

Honoring Japanese Americans

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Read the “Directions” sheets for step-by-step instructions.

SUMMARY

In this activity, children will examine pictures of a Congressional Gold Medal, investigate the symbols on both sides, and design their own medal for kids who lived in the camps.

WHY

By looking closely at historical artifacts and making meaning of their design, children will develop detailed observation skills and practice thinking critically about the meanings and stories behind objects in their lives.

TIME

- 20 minutes

RECOMMENDED AGE GROUP

This activity will work best for children in kindergarten through fourth grade.

CHALLENGE WORDS

- **Congressional Gold Medal:** an award given by the United States Congress to individuals or groups who perform an outstanding act of service to the country
- **Symbol:** something real that stands for or suggests another thing that cannot itself be pictured or shown
- **Patch:** a piece of cloth worn on a soldier’s uniform as an ornament or emblem
- **Veteran:** a former member of the military
- **Prejudice:** a dislike of someone or something without good reason
- **Nisei:** a son or daughter of immigrant Japanese parents who is born and educated in America
- **Ape plant:** an edible, Hawaiian plant (pronounced ah-pay) with large, heart-shaped leaves

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GET READY

- Read *Baseball Saved Us* together. This book tells the story of a Japanese American community coming together to build a baseball field in an internment camp during World War II. For tips on reading this book together, check out the Guided Reading Activity (http://americanhistory.si.edu/ourstory/pdf/internment2/internment_reading.pdf).
- Read the Step Back in Time sheets.

YOU NEED

- Directions sheets (*attached*)
- Step Back in Time sheets (*attached*)
- ThinkAbout sheet (*attached*)
- *Baseball Saved Us* book (*optional*)
- Images of the Congressional Gold Medal
- Pen, pencil, or markers

More information at <http://americanhistory.si.edu/ourstory/activities/internment/>.

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Step Back in Time, page 1 of 2

For more information, visit the National Museum of American History website <http://americanhistory.si.edu/ourstory/activities/internment/>.

On December 7, 1941, Japan attacked the United States naval base at Pearl Harbor, Hawaii. The next day, the United States government went to war with Japan. The government was afraid that Japanese Americans might threaten the country's safety. On February 19, 1942, President Franklin Roosevelt signed a law that allowed the military to remove Japanese Americans from some parts of the country, and move them to new places.



In the spring of 1942, scenes like this were repeated in every Japanese American community along the Pacific Coast. [Dorothea Lange, Courtesy of National Archives]

The Japanese Americans weren't given a lot of time to pack, sell, or store their things. Families were allowed to take only what they could carry. Some families were lucky enough to have neighbors or friends to care for their things. Others had to leave behind family pets, special toys, and many memories.



Two children and their father await baggage inspection at an assembly center in 1942. [Dorothea Lange, Courtesy of National Archives]

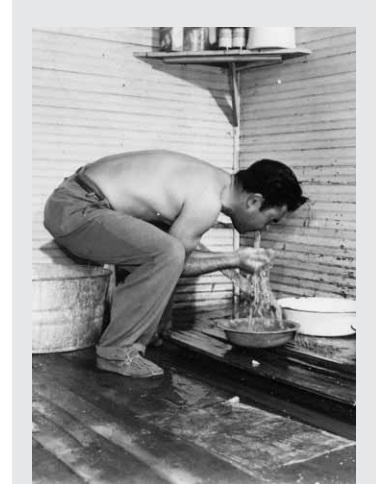
Assembly centers were the first stop for these Japanese Americans before the **internment camps** were ready. The **assembly centers** were not designed for housing—in fact, some people had to live in horse stalls! The food was bad, the living space was dirty, and there were not enough doctors to take care of all the people. Sadly, some had to stay in assembly centers for months before moving to an **internment camp**.

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The **internment camps** were located far away from other people and towns. They were fenced in and guarded by soldiers. Families lived in rough buildings called **barracks** where many people stayed together in a small space. They were cold in the winter and hot in the summer. The bathrooms and kitchen were in separate buildings from the bedrooms, so adults and children had to wait in line to take a bath or get a meal.

Even though the Japanese Americans lost many of their basic rights, they tried to create a community within the camps. Kids went to school and formed Boy Scout troops, played on sports teams, and went to dances. Grown-ups had jobs, played cards, and formed clubs like the Parent Teacher Association.



A man washes his face in a basin. There was no running water at the camps. [Courtesy of National Archives]

Assembly center: fairgrounds, racetracks, and other public places where Japanese Americans were held after being removed from their own homes until permanent internment camps could be built

Internment camps: a barbed wire fenced in area built by the U.S. government to imprison the Japanese Americans.

Barracks: a large, poorly built structure in the camps in which many families lived

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Directions

For adults and kids to follow together.

1. Read through the Step Back in Time sheets or *Baseball Saved Us*.

2. Take a close look at the pictures of the **Congressional Gold Medal** that was presented to the 442nd Regimental Combat Team, the 100th Infantry Battalion, and **Nisei** serving in the Military Intelligence Service. These were the units made up of Japanese American soldiers from internment camps and Hawaii, where there is a large population of Japanese descent. Use the questions on the ThinkAbout sheets to talk about the medal.

3. Design your own medal for the kids who lived in the camps.
 - What interested you most about life in the camps?
 - How would you represent that on a medal?
 - Would you use just one picture, or many?
 - How would you lay out the images on the medal?

For more activities about Japanese American internment and *Baseball Saved Us*, visit <http://americanhistory.si.edu/ourstory/activities/internment/>.

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ThinkAbout, page 1 of 4

Talk about the Congressional Gold Medal.

1. Look closely at the front and back side of the **Congressional Gold Medal**. First, think about its physical features—what does it look and feel like?
 - What color is it?
 - Can you make any guesses about its size, or weight?
 - Can you tell what it is made of? Is it natural or man-made?
 - How would you lay out the images on the medal?

2. Second, think about how its construction—how was it made?
 - Is it hand-made or machine made?
 - Was it made in a mold or in pieces?
 - How has it been put together?

3. Next, think about its function—what was it made for?
 - How is the object used?
 - Think about the prejudice that Japanese Americans faced before, during, and after World War II in the United States. Do you think the medal has more than one meaning?

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4. Finally, consider its design—are there special pictures or words on it?
 - Does it do the job it was supposed to do?
 - Were the best materials used?
 - Is it decorated? How is it decorated? Can you make any guesses as to what the decorations mean?
 - Do you like the way it looks? Would other people like it?

5. How many people are pictured on the front of the medal, and what are they holding? Who do you think they are? What can you see in the background of the medal?

6. Depicted on the back of the medal are **patches** from each of the military branches in which Japanese American soldiers served. How do the **patches** reflect the jobs of each unit?

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Create your own medal design.

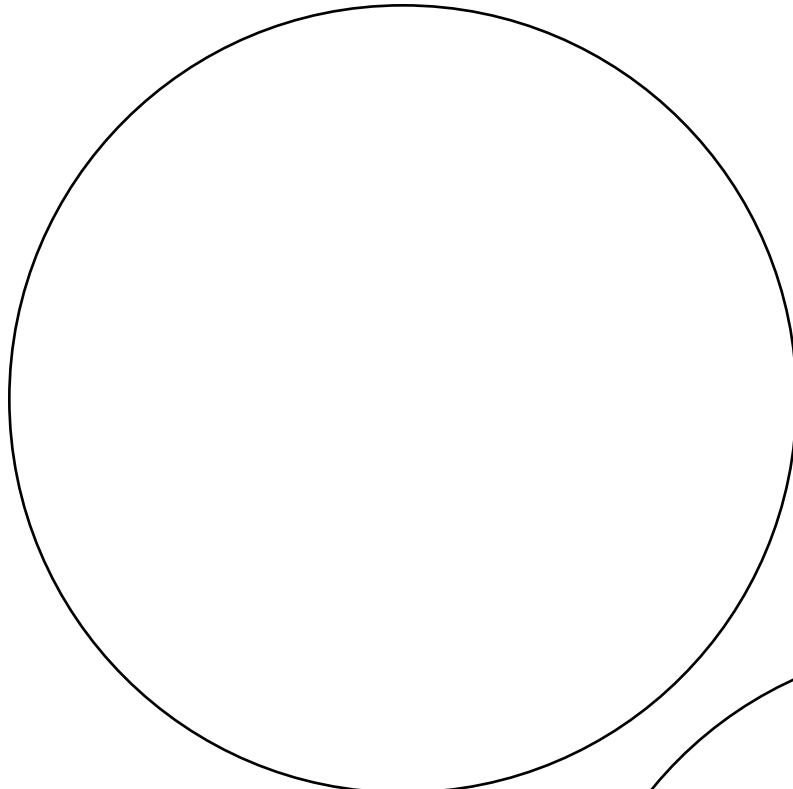
1. The **Congressional Gold Medal** was given to Japanese American soldiers to honor them for their service during World War II. But what about the average Japanese Americans who were held in internment camps during the war? Do you think they should receive a special honor?

2. Imagine that you have been asked to create a medal to give to the kids who lived in the internment camps. What would you include in the design of the medal?
 - What interested you most about life in the camps?
 - How would you represent that on a medal?
 - Would you use just one picture, or many?
 - How would you layout the images on the medal?

3. Use crayons, markers, or colored pencils to decorate the front and back side of a medal (next page).

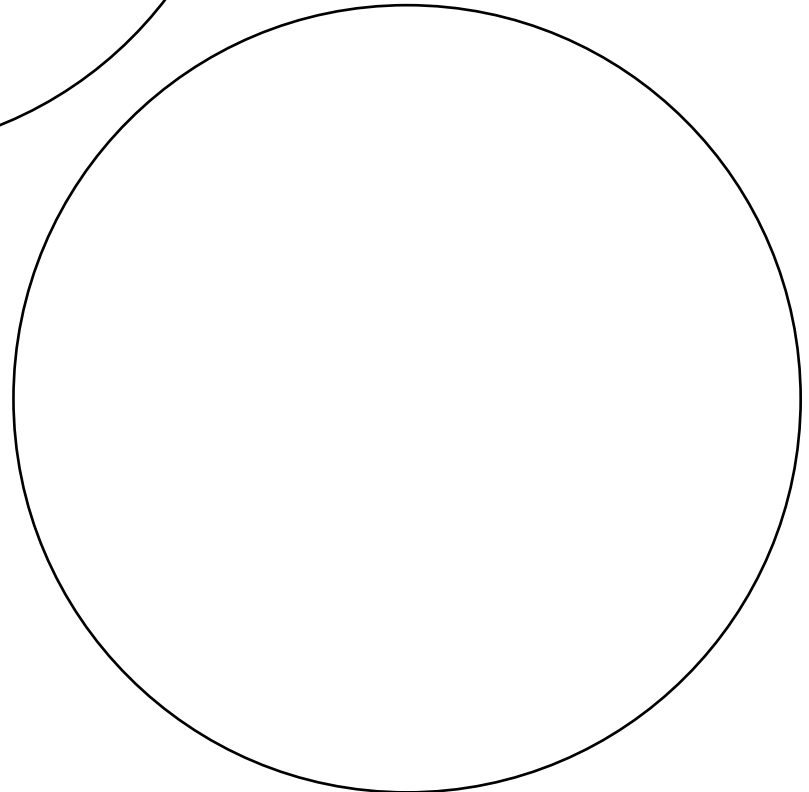
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ThinkAbout, page 4 of 4



FRONT

Use crayons, markers, or colored pencils to decorate the front and back side of a medal to give to the kids who lived in the internment camps.



BACK

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Images of the Congressional Gold Medal, page 1 of 2



FRONT

Awarded to the 442nd Regimental Combat Team, the 100th Infantry Battalion, and Nisei serving in the Military Intelligence Service



BACK

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Images of the Congressional Gold Medal, page 2 of 2

Even though many of their families were living in internment camps, American men of Japanese descent served as soldiers in the U.S. Army. Today, many people think it is unfair that Japanese Americans were fighting to protect the freedom of Americans while their own families were locked up in internment camps.

The Japanese American soldiers proved to be excellent fighters and received many medals for their bravery. Their success helped change the minds of some people who didn't want Japanese Americans living in their communities, but there was still plenty of **prejudice** to face when the internment camps were closed after the end of World War II.



The **Nisei** volunteer soldiers produced a **patch** design of their own. It depicts a silver hand holding the torch of liberty aloft. By August 1945, 18,000 Japanese American soldiers wore this **patch** with pride.



Nisei soldiers also served in the Military Intelligence Service, performing secret intelligence work against the Japanese military. The sphinx, a traditional military intelligence **symbol**, indicates watchfulness, wisdom, and silence.



Many of the soldiers in this battalion were from Hawaii. The leaf is from an **ape plant** and symbolizes protection in Hawaiian culture. The helmet is similar to one that would have been worn by a native Hawaiian leader.

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For Teachers

Read the “Parent Guide” and “Directions” sheets for specific instructions.

OBJECTIVES

The student will be better able to:

- Look closely at an object for clues as to its purpose.
- Illustrate aspects of life for a Japanese American child in an internment camp during World War II.

STUDENT PERFORMANCE CRITERIA

- Interpretations of medal images are logical.
- Created medal reflects an understanding of a child’s life in a Japanese American internment camp.
- Discussion demonstrates an understanding of the historical content.

STANDARDS

NCHS History Standards

K-4 Historical Thinking Standards

2G. Draw upon the visual data presented in photographs, paintings, cartoons, and architectural drawings.

3A. Analyze illustrations in historical stories.

4C. Interrogate historical data.

K-4 Historical Content Standards

1A. The student understands family life now and in the recent past; family life in various places long ago.

4B. The student demonstrates understanding of ordinary people who have exemplified values and principles of American democracy.

5A. Demonstrate understanding of the movements of large groups of people into his or her own and other states in the United States now and long ago.

More information at <http://americanhistory.si.edu/ourstory/activities/internment/>.