

Lesson: Who is Fred Korematsu and Why is He an American Hero?

Lesson Author: Nikki Mathews

Grade Level(s): 6-8

Overview

Students will learn about Fred T. Korematsu and his stand against the injustice of the Japanese American incarceration during World War II. He suffered greatly and was ostracized by his own people. However, he believed that the mass removal of the Japanese people was wrong. Even after being convicted of a crime, he stood by his beliefs no matter what harm came to him.

In 1983, Korematsu's wrongful conviction was overturned and, in 1998, he was awarded the Presidential Medal of Freedom. Currently, January 30th is remembered as Fred Korematsu Day of Civil Liberties and the Constitution and is commemorated in several states. This lesson is designed to be taught on January 30th, the Fred Korematsu Day of Civil Liberties and the Constitution.

Essential Question(s)

- What qualities make someone a hero?
- How can one person make a difference in their community or culture?

Student Objectives

Students will be able to...

- Define, redefine, and analyze the qualities that make someone a hero
- Understand basic facts about Fred Korematsu and how he stood up to the American government

Materials

Teachers will provide the following materials:

- Copies of "Who is Fred Korematsu? A Timeline" from Atkins, Laura; Stan Yogi. *Fred Korematsu Speaks Up*. Berkeley, CA: Heyday, 2017.
- Film Clips:
 - Fred Korematsu Institute. "Of Civil Wrongs and Rights: The Fred Korematsu Story three-minute version."
<http://www.korematsuinstitute.org/of-civil-wrongs-and-rights-the-fred-korematsu-story/>
 - Fred Korematsu Institute. "What would you do?"
<http://www.korematsuinstitute.org/homepage/>
 - Clip from the film, *And Then They Came for Us (2017)*:
 - "Fred Korematsu" (15:20 - 16:39)
 - After registering for a free account, educators can screen the film on Facing History's website:

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<https://www.facinghistory.org/resource-library/video/and-then-they-came-us>

Assessment

- Written responses and discussion about the qualities of a hero
- Reading and analyzing textual evidence
- Reconstructing qualities of what makes a person a hero

C3 Alignment

D2.His.3.6-8. Use questions generated about individuals and groups to analyze why they, and the developments they shaped, are seen as historically significant.
D2.Civ.7.6-8. Apply civic virtues and democratic principles in school and community settings (see Extensions).

Prior to Class

- Copy and cut strips of facts about Fred Korematsu's life and put into several different envelopes depending on your class groupings
- Have short film clips ready to view
- Write on board: "What makes a person a hero?"
- Have sticky notes ready to give to students before the lesson

Do Now

Give students sticky notes and have them write down an answer to the question on the board :

What makes a person a hero?

Have the students place their sticky notes on the board.

Before

Read and review the students' responses. Debrief some of the sticky notes as a class then ask students about the heroes they know about and share aloud with the entire class.

During

Tell the students that they will learn about one person who has become an American hero but at a personal cost. Fred T. Korematsu, a 23-year-old Japanese American living in the San Francisco Bay Area in 1942, defied military orders to register and go to the incarceration camps with all the other Japanese immigrants and Japanese Americans after the bombing of Pearl Harbor. Later, with the help of a lawyer, Fred challenged the United States Government that the incarceration of Japanese immigrants and Japanese Americans was unconstitutional. His case went all the way to the Supreme Court.

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Each team will investigate Fred Korematsu by putting together facts about his life in sequential order. Students should ask themselves these questions as they put the facts in order: *What is it that makes Fred Korematsu an American hero? Does he have the qualities you wrote down on your sticky notes about what makes someone a hero?*

Pass out one envelope of the cut-up facts (see below for a handout) to each team (depending on your class groupings).

Have teams work together to read the facts and put them in sequential order. Then have teams discuss the following questions in their groups. If desired, have students write their responses in journals:

- Why do you think Fred Korematsu is deemed a hero?
- What inconsistencies with heroic characteristics do you notice about Fred's facts?
- Do we need to change or add any characteristics to our opening question of "What makes a person a hero?"

After

With the students, make some predictions about the rest of Fred Korematsu's life. Ask, what do you think Korematsu went on to do with his life? Discuss as a whole class.

Then, tell students that they are going to find out more about Fred Korematsu's life and his significance in history. Queue up and show video clips (see above for the links to the clips). Depending on the age group, you might wish them to take notes on each clip and what information they are gleaned about Korematsu's life and significance. The following is a table that might be used to take notes on the film:

Film Clip	What "heroic" actions did Fred Korematsu take?
"Of Civil Wrongs and Rights: The Fred Korematsu Story three-minute version."	
"What would you do?"	
<i>And Then They Came for Us</i>	

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Extensions

Ask the students after watching the videos: *So, now that we have the whole picture of Fred Korematsu's life, what makes Fred an American hero?* If needed, the students can debrief the films with a partner first and use their notetaking to support their discussion.

To end the lesson, go back to the sticky notes from the Do Now activity. Ask the students what they might add to their list as heroic qualities.

Finally, prompt the students to apply these qualities to their own lives: *What are your strengths or weaknesses? Do you think you have the qualities to become a hero someday?* If time permits, have students share some of their responses aloud as a class or with a partner.

After learning about Fred Korematsu's life, ask the students to identify a social problem they would like to address. Later class periods could be used to develop the idea of how students can help this situation and then they can make a plan to do something of civic action.

Have the students write an essay to the following questions: *Identify an injustice happening in your school, community, state, or even in the United States. How can you stand up or address this injustice in your school, community, or state? What do you think are some solutions to this problem?*

Who is Fred Korematsu? A Timeline (Teacher's Guide)

All factual statements are taken from the book
Fred Korematsu Speaks Up by Laura Atkins and Stan Yogi

1. Fred's father and mother move to the United States in the early 1900s from Japan looking for better opportunities.
2. Fred's first grade teacher can't pronounce his Japanese name of Toyosabura, so she asks if he would like to be called Fred. The name sticks.
3. Fred's parents claim he gets into too much trouble, like when Fred and his friend steal oranges from a neighbor's tree or drive around in a car when they are 12.
4. Fred grew up in Oakland, California and is discriminated against because he is Japanese American.
5. Fred is rejected from the military before the bombing of Pearl Harbor because of his race.
6. Fred works as a welder to build ships and he plans to marry a girl he loves. Both parents disapprove because they are of different races.
7. President Franklin D. Roosevelt signs an order that allows the military to force all Japanese Americans living on the West Coast from their homes. Fred plans to disobey orders and move away.
8. Fred changes his name to Clyde Sarah and claims he is Spanish Hawaiian, but he is arrested on May 30, 1942 (about one month after his family was imprisoned) and is put into prison.
9. Ernest Besig, a lawyer for the American Civil Liberties Union, reads about Fred's arrest in the newspapers and comes to the prison to meet him. Ernest asks if Fred will agree to fight this case against him which would also mean challenging the imprisonment of all Japanese Americans as unconstitutional. It will take a long time to fight and Ernest will not charge Fred any money. Fred agrees. Ernest pays for Fred's bail at \$2,500.
10. Fred is arrested again by military police officers right after Ernest paid for Fred's bail and is imprisoned at Tanforan – a former racetrack – where other Japanese people from San Francisco are imprisoned. His family is there.
11. Fred's family are ashamed that Fred disobeyed the government's orders. The Japanese community at Tanforan are afraid that Fred's court case will make things harder for them and do not support him. Fred's girlfriend breaks up with him. He feels all alone.
12. Fred and his family are moved to an incarceration camp at Topaz, Utah. He eats his meals alone and waits to hear about his court case.
13. In March 1944, Fred receives the news that the Supreme Court will agree to hear his case in October. They lose. Six of the nine judges ruled that it was legal to remove Japanese Americans from their homes because of "military necessity." Fred feels as if he lost his country.
14. In 1945, the camps close. Fred and all the other imprisoned Japanese Americans try to rebuild their lives.

Who is Fred Korematsu? A Timeline (Student Copy)

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