

Secrets of the Desert:
Japanese American Incarceration at Minidoka

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Phase I: Invitation

Part A:

You are hiking in southern Idaho and come upon an old tower. Since you are in the middle of the wilderness, you are surprised to see a sign that reads "Minidoka National Historic Site." You spot an elderly gentleman near the tower. You approach him and he hands you a picture. With a strained voice, he says, "This is what that guard tower looked like when I was your age." You examine the image closely, and when you look up, he is gone. You glance back at the picture and then at the tower in front of you. You compare the two and try to figure out what has changed over time. What do you think the elderly gentleman wants you to learn? Something important must have happened here.

During this quest, your goal is to discover: **What happened at Minidoka?**

Begin your journey by studying the image the man gave you as well as the tower in front of you. Look carefully at every detail. Take notes in your Idaho Travelogue, writing down what you notice and wonder.

Part B:

You remember your family talking once about an event in the past.

On December 7, 1941, Japan bombed the Pearl Harbor military base in Hawaii. Many American ships and airplanes were damaged or destroyed. More than 2,400 Americans were killed. This shocked the United States, and the country decided to enter World War II. They teamed up with other countries fighting against Japan, Germany, and Italy.

After the attack on Pearl Harbor, some Americans started to worry that Japanese Americans might be spies, however, there was no evidence of this. Many people gave in to this worry. Some people already had an unreasonable fear of the Japanese Americans, so this was just another reason to be suspicious. They thought it would be okay if the government forced Japanese Americans from their home. Most of the places the government forced Japanese Americans to move to were in the middle of the desert, away from cities.

Why did you suddenly remember this? How is it connected to what happened here at Minidoka?

Phase II: Preparing for Relocation & The People Who Were Forcibly Removed

Part A:

You take a closer look at the sign welcoming you to the “Minidoka National Historic Site.” You remember that this is one of the places where the United States government made Japanese Americans go and live during World War II. Was the elderly gentleman forced to move here? You decide to look around for him.

The wind picks up, and you notice a paper blowing across the ground. It skips and flips and eventually hits your pants and sticks. You reach down and grab it, noticing it looks old and some parts are torn off.

When you look closer, you realize that it is a piece from a pamphlet that the government gave to Japanese Americans who were forced to relocate. The information was supposed to help them prepare for when they were taken away from their homes. The pamphlet has information about the relocation program. What do the terms tell you about what people experienced at Minidoka? Write down your inferences in your Idaho Travelogue.

Part B:

You lower the paper after looking at it and notice a photograph in a shrub. As you reach out and grab it, you think you see the elderly gentleman out of the corner of your eye, but when you turn to look, he's not there. Then you find another photo tucked under a rock. You spot one under some sagebrush, one stuck to a piece of wood, and one tucked in a nearby tree hole. In total, there are five photographs. You lay them out on a nearby picnic table.

What could these pictures tell you about the people who were forced to relocate to the camp at Minidoka? What was it like to live there? Record your notices and wonders in your Idaho Travelogue.

Phase III: How the Events Unfolded

Part A:

As you are sitting at the picnic table thinking of the people who were forced to move to Minidoka, you hear a nearby door squeak as if opening and closing. You look up at a building not far from where you are sitting. Is the elderly gentleman in there? You go in and call out, "Hello? Hello?" There is no answer, but there are leaves, dust, and debris inside. You see something shimmering in the corner and step closer. It looks like the handle of an old suitcase. There is a word (maybe a name?) and a number on the suitcase. You open it up and find photographs as well as loose papers. You're very curious about what you see in the photographs and what might be written on each of the papers.

Part B:

After exploring the contents of the suitcase, you realize that each paper tells a part of the story captured in the pictures. Match each paper with its photograph. For each pair, write one sentence in your Idaho Travelogue summarizing what happened.

Phase IV: Differing Viewpoints

You put the photographs and papers in order and place the artifacts back in the suitcase. You feel like you're really beginning to understand the history and importance of this place. But, you also realize there is still so much to learn. Where is the elderly gentleman from earlier? You have so many questions, and you're beginning to think he's the one you'll need to talk to. You put your hand on the wall as you start to stand up, and a piece of wood moves. You look at it closely and realize that there is a hidden compartment. You remove the piece of wood and find several newspaper editorials. You cannot see them well in this room, so you move outside to read them in the sun.

You notice from the headlines that these editorials describe what different people thought about forcing Japanese Americans to go and live in places like Minidoka. Read them closely to learn why each writer supports or opposes the incarceration camps. Record your answers in your Idaho Travelogue.

Phase V: Artistic Visions

Suddenly, you see movement up ahead, and you move toward it, thinking you might finally catch up with the elderly gentleman. As you head in the direction of the movement, you spot another structure nearby that you hadn't noticed before. It's a long building labeled "Block 22." You enter through the door and see some old desks. Maybe this was a classroom? You notice papers spread out on one of the desks. You carefully look through them. Some of the papers have been damaged by water, but there are a few that are in good condition. Each paper features a fascinating work of art. You look through them and begin to figure out another piece to the puzzle. Write down what you notice and what you wonder about the artwork in your Idaho Travelogue.

Phase VI: Sketches of Snapshots

As you leave Block 22, you suddenly see the elderly gentleman again. He is accompanied by a Park Ranger who is holding a box. The elderly gentleman explains that the box is an important item from his family's life here in Minidoka. He has come today to donate it to the Visitor Center to help people remember what happened here.

The Park Ranger explains that after World War II ended, the camps slowly shut down and people were allowed to leave and return to their homes. Some went back to where they lived before, while others started new lives in different places. Many Japanese Americans faced challenges after being forced to leave their homes and businesses. Some of their homes were vandalized. For some, all of their belongings and homes were stolen. For many people, life never went back to normal.

The elderly gentleman tells you that it's important to remember what happened here at Minidoka to make sure it never happens again. He asks if you would like to see the artifact he has brought to donate. You nod, and he gently removes a suitcase from the box. As you look at it carefully, reflect on all of the other artifacts you've seen during this quest.

Select one artifact that helps you understand what happened in Minidoka.

Phase VII: Preliminary Findings

It is time to review what you discovered during this quest and document your preliminary findings. Together, we will build our community's historical knowledge and understanding. Review your Idaho Travelogue and then respond to the following questions:

- What is one surprising thing that you uncovered?
- What is one thing that is still unclear?
- What happened at Minidoka?

Phase VIII: Creation

It is time to share what you learned with the community! We study the past so we can make better decisions in the future. The more we know and understand about the past, the brighter our world can be.

Create a museum exhibit that helps people in your community understand what happened at Minidoka. Review your Idaho Travelogue for ideas and then use available materials to represent what you think is most important to remember about Minidoka and the people who were forced to live there.

Sketch a picture of your museum exhibit in your Idaho Travelogue.

Phase IX: Interpretation

Before you display your work, write an interpretive sign for people to read as they look at your museum exhibit.

Respond to the following questions by thinking specifically about the part of Sacajawea's story that is represented in your museum exhibit.

- What happened?
- Who was involved?
- Where did it happen?
- When did it happen?
- Why is this an important part of Idaho history?

Connect your responses to these five questions with transition words and phrases to develop a clear paragraph. Begin the paragraph with a topic sentence and end with a concluding statement.

Include a copy of the final draft of your interpretive sign in your Idaho Travelogue.

Phase X: Reflection

Great work, historian! Make sure your interpretive sign is attached to your museum exhibit and display it in your class's museum.

Walk around and view the other exhibits. Think about how they are similar and how they are different from the one you created. Add your notes to your Idaho Travelogue.

Now that you have completed this quest, what do you think about who Sacajawea was and why we remember her? What do you wonder? How will your new understanding impact your actions as a resident of Idaho? Write down your responses in your Idaho Travelogue and then share your reflections with your classmates.

Record what you learned from your fellow classmates in your Idaho Travelogue. How are their reflections similar to or different than yours?