Family Discussion Guide
for Talking About Japanese American Incarceration & Present Day Connections with Children in Camps
As we engage in the movement to #CloseTheCamps, it is important to invite our children into the experience as full participants. Below is a guide with some talking points and resources to help launch the beginning of what we hope will be an ongoing dialogue about Japanese American and Japanese Latin American history and their present day connections to injustice against migrant communities and other historically marginalized people.
How the Guide is Organized...

This discussion guide is organized by 6 foundational questions to help launch discussions along with some language for how to answer the questions. Additionally, there are hyperlinked resources for caregivers to read and watch that are underlined. Any section with an underline is a hyperlink. All information has been sourced through Densho. This guide is a starting point geared toward younger children, but you know your children best and you as a caregiver are able to assess what your child can handle and at what stage. For the resources for kids section, we encourage adult family members to preview and then decide if/how to utilize them.
Sometimes the easiest way to begin a conversation is to have a tangible object in hand, so we invite your family to read a book (suggestions are included), pull out family photos, or special cultural objects.
Self Care...

We acknowledge that having these kinds of conversations can be emotional. We invite you to perhaps acknowledge that openly if it feels comfortable. Notice your breath if emotions arise and put your hand on your heart or body to reassure yourself. Perhaps sit close with your child or children, and take breaks if needed. Sometimes our ideas about how we want a conversation or an activity to play out does not go as planned. This is a gentle reminder to consider revisiting the conversation or activity in another moment if it goes a bit sideways, rather than give up on it altogether. Planting the seeds of these conversations at a young age matters. Your family is engaging in healing work! We honor you and thank you!
What was Japanese American Incarceration during World War II?

Japanese heritage people started coming to the United States on the west coast and the Kingdom of Hawai’i in 1885 to work. Many Japanese heritage people also moved to the West Coast of Canada as well as throughout the Americas including Peru, Cuba, and Brazil. Many of these communities faced unfair treatment because of racism.

**racism** is when individual people in positions of power or privilege or the government treats people unfairly because of their heritage, how they look, or where their ancestors come from.
Asian American Identity

There has been a long history of treating Asian heritage people as one big group who are "very foreign" or "too different" from white people. Many laws were put in place that treated Chinese heritage and Japanese heritage people unfairly. Many people identify both as Japanese American and then also as Asian American because of a shared experience of discrimination.

discrimination is when people are treated unfairly or unjustly based on something about who they are like their race, ethnicity, religion, gender, or culture. It can happen on an individual level or also be part of laws that are purposely made to be unfair.
Incarceration History

Because of racism, the United States Government justified putting over 120,000 Japanese heritage people in prison camps in places that were often on Indigenous reservations, where Indigenous people had been unfairly pushed out themselves.

People were imprisoned for many years. There were 10 prison camps that were open from 1942–1945.

WWII Started
World War II started in 1939 with Germany, Italy, and Japan fighting against France, Great Britain, and the United States.

Forced Removal
Because of racism, the United States Government justified putting over 120,000 Japanese heritage people in prison camps in places that were often on Indigenous reservations, where Indigenous people had been unfairly pushed out themselves.

3 years of Imprisonment
People were imprisoned for many years. There were 10 prison camps that were open from 1942–1945.
Japanese heritage people and families had very little time before they were forced into the prison camps, so many people had to leave behind their belongings, their homes, their cars, and even their pets.
Resources...

WATCH

Densho’s
"Ugly History: Japanese American Incarceration Camps"

READ

Core story from Densho.

FOR KIDS!

WATCH

Kids Meet a Survivor of the Japanese American Internment
Were any other groups also imprisoned by the US Government during World War II?

- Over 2,200 Japanese Latin Americans were also imprisoned by the United States Government which made agreements with Latin American countries and governments.

- Some Italian and German American people were also imprisoned, but in much smaller numbers because they did not face racism like Asian Americans did.
Resources...

READ
Densho description of Japanese Latin American incarceration.

READ
Art Shibayama

READ
The Other Japanese Internment America Still Hasn’t Fully Acknowledged
What was it like for children who were incarcerated in the prison camps?
Many children were also imprisoned in the prison camps during World War II. About \( \frac{1}{3} \) of all people imprisoned were children.

Children did go to school and have some activities to do, but it was very hard for them. Most families lived in one room barracks in places that had very harsh, uncomfortable weather.
Resources...

**WATCH**
Children in Internment Camps

**FOR KIDS!**
READ
A Place Where Sunflowers Grow

**FOR KIDS!**
READ
Baseball Saved Us

**FOR KIDS!**
READ
Weedflower

The Bracelet
What happened after the prison camps closed and the war ended?
Japanese Americans and Japanese Latin Americans faced many challenges rebuilding their lives after being imprisoned. It was a very difficult time because many families had very little money or belongings.

Japanese Americans and Japanese Latin Americans fought for an apology and financial reparations for many years. In 1988 Japanese Americans got a formal apology and money from the government. Ten years later in 1998, so did Japanese Latin Americans, but it was less money. Many people were very hurt and angry about that.
Why are people who are immigrating to the United States being incarcerated now?
Our country has a long and complicated history of treating people who are labeled as “different” from white people in a harsher way. Black people, Indigenous people, Latinx people, Asian people, and many people who are called people of color have faced unfair treatment since the United States was started.

Many people are coming to the United States from other countries to seek safety and to make a better life for their families. They are being unjustly held in prisons that are called, "detention centers" to make it sound less harsh than it really is.

Even children are being imprisoned, just like Japanese American children and families during World War II. This is why so many Japanese Americans are fighting to close the camps.
What can we do to fight injustice?
Learn about...

Social justice role models like Yuri Kochiyama and Mia Yamamoto.

The histories of people of color in the United States.

The Black Lives Matter movement through this coloring book and activity materials.

Check out...

The work of Butterfly Effect Migration Youth Group.
Take Action...

SUPPORT THE TSURU FOR SOLIDARITY PILGRIMAGE!

KEEP DISCUSSIONS ABOUT HISTORY, FAMILY STORIES, ANTI-RACISM, & EQUITY ALIVE IN YOUR FAMILY!

GET INVOLVED! CONSIDER JOINING THE TSURU FOR SOLIDARITY FAMILIES & KIDS COMMITTEE!
FOR KIDS! WATCH Mia Yamamoto Radical Cram School Episode

FOR KIDS! WATCH Yuri Kochiyama Tribute Video

FOR KIDS! READ It Began With a Page, How Gyo Fujikawa Drew The Way.

FOR KIDS! WATCH Muslim Kids Read Letters from Japanese Internment Camps

All photos are from Densho's Archive.