Film - Of Civil Wrongs and Rights: The Fred Korematsu Story
Fred Korematsu: Standing Up for Many
Film Courtesy of Fred T. Korematsu Institute, Lesson Creator(s): Freda Lin and the Fred T. Korematsu Institute

Grade Level(s)      7th-12th

Summary of Lesson
Students will gain an understanding of how Fred Korematsu is a civil rights hero who “stands for millions of souls” according to President Bill Clinton, by analyzing several quotes from the documentary Of Civil Wrongs and Rights: The Fred Korematsu Story. This will serve as a preview to the film clip they will watch after the lesson activities. Students will first reflect on what it means to have one person standing for many people through an individual writing prompt. Then they will do a Fishbowl activity to investigate the quotes, which will allow for diverse perspectives from all students in an open forum environment. The set-up consists of dividing students into groups, where one group will be the discussion group in an inner circle set up in the middle of the classroom and a larger group will be the observation group in an outer circle surrounding the inner circle. After about ten minutes, groups will switch seats between the inner circle and the outer circle until all students have the opportunity to be in the inner circle discussion group to give their analysis and opinions about quotes from the film.

Background

Of Civil Wrongs and Rights: The Fred Korematsu Story documents the story of an ordinary person who took an extraordinary stand: Fred T. Korematsu. In 1942, at the age of 23, he refused to go to the U.S. government’s incarceration camps for Japanese Americans. After he was arrested and convicted of defying the government’s order, he appealed his case to the U.S. Supreme Court. In 1944, the Supreme Court ruled against him, arguing that the incarceration was justified due to military necessity.

In 1983, a legal historian and researcher discovered key documents that government lawyers had hidden from the Supreme Court in 1944. The documents consistently showed that Japanese Americans had done nothing wrong and represented no substantial threat to national security. With this new evidence, a legal team re-opened Korematsu’s case by petitioning for a “writ of error coram nobis,” meaning that “an error has been committed before us,” and in this case referring to an error made before the U.S. courts by federal prosecutors on the part of the government. On November 10, 1983, Korematsu’s conviction was overturned in the U.S. District Court of the Northern District of California. It was a pivotal moment in civil rights history.

In 1998, Fred Korematsu received the Presidential Medal of Freedom, the nation’s highest civilian honor from President Bill Clinton. After 9/11, Fred continued to speak out, filing a number of legal briefs with the U.S. Supreme Court on behalf of American Muslim inmates being held in U.S. military prisons. In 2005, after more than 60 years of activism, Fred Korematsu passed away at the age of 86.
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Possible Unit(s) for Lesson
- Civil Rights History and Heroes
- Constitution and Civics
- World War II
- Displacement
- Ethnic Studies

Focus Question(s)
- What does it mean to be someone who stands for millions of people?
- What does it mean to be an American?

Objective(s)
1. Analyze primary and secondary source quotes and archival footage
2. Determine how Fred Korematsu is a civil rights hero who “stands for millions of souls”

Historical Thinking Skill(s)*

Historical Significance
Events, people, or developments have historical significance if they are revealing. That is, they shed light on enduring or emerging issues in history or contemporary life.

Cause and Consequence
Events result from the interplay of two types of factors: (1) historical actors, who are people (individuals or groups) who take actions that cause historical events, and (2) the social, political, economic, and cultural conditions within which the actors operate.


C3 Framework Standards
D2.Civ.8.6-8. Analyze ideas and principles contained in the founding documents of the United States, and explain how they influence the social and political system.
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.

Required Materials and Preparation
Materials:
- Of Civil Wrongs and Rights: The Fred Korematsu Story (3-minute version)
- Post-its of Outer Circle Observation and Reflective Questions - These are recommended questions that can be revised by the teacher. The number of Post-its is determined by subtracting the discussion group size (6 to 12 students) from the total number of students in the class. Teachers can write the same question on several post-its, meaning that several students can be given the same question. This can allow for more student perspectives on one question. Write 1 question/prompt per Post-it:
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one question. Write 1 question/prompt per Post-it:

- Choose a statement from 1 of the inner circle students about the quote and write an argument that supports the statement.
- Choose a statement from 1 of the inner circle students about the quote and write an argument that counters the statement.
- Give examples of students who were respectful in the way they discussed with one another.
- Give examples of students who were disrespectful in the way they discussed with one another.
- Do some students speak more than others? Which students spoke the most and least?
- How many times did students interrupt each other?

- Separate copies of each quote from Appendix A: Quotes for every student during each round of discussions
- One copy of Appendix B: Teacher/Facilitator Discussion Questions for the teacher to use during inner circle discussion time

Binder paper

Preparation:

1. Make sure students have a working knowledge of WWII and the reasons why Executive Order 9066 was implemented as well as the euphemisms used during this time in history and what the more accurate terminology to use is. The following lesson plans from the Korematsu Curriculum Kit can be used:
   - “The Reasons for Executive Order 9066” Lesson Plan in the Teacher’s Guide
   - “President Roosevelt Removes Japanese Americans: Executive Order 9066, 1942” - Lesson Plan in the Teacher’s Guide
   - “The Power of Euphemisms” Film Lesson Plan for A Bitter Legacy

2. Questions for students to consider before beginning this lesson:
   - Imagine that you are President Franklin Roosevelt meeting with your cabinet soon after the bombing of Pearl Harbor. On what basis might it be legitimate to brand/identify a group of people as being a threat to national security?
   - In times of war, how does a country distinguish between its loyal citizens and potential enemies?
   - The 14th Amendment to the Constitution guarantees that the government can’t “deprive any person of life, liberty, or property, without due process of law; nor deny to any person within its jurisdiction the equal protection of the laws.” During times of war, should these rights be dismissed or do these rights take on heightened importance?
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1. Writing Prompt
   a. Instruct students to individually answer the following question on a sheet of binder paper:
      i. What U.S. American do you know of who stands for millions of people and why did you choose this person? Think about actions this person has done in history or current times or certain values this person demonstrates that many people can stand behind. (Examples can include civil rights activists such as Dolores Huerta to sports legends like Lebron James)
   b. Direct students to pair up with a student and share responses.
   c. Conduct a class discussion on their responses and the types of values they would want in someone who stands for so many people. End the discussion by telling them that they will watch a film clip about Fred Korematsu, who was awarded the Presidential Medal of Freedom in 1998 by President Bill Clinton because he “stands for millions of souls.”

2. Fishbowl Activity
   a. Introduction
      Tell students that they will first analyze important quotes from the film clip by doing a Fishbowl activity, where they will have organized student-centered discussions in small groups. One group will have the discussion while the other group will write observations and responses to the discussion. Review what respectful discussions look like. For example, they should listen attentively and make thoughtful statements. The teacher will pose a variety of questions but not participate in the discussion. The main role of the teacher is to facilitate the discussion and allow for students to engage in analyzing the quotes themselves. Students do not need to raise their hands during the discussion. They will respectfully take turns by waiting for the speaker to finish.
   b. Room Set-up
      i. Divide students into several discussion groups of 6 to 12 students.
      ii. Direct Discussion Group 1 to make a small inner circle in the middle of the classroom and the other groups to form a larger outer circle surrounding Group 1. Make sure there is ample space for students to move from one circle to the other.
      iii. After Group 1 finishes the discussion facilitated by the teacher, Group 2 will move to the inner circle. This process will continue until all groups have discussed a quote.
   c. Discussion Time - See Appendices A and B for Quotes and Teacher/Facilitator Discussion Questions.
      i. Distribute a copy of Quote 1 Handout to all students.
      ii. Prompt/Question 1: Instruct students to read the quote carefully and circle any words or phrases that stand out to them and to be prepared to explain why. Give them a few minutes to complete this.
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Procedure

iii. Start the discussion by telling students to share their responses one at a time and to feel free to ask each other questions or make additional comments that relate to the quote and discussion. Remind students about discussion protocol (from the Introduction above) and to refer to the text as much as possible when making comments.

iv. Make sure students are given long pauses to allow for them to digest information and participate in the discussion.

v. After a long enough pause where it seems students have nothing else to say about Prompt 1, ask them a question from Appendix B or a question that pertains to the text they are analyzing.

vi. Continue this procedure for about 10 - 15 minutes.

vii. Debrief the discussion by having outer circle students share their responses to their assigned question or prompt.

viii. Instruct Discussion Group 2 to switch seats with Discussion Group 1.

ix. Repeat steps i through viii, except have Discussion Group 2 switch seats with Discussion Group 3 and distribute Quote 2 Handout to all students.

x. If there are more than two discussion groups, have the next discussion group switch seats with Discussion Group 2 and distribute Quote 3 Handout to all students. Repeat the whole process for Quote 4 Handout, if using.

3. Of Civil Wrongs and Rights: The Fred Korematsu Story Film Clip Notes. Tell students that they will hear the quotes they just analyzed as they watch the Of Civil Wrongs and Rights: The Fred Korematsu Story film clip. Instruct them to take notes to help them respond with examples to the following question:

How is Fred Korematsu a civil rights hero who “stands for millions of souls?”

4. Conduct a class discussion on students’ responses. Ask students what they think may have happened in Fred Korematsu’s case. This discussion and lesson can be used as a way to preview learning about the U.S. Supreme Court case, Korematsu v. U.S. and Korematsu’s 1983 coram nobis case where his Supreme Court federal conviction was overturned in the U.S. District Court of the Northern District of California;

The following strategies can be used to scaffold the content:

A. Writing prompt: For younger students or students who can’t think of anyone who represents millions of Americans, have them come up with a list of values or actions they think a person should have (such as the President of the U.S.).

NOTE: Currently, Korematsu v. United States still stands on the U.S. Supreme Court record.

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B. Quote 1 can be used as a way for teachers to model an example of how to analyze quotes by conducting a discussion with the whole class.

C. Film Clip Notes: Instead of students taking film clip notes with their own note-taking strategy, create a handout with the following questions to help students understand main points from the film clip:
   • Fred Korematsu said “We expected the worst to happen, and it did.” What actions occurred that confirmed this statement?
   • What was Fred surprised about that the U.S. government did?
   • What did Fred think was wrong about what the U.S. government thought about Asian Americans during WWII?
   • What did he think of the conditions of Tanforan “Assembly Center,” where he was first imprisoned during WWII?
   • According to President Bill Clinton, what did Fred do against the forced “internment” of Japanese Americans during WWII? What were the consequences of his actions? How did the U.S. government ultimately judge Fred?

Show students the Of Civil Wrongs and Rights: The Fred Korematsu Story 24-minute version from the Korematsu Curriculum Kit DVD and have them write an essay to answer the same question in Procedure step 3: How is Fred Korematsu a civil rights hero who “stands for millions of souls?”

Suggested Discussion Questions after watching the 24-minute video:

1. Fred Korematsu was surprised by the fact that the government incarcerated both immigrants and first generation Japanese Americans (Americans of Japanese descent born in the U.S. as citizens). Why do you think he made this distinction? What was the basis for the incarceration?

2. If you were subjected to the same forced removal as the Japanese Americans, how might you react? Why? How do you think Japanese Americans reacted? Why?
   • Just go along with things and show your American loyalty?
   • Non-violent, passive resistance?
   • Outwardly fight the forced removal?

3. The U.S. justified the mass incarceration of Japanese Americans because those of Japanese descent were part of an “enemy race.” Was the U.S. at war with a race or a country? How does this apply to the post-9/11 environment and the “Muslim ban” of 2017, where some argue that the U.S. is at war with a religion? Is that a fair or unfair assessment?
4. Karen Korematsu said that her father never told her about his famous Supreme Court case. Many incarcerees didn’t mention their imprisonment to their children for years and in some cases, decades. Why do you think this was the case?

5. Why is *Korematsu v. United States* a landmark civil rights case? Why was it so critical for the legal team to win the 1983 case? Was the 1983 verdict important in the government’s reaction to the 9/11 attacks?
Appendix A - Quotes

* Photocopy and cut each page in half to ensure enough copies of each quote for all students. Hand them out one quote at a time right before the inner circle discussion begins.

Quote 1

“It was I think for him [Fred Korematsu], a personal shock of recognition: ‘Who am I? Am I an American? What does it mean for me to be an American’” - Ronald Takaki, historian

Quote 2

“Fred Korematsu’s case represented the trial that Japanese Americans never had...” - Don Tamaki, 1983 legal team of Fred Korematsu’s reopened case from WWII
Quote 3
“The real significance of Fred’s case was that it raised for the first time the central issue: Was the ‘internment’ itself constitutional?” - Peter Irons, legal historian

Quote 4
“If you look at Fred Korematsu you see a very ordinary man who just wanted to be left alone but who defied the U.S. government because he knew it was wrong.” - John Tateishi, former Executive Director of the Japanese American Citizens League
Appendix B - Questions

Teacher/Facilitator Discussion Questions
These are recommended questions for teachers to facilitate each discussion. Questions can be revised or new questions can be created to have a more productive reflection and understanding of the quotes. Print 1 copy of these questions to use during the Fishbowl activity.

Quote 1 Discussion Questions
1. What does it mean to be an American?
2. Why would someone question whether they’re an American?
3. What do you think Korematsu was shocked about?

Quote 2 Discussion Questions
1. What “trial” do you think Don Tamaki is referring to?
2. Why would an entire ethnic group like the Japanese Americans need a trial?
3. What would Japanese Americans’ arguments be at this trial?

Quote 3 Discussion Questions
1. What does it mean for something to be constitutional?
2. Was the “internment” and mass incarceration of Americans of Japanese descent constitutional? Give reasons why.
3. Why is it important to bring up the constitutionality of past occurrences and events?
4. Why do you think the “first time” is mentioned? How long do you think it took to raise this issue?

Quote 4 Discussion Questions
1. Why do you think Fred Korematsu is highlighted as an “ordinary man?”
2. Why do you think Fred Korematsu wanted to be left alone and from what did he want to be left alone?