

Reading Place as History: **Uncovering Shadowed Lands & Collective Memory**

"The land is our history, our present, and our hope for the future. Every mountain holds the stories of ancestors, every river carries their songs, and every tree stands as witness to our history."- Unknown

Teacher Preparation:

Spaces and places carry significant historical and emotional weight. Every environment we enter is layered with the histories of the people, events, and communities that have shaped it, even when those stories remain unspoken or unfamiliar to us. Anthropologist Tim Ingold reminds us that "the landscape tells—or rather is—the story of the people who dwell within it." He emphasizes that landscapes are not passive settings but active processes, shaped by the movements, routines, actions, and memories of those who inhabit them. Building on these active processes that shape landscapes, geographer Yi-Fu Tuan distinguishes place from space, noting that "place is space made meaningful." It is through human actions, memories, and interpretations that a location gains significance—informing which narratives are remembered, centered, or overlooked. Engaging with place through this lens helps learners recognize how both visible and concealed histories continue to influence our understandings of community, memory, and identity.

At the Museum of Tolerance, we lean on our pedagogical principles to begin and end in story, as well as utilizing primary sources to engage our participants in experiential learning. In our workshop *The Roots of Curiosity: Places, Spaces, and Layered Histories*, our goal is prompt learners to engage with "shadowed lands"—places that carry powerful, painful, or traumatic memories—and to explore how these spaces give rise to what we call "intertwined narratives" and "layered histories." Through visual analysis of primary sources from the *Incarceration of Japanese Americans*, learners will investigate how places and spaces shape historical memory and reveal the layered histories held within "shadowed lands."

Intertwined narratives operate along two distinct paths: one that acknowledges and honors the places hold memory, and another that views the same space in isolation, detached from the histories that give it meaning. The Santa Anita Racetrack offers a powerful example of this duality. For many Japanese Americans, it is a site of wartime incarceration and the erosion of civil and human rights during World War II. For others, it is a venue of sport and celebration—a place where a painful past is often overlooked or forgotten.

Drawing on Anthropologist and Historian Shannon Lee Dawdy's concept of patina, we consider how places absorb multiple histories and how communities selectively interpret these layers—romanticizing, forgetting, resisting, or encountering them in fragments. These overlapping memories intertwine to form the broader fabric of our shared histories, even when they are not recognized or understood in their full complexity.

In this workshop, learners will explore their personal connections to places and spaces while also investigating sites of "shadowed land" whose histories have shifted, evolved, or faded from public memory over time. The workshop centers curiosity and collective memory-keeping as essential practices for preserving the layered histories that define both our own communities and those whose stories differ from ours.

Through the activities and discussions, learners will cultivate an ethic of curiosity toward people and places, recognizing that the human experience is expansive, dynamic, and shaped by continuous engagement. Together, participants will contribute to a shared tapestry of understanding—one that acknowledges complexity, invites dialogue, and honors the layered stories woven into the spaces we inhabit.

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Facilitation Notes:

As MOT facilitators, we recognize that every workshop exists within real-world time constraints and is shaped by the unique dynamics of each learning space. The bold elements labeled as core in this guide represent essential components to achieve the workshop's overarching goals.

Non-bolded or those sections labeled as optional or suggested may be thoughtfully condensed or adapted as needed. We trust your professional judgment to make intentional choices that honor both the integrity of the workshop and your learners' needs.

Grades: 8-12

Time for Completion: 2 hrs

Required Reading and Pre-Materials:

To prepare for facilitating this workshop, please review the History of Japanese-American Incarceration paper, as well as our resource on Shadowed Lands.

Materials:

Chart Paper, Markers, Image analysis folder.

Enduring Understandings:

- Physical spaces carry layered meanings shaped by time, lived experience, and the cultural and communal perspectives of those who inhabit them. Recognizing these layers deepens our understanding of the human experience and the histories embedded within the places we encounter.
- Preserving the memory of shadowed lands requires the active participation of all community members in keeping and engaging with collective memory. Through this shared commitment, learners cultivate curiosity for their own lived experiences and for those that differ, strengthening connection and empathy within their community.

Essential Questions:

1. How can curiosity about our own histories inform and deepen the way we engage with the histories of others?
2. Who or what informs our understanding of a place, and how does that shape the narratives we choose to recognize and uphold?
3. In what ways can collective memory and shared storytelling strengthen empathy and foster more connected communities?



"Young girl near guard tower-Ayaho Inouye." Heart Mountain Wyoming Foundation. Denshō. Cody, Wyoming

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Lesson Outcomes Through Standards Alignment:

In alignment with C3 Social Studies Standards, Social Justice Standards, and California's Transformative SEL competencies, learners will:

- Analyze primary sources to identify how places are shaped by layered histories and lived experiences, to explain how these insights inform placemaking practices.
- Apply the Tree of Curiosity—a relational communication tool—to deepen mutual understanding and integrate multiple perspectives through which we view layered histories.
- Synthesize the concept of “shadowed land” with the dialogic framework—to tailor ethical approaches of engagement with layered history and places within their own educational spheres.

Standards Alignment:

California Common Core Standards:

RI.6-8.1 / RI.9-10.1 / RI.11-12.1

Cite textual evidence to support analysis of primary and secondary sources.

W.6-8.9 / W.9-10.9 / W.11-12.9

Draw evidence from informational texts to support analysis and reflection.

SL.6-8.1 / SL.9-10.1 / SL.11-12.1

Initiate and participate effectively in collaborative discussions.

SL.6-8.4 / SL.9-10.4 / SL.11-12.4

Present information and findings clearly and logically.



April, 1942. Records of War Relocation Authority, Record Group 210; National Archives at College Park, College Park, MD



Incarcerated Japanese Americans at Santa Anita Assembly Center. 1942. Courtesy of the National Archives and Records Administration and the Saul Collection.

Museum of Tolerance Principles of Pedagogy:

- Situate Learners as Contributors to History
- Begin in Story, End in Story: Narrative as Transformational Change
- Primary Sources and Experiential Learning

Key Terms:

Shadowed Lands

Interwoven Narratives

Collective Memory

Layered History

Key Historical Moments:

The Incarceration of Japanese Americans (1942-1946)

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Pre-workshop:

Facilitators should prepare any handouts, physical, and digital materials.

1. Welcome & Introduction: (3 min):

2. Space Made Meaningful: Journaling & Discussion (10 min):

In this portion of the workshop, learners will engage in a journaling activity and pair share dyad. Learners will respond to the following prompt:

Activity Prompt

We each engage with physical spaces in distinct ways. A place that carries deep meaning for one person or community may hold an entirely different significance for someone else. Over time, people, events, and historical shifts shape and reshape how we understand the spaces around us. These histories do not vanish; instead, they accumulate, creating layers of memory and meaning that coexist within a single place. For this journaling activity, respond to the questions below:

Journaling Questions

- What place holds a powerful memory for you? Describe the space and the memory associated with it. Why is it meaningful?
- Do you know the history of this place? What was it before?
- How has this place changed over the years? If it has not changed, reflect on what it feels like to see it remain the same.

Activity Close:

After journaling, let learners know to keep their writing close as it will be utilized for a later activity.



Japanese folk dancing at
Kaslo Internment Camp. 1944.

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Suggested Transition Dialogue:

“Thank you all for taking the time to journal about a place that holds meaning for you. The memories you reflected on add another dimension to the rich histories embedded within the spaces we inhabit. In the prompts, we asked you to consider both the past and present of your chosen place. Let’s take a moment to reflect: Why are places important to us?”

Exploring the layered histories of a space—its shifts over time, the memories attached to it, and the perspectives that shape it—allows us to engage more deeply with local histories and the diverse lived experiences within and outside of our communities. This kind of engagement expands our understanding of one another helps bridge the divides that separate us. As we transition into our next activity, we will explore sites of “shadowed land,” examining how multiple meanings coexist within a single place and how these dimensions inform our work as educators and memory keepers.”

Activity: Seen & Unseen: Shadowed Lands and Layered Histories (35min)

Seen & Unseen Framework:

The seen and unseen framework supports learners in analyzing and interpreting visual imagery. Learners are supported in moving beyond baseline observations of the visual imagery to draw conclusions of underlying themes, symbols, and emotions that are not explicitly presented.

Pre-Activity Preparation:

Present learners with chart paper featuring two images with the second image being consistent across all chart papers. This will allow for a comparative element from each group’s differing perspectives. The captions of each image should also be covered, and the chart paper should be placed on the walls of the learning environment.

Zoom Differentiation:

Break learners up into groups of 2-4 depending on the workshop size. Each breakout group will be presented with a digital PDF packet containing two images and a set of testimonies from the Incarceration of Japanese Americans.

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Seen & Unseen Activity Prompt:

In this activity, you will examine historical images by exploring two dimensions of meaning. First, identify the seen—the visible details, people, objects, and actions captured in the photograph. Then, consider the unseen—the themes, emotions, histories, and symbols that are suggested but not directly shown.

You will work through the packets in order, beginning with Packet 1 for Part 1 of the activity. After each step, we will bring the breakout groups back together to share and compare your observations.

Part 1- Investigate the Seen (Image 1) (5min):

Observe the literal elements in each image.

Who is in the image?

What are they doing?

What information can you gather from their body language?

What is happening in the image?

Is there any text visible in the image?

What aspects of the image suggest the time period?

Part II-Investigate the Unseen (Image 1) (5min):

Take a deeper look to explore what is not easily seen:

What themes stand out from the image?

What emotions does the image invoke?

What is missing from the image – what don't we know?



Byron, California. These families of Japanese ancestry, evacuated from farms in Contra Costa County

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Activity Check In:

After completing the initial image analysis, bring participants back together to share their observations with the whole group. As each group presents, distribute the next folder of images. Invite participants to repeat the same analysis process—using the guiding questions provided—to deepen their examination of the new set of images.

Part 3- Image 2 Analysis and Comparison (10min):

Participants should return to the analysis steps used for the first image set and respond to the following additional questions:

How did your understanding of the first image shift after analyzing the second image?

In what ways did the testimony you engaged with deepen, clarify, or complicate your understanding of the images?

Why is it important to make space for the multiple truths and perspectives that these images reveal?

Part 4: Presentations (15min):

Each group will be invited to present their findings to the whole group.

Facilitation Note:

As participants engage with the images, weave in historical context that enriches and extends the narratives emerging from their observations. Rather than offering a traditional lecture, allow the context to develop organically through the discussion, using participants' insights to guide an inquiry-centered exploration of the historical case studies. This approach keeps the learning grounded in dialogue, curiosity, and collective meaning-making.

For recommended historical touchpoints, please review our History of the Incarceration of Japanese Americans Resource.

Transition Statement:

"Now that we've examined the layered histories embedded in places and spaces, take a moment to return to your initial journal entry from the start of the workshop. Reflect on how the historical images and the seen and unseen analysis may have expanded or shifted your understanding of the place you wrote about. Have your thoughts changed or curiosities expanded after engaging in this activity?"

Reflection Question:

When reflecting on the journal prompt above:

How did you respond to these changes in your selected place (or lack of change)? Did they raise questions, or evoke a particular emotion?

Please jot down your reflections (2 minutes).

Once you've noted your ideas, we will move into a partner dialogue activity to share and deepen these insights."

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Activity: The Tree of Curiosity: Layered histories (30min)

Activity Instructions:

Step 1: With your partner, share only the name of the place you journaled about. Give no more details other than the name.

Step 2: After sharing the name of the place, turn to a new page in your journal. At the top of the page, write the name of your partner's chosen place. Then draw two "branches," one on the left side of the page and one on the right.

Left Branch: Take two minutes to reflect on the name of the place your partner shared. If the name is unfamiliar, note your initial assumptions or impressions based on the limited information you have. If you already know the place, reflect on what you understand about its history, location, or your own experiences with it.

Right Branch: Write one question or curiosity you have about your partner's place.

Step 3: Each partner will have three minutes to share their journal entry. After the first person shares, switch roles so the second partner can share their place of memory.

Once both partners have shared, take turns again—each partner will have two minutes to describe their initial reactions based solely on seeing the name of the other person's place. After sharing these reactions, each partner should ask the question or curiosity they wrote for their partner.

Step 4: After sharing with your partner, return to your branches.

Left Branch: After hearing your partner describe their place of memory, reflect on how your initial thoughts, feelings, or assumptions have changed. If you were already familiar with this place, consider what similarities or differences emerged between your experiences and your partner's. Take three minutes to journal.

Right Branch: Write down one new question or curiosity you now have for your partner, based on the additional information and insights you gained from their explanation.

Step 5: Share your question with your partner and allow for time for them to answer. Each partner should have 2 minutes uninterrupted to answer the question presented.

Step 6: After your conversation with your partner, take a moment to pause and write in your journal. Use the questions below to guide your reflection:

What did it feel like to open up a meaningful place in your life to someone else? Consider what it was like to share its history, memories, or emotions, and how it felt to widen another person's understanding of that space.

After listening to your partner's story, how has their place of meaning taken on significance for you? Think about what you learned, what surprised you, and how their experiences may have shifted or deepened your perspective.



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Activity Conclusion/Contextualization:

The Tree of Curiosity invites us to slow down and look more carefully at our own experiences, at the stories of others, and at the histories held within the communities around us. This process invites us to uncover unfamiliar narratives, notice new details, and discover deeper layers within places or stories we thought we already understood.

Teacher Differentiation:

The Tree of Curiosity can be adapted for a wide range of subjects and historical case studies. It offers a flexible framework for facilitating structured dialogue on challenging topics, supporting social-emotional learning, and strengthening learners' active listening skills.

Extension Activities:

Patina Walk

Have students explore a nearby street, building, or public space and pay attention to the little signs of change—materials, repairs, old names, new additions. It's a simple way to surface the layered histories hiding in everyday places.

Dual Narrative Investigation

Choose one site that holds very different meanings depending on who you ask (a place of celebration for some, trauma for others). Students create two parallel narratives to show how memory can be remembered, silenced, or contested.

Shadowed Lands Inquiry

Students investigate a local site whose history has been overlooked—maybe an area transformed by gentrification or a landmark that lost its story over time. They dig into archives, oral histories, or community knowledge to bring those stories back into view.

Curiosity & Collective Memory Practice

Students interview peers or community members about a meaningful place, then add quotes, photos, or drawings to a shared “patina wall” that visualizes how places carry layered personal and communal memories.

Legacy Keeping Research Project

Students work together to research sites of shadowed land and uncover how younger generations and families of those with a connection to these shadowed lands are upholding the memory of their familial experiences of a place.



Arcadia, California. Meal time, cafeteria-style, for these children at Santa Anita assembly center for evacuees of Japanese ancestry. Courtesy of the National Archives and Records Administration. 1942



Amache Incarceration Camp, CO. Courtesy of the George Ochikubo Collection. Denshō. 1944