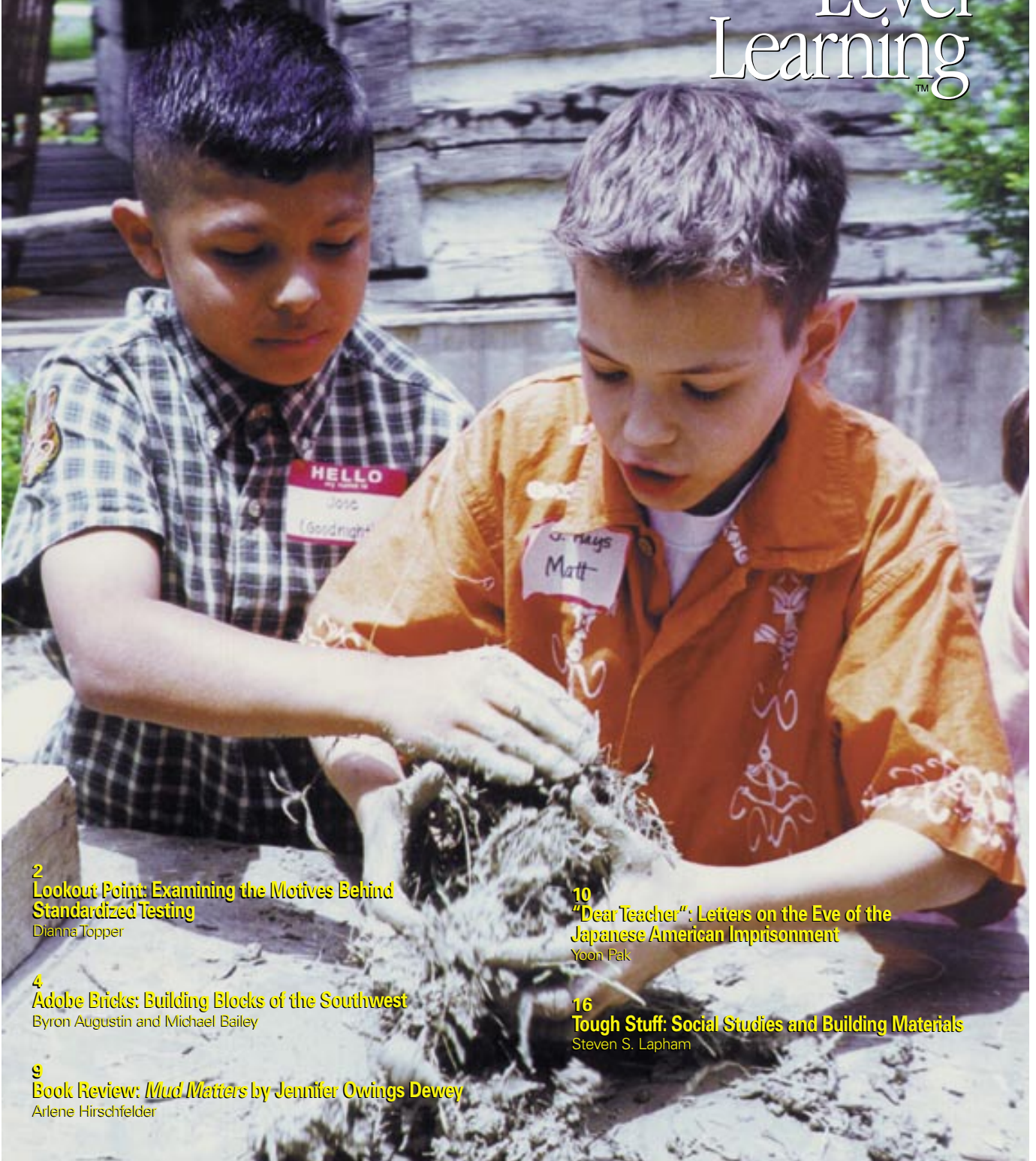




# Middle Level Learning™



**2**  
**Lookout Point: Examining the Motives Behind Standardized Testing**

Dianna Topper

**4**  
**Adobe Bricks: Building Blocks of the Southwest**

Byron Augustin and Michael Bailey

**9**  
**Book Review: *Mud Matters* by Jennifer Owings Dewey**

Arlene Hirschfelder

**10**  
**"Dear Teacher": Letters on the Eve of the Japanese American Imprisonment**

Yoon Pak

**16**  
**Tough Stuff: Social Studies and Building Materials**

Steven S. Lapham



# Lookout Point

## Examining the Motives Behind Standardized Tests

Dianna Topper

What is it that we are assessing when we give a standardized test to our students? What is such assessment for? I find myself pondering these questions more and more, as a parent and teacher. Unfortunately, the conclusion I'm reaching is that instead of promoting better schools, we may be sabotaging them.

Before dismissing my ideas as sour grapes from a frustrated teacher, let me share three stories with you.

- ▶ When I returned to college, intent on securing a teaching certificate, it had been many years since I had taken a standardized test. Even so, I wasn't too worried about passing the Michigan Teacher Competency Exam. My educational background (BA in history), though somewhat ancient, was solid enough. On the exam, a multiple choice question asked for "the cause" of the Civil War. I didn't know whether to laugh or cry. I could have made a credible argument, consisting of several pages, for each of the proffered answers. I found myself thinking not about the "correct" answer, or the question, or the war, but about which answer the test writers thought was "correct." My knowledge of history became meaningless.
- ▶ My son, a bright, likable young man, had always scored well on standardized tests. Then, in middle school, his scores slipped, putting him closer to average in a few areas. He joked about getting dumber as he got older, but the distress under the thin joke was real. During these years, he witnessed his father's lingering illness and death. Shortly thereafter, my son was ill, hospitalized, and had surgery. Unfortunately, published scores don't reveal that sort of background information. Even seasoned professionals have trouble understanding the vagaries of test scores, yet we are holding students and entire school districts hostage to these numbers.
- ▶ I was fortunate to teach an energetic, interested class of ninth graders in an enriched section of American History. Although most of these kids were extremely good students, they labored long and hard on their writing, working on the intricacies of essay tests. The work seemed to pay off when the students created responses showing thought and judg-

ment, sometimes beyond their years. Imagine my surprise when I gave an objective test and a majority of the students failed it. Through journal entries and discussions, it gradually became clear that students had over-analyzed the test. Far too often, I find students who can talk to me knowledgeably about course material, who then "lock-up" on a test. What they know becomes useless to them.

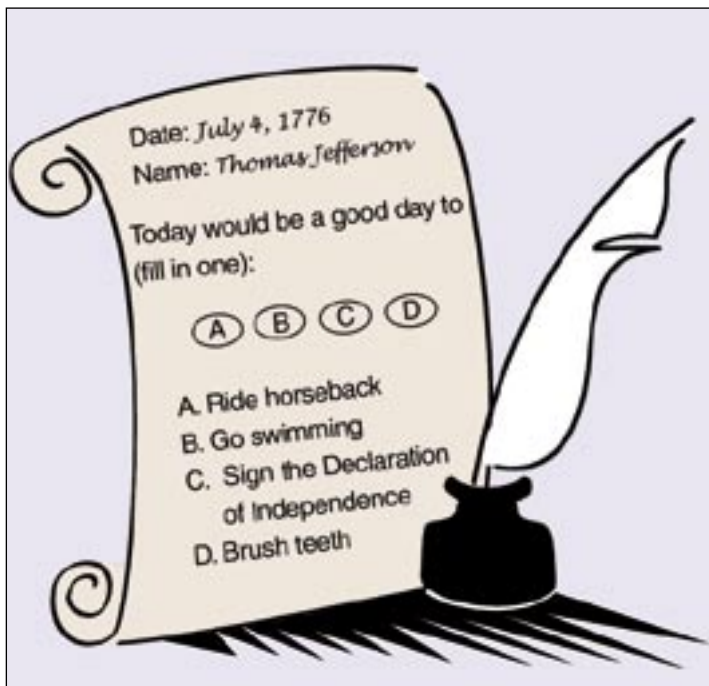
Educators, students, politicians, and most importantly, parents want to know how schools and students "measure up." Scores get posted in the newspapers, and success or failure is measured by those published numbers. I can hear some people asking, "What's wrong with that? Isn't that what school and life are all about? Competition! Winning!" Certainly that's the prevailing "wisdom," but competition also shows up the losers, and if the "losers" are young children, they learn to give up on themselves.

If assessment is about fostering excellence in students, teachers, and schools, then we should be evaluating what methods and materials seem the most successful and why.

There are a number of changes that might bring us closer to meaningful and useful standardized testing.

- ▶ First, testing and test preparation should be done sparingly. As a result of the current enthusiasm for testing, ever more time is taken away from classroom instruction. Since subject content is ostensibly what students are being tested on, this is an obvious contradiction. There should be a limit on instructional time lost to assessment.
- ▶ Second, all students should take the tests. Compelling reasons for a student to be excluded might be allowed, but parents should not have the option to exempt their child from a test. We are all in this together.
- ▶ Third, testing should be handled humanely. Students are forced to take too many tests in too short a time. Testing periods are unreasonably long. Research shows that students perform better when the test periods are not too long or too close together and if tests are administered in the afternoon and early evening, yet tests are often given first thing in the morning.





- ▶ Fourth, we need accurate reporting by the media. The way test scores are reported now is often meaningless. The number of special education students, non-native speakers of English, or homebound students might be expected to influence average scores, but these data are rarely included in reporting. In this age of mobility, one might look at how many schools a child has attended. For one elementary school I know of, about ninety percent of the scores could be flagged for that reason. Reporters should do more than list scores—they should help the public interpret them.
- ▶ Fifth, it is imperative that we make standardized testing diagnostic rather than punitive. A state threatening to cut off funds to schools failing to “make the cut” is akin to a doctor telling a patient, “If you don’t get better, I’m going to withhold all treatment!” A standardized test should not be a statewide “beauty” contest. We would all be better served if we examined the reasons why scores rise or fall and searched for ways to help all students be successful.
- ▶ Finally, there is a place for standardized tests, but they are not the defining tool for measuring education. A student should be able to think independently, reason critically, and solve higher-level problems—learning that cannot be measured with a bubblesheet.

From the White House to the town hall, politicians have their constituents in an uproar over test scores. Hardly a month goes by without an announcement of a plan for a new test or a draconian measure for schools whose students fail to “measure

up.” Some people in Michigan are attempting to tie school accreditation to the results of a single standardized test. All of this hysteria may get people elected, but it is helping to educate our youngsters? Or in the midst of all the sound and fury, did we forget what education was about?

I don’t pretend to speak for all teachers, but I will tell you what I’m observing from the front of my classroom. Children are generally adaptable, so once they understand the rules of a game, they look for shortcuts. That has begun to happen with my high school students, who say, “If the test is so all-important and ‘this’ isn’t on the test, then why do I have to know it?” “Forget this knowledge stuff; just spoon-feed me the facts and terminology.” While some students have always had this attitude, the trend is growing.

Do we really want the message of education to be that there is no intrinsic value to learning? If we don’t stop soon to examine the motives and methodology behind today’s testing mania, we’ll end up with citizens who can only solve problems if they are given four choices and a bubble sheet.

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Dianna Topper teaches social studies at Eastern High School in Lansing, Michigan. She has taught for seven years.



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Middle Level Learning,  
National Council for the Social Studies  
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# Adobe Bricks

## Building Blocks of the Southwest

Byron Augustin and Michael Bailey

Social studies teachers are eternally vigilant for new materials or teaching strategies that will assist them in reaching the educational goals of the district, the state, and the nation. They are required to be familiar with curriculum requirements and standards of their state, such as the TEKS (Texas Essential Knowledge and Skills for Social Studies)<sup>1</sup>; various discipline standards (such as the five themes of geography)<sup>2</sup>; and the social studies standards published by the National Council for the Social Studies (with its ten strands).<sup>3</sup> Teachers are on the lookout for lessons that will improve skills and content knowledge while, at the same time, providing some hands-on excitement.

This article describes a lesson that draws upon the rich historical, geographical, and cultural characteristics of the adobe

brick as a building material. The first section of this article provides a brief historical background on adobe building materials and their special meaning for Texas and the Southwest. The second section presents a detailed lesson plan on the craft of adobe brick making. This activity has been used for several years at Omar Bradley Middle School in San Antonio, with outstanding success.

The lesson could be used in the sixth or eighth grade, but it is perfect for seventh grade units of study in history and geography, where it could be part of a larger lesson on Native Americans, Spanish colonial rule, or the early Catholic missions in the Southwest.

### Early History

Throughout history, humans have constructed shelter from the material that is most available to them. In arctic regions, that material might be ice. In the world's forested areas, wood is a common building material. One of the most common materials used to build houses is adobe brick. Composed of soil materials including sand, silt, and clay mixed with water and organic matter or grass, earthen structures can be found on every continent except Antarctica. They are located in the most remote corners of Afghanistan, the searing deserts of North Africa and the Arabian Peninsula, the densely populated valley of Central Mexico, the Altiplano of Bolivia, and our own desert Southwest. Because soil materials are relatively ubiquitous, it is not surprising that an estimated one-third of the world's inhabitants live in earthen structures.<sup>4</sup>

Building with adobe is an "environmentally friendly" process. Adobe requires

very little exploitation of natural resources, and when adobe structures are abandoned, they weather back into their natural components. As a result, building with adobe has a limited effect on the environment.

For centuries, builders who have used adobe have had a conscious awareness of the Earth and its elements, creating structures that maximize adobe's assets and minimize its liabilities with respect to the setting. In cool or cold climates, structures were designed with windows, doors, and courtyards facing the sun to capture the light and heat energy during the winter months.<sup>5</sup> In North Africa and Arabia, tiny windows and small doors reduce the entry of dust and sand carried by vicious desert winds as well as keep out the heat. In central Africa, thick mud walls in huts help maintain cool interior temperatures, while outside the summer temperature may climb above 120° Fahrenheit.<sup>6</sup>

### Spanish Influence

Although the Precolumbian Indians of Mexico used adobe in building for centuries, it was the Spanish who would spread its use throughout the Southwest. Early Pueblo Indians of the Southwest, the Anasazi, built homes using a puddling method; they built walls by placing handfuls of wet adobe in a mound, letting it dry, then adding on another layer, as opposed to making and stacking bricks. The Spanish introduction of adobe bricks revolutionized construction and resulted in an aesthetically pleasing mixture of Spanish and Indian styles.

Spanish architectural styles were strongly influenced by the Moors of northwest Africa. The Moorish-Islamic Empire spread to Spain in 711 A.D. and had a remarkable influence on Andalusia until Grenada fell in 1492. Moorish styles and techniques of construction followed the conquistadors to the New World.<sup>7</sup> The word

“adobe” comes from the Spanish language, but was derived from the Arabic words *at-tub* and *tobe*, both of which mean brick.<sup>8</sup>

Many of early Spanish American buildings are still in use, including several missions in the El Paso area. The Socorro and San Ysleta Missions have massive adobe walls and are the oldest missions in Texas. While floods and fires have taken their toll on the missions, they have been rebuilt from local adobe material.<sup>9</sup> The San Ysleta Mission rectory, also constructed from adobe, is one of the oldest buildings in El Paso County.<sup>10</sup>

The Palace of the Governors in Santa Fe, New Mexico, was built with adobe between 1608 and 1610. It still stands as the oldest continuously occupied public building in America. This historic building has withstood many conflicts, first between Native Americans and the Spanish. The building was occupied by Mexican troops in 1821 and Confederate troops during the Civil War. In 1909, the Palace of the Governors was dedicated as a museum for the purpose of displaying the rich cultural diversity of the Southwest.<sup>11</sup>

### Brick by Brick

Building with adobe was labor intensive. The traditional size of adobe blocks in the Southwest is four inches thick, with outside dimensions of ten inches by sixteen inches. Such a brick weighs twenty-five to thirty pounds. To insure stability, a wall should

not be more than eight times taller than it is thick (as a general rule). Imagine the labor necessary to make, carry, lift, and set the two- to six-thousand blocks needed to build a typical house.<sup>12</sup>

After the blocks were set and mortared with mud, the exterior surface was usually finished by hand with a smooth stucco face. The stucco prevented moisture from entering the joints between the bricks and extended the life of the building. In the Southwest, some women were well respected for their skill in applying the stucco surface. These craftswomen were called *enjaradoras* (plasterers).



### Adobe Today

As a building material, adobe has many favorable properties. Adobe is

- ▶ *Inexpensive.* Building material is readily available at low cost to families of modest income living in arid climates around the globe.
- ▶ *Durable.* Adobe buildings are strong and weather well in arid and semi-arid environments.
- ▶ *Fire resistant.* The bricks or blocks are very resistant to flame.
- ▶ *Heat insulating.* The walls maintain

comfortable temperatures, saving on both heating and cooling.

- ▶ *Noise insulating.* The thick walls reduce outside noise and provide excellent interior acoustics.
- ▶ *Environmentally gentle.* The making of adobe has a minimum impact on the natural environment. Solar energy is used to harden the bricks. If an old structure is demolished, the adobe can be recycled back into the earth.
- ▶ *Easy to use.* Making adobe bricks and assembling a one-family house can be a low-tech operation. Also, adobe is said to be “forgiving of mistakes:” If an

adobe brick is inferior, it can be destroyed, the material remixed, and a new brick formed. Try that with vinyl siding!

▶ *Beautiful.* Award-winning modern homes have been built with adobe bricks in Mexico and the Southwestern United States. These homes harmonize with their natural surrounding.

Despite these benefits, a prejudice

against earthen buildings persists, which may be the result of misplaced worry over their durability: well-made adobe dwellings do not wash away in the rain; they are quite stable. People may dismiss adobe because the raw materials are so common and inexpensive.<sup>13</sup> On the other hand, adobe remains a building material of preference in many parts of the world because of its many good points. Adobe has a solid history, and probably a lively future as well. *Viva adobe!*

# Teaching History with Adobe Bricks:

## A Lesson Plan and Hands-on Project

### Purpose

To engage students in a hands-on activity in which they create adobe bricks similar to those used by early residents of Texas and the Southwest in the construction of early houses and missions. This activity can reinforce lessons on the history, geography, and anthropology of the Southwest.

### Specific Objectives

When the students finish this project, they will:

1. Comprehend the history of adobe bricks and their use in Texan and Southwestern architecture (NCSS Standard ❶ **CULTURE**. Adobe is characteristic of Southwestern culture. See also Standard ❷ **TIME, CONTINUITY, AND CHANGE**. Adobe is part of the human record and landscape.)
2. Appreciate the positive qualities of adobe bricks as a building material in arid climates. (NCSS Standard ❸ **SCIENCE, TECHNOLOGY, AND SOCIETY**. Adobe stacks up well to properties of interest to builders and architects.)
3. Understand, from personal experience, the process of mixing

specific proportions of raw materials to create a sturdy adobe brick. (NCSS Standard ❹ **INDIVIDUAL DEVELOPMENT AND IDENTITY**. How we mold the earth in our hands is a part of who we are.)

4. Realize the amount of work (time and effort) needed to build one adobe structure. (NCSS Standard ❶ **CULTURE**. Creating one's own shelter takes some sweat.)
5. Gain an awareness of how people can use the materials that nature provides to answer their basic needs. (NCSS Standard ❸ **PRODUCTION, DISTRIBUTION, AND SOCIETY**: Using adobe makes economic sense in many places around the world.)

### Parental Notification

Several days before conducting the adobe brick building activity, a letter printed on official school stationery should be sent to all parents explaining the procedures in which their children will participate. Students should wear "rough" clothes that will not be ruined if they get stained by mud.

### Materials

The quantities suggested below are adequate for one class of twenty four students (gathered into six groups of four people) to make six to ten bricks.

- caliche, 15 gallons (see note 1)
- dirt or organic matter, 15 gallons (see note 2)
- hay, 1 bale
- plastic gallon milk jugs, 6
- wooden forms (built from 2" x 4" lumber), 6
- wax paper, 1 roll
- plastic or putty knives, 6
- large plastic bags - Six Hefty Scrap Bags are recommended (6½" x 5½" x 11")

- sturdy folding tables, 6 (optional)
- accessible water source with a hose
- soap and paper towels
- bottle of hand lotion, 1 (optional)
- garbage can, 1 or 2

Note 1: Caliche has a high clay content that serves as the adhesive for the adobe brick. Possible sources of caliche include building supply companies, state and county road department offices, Soil Conservation Offices, and County Extension Agents.

Note 2: Top soil, peat, or weathered organic matter from a compost pile will all meet the requirements of the project. Most of these are readily available at garden supply stores or large discount stores.

### Brick Making Procedures

Plan to assemble the students in teams, four students to a team. Each team will need a work station for making adobe bricks. All can share one water hose for filling the jugs and cleaning up after mixing the brick materials.

1. Before conducting the activity, build wooden frames from common lumber, one frame for each workstation (figure 1). The frames will be filled with wet adobe to make bricks. Be sure to build the frame so that the inside dimensions are 8 X 10 inches. An additional 3 inches of wood on each corner of the long side of the form serves as handles for removing the frame after the adobe has set. The frames will be filled with the adobe to make bricks.

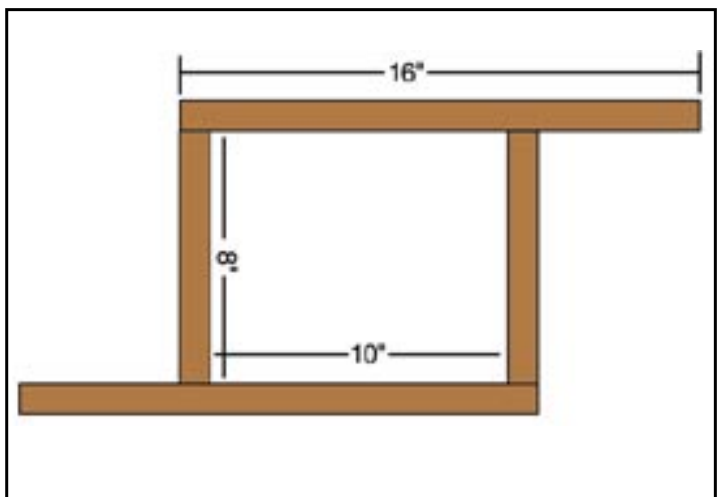


Figure 1



2. A day or two before the planned activity, bring the caliche and black dirt or organic matter to the site. Cover these materials with a sheet of plastic to prevent them from getting wet.
3. In a class period preceding the activity, teach a lesson that includes historical information about adobe brick-building and why adobe is a useful material. Class discussions should center on what adobe is, how it is made, and how it was used by early residents of Texas and the Southwest. Some teachers may prefer to demonstrate brick making in the classroom (with a small amount of material) on the day preceding the group project.
4. On the day of the activity, before the first class, set up work stations outside on concrete or asphalt surfaces such as a sidewalk or on folding tables. Place at each workstation:
  - a rectangular wooden form,
  - a sheet of wax paper that extends beyond the sides of the form,
  - two large plastic bags,
  - a plastic knife or putty knife,
  - one-gallon plastic water jug, and



three or four handfuls of hay (prairie hay or natural grasses work best).

5. Assemble the students in front of the work stations, remind them of the rules associated with the activity, and talk through or demonstrate the procedures for making an adobe brick, as follows.
6. The first two students in each team go to the caliche pile and fill their plastic bag approximately two-thirds full with caliche and return to the work station. The other two students go to the dirt or organic matter pile and return with a plastic bag two-thirds full of dirt or organic matter.
7. Now the mixing can begin! The first two students thoroughly hand-mix the caliche and dirt (in equal portions) on a flat surface. Then they slowly begin to add water to the mixture. Stress that the water should be added slowly! Water can always be added to the mix, but it can't be taken out.
8. After the first two ingredients are mixed, the other two students mix in the hay, making sure that the stems are not too long and that an excess amount of hay is not added. Water may need to be added slowly to acquire the desired texture and consistency. Students should err on the dry side. To check the consistency, the students should shape a baseball-size patty from the

## Seventh Grade Docents, Fourth Grade Visitors

My co-author, Mike Bailey, has developed a project known throughout San Antonio as the Texas History Educational Facility. Constructed by volunteers over several years on the campus of Omar Bradley Middle School, it now includes a barn, teepee, chuck wagon, windmill, and authentic log cabin.

The cabin was originally constructed from logs cut in 1820, near Mill Springs, Kentucky. During the Civil War, the cabin survived the famous Mill Springs battle, which raged just a few hundred yards from the front door. The cabin was moved to Fredericksburg, Texas, in 1998 and purchased a short time later by Bradley Middle School.

Each spring, the cabin becomes the focus for an educational experience for area school children. Fourth grade students from the North East Independent School District, as well as students from surrounding districts, are bussed to the facility for a full day of hands-on activities like making adobe bricks. Seventh grade students from Bradley Middle School serve as docents for the fourth grade students. Since the Texas curriculum requires that Texas history be taught in the fourth and seventh grade, both groups of students are rewarded with a rich educational experience. In the spring of 2001, approximately 2,500 students participated in this living example of how people adapted to their physical environment on the Texas prairie.<sup>14</sup>



# 101 Adobe Schools

Over one hundred new adobe schoolhouses have been completed in Southern Honduras under a program directed by the Honduran Department of Education.

Christopher Columbus established the port city of Trujillo, on the north coast of Honduras, in 1504. Adobe was probably a common building technique by the time Tegucigalpa was founded in the 1580s. Builders are turning again to the use of adobe for several reasons. First, the Honduran population is growing faster than the economy. People cannot afford red brick or concrete block. Second, lumber prices have risen sharply—beyond the reach of many pocketbooks. An effort is underway to preserve the existing four varieties of Honduran pine, severely cut in some areas. Third, there is growing awareness of the native building arts, and adobe in particular, as a value in eco-tourism. Recently, some Honduran architects have welcomed the opportunity for expression that draws on native sources, while practicing conservation.

The School Building Project began in 1990, after it was discovered that adobe walls were being constructed at 60% of the cost of concrete block or red brick walls. Teachers also reported cooler interior temperatures during hot spells (4° celsius cooler on average), better sound quality, and better class performance, as compared with existing concrete block schoolhouses.

The U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID) provided educational seminars, machinery, and management for the project. The story of these school houses and how the Honduran community organized to build them is worth a close look.

*Reprinted by permission from an article by Joe Tibbets in Adobe Builder Magazine, issue 2, spring 1997. See a longer abstract on the web, and other resources, at [www.adobebuilder.com](http://www.adobebuilder.com).*

material, hold it waist high and let it drop to the concrete.

**Splat!** If adobe splatters everywhere, the mixture is too wet. Add more caliche and dirt.

**Crack!** If the material breaks apart into pieces, the mixture is too dry. Add a little more water.

**Thump!** If the patty stays together and makes a nice solid “thump” as it hits the concrete, it is ready to shape into an adobe brick.

9. Students spread out the sheet of wax paper and place the form on top. The wax paper should extend beyond the outside margins of the form, so that the brick will not stick to the concrete. They place the adobe mixture in the form and pack it tightly with their hands to force out all of the air pockets. The mixture should fill the form either to the top or very near the top.
10. Let the adobe set for 10 to 15 minutes. During this time the students should go to the hose and wash their hands with soap and water. Make sure the paper towels are near the washing site with a receptacle for trash. Because caliche absorbs moisture, the students' hands will be very dry and they should apply some hand lotion.
11. The adobe brick should now be ready to remove from the form. The students take the plastic knife or putty knife and cut around the interior edges of the form, loosening the brick from the form in the same way that a cake is freed from a baking pan. When they take the form by the handles and lift it from the brick, they will be viewing their very own adobe brick. They will only have to make 3,000 to 6,000 more to construct a modest house. (If each member of the team wants a piece of the brick, it should be cut into segments before removing the form from the brick.)
12. The bricks, of whatever size, should be left to dry in the sun for several days and covered with a plastic sheet if rain is forecast. The entire brick-making process should not require more than 40 to 50 minutes, or an average class period. Happy adobe brick making!





## Notes

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10. Robert R. Rafferty, *Texas* (Austin, TX: Texas Monthly Press, 1989), 904.
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13. Paul Aller and Doris Aller, *Build Your Own Adobe* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1946), 1.
14. The authors would like to thank Bill Boyd, principal of Omar Bradley Middle School, who provided the administrative support for the Mill Springs Cabin Project. A version of this article appeared in the journal of the Texas Council for the Social Studies, *The Social Studies Texan* (Summer, 1999): 72-75.

Michael Bailey is a seventh grade Texas History teacher at Omar Bradley Middle School in San Antonio. He was named an outstanding teacher at Bradley and was the state's History Teacher of the Year in 2000. Byron Augustin is a professor in the Department of Geography at Southwest Texas State University in San Marcos. He is a recipient of the Distinguished Teaching Achievement Award given by the National Council for Geographic Education.

COVER and article photos by Rebecca A. Augustin.  
Photo page 8 top by Byron Augustin.

## MUD MATTERS: STORIES FROM A MUD LOVER

Written and Illustrated by Jennifer Owings Dewey, photographs by Stephen Trimble  
New York: Marshall Cavendish, 1998. 72 pp. \$15.95 hardback.

### Reviewed by Arlene Hirschfelder

This delightful memoir tells of the author's lifelong love affair with "mud, glorious mud." Dewey takes readers on many childhood adventures (some quite risky) that included testing the sucking power of a quicksand hole, searching for "primordial ooze," digging for fossilized bones, making a *horno* (mud oven) by trial and error, exploring mud for animal tracks, building miniature mud villages (and watching them destroyed by flood waters), and inventing mud games with playmates. Dewey's evocative language ("Mud sparkled and shone if it contained mica.... There was slick, smooth mud, like satin, and pebbled mud with grit in it") is matched by dramatic full-color photographs of mud landscapes in Arizona, Colorado, Nevada, and Utah. A glossary of "Mud Words and Plants" and "Animals Named After Mud" enrich this personal story.

Although most of this book offers accurate descriptions about the properties of mud, Dewey missteps when she discusses the ritual use of mud in Zuni ceremonies. She refers to Mudheads "doing some childish dance" and writes they "stood quietly, obediently, like children waiting for permission to leave the playground." Comparing Indian people to children can reinforce Indian stereo-

types among young readers who have little if any knowledge about Indian people, much less their sacred clowns.

Dewey's need to question Pueblo people about Mudheads and Mudslinging sends the wrong message to non-Indian readers. While asking questions is a desirable practice in the social studies classroom, it's not acceptable behavior during an Indian religious ceremony (and may not be welcomed afterwards). Indeed, many Indian religious practitioners resent discussions about the specifics of their spiritual traditions, which they consider private and sacred. Native children are not encouraged to ask questions in spiritual settings, but rather to listen and observe. Unless a guide has invited them to raise questions, non-Indians should do the same.



Arlene Hirschfelder is the author of eighteen nonfiction books about Native Americans, including *Native Americans Today: Resources and Activities for Educators in Grades 4-8* (Englewood, CO: Teacher Ideas Press, 2000). She worked at the Association on American Indian Affairs for over 20 years.

# “Dear Teacher”

## Letters on the Eve of the Japanese American Imprisonment

Yoon K. Pak

March 24, 1942

Dear Miss Evanson,  
Because of this situation, we are asked to leave this dear city of Seattle and its surroundings. I am sure I will miss my teachers and Mr. Sears. There was never a school like Washington School and I sure will miss it. As for me, the one I will miss the most will be you. You have been very patient and kind throughout my work. If the school I will attend next would have a teacher like you I will be only too glad. When I am on my way my memories will flow back to the time I was attending this school and the assemblies that were held in the hall. Wherever I go I will be a loyal American.

Love, Emiko

### Introduction

On February 19, 1942, President Franklin D. Roosevelt signed Executive Order 9066, calling for the imprisonment of people of Japanese descent living on the west coast of the United States. A significant source of primary documents on the events that followed this order is a collection of classroom compositions written by seventh and eighth grade *Nisei* (pronounced “nee-say”), the children of Japanese immigrants in Seattle, Washington.<sup>1</sup>

Emiko, the author of the letter above, was a seventh-grade student in Ella Evanson’s homeroom class at Washington School in Seattle. Writing to her teacher in response to Executive Order 9066, she attempted to make sense of the dissonance between the pledge of “freedom and justice for all” and the experience of being treated as an “enemy alien.” Emiko was born in the United States. She was an American citizen.

In 1940 and 1941, as hostilities grew between the nations of Europe and Asia, some Americans of European background accused Japanese Americans living on the west coast of the United States of being allied with Japan. People said and wrote (in newspaper articles, for example) that *Issei* (pronounced “ee-say”), first generation

immigrants, were a threat to U.S. national security. Such fallacious allegations (and subsequent acts of intolerance against Japanese Americans) increased after Japan bombed Pearl Harbor on December 7, 1941.

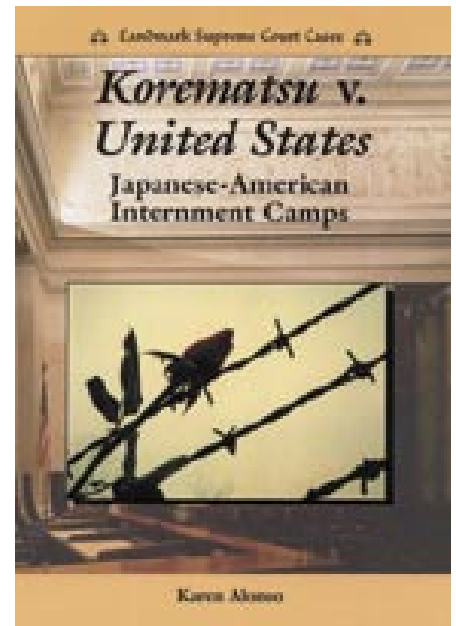
Washington School, a public school, bordered the multiracial “Central District” of Seattle, near a Jewish Settlement House, and served students of different ethnic backgrounds. Significant ethnic minorities in the school population included Eastern and Southern European Jews, Asians, African Americans, and Latinos.

While Seattle Public Schools promoted racial tolerance through its citizenship education curricula, its democratic principles were put to the test in 1941. Public schools, in the end, could not shield their students from wartime hysteria. But the principal and teachers of Washington school did give their Japanese American students an opportunity to write about their feelings and their experiences at this crucial moment – and thus to speak to their teachers, their peers, and future generations of Americans.

### Teaching Tolerance

Arthur Sears, the principal of Washington School, emphasized the teaching of democratic citizenship and tolerance during his tenure. In a 1937 article for the *Seattle Educational Bulletin*, he described how he encouraged students to write letters inviting their parents to the school’s open house.<sup>2</sup> He told students to write in English and also in the language of their immigrant parents – Spanish, Hebrew, Japanese, or Chinese.

“I use this device not only to get the message over to the parents, but also to dignify the parental background. Too often I have seen tragedies among the second generations. They feel frequently that they have reason to be ashamed of their parents when they can neither read nor write the English language. I believe we produce better Americans from the foreign-born if we dignify their background, and while they should love America more, they should not



Enslow

lose their love of the land of their ancestry.”

Mr. Sears understood the importance of preserving one’s ethnic heritage. He believed that total assimilation, at the cost of forsaking one’s ethnicity, created a rift not only between parents and their children, but also within the children themselves. A careful balance between one’s past and present identities was the mark of a successful entrée into the American way of life. Sears taught this lesson in various ways until his retirement in 1942.

### Assembly, December 8, 1941

The first set of documents (See Handout: Part I) consists of an assignment that was given by Miss Ella Evanson to her homeroom students. She asked them to write about a school-wide assembly held the day after Japan bombed Pearl Harbor. At the assembly, the principal read a student’s poem about racial tolerance. Unfortunately, we have not found the poem.

The ideas of “race” and physical differences, and how these fit within the concept of citizenship, were central in the minds of *Nisei* students. The students’ interpretations of race is evident in their use of the words “different color face or skin” or “mixed nationalities.” In that regard, citizenship

meant accepting individuals from various ethnic backgrounds with different physical characteristics. Race as a social and cultural construct permeated scientific communities and popular culture, and it created an artificial hierarchy of social order (that arguably lingers to the present). For Sears to emphasize the idea of equality of the races at this moment came as a welcome message to Nisei students.

### Imprisonment, March 1942

Sadly, Mr. Sears' call for racial tolerance in the school was not heeded by the larger community. In a second set of letters dated March 1942, students wrote farewell messages to Miss Evanson in response to Executive Order 9066. In these letters, Nisei students expressed how they would remain loyal to the United States despite the government's view that they were not to be trusted, despite the looming imprisonment.

The Nisei farewell letters (See Handout: Part II) reveal young Americans grappling with conflicting messages about citizenship and exclusion, tolerance and prejudice, loyalty and distrust, and democracy and totalitarianism. They are reflections of lost innocence. Nisei were suddenly thrust into a situation where their ethnic identity became the only test of their loyalty to the nation. The United States government, which was going to war "to preserve democracy" overseas, was enforcing a policy of racism at home.

The Nisei students made it clear that they were American born and distinguished themselves from the Japanese in Japan, with one student, James, even using the pejorative term "Japs." Unfortunately, any reference to one's Japanese heritage was deemed to be a sign of disloyalty by the government. In that regard, James purposely distinguished himself as a loyal American. At the same time, however, the students acknowledged that they looked like the "enemy" and that their evacuation was taking place because of their ethnicity.

One of the cultural values Japanese immigrant, or Issei, parents instilled in their children was a sense of loyalty to their country, the United States. They also taught their children to follow voices of authority to a large degree. But now government authorities were doing something wrong. For the Nisei students of Washington School, writing about their immediate anxieties

afforded a limited opportunity to wrestle with this dissonance. They believed that the government would take care of them (for example, by providing "some good school") because they were citizens, after all. But the government was not respecting their basic constitutional rights.

The students expressed uncertainty at what the future would hold and sadness at having to leave their home. This uprooting of young people from their birthplace created extreme anxiety. Perhaps the opportunity to express some of the chaos, fear, and disappointment in their letters helped some of the students survive the trauma. Clearly, they appreciated the guidance and empathy given by their teacher.

### A Paradox or Two

*Shikata ga nai.* It cannot be helped. Japanese Americans living on the west coast used this traditional phrase to express the paradox of forced imprisonment.<sup>3</sup> Loyalty toward the United States could only be shown by acquiescing to an unjust "evacuation" order. The only loyal thing to do was to obey a law that assumed one's disloyalty. It was a "Catch-22." So Japanese Americans obeyed the order to leave their homes. What else could be done? General public protests against the imprisonment orders were scant. The few voices of dissent came from the American Civil Liberties Union and Quaker activists in Seattle.<sup>4</sup> Some Nisei (old enough to be drafted into the military) who actively resisted the unconstitutionality of the imprisonment were sent to federal prisons (see side bar on page 15).

In contrast to the experience of Nisei on the west coast, there was no mass imprisonment of Japanese Americans in Hawaii, which was then a U.S. territory, and no record of disloyalty among that population during the war. This is just further evidence that Japanese Americans in Seattle posed no real security risk to the United States. President Roosevelt, who was aware of this discrepancy, could have pointed it out to Americans living on the west coast, confronting racial hysteria openly in one of his radio addresses to the nation. Instead, he acquiesced to anti-Japanese prejudices and quietly signed Executive Order 9066.

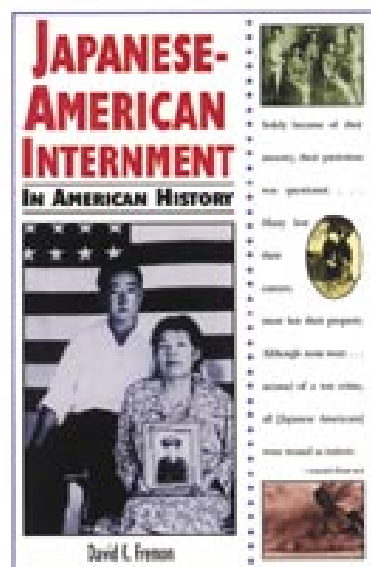
### Chaos and Loss

Many Nisei suddenly faced chaotic home lives. Many fathers were arrested by the FBI

and interned in Fort Missoula, Montana. Mothers were left to resolve the final details of their removal from Seattle. Most of their belongings had to be sold. Family memorabilia were either burned by the FBI or were sold below value. Families were moved by train to prison camps in desolate areas in Arizona, Arkansas, California, Colorado, Idaho, Utah, and Wyoming. From 1942 to 1946 Japanese Americans lived in makeshift barracks with the ever-present dust storms and machine guns pointed at them. They lived a regimented life structured around a bugle reveille signaling when they should wake up, eat, and sleep.

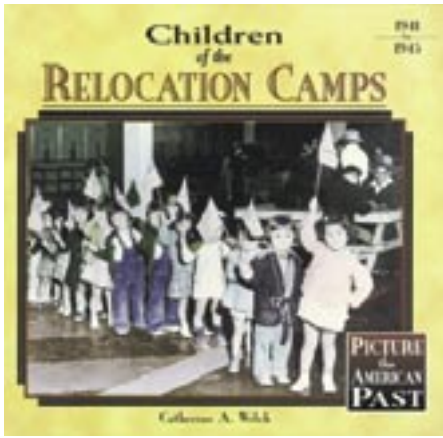
Despite this treatment, Japanese Americans survived for three years behind barbed wire fences, a testament to their faith in democracy. The U.S. Army recruited Japanese American soldiers from the imprisonment camps, and these young men fought with distinction in Europe.

When teachers and parents began forming schools, they had to work from scratch. There were no chairs, desks, blackboards, or heat stoves. Classes were overcrowded; there might be fifty children to a room. But the Army gradually provided some materials for classrooms and for recreational activities like baseball, Boy Scouts, and Girl Scouts. Families and schools planted "Victory Gardens" to help supply food. Adults tried to remain hopeful and keep spirits up, but bullying and vandalism—which had seldom troubled the Japanese American community before—became a problem. Still, thousands of students graduated from high school while living in the camps.



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### Personal Justice, 1988

In the 1970s, *Nisei* and *Sansei* (second and third generation Japanese Americans) spearheaded the Redress Movement, seeking personal justice for every Japanese American imprisoned during World War II. They asked for personal justice in the form of an apology from the United States and monetary compensation for individuals. They reminded the general public that, in 1942, American citizens were denied due process of law, that the forced imprisonment of innocent civilians was a serious breach of the democratic principles that

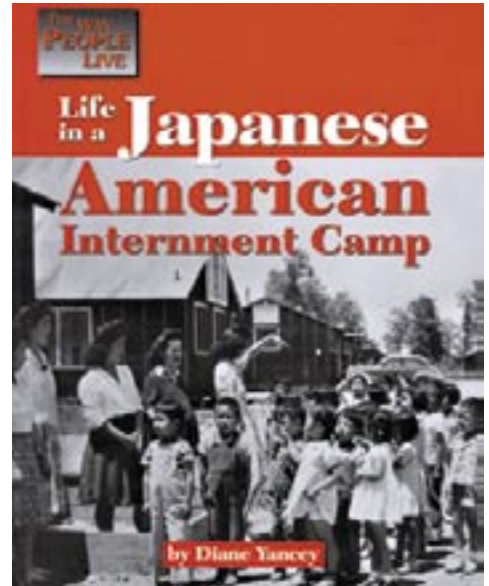
we all learn in school. Congress appointed a Commission on Wartime Relocation and Internment of Civilians to investigate the charges. As a result, in 1988, President Ronald Reagan signed a new law, the Civil Liberties Act, which acknowledged the findings of the commission that the imprisonment of Japanese Americans was motivated largely by racial prejudice and wartime hysteria, and represented a failure of political leadership.

### More Than a Footnote

The imprisonment of Japanese Americans might best be understood not as an odd, wartime event, but as the result of an attitude of intolerance that had been developing over decades – as revealed by immigration restrictions and anti-Asian sentiments along the west coast of the United States beginning in the late 1800s.<sup>5</sup>

By studying these student compositions of 1941-42, we place the experience of *Nisei* youth at the front of a defining moment in American history. Japanese Americans did not loudly protest this unjust imprisonment, and yet they were not entirely silent either. *Nisei* spoke to their

fellow citizens in writing (as these student letters show), through protest against curfew orders and the military draft (resulting in challenges in court), through military service (as Japanese American soldiers fighting in Europe), and finally in a petition to the federal courts and the Congress of the United States—leading to the Civil Liberties Act of 1988. These student letters are not a footnote to American history, they are part of the main text.



## SUGGESTIONS FOR A LESSON

After students have learned some background about the coming of World War II, break up the class into groups of four or five students and then distribute the Handout, which presents the writing of some Japanese American seventh and eighth grade students from 1941 and 1942. Direct the groups to read Part I of the Handout and then discuss among themselves, for about ten minutes, the following questions. Announce that you will be calling on a student from each group to stand up and summarize their group's discussion.

- ▶ What was the main theme, the main idea, of the school assembly that the students attended on the morning of Monday December 8, 1941?
- ▶ What did the students think and feel about this theme?
- ▶ What did the students think and feel about their country, the United States of America?

Ask a representative from each group to state his or her opinion on just one of the questions (for a total of five or six oral statements). There is no absolutely "correct" or "incorrect" answer to these questions. The purpose is to help the students imagine what they might have thought and felt living through such an experience

and to challenge students to draw information from primary source documents.

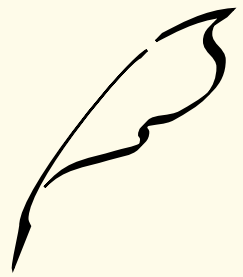
Direct the groups to read Part II of the Handout and then discuss among themselves, for about ten minutes, the following questions.

- ▶ Do these writing samples seem to be a class assignment, or are they personal letters?
- ▶ How do the students feel about their teacher and their school?
- ▶ Why would James, a Japanese American boy, refer to citizens of the nation of Japan as "Japs?" which is considered to be an impolite, insulting term?
- ▶ At this point, what did the students think and feel about their country, the United States of America, and their fellow citizens?

Ask a representative from each group to state his or her opinion on just one of these four questions.

Finally, provide students with historical detail concerning the imprisonment of Japanese Americans, either as a lesson or by assigned reading with the use of the resources listed above. End the lesson by describing the Civil Liberties Act of 1988, and how it came to be.

# Handout: Part I



**Monday December 8, 1941**

*Middle school students wrote these compositions upon returning to class after a school-wide assembly. It was the day after Pearl Harbor was bombed. These students were American citizens, of Japanese descent. They attended Washington School in the city of Seattle, in the state of Washington. Mr. Sears was the principal. The occasional spelling errors in these compositions have been left uncorrected, so that you can see exactly what the students wrote.*

In this morning assembly Mr. Sears experimented about having the morning assembly in the second period and next week it would be the third period because we always miss the first period class.

He spoke to us about not hating each other first because we have mixed nationalities in this school. But instead cooperate with each other and think of other people as our neighbors.

He also told us a story about a German boy and a Italian boy being a good American Citizens and even if their country is in war they are very good friends.

Mr. Sears read us a poem copied from a bulletin that a boy from Miss Fitzgerald's room [wrote]. Then he mentioned about the paper drive. After he was through with his speech we sang America from the bottom of our hearts and we also saluted the flag.

Katsu

Today Mr. Sears talked to us about tolerance. As we know tolerance means to be friendly to other in any way.

When war broke out in the Far East situation yesterday some citizen of this country were intolerance. The people who are intolerant do not think before they speak.

Every person should be tolerant to different nationality [even] if they have enemies.

Keisoo

The morning assembly was good for it tells to be good friends or neighbors wither our skin are different. That skin does not count by shelf but our spirit for helping people and cleaned heart count more for America and honesty too counts more for defending and best of all is love one another. We are all brothers and sisters even our parents and teachers but they are sent to take care of us and to give us more education and to become a better boy and girl.

The poem was good also and that all make to become American.

I wish sometimes if there were no war or evil thing, that do now happen were stop we should be friendly with country more and more until the end of the world than people would be like neighbor, no war, no unclean heart, but all clean and cheerful voice in this world.

Fumiko

In our first assembly, Mr. Sears our principal spoke on the freindly attitude toward the pacific crisis. He said, "We are all American's and we here at Washington want no part of race hated. We are all under the same roof."

In the short time he spoke he accomplish very much. He spoke of 23 years ago, of how he work in the naturalazion dept., and of two gents, one a Italian and a German who at the same time as Germans were fighting Italians were still good neighbors and good americans. We should now be that way here at Washington school.

Maurice

In assembly this morning Mr. Sears told us about being intolerant he said that now because of the war different races might fight with each other and say that they started the war. He said that no matter what race or color you are that you are all American citizens and that even if your parent came from country that are fighting aganest us that we had nothing to do with it.

Mr. Sears also read a poem that a boy in our school made up it was very patreotic and expressed the feeling that and imagrant might have coming to America.

Mr. Sears said that people said to him that they thought he would have trouble with the children of Washington School because of the many different races and Mr. Sears said that he trust us and knew that we would not be intolerant.

Shirley

This morning we had a assembly in the hall. Mr. Sears told us that if even we have a different color face, it's alright because we're American Citizen. We all should be American Citizen.

He read us a poem of prayer because in school or out side the school the people might not be friendly with the other people which as (Japanese people) cause the war is going to be. When I heard Mr. Sears read that poem I was proud to be a American Citizen. And I'll always be American Citizen.

This year is the second world war in many years if it goes on. When we were saluting the flag I was proud to salute the flag. Some people were crying because they were proud of there country.

Betty

# Handout: Part II



March, 1942

*Middle school students wrote these letters to their homeroom teacher, Miss Ella Evanson, after the U.S. government announced that it would force them and their families to leave their homes and move to prison camps for Americans of Japanese descent. Miss Evanson kept and preserved the letters (and the earlier compositions), thus we can read and study them today as historical documents.*

Dear Miss Evanson,

We are leaving our city, to where I am going I am wholly ignorant. However I am not unhappy, nor do I have objections for as long as this evacuation is for the benefit of the United State. But I do am regreting about leaving this school and the thought that I shall not see [you] for a long while pains me extremely. Your pleasant ways of teaching had made my heart yearn for the days when I was in your classroom. Your kind smile and your wonderful work you did for me shall be one of my pleasant memories.

Tooru

Dear Miss Evanson,

I am writing to you today because I am expecting to move away with in very short time. As you always know the japane-se people has been asked by our goverment to evacuate. I do not know yet where we will go. I hope there will be some good school in which I can continual, my school work. I am very sorry to leave Seattle and Washington School. And most especially to lose you for my teacher. I am hoping the war trouble will be soon over and I could come back to Seattle and be in your school and have you for my teacher again.

Sincerely yours,  
Chiyoko

Dear Miss Evanson,

I well start out my letter by writing about the worst thing. I do not want to go away but the goverment says we all have to go so we have to mind him. It said in the Japanese paper that we have to go east of the cascade mt. but we were planning to go to Idaho or Montana.

Now that the war is going on many Japanese men, women, and girls are out of jobs. And a lot of my friends fater are in consentration camp. If I go there I hope I well have a teacher just like you. And rather more I hope the war well be strighten out very soon so that I would be able to attend Washington school.

Sincerely Yours,  
Sadako

Dear Miss Evanson,

Because of this situation, we are asked to leave this dear city of Seattle and its surroundings. I am sure I will miss my teachers and Mr. Sears. There was never a school like Washington School and I sure will miss it. As for me, the one I will miss the most will be you. You have been very patient and kind throughout my work. If the school I will attend next would have a teacher like you I will be only too glad. When I am on my way my memories will flow back to the time I was attending this school and the assemblies that were held in the hall. Wherever I go I will be a loyal American.

Love, Emiko

Dear Miss Evanson,

I am very sorry I will have to leave Washington School so soon. As long as I am here I will try in some way to appreciate what you've taught me.

We all hope we will win this war (not the Japs) and come back to Seattle for more education.

Sincerely Yours,  
James





## Notes

1. The students' compositions are from the Ella Evanson Papers at the University of Washington's Manuscripts and Archives Division in Seattle, Washington.
2. Arthur Sears, *Seattle Bulletin* (1937).
3. I use the terms "imprisonment" instead of "evacuation" or "internment." "Evacuation," according to David Takami, was a government euphemism that conveyed the excuse that the government was removing Japanese American citizens for their own safety. "Internment" of enemy aliens during a war has a basis in law – specifically the Alien and Sedition Act of 1798 – and is governed by international accord through the Geneva Conventions. The U.S. government's roundup and incarceration of U.S. citizens had no legal precedent. It singled out a people on the basis of race, not nationality. See David Takami, *Divided Destiny: A History of Japanese Americans in Seattle* (Seattle, WA: University of Washington Press, 1998).
4. *The Seattle Times*, February 23, 1942; R. Daniels, S. C. Taylor, and H. H. L. Kitano, eds.,

*Japanese Americans: From Relocation to Redress*. (Rev. ed.) (Seattle, WA: University of Washington Press, 1994).

5. A longer version of this article appeared in the Summer 2000 issue of *Theory and Research in Social Education* (vol. 28, no. 3, p. 339). A book is in preparation, "*Wherever I Go I'll Always Be a Loyal American*": *Seattle's Japanese American Schoolchildren During World War II* (New York: Routledge/Falmer Press).
6. I thank Nancy E. Beadie and Valerie Ooka Pang for their support throughout this project and James D. Anderson and anonymous reviewers for providing helpful comments.

## Background for Students

Alonso, Karen. *Korematsu vs. United States*.

Springfield, NJ: Enslow, 1998. This book looks at the experiences of Fred Korematsu and others involved in the landmark Supreme Court case.

Fremont, David K. *Japanese American Internment in American History*. Springfield, NJ: Enslow,

1998. This book highlights the personal accounts of many Japanese Americans who experienced the camps.

Tunnell, Michael O. and George W. Chilcoat. *The Children of Topaz: The Story of a Japanese-American Internment Camp*. New York: Holiday House, 1996. This account is based on a third grade classroom diary.

Welch, Catherine A. *Children of The Relocation Camps*. Minneapolis, MN: Carolrhoda Books, 2000. An overview of the issue for young readers, with many photos.

Yancy, Diane. *Life in a Japanese American Internment Camp*. San Diego, CA: Lucent Books, 1998. For the seventh or eighth grade reader, this book describes the experiences of the "Quiet Americans" in great detail.

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# Conscientious Objectors

In 1944, sixty-three young American men stood trial for resisting the draft at the concentration camp at Heart Mountain, Wyoming. They were ready to fight for their country, but not before the government restored their rights as U.S. citizens and released their families from camp. Seven leaders were accused of conspiring to encourage them. The dissidents served two years in prison, and for the next 50 years the episode was written out of the popular history of Japanese America.

When confronted by mass injustice, should a citizen comply or to resist? And if one chooses resistance, what is the best way to "say no" to a powerful government? A PBS television documentary, *Conscience and the Constitution*, delves into the heart of the Japanese American conscience and a controversy that continues today. Learn more about the controversy by visiting [www.pbs.org/conscience](http://www.pbs.org/conscience), a website that contains resources for teachers on this topic.

## Resources

John Okada, *No-No Boy* (Charles Tuttle, 1957; Seattle, WA: University of Washington Press, 1980).

Eric Muller, *Free to Die for Their Country: The Story of the Japanese American Draft Resisters in World War II* (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, August 2001).

The documentary film *Conscience and the Constitution*, produced and directed by Frank Abe (pronounced "Ah-bay"), can be ordered by calling (800) 343-5540 or visiting [www.resisters.com/orders.htm](http://www.resisters.com/orders.htm). An online, middle-level study guide is available at [www.pbs.org/conscience](http://www.pbs.org/conscience) under the Resources link.



Frank Emi (right), leader of the Heart Mountain Fair Play Committee, with supporter Kozie Sakai, at the height of the draft resistance movement in 1944.

# TOUGH STUFF

## SOCIAL STUDIES AND BUILDING MATERIALS

Steven S. Lapham

*Have you ever thought about the social studies side of durable building materials? There might be a lot of history, anthropology, and geography hiding in there between the bricks. Test your knowledge of tough stuff.*

1. When earthquakes hit Kavakbici, Turkey in 1999, the three modern buildings in that village were ruined. In traditional houses, however, brick walls that were braced with diagonal beams of this material safely withstood the shaking. A fissure opened up directly under one home, but the diagonal beams absorbed the shock. What were the beams made of?
2. Two thousand years ago, the Romans were mixing lime, volcanic ash, and water to make this “liquid rock.” It could be poured into a mold and left to harden. When mixed with sand, it could be used as a mortar to bind blocks of stone. Aqueducts built by the Romans with the use of this material still stand after 1,500 years. What is this material?
3. Around 700 A.D., the Anasazi made shelters by covering wooden poles with mixed clay and sand. Later, they built square “pueblos” out of this earthen material. Traces of these dwellings can be seen in the Four Corners region of the USA (where the borders of Utah, Colorado, New Mexico, and Arizona touch). Today, “environmentally friendly” homes can be made of this material (although straw is usually added to the mixture). What is it?
4. A material made of crushed oyster shells, sand, and water was used as a mortar between the bricks of the Old Exchange Building in Charleston, South Carolina, when it was built around 1771. When Hurricane Hugo hit the coast of South Carolina in 1988, the Old Exchange Building (shown in the background) suffered only minor damage to the roof. What is the name of the mortar that held the bricks together? (It’s also the name of any plaster or stucco in which oyster shells provide the lime.)

Answers:

1. Wood
2. Cement
3. Adobe
4. Tabby

### Resources

- Rick Gore, “Wrath of the Gods,” *National Geographic* 198, no.1 (July 2000): 50.
- Jonathan Rutland, *See Inside a Roman Town* (New York: Warwick Press, 1977), 13.
- Raymond Bial, *The Pueblo* (New York: Marshall Cavendish, 2000).
- Interview with John Young, educational coordinator, Old Exchange Building, Charleston, South Carolina on May 10, 2001. Visit [www.oldexchange.com](http://www.oldexchange.com) on the web.