

# Japanese American Incarceration in World War II



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BROWN UNIVERSITY

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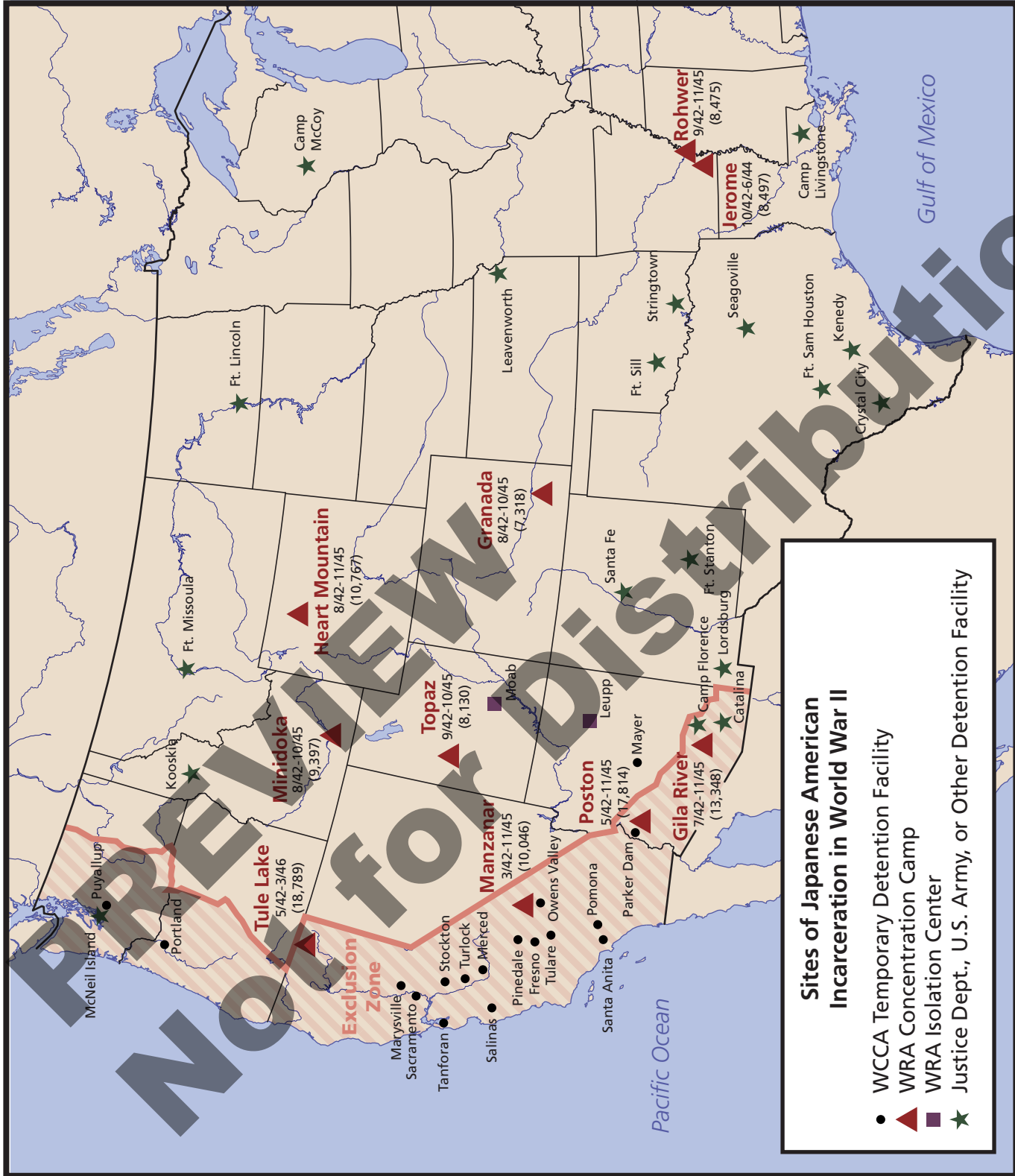
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Following President Roosevelt's signing of Executive Order 9066 in February of 1942, Japanese Americans living within the Military Exclusion Zone on the West Coast were removed from their homes and incarcerated in Wartime Civil Control Administration (WCCA) Temporary detention facilities, also known as assembly centers. Weeks to months later, 120,000 incarcerated people of Japanese ancestry were relocated again to longer-term War Relocation Authority (WRA) concentration camps. The map also shows the dates the concentration camps were in operation and the maximum number of people imprisoned there. Though not pictured here, the state of Hawai'i also maintained camps.



## Introduction: The Incarceration of Japanese Americans in World War II

On February 19, 1942, U.S. president Franklin D. Roosevelt signed Executive Order 9066. He signed the order after the bombing of the U.S. naval base at Pearl Harbor by the Japanese military and the entrance of the United States into World War II.

Executive Order 9066 authorized the forced removal of Japanese Americans living along the West Coast of the United States to ten concentration camps. Roosevelt and other government officials publicly justified incarcerating Japanese Americans in these camps by arguing that they would not be loyal to the United States and could not be trusted. As history would show, this was an unfounded fear fueled by anti-Japanese racism.

The process of forced removal was hasty. Thousands of Japanese Americans had to leave their homes, jobs, and friends behind. Pain and confusion spread throughout the Japanese American community.

Almost fifty years later, U.S. president Ronald Reagan signed the Civil Liberties Act on August 10, 1988. The act allotted twenty-thousand dollars to all living incarcerated. The



Families of Japanese ancestry arrive at Turlock Assembly Center in California. May 2, 1942.

### Introduction Definitions

**Incarcerate**—To confine or imprison someone, usually as punishment for a crime.

**U.S. concentration camp**—A concentration camp is as a facility where people (such as political prisoners, prisoners of war, or refugees) are detained or confined. During World War II, Japanese Americans were confined in American concentration camps. “Concentration camp” was the term used by the U.S. government at the time. These concentration camps should not be confused with the death camps operated by Nazi Germany in World War II. Concentration camps are not necessarily death camps that function to exterminate a population. U.S. concentration camps during World War II were sites of mass violations of civil rights. They were not sites of mass killings.

U.S. concentration camps have also been called internment camps. But, internment actually refers to the confinement of “enemy aliens.” It was one of many euphemisms (or, words that soften or disguise meaning) used to describe the incarceration of Japanese Americans. Because the majority of the ethnic Japanese incarcerated were born in the United States and were U.S. citizens, “concentration camps” is a more accurate term. The U.S. government also used the term “relocation” instead of “forced mass removal.”

act represented an official apology from the U.S. government.

People often present Japanese American incarceration as a terrible exception in U.S. history. But, in reality, Japanese American incarceration is merely one of the instances in which U.S. policy has targeted and discriminated against a specific group on the basis of ethnicity, race, religion, or national origin.



Courtesy of Yoshio Okumoto, Heart Mountain Wyoming Foundation, and Denzho. CC-BY-NC-SA 4.0.

A family poses with barracks and a guard tower in the background at Heart Mountain concentration camp in Cody, Wyoming. This photo was taken between August 1942 and November 1945.

In the following pages, you will explore the history of Japanese American incarceration. In Part I of the reading, you will examine Japanese immigration to the United States and Japanese and Japanese American experiences in the United States up until World War II. Part II is about life inside the concentration camps for Japanese Americans during the war. In Part III, you will read about life after incarceration and efforts to remember this time in history.

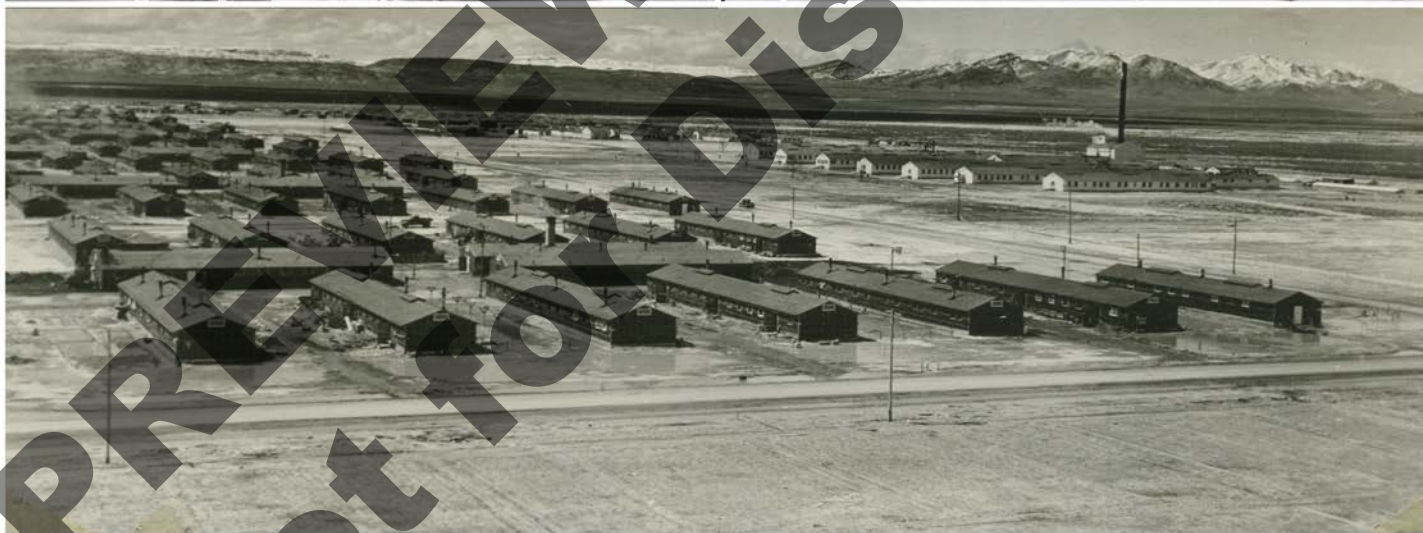
As you read, keep in mind the following questions to guide your thinking:

- What events and ideas led to the incarceration of Japanese Americans during World War II?

- How did Japanese Americans experience and resist incarceration? How do survivors remember it?
- Why is the history of Japanese American incarceration often left out of narratives of U.S. history? What motivates people to hide this history, or to understand it as an exception?
- How did mild or euphemistic words such as “relocation” and “camp or colony residents” disguise what was happening? Why do words matter in how we tell history?

# Japanese American Incarceration in World War II

## Teacher Resource Book



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## Documenting Life in the Camps: The Watercolors of Kango Takamura

### Objectives:

**Students will:** Analyze a watercolor depicting life in U.S. concentration camps by considering artistic technique, historical context, and artist's purpose.

Discuss the ways that people recorded their experiences of incarceration.

Evaluate the benefits and limitations of analyzing watercolors as a primary source to learn about life for incarcerated Japanese Americans.

### Required Reading:

Students should have read Part II in the student text and completed “Study Guide—Part II” (TRB 11-12) or “Advanced Study Guide—Part II” (TRB-13).

### Video:

The video used in this lesson is available at <[www.choices.edu/incarceration](http://www.choices.edu/incarceration)>.

### Handouts:

“The Watercolors of Kango Takamura” (TRB 27-32)

“Analyzing a Painting” (TRB-33)

### Note:

A slideshow of the watercolors is available at <[www.choices.edu/incarceration](http://www.choices.edu/incarceration)>.

### In the Classroom:

**1. Focus Question**—Begin class by asking students what types of sources historians might use to learn about life for Japanese Americans who were incarcerated during World War II. List student responses on the board. (For example, students may identify sources such as written accounts, newspaper articles, letters, photographs, or songs.)

Inform students that one of the challenges of learning about Japanese American incar-

ceration from the perspectives of those who experienced it is that many of the primary sources about incarceration were created by the U.S. government. For example, many of the famous collections of photographs with which students may be familiar were taken by white visitors to the camps. How might this affect what is represented in these sources? What different types of information might be emphasized in a source authored by a white American? What about a source authored by a Japanese American?

Tell students that Japanese Americans were limited in what types of records they were allowed to keep during their incarceration. They were not allowed, for example, to take photographs during the first months to years of their incarceration. Japanese Americans had to find other ways to document their lives. One artist, Kango Takamura, recorded his experiences and opinions in a series of watercolor paintings of life while incarcerated. Today, students will analyze a selection of those watercolors.

**2. Developing Art Analysis Skills**—Distribute the handout “Analyzing a Painting” to students. Show the video “Analyzing Historical Sources: Images” to the class. As students watch, have them take note of the steps for analysis that the video recommends, which are listed on their handout. After viewing the video as a class, review with students the three steps for analyzing an image, in this case a watercolor painting. (You may wish to have students refer to their painting analysis handout where these steps are also outlined.)

- *Describe:* What do you see?
- *Contextualize:* What larger history is it a part of? How does it fit into the history you are learning about now?
- *Interpret:* How did the artist want you to see this image and why?

**3. Individual Watercolor Analysis**—Give each student a copy of “The Watercolors of

Kango Takamura” or direct students to the online slideshow of the images. Assign each student one of the watercolor paintings to analyze. Have students follow the instructions for analysis on “Analyzing a Painting.”

**4. Discussion**—Reconvene the class. Have at least one student who analyzed each watercolor share some of their answers from “Analyzing a Painting.” You may also want to have students share their written painting descriptions or post them throughout the room.

After students have shared, ask them to consider what the paintings, as a collection, reveal about the experiences of their author, Kango Takamura. What can students learn about incarceration at large from analyzing these paintings? Do the paintings leave students with any questions? To what sources

might students turn to find answers to these questions? What do students see as the benefits of studying Takamura’s art as a way to learn about Japanese American incarceration? Can students identify any limitations? Can students think of any other ways that Japanese Americans might have recorded their experiences of incarceration? Are there ways that incarcerated Japanese Americans might not have been allowed to record their experiences? Why do students think this might be?

### **Homework:**

Students should read Part III in the student text and complete “Study Guide—Part III” (TRB-34) or “Advanced Study Guide—Part III” (TRB-35).

## The Watercolors of Kango Takamura

*Instructions:* Use your assigned watercolor painting to answer the questions on “Analyzing a Painting.”

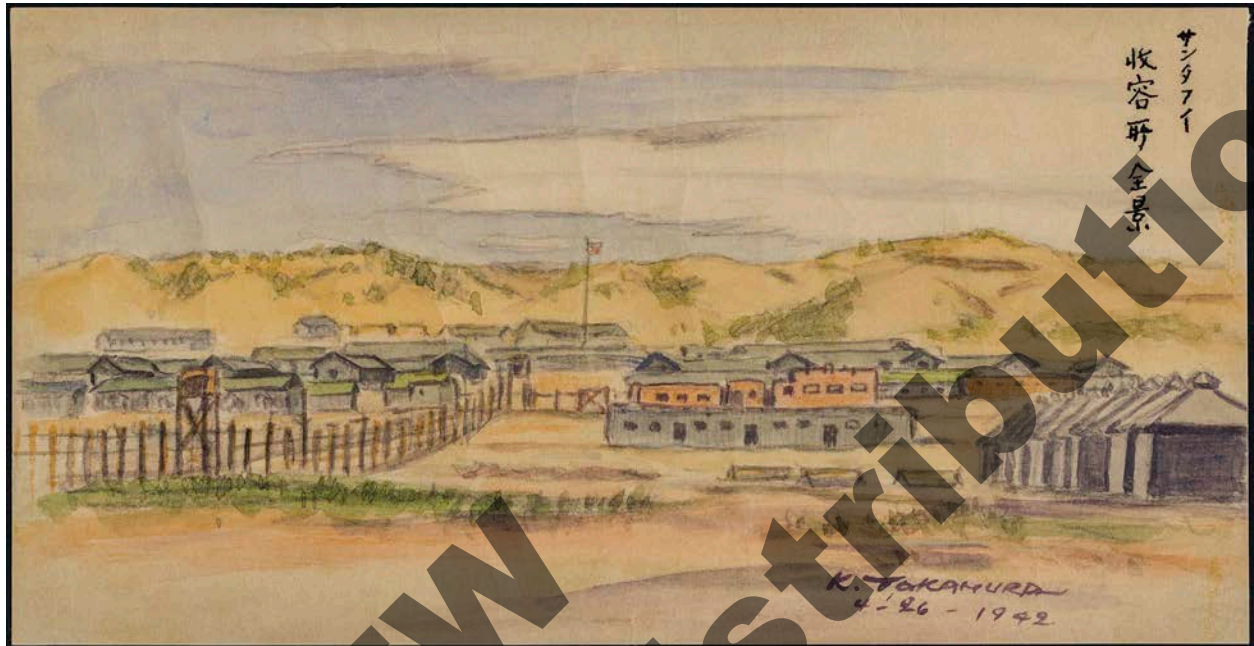
Image 1: “Painting of the nursery school at Manzanar”



Used with permission. Courtesy of Manzanar National Historic Site and the Kango Takamura Collection.



Image 2: "Painting of Santa Fe Internment Center"

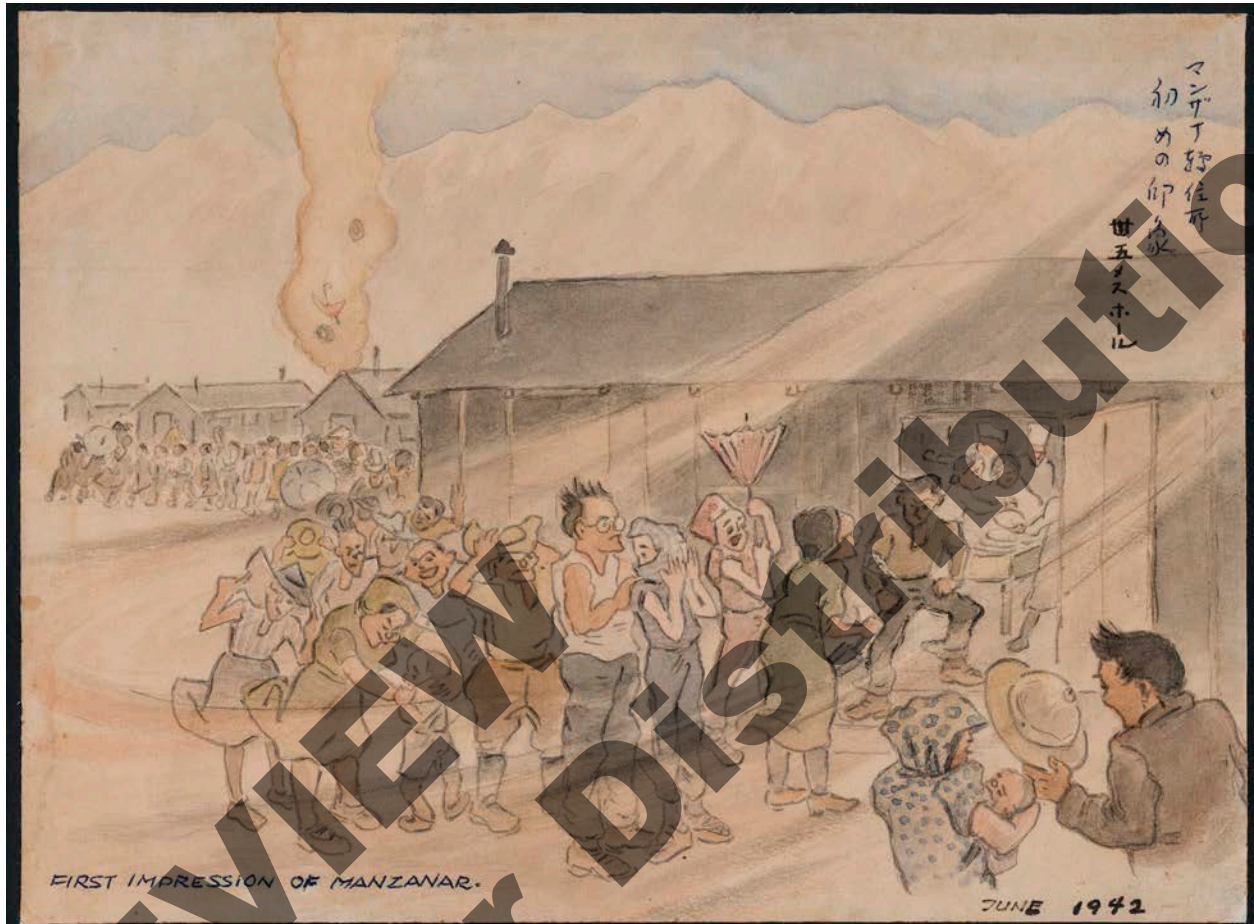


Caption on reverse: "Panorama of Santa Fe Internment Center. Drawn on writing paper - with anxiety - during early days when I was not sure that drawings of any kind were permitted."

Used with permission. Courtesy of Manzanar National Historic Site and the Kango Takamura Collection.

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

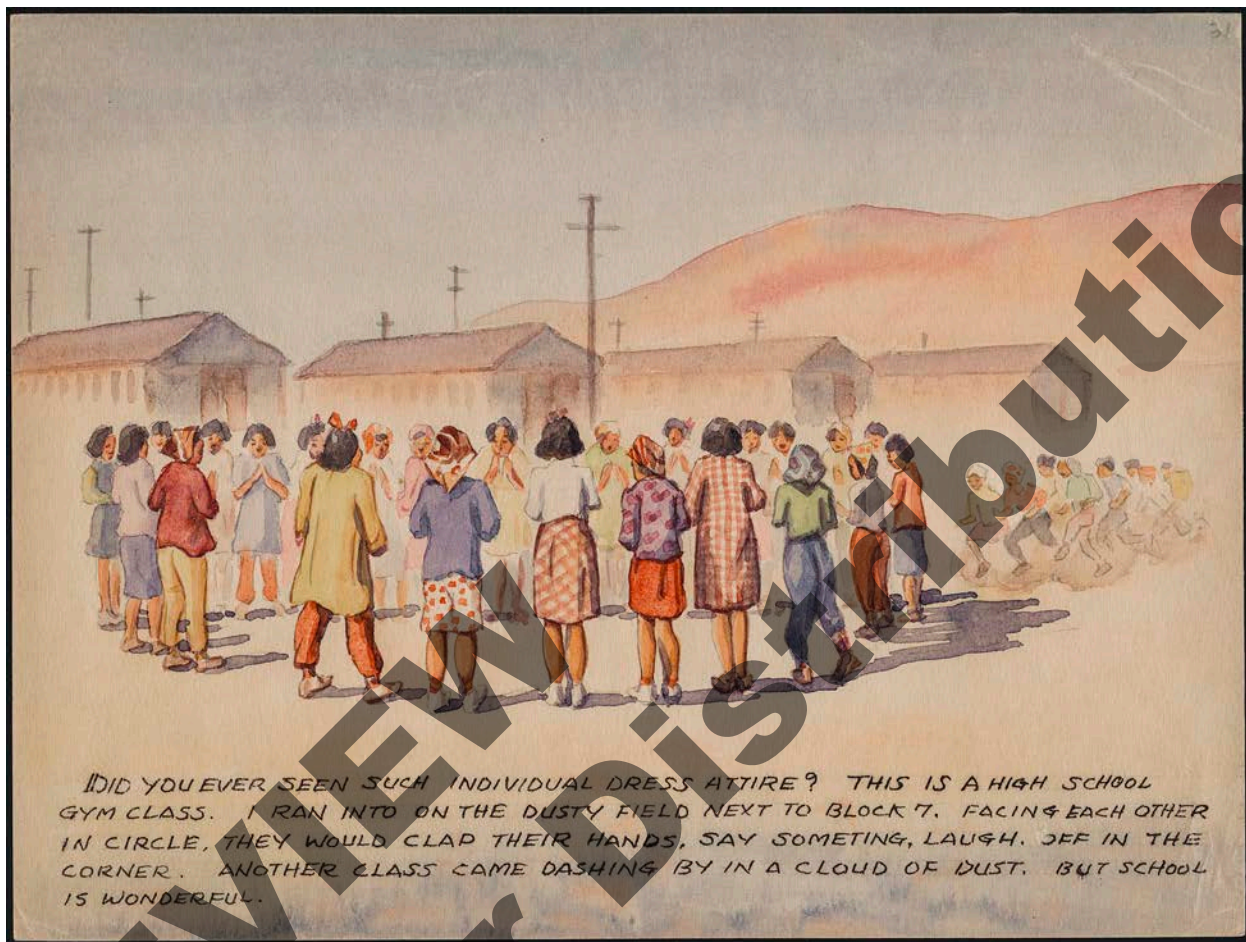
Image 3: "Sketch of a dust storm at Manzanar"



Used with permission. Courtesy of Manzanar National Historic Site and the Kango Takamura Collection.



Image 4: "Painting of a Manzanar High School gym class"



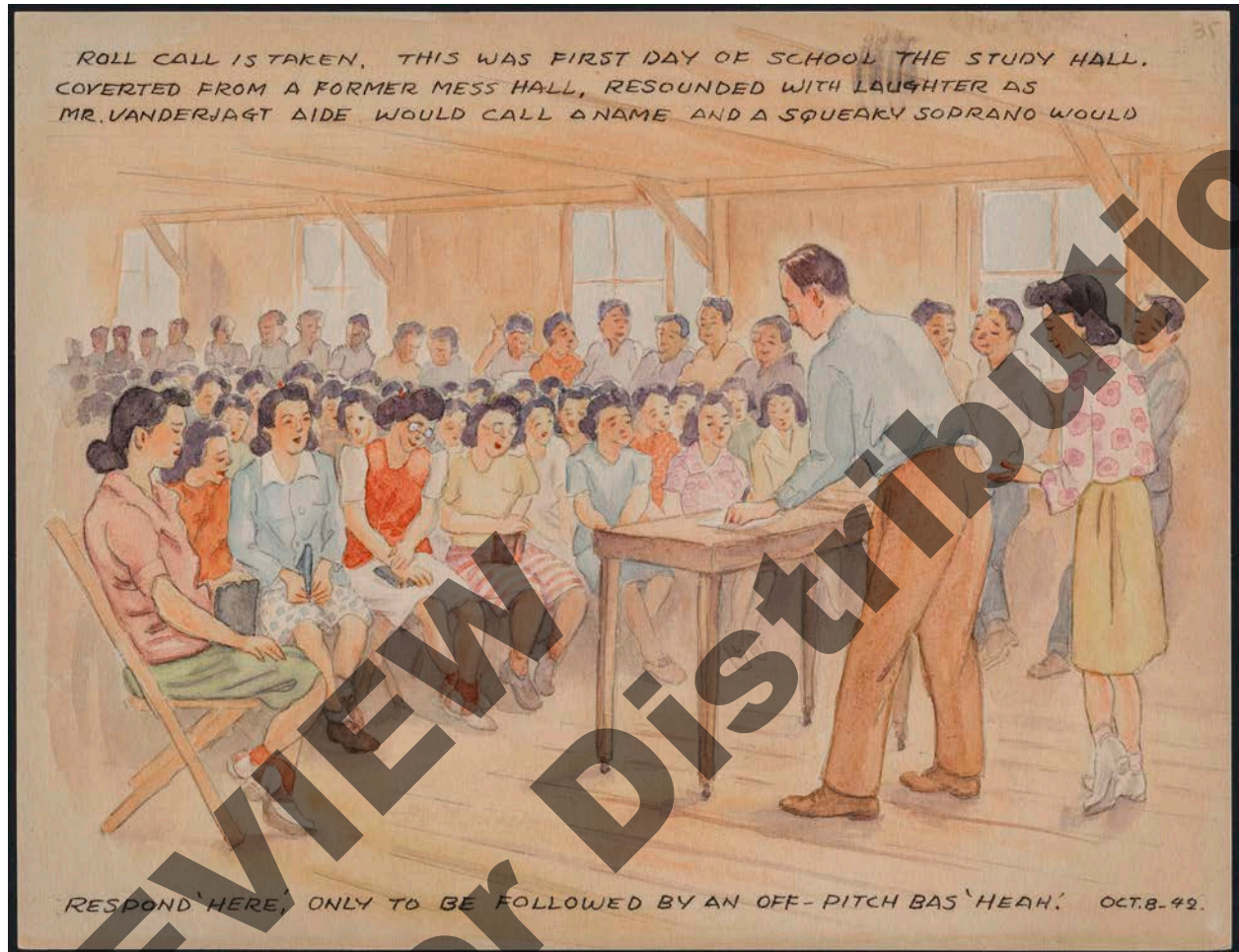
Used with permission. Courtesy of Manzanar National Historic Site and the Kango Takamura Collection.

Image 5: "Painting of farmers harvesting watermelons"





Image 6: "Painting of roll call at Manzanar High School"



## Analyzing a Painting

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*Instructions:* Use the steps below as you analyze your assigned watercolor painting by Kango Takamura. You may not be able to answer all of the questions. Simply leave questions blank if you do not have enough information to answer them.

### 1. Describe: What do you see?

*Questions to consider:* What is happening? Who is depicted? Where are they? What else is in the image? What colors are used? What appears in the foreground of the painting, and what is in the background?

### 2. Contextualize: What larger history is this scene a part of?

*Questions to consider:* Is there a caption, title, or description? What does it say? What do you know about the time period in which the painting was created? Does the painting reveal anything about World War II? Does it reveal anything about Japanese American incarceration?

### 3. Interpret: How did the artist want you to see this painting and why?

*Questions to consider:* Why do you think the artist made this watercolor? How did he depict this scene? What emotion do you think he wanted to convey? What message do you think the artist might have wanted to communicate with this particular watercolor?

**4. Painting description:** Imagine that the painting you analyzed is going to be displayed in a museum. Write a short paragraph (3-4 sentences) describing the painting. Be sure to include information about who painted it, what is being depicted, relevant historical context, and how the author is depicting the scene.