

# THE COTERIE

no small characters.

## AUTOBIOGRAPHY LESSON PLAN

Created for use in your classroom after seeing  
*Justice at War at The Coterie*

Developed by Amanda Kibler, Education Director

### Materials Provided:

- Primary source letters from the Japanese American National Museum

### Student Objectives:

1. Students will be able to infer meaning from primary sources.
2. Students will be able to develop deeper understanding of the experiences of others.
3. Students will be able to understand and empathize with experiences of figures from historical events.

### Assessments:

- Students will create and present a mask showing the difference between outward appearance and internal thoughts.

### Lesson:

#### *Introduction*

- Group Discussion (5-10 minutes): Review what students remember about the production. Summarize the conclusions that were made in the post-show discussion and debate.

#### *Building Activities*

- Letters (20 minutes): Each student gets a copy of a letter written by a child or young adult in one of the Japanese internment camps.
  - On a separate piece of paper, ask students to write down important details that are written in the letter. Right now they are not speculating or guessing what the letter writer is thinking, they are just writing in their own words what the letter writer has said.
    - In a different color, ask students to write down how they think the letter writer actually feels about each of those points.
- Masks (30 minutes): Students will each be given a piece of paper with a mask outline or a 3-D craft mask. Their job is to create through words, pictures, or any other medium you open to them an interpretation of the letters they were examining. The outside of the mask is what was written

in the letter (i.e. what they are willing to put in writing). The inside of the mask is their true feelings and reactions (i.e. what they feel and are afraid to say out loud or are only willing to say in private).

*Wrap-up*

- *Collaborative discussion (10 minutes)*: Ask students to share their masks with the class, briefly describing the decisions they made.
  - What similarities did you see from the outside of the mask to the inside of the mask? Differences?
  - What similarities did you see between your mask and other classmates' masks? What differences are there? Why do you think that even if we had the same source letter, we created different art?
  - What did you learn about the people who wrote these letters?
  - What surprised you about the letters? What were they hiding that surprised you?
  - Did you learn anything new through this person's story?

On the following pages are transcriptions of some letters written by young people in the internment camps to their librarian, Clara Breed. There are over 300 letters at <https://janm.emuseum.com/groups/clara-breed-collection/results/images?page=1>. Please feel free to find more letters to use for this activity here.

Sept. 16, 1942

Dear Miss Breed,

Received the surprise pkg yesterday late in the afternoon. The chocolates just wilted when the box was opened 'cuz it was 110 inside the barracks. Wilted or not they were really welcome. I passed it out among our neighbors as they (the chocolate) wouldn't keep as the afternoons are getting hotter. However to compensate the morns are colder. brrrrr Had a wonderful sunrise this morning 'cuz there were clouds low on the horizon that turned golden from the rays of the sun. Otherwise the Dust Heat etc. are the same.

Sincerely  
Ted

My regards to your mother and Miss McNarry.

P.S. Your card came just as I was about to mail this card TH

December 25, 1942

Dear Miss Breed,

Jack was very happy when he received the present you sent him. You made his Christmas a happy one and I am glad too. Maybe one of these days he will make an attempt to write you a letter. I am writing this letter to thank you for all you have done in the way of making Jack happy.

In a camp like this there is not very much a child can do to enjoy himself. Jack has no games to play with so you can see how happy you have made him by sending him all those lovely books. We all thank you from the bottom of our hearts.

Some of my girl friends like Louise, Margaret, etc. were talking about receiving presents from you too. They seemed very happy too. Louise was saying she has received quite a few books and she said she would lend me a book since I do not have any. I wonder if it would be too much to ask if I were to ask you to send me any old discarded book you might have at the library. I would appreciate it very much if you would do this for me and I would be grateful to you. The reason I ask this is because my Christmas this year was really awful. I didn't receive a single thing and I thought if you could send me an old discarded book of any kind I would have something to show as being a present from someone. I don't want to put you to any trouble and I do want you to know I appreciate all you have done for the many Japanese children. Thanking you again and hoping to hear from you soon.

Sincerely yours,

Hisako Watanabe

(Jack's sister)

I hope you still remember me.

July 24, 1942

Poston, Arizona

Dear Miss Breed,

Thank you for the soap bubbles. I enjoyed them very much.

Night before last we had a rain storm. I sure mean storm! Several roofs were blown off, and our wires broke so we don't have any light yet. Our roof almost came off, and every time a wind came, it shook our room. There was a whole lot of thunder and lightning.

How did you like your visit to Santa Anita?

I sure wish I was back there again. I hear they get ice cream + cake + watermelon. We get watermelon, but we have to pay for them. I guess everybody thinks I'm going crazy. The reason is that I am learning Pig Latin!

You ought to hear me.

I sure wish I brought a dairy with me. I certainly would have a lot to write. This is what I would write:

The food is awful  
The heats terrific  
Whirlwind—dust  
Home sich

This is only half. Too bad you couldn't come up here and see for yourself.

Yours Truly,  
Katherine Tasaki

Excerpt from a letter by Louise Ogawa on November 11, 1942

Today all the elderly people and invalids received a mattress. My father received one but I'm still a little spring chicken so the straw mattress is good enough for me!! I have heard linoleums are going to be laid on the mess hall floors. I think this is wonderful.

Since school began the first school affair was the Junior Jubilee. It was a social put on by the Junior class. It seems to have been very successful. The seniors are going to have a social soon. I hope this will be successful too.

Every morning I see men with packs on their backs walking toward the east to the plateau for petrified wood and mineral rocks or toward the west to the Colorado River to fish. This seems to be the main activity for the older folks.

My! I am practically writing a book and I do want to hear about you. I imagine the library work keeps you busy as usual. I heard San Diego is a boom town too over-crowded for words. I probably won't recognize S.D. now.

Do write during your leisure hours for I just love to hear from you.

Hoping to hear from you soon  
Louise Ogawa

Ps. I enclosed a piece of cotton I picked. It has the seed in it. I wanted to send you a few branches but I was told it would not last so I changed my mind.