

# Lesson: How are We Defined as Americans?

Lesson Author: Loret Peterson

Grade Level(s): K-5

## Overview

In this lesson, the students will explore what it means to them to be an American. They will reflect on their own identities and family histories to better understand their experience. Individually and as a group, students will develop a definition of what it means to be an American and add to that definition throughout the year.

## Essential Question(s)

- What does it mean to be an American?
- Do you have to be a citizen to be considered an American?

## Student Objectives

*Students will be able to...*

- Create an individual and a group definition of an American
- Gain understanding through group discussions of their identity as Americans
- Illustrate a snapshot of themselves
- Write a sentence using the frame, "I am an American because \_\_\_\_\_ and \_\_\_\_\_."

## Materials

*Teachers will provide the following materials:*

- Chart paper
- Concept map handout
- Large blank index cards
- Marker or colored pencils
- Journals and lined paper
- Clip from the film, *And Then They Came for Us*:
  - "Children's Perspective" (17:29-20:00)
  - After registering for a free account, educators can screen the film on Facing History's website:  
<https://www.facinghistory.org/resource-library/video/and-the-n-they-came-us>

## Assessment

The students will share with the class a snapshot portrait of themselves along with a sentence describing what it means to be an American. They will use the sentence frame:

*I am an American because \_\_\_\_\_ and \_\_\_\_\_.*

The students can add to the definition of what it means to be an American throughout the school year. As students finish units of study on American History, for example, they can return to the chart and add to the definition.

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<b>C3 Alignment</b>	D2 His. 2. 3-5 Compare life in specific historical time periods to life today.
<b>Prior to Class</b>	<p>The teacher might wish to watch the film, <i>And Then They Came for Us</i>, in its entirety and be familiar with the content and the language. Focus on the specific film clip (referenced above) for the lesson.</p> <p>Have a large piece of chart paper available for recording the students' responses.</p> <p>Photocopy graphic organizers, have large blank index cards or cardstock paper available in 5 x 8 for the snapshot portraits, and provide markers or colored pencils.</p>
<b>Do Now</b>	<p>Show the students the 2:31 minute video clip from <i>And They Came For Us</i> (see above for accessing the clip online). The students should watch the video without taking notes or discussing the content. Inform the students that they are watching a short clip from a much longer film on the World War II-era Japanese American Incarceration.</p> <p>Explain to the students that in the video clip, 120,000 Japanese Americans have been forced out of their homes and taken to prison camps. This occurred after the bombing of Pearl Harbor during World War II.</p> <p>The clip is heart-breaking and it is important for the students to know that the majority of the Japanese Americans forced into these prison camps were American citizens. Describe to them that a citizen is a native or naturalized member of a state or nation and entitled to its privileges and protection.</p>
<b>Before</b>	<p>After watching the video clip, the students will participate in a quick-write about the final comment from the video clip, "<i>Mama, I want to go back to America.</i>"</p> <p>The teacher will write the questions:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• What do you think the speaker meant by her comment?</li><li>• What does it mean to be an American?"</li><li>• Do you have to be a citizen to be considered an American?</li></ul> <p>The students should respond to these questions using a journal or lined paper. Allow the students time to write and even draw their interpretation of these questions. A combination of writing and illustrations can be used to explain their feelings and thinking on these questions.</p>

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### During

After the students finish writing their individual reflections on the questions, have them use a think-pair-share strategy to share their writing. They will share their writing with an elbow or desk partner.

Once they have shared their writing, the student pairs will create a shared definition of what they think it means to be an American using the Concept Map graphic organizer (see below).

First, model the Concept Map using a familiar word so that the students understand how to access it. Students will illustrate the word, come up with a definition, and use the word in a sentence. The Concept Map, then, will support students with a structure to write their definitions. Next, after modeling with a familiar word, they should fill out the Concept Map on the word, "American." They should be prepared to share with the whole class.

After students are given ample time to finish their Concept maps, ask the student pairs to join together on the rug or to return to their seats. As the student pairs share their definitions aloud, the teacher will record the definitions on a large piece of chart paper. The students will be able to see all the definitions generated by their classmates.

The students receive a large index card to draw a snapshot or a self portrait. In this portrait, they will be drawing their faces, neckline and shoulders and coloring them. They will also write a sentence below their picture using the frame:

*I am an American because \_\_\_\_\_ and \_\_\_\_\_.*

The teacher should model finishing this sentence for the students and allow enough time for students to write a sentence below their self-portraits.

### After

The students will share with the class an illustration of themselves along with a sentence describing what it means to be an American.

### Extensions

- The teacher can take all the cards and put them together to form a quilt of, "What it means to be an American."
- Students can interview a family member using the question, "What does it mean to be an American?" Record the response in a journal or a lined paper. Be prepared to share your response with a partner.

# Concept Map

This graphic organizer can be used with any vocabulary word in any subject area.

<b>Word</b>	<b>Illustration</b>
<b>Definition</b>	<b>Sentence</b>