

Innocence in an age of Infamy

Activity 3:

Only 48 Hours

Grades 7-12

Objectives:

- Students will compare and contrast the experiences of Les Aigner in Hungary and Kennie Namba in Oregon in being forced to relocate to concentration camps during World War II.
- Students will explore the personal and social effects of prejudice, discrimination, anti-Semitism, and racism.

Materials:

- **“Innocence in an Age of Infamy”** video: “Paul and Edith Lavender,” “Kennie Namba,” and “Les and Eva Aigner” excerpts

Procedure for Classroom Activity:

1. Before students enter the classroom, post large posters prominently with such commands as

- “Only teachers are allowed to sit.”
- “No blue-eyed students allowed in front two rows.”
- “Only blondes are allowed to use notes during tests.”
- “Only students under five feet in height may eat and drink during class.”
- “No gum chewing is allowed except for French-American students.”
- “All students are required to stay after school today to complete an extra assignment.”

(Use your creativity to develop possible, but unusual and unfair, rules that could relate to your students.)

2. When students enter the classroom and notice the new rules, appear serious as you require them to do a quick-write about how they feel about the new classroom rules. Then, have students share their feelings by reading their quick-writes aloud to the whole class. Focus the discussion on their feelings of injustice, inequality, and the deprivation of their civil rights from these relatively

minor new rules. Emphasize that these in no way compare with the loss of civil rights and the deaths that occurred during World War II.

3. Ask students if there have been times in history when more serious injustices have been imposed on citizens and list these on the chalkboard. (The students may mention the Holocaust, colonialism, forcing American Indians onto reservations, slavery, women being denied the vote, the internment of Japanese-Americans during World War II, anti-immigration laws, etc.) Explain that the lesson today will focus on the similarities and differences between the European Holocaust and the Japanese-American Internment.
4. View the “Paul and Edith Lavender” excerpt. As students watch, ask them to write down examples of government policies and the actions of individual citizens that resulted in discrimination against Jewish people in Europe. (These examples could include the Nuremberg Laws, being fired from their jobs, the government forcing the Jews to change their names, anti-Semitic insults, wearing the yellow star, being forced to move to a ghetto, etc.) Examine the Nuremberg Laws: <http://www.mtsu.edu/~baustin/nurmlaw3.html>. Compare to the above list developed by the students.
5. Review the “Kennie Namba” excerpt and ask students to list the examples of government policies that resulted in discrimination against Japanese-Americans and add what happened to him personally. Read Executive Order 9066: <http://www.library.arizona.edu/images/jpamer/execordr.html>. Discuss how this order was implemented and its effect on the 120,000 Japanese-Americans on the West Coast.
6. Ask students what is similar and different about the two lists. Was the U.S. government “just as bad” as Nazi Germany in the way it discriminated against its citizens? Why or why not?
7. Conclusion: Pretend that, like the Aigner and Namba families, your government passes a law saying that because of the serious rise in crime and drug use in your town, students your age only have 48 hours before they will be rounded up and moved to “Re-education Camps.” Write one paragraph explaining what you would do to prepare during these 48 hours and one paragraph explaining whether you think this could ever happen today where you live.

Assessment Suggestions:

1. Ask the students to read their paragraphs aloud and discuss their conclusions with the class.

Extension Ideas:

1. Use the World Wide Web (<http://www.pbs.org/childofcamp/history/clinton.html>) to view the letter of apology sent by President Bill Clinton to the Japanese-Americans who had been interned during World War II. Discuss the pros and cons of this action by the federal government.
2. Analyze Holocaust Denial and the recent rise in neo-Nazism and white supremacy in the U.S. Ask students to develop conclusions about how they think these groups should be treated in the U.S. Is this a healthy sign of a free society or the beginning of a serious period of increased discrimination and prejudice in the U.S.?
3. Invite a police officer or district attorney to speak to your class about recent examples of hate group activities (cross burnings, vandalism of Jewish cemeteries, discrimination against Arab-Americans, etc.) in your city or town. What actions are being taken to stop these activities? How effective have they been? How do these government agencies balance the needs for security and law and order with citizens' rights to freedom and justice?