedded in PowerPoint) about the Art of Gaman with commentaries from the author Deliphine Hirasuna and artists.
 - Teacher will pause at slide 1 and 2 to explain to the students that today they will be looking at internment artwork from the book *The Art of Gaman: Arts and Crafts from the Japanese American Internment Camps 1942-1946* written by Delphine Hirasuna. Teacher will explain to students that Gaman means enduring the seemingly unbearable with patience and dignity.

II. Quick Write (5 minutes)

- Teacher will ask the students to take out a piece of paper and predict what they will learn about the internment through *The Art of Gaman* by answering the following question:

What do you think Japanese American internee artwork will be able to tell us about life inside the relocation and internment camps?

- Teacher will give the students a few minutes to jot down some predictions and then ask for a couple of volunteers to share their predictions.

III. Readings (10 minutes)

- Teacher will ask the students to keep their predictions in mind while reading “The Artists and Their Materials”. Teacher can also ask students to complete the optional “The Artists and Their Materials” guiding questions worksheet if time allows or if an additional assessment is desired.

IV. Mini-Lecture (7 minutes)

- Teacher will informally assess whether the students comprehended the reading through a mini-PowerPoint lecture.
 - First the teacher will ask the students to do a verbal quick think-pair-share in which students will turn to their neighbors and briefly discuss the following question: *What purpose did art serve in the relocation and internment camps?*
 - After giving the students a minute or two to discuss the teacher will bring the class back together and ask a few pairs to share with the class their ideas.
 - The teacher will then progress through the PowerPoint to explain how art was both a physical and emotional necessity for the internees. Throughout these explanations the teacher can further informally assess the students’ comprehension of the reading by asking questions such as: How was art a physical necessity for the internees? What types of objects were created as a result of physical necessity? How was art an emotional necessity? What types of objects were created as a result of emotional necessity?
 - Teacher will explain to the students that internment barracks were all but bare with the exception of cots and so people engaged in art to furnish their barracks and make them more livable. Internees who had young families especially strove to give their children a sense of normalcy. Objects made out of physical necessity were chairs, tables, dressers, shelves, and baby cribs. Later on after the initial move internees engaged in art as an emotional necessity to fill up their time and in order to feel productive. Some camps created art schools where Japanese internees who went to art school before relocation taught their fellow internees but in most cases artistic skill was self taught. Objects were most often made out of the natural materials surrounding the camp such as shells and wood. Objects made were paintings, sculpture, doll, brooches etc.

V. Artwork Analysis (20 minutes)

- Teacher will then ask students to take out their Art of Gaman Analysis packets and lead an interactive analysis of the artwork via the slides on the PowerPoint.
 - Teacher will pause at slide 8 to introduce the first piece of art: a pair of scissors, and a pair of pliers. After identifying what the object is and where it came from the teacher will ask the students these questions: In your opinion are these objects artwork? (answers will vary) What can these objects tell us about camp life?

(answers will vary) Do you think these objects fell under a physical or emotional necessity? (physical) These questions will prompt students to fill in their analysis packets.

- The teacher can explain that “Scissors, pliers, and tin snips were scarce in the camps, so many men melted down scrap metals-discarded saws, automobile springs, filings, butter knives, and the like-in the boiler furnace and hammered out their own tools. Worn-out triangular files were the most coveted scrap because they offered the advantage of being evenly tempered.” (*Art of Gaman*) Teacher will explain that these scissors and pliers can help to show us how sparse the camps were and how materials such as these were so rare that internees went about and created them.
- Teacher will pause at slide 9 to introduce the second piece of artwork: a set of four paintings. After identifying what the object is and where it came from the teacher will ask the students these questions: In your opinion are these objects artwork? (answers will vary) What can these objects tell us about camp life? (answers will vary) Do you think these objects fell under a physical or emotional necessity? (emotional) These questions will prompt students to fill in their analysis packets.
 - The teacher can explain that the artist “Suiko Mikami studied traditional brush painting, or sumi-e, in Japan before immigrating to Seattle in 1919. While interned in Tule Lake and later in Topaz, he painted the camp landscapes, depicting their desolate and lonely mood no matter the season. A characteristic of nearly all of the finished paintings made in the camps is the absence of human activity. The artists had a morbid fascination with their physical surroundings, which they painted repeatedly, but people, if pictured at all, were presented as insignificant, faceless figures. Only rough sketchbook drawings, usually done in pencil, crayon, or ink, depict scenes of daily camp life. Many of these drawings were treated in a humorous, cartoon-like manner, lest expressing a more serious point of view would incite WRA authorities.” (*Art of Gaman*) Teacher will explain that these paintings can be used as a primary source to show us how internees viewed the camps.
- Teacher will pause at slide 10 to introduce the third piece of artwork: a carved wooden snake. After identifying what the object is and where it came from the teacher will ask the students these questions: In your opinion are these objects artwork? (answers will vary) What can these objects tell us about camp life? (answers will vary) Do you think these objects fell under a physical or emotional necessity? (emotional) These questions will prompt students to fill in their analysis packets.
 - The teacher can explain that “The stringy fibers and gnarled forms of desert plants such as mesquite, sagebrush, and greasewood delighted those who sought to let nature create its own sculptures. Takizo Obata carved the head and tail rattle on this mesquite branch to help the viewer appreciate how the natural form of the mesquite resembled the pose of a rattlesnake. The branch was destined to become firewood until Obata rescued it from the woodpile.”

(*Art of Gaman*) Teacher will explain that this carving definitely falls under the emotional necessity and can be used to show us how internees used the natural materials surrounding them to create beautiful art.

- Teacher will pause at slide 11 to introduce the fourth piece of artwork: a Shamisen. After identifying what the object is and where it came from the teacher will ask the students these questions: In your opinion are these objects artwork? (answers will vary) What can these objects tell us about camp life? (answers will vary) Do you think these objects fell under a physical or emotional necessity? (emotional) These questions will prompt students to fill in their analysis packets.
 - The teacher can explain that “An unknown artist in Rohwer crafted this *shamisen*, a three-stringed Japanese musical instrument played with a pick.” (*Art of Gaman*) Teacher will explain that this instrument can show us that internees also used music to fill time and like art it became an emotional necessity and something to give their lives a sense of purpose and normalcy.

- Teacher will pause at slide 12 to introduce the fifth piece of artwork: a wooden chair. After identifying what the object is and where it came from the teacher will ask the students these questions: In your opinion are these objects artwork? (answers will vary) What can these objects tell us about camp life? (answers will vary) Do you think these objects fell under a physical or emotional necessity? (physical) These questions will prompt students to fill in their analysis packets.
 - The teacher can explain that “This chair was constructed completely out of short pieces of salvaged 2" x 4" lumber with the back brace portion split at an angle to create a more comfortable position for the sitter. After camp, Mits Kaida kept the chair he made in his living room as a conversation piece until he was coaxed into donating it to the Japanese American Museum of San Jose.” (*Art of Gaman*) Teacher will explain that often times people did not leave with the larger objects that they made in the camps which is why this object is such a treasure. The teacher will explain that this chair can help us to acknowledge that there was nothing in the camps and everything that the internees wanted in terms of furnishings were home made.

- Teacher will pause at slide 13 to introduce the sixth piece of artwork: two wooden dressers. After identifying what the object is and where it came from the teacher will ask the students these questions: In your opinion are these objects artwork? (answers will vary) What can these objects tell us about camp life? (answers will vary) Do you think these objects fell under a physical or emotional necessity? (physical) These questions will prompt students to fill in their analysis packets.
 - The teacher will explain that again these dressers like the chair represent the fact that the internees had to hand make everything they needed to make their barracks livable. Teacher will also point out that when internees were moved from temporary assembly centers to permanent relocation camps they often had to leave what ever they made for those barracks and start all over again once they got to the relocation camp. Often chairs and different kinds of seats were broken down to build crates and boxes to carry their belongings with them to the next camp.

VI. Reflection/Closure (3 minutes)

- Teacher will explain homework assignment to students.
 - Teacher will use the last slide of the PowerPoint to explain that for homework the students will be required to complete a one paged typed reflection to the following question: *What does the Art of Gaman reveal about the life and experiences of Japanese Americans within relocation and internment camps?*
 - Teacher will remind students that they should refer to the pieces of artwork discussed in class as examples and that their analysis packet will be useful in helping them write their reflections.

Assessments:

- Informal Assessments:
 - *Day 1: Teacher will informally assess the students at multiple points during the lesson – the quick write prediction discussion, the think-pair-share discussion, and the artwork analysis.*
- Formal Assessment:
 - *Day 1: Teacher will formally assess the typed reflection which will be turned in at the teacher's discretion.*

Connecticut Framework Performance Standards:

Connecticut Standard I: Content Knowledge – Knowledge and concepts from history and social studies is necessary to promote understanding of our nation and our world.

1.1 Demonstrate an understanding of significant events and themes in United States history.

Connecticut Standard II: Historical/Social Studies Literacy – Competence in literacy, inquiry and research skills is necessary to analyze, evaluate, and present history and social studies information.

2.3 Create various forms of written work to demonstrate an understanding of history and social studies issues.



2.4 Demonstrate an ability to participate in social studies discourse through informed discussion.

Connecticut Standard III: Application – Civic competence in addressing historical issues and current problems requires the use of information, skills and empathetic awareness.

3.1 Use evidence to identify, analyze and evaluate historical interpretations.

3.2 Analyze and evaluate human action in historical and/or contemporary contexts from alternative points of view.

The Art of Gaman Analysis Packet

Object	Description	Emotional or Physical Necessity	What can it tell us about camp life?
			
			





“Art in Adversity” Questions

1. Explain how art was a physical necessity and what kinds of objects were created out of this necessity.
2. Explain how art was an emotional necessity and what kinds of objects were created out of this necessity.
3. Why did the internees spend so much time furnishing their barracks?
4. Why did the WRA support the arts?
5. What did the internees use to create their art and how were these objects different in each camp?
6. How did internees use everyday items to make art and what did they use?
7. What happened to internment art when the camps closed?
8. Did the internees continue to pursue art after being released from the camps?

The Art of Gaman Reflection



Directions: Write a one page typed reflection that answers the following question:

What does the Art of Gaman reveal about the life and experiences of Japanese Americans within relocation and internment camps?

Be sure to refer to the pieces of artwork discussed in class as examples. Your analysis packet will be useful in helping to write your reflections.