

A Classroom Guide for  
**American Pastime**

Written by Gary Mukai



American Pastime, 2007  
Screenplay by Desmond Nakano and Tony Kayden  
Story by Desmond Nakano  
<http://warnervideo.com/americanpastime/>

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# Acknowledgements

Gary Mukai is the Director of the Stanford Program on International and Cross-Cultural Education (SPICE), Freeman Spogli Institute for International Studies, Stanford University.

Special thanks to Kerry Yo Nakagawa, Associate Producer, *American Pastime*, and Director, Nisei Baseball Research Project, <http://www.niseibaseball.com>, for his support during the development of this guide. No one has done more to promote the awareness of Japanese-American history through the prism of baseball.

Special appreciation to Ric Sakai, Y Design, <http://www.ydesign.com>, for his design of this guide. With his sensitivity to the Japanese-American experience, Ric brings a unique skill to his graphic design work with the Japanese-American community. Thanks also to Barry Rosenbush, Rosey Bushes, Inc.; Kevin Tsujihara and Jim Noonan, Warner Bros.; and Chip Taylor, Chip Taylor Communications.



## Photo Credits:

Sarah Drew, page 7

Frank Kamiyama, page 13 (photograph on DVD)

Matthew Morgan, pages 5, 6, 10

Kerry Yo Nakagawa, cover and acknowledgements pages, pages 8, 11

Joseph Osborn, pages 1, 15

Warner Bros., DVD cover on front and title pages and on page 12

Matthew Williams, page 4



# Introduction

*American Pastime* is one of only a handful of Hollywood films about Japanese-American internment. The film can be a useful tool for teaching about the impact of World War II on the homefront. The film can be used effectively at the collegiate level and possibly at the high school level. The film shows how the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor on December 7, 1941 impacted the lives of Japanese-American families on the West Coast of the United States and offers a glimpse into their lives in “relocation camps” during World War II. The film offers diverse perspectives on the internment experience.

Before showing the film in a classroom, it is recommended that teachers preview the film and review this guide. It is important to note that the film is rated PG. Profanity is used in the film. Also, disparaging and derogatory terms are used in the film; these terms were commonly used during the years depicted in this film—that is, from the early 1940s to the mid-1940s. An explanation of these terms is included in this guide and if teachers choose to use this film at the high school level, it is especially important to point out the background of these terms to students.

## Grade Levels

Recommended for colleges; possibly for high schools

If this film is used at the high school level, it can be used to address Standard 3C, U.S. National History Standards, <http://nchs.ucla.edu/standards/>.

Standard 3C: The student understands the effects of World War II at home.

Evaluate the internment of Japanese Americans during the war and assess the implication for civil liberties.

## Class Periods

Three to four class periods. The film is 106 minutes in length and will require at least two class periods to show. The activities in this guide can be used during the third and fourth classroom periods.

## Major Themes of *American Pastime*

- Redemption
- Tolerance
- Humanity
- Patriotism



## Objectives

Students will

- learn how the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor impacted people of Japanese descent in the United States;
- learn about Japanese-American internment through the prism of baseball;
- learn about the challenges that faced people of Japanese descent in the United States during World War II;
- appreciate the moral dilemmas faced by people of Japanese descent in the United States during World War II;
- consider themes like redemption, tolerance, humanity, and patriotism in the context of the Japanese-American internment experience;
- consider the impact of the “relocation camps” on neighboring communities;
- consider the nature of civil liberties during times of crisis;
- view films critically; and
- compare and contrast different points of view.

## Procedures

1. Before showing *American Pastime*, ask students what they think about when they hear the terms, “American pastime.” Show the cover image of the DVD for *American Pastime* and ask students what they think the film may be about. You may want to read the film description found on the back of the DVD.

Film description: *American Pastime* tells a poignant story set against the Japanese-American internment camps during World War II. Built to house Japanese-American citizens whose loyalties stood questioned by the pressures of war, these camps created many hardships for their internees. Rounded up and uprooted from their everyday lives, they remained loyal to the United States, and ironically turned to that most American of sports—baseball—as a way to deal with their plight.

2. *American Pastime* offers many lessons about life in the “relocation camps” and offers a glimpse into diverse perspectives on the internment experience through the film’s many characters. Before showing the film, divide the class in half. Assign one-half of the class to focus on “camp life” while viewing the film. Assign one of the topics below to each student or to pairs of students. Each student should take notes on his or her assigned topic while viewing the film.

### Camp Life

Agriculture	Military service
Camp layout	Music
Curfew	Privacy
Employment	Psychological issues, e.g., depression, suicide
Festivals, e.g., Obon	Protests
Japanese culture	Rations
Life in Abraham	Recreation
Marriage	Religion
Meals	Schooling

3. Assign the other half of the class to “character analysis.” Assign one of the characters to each student or to pairs of students. Each student should take notes on his or her assigned character while viewing *American Pastime*. Some questions to consider are: What perspectives does the character have on topics such as World War II, internment, military service, and/or baseball?

### Character Analysis

Army recruiter in Poston

Billy Burrell, camp administration official; sergeant; aspiring New York Yankee

Katie Burrell, daughter of Billy Burrell

Shirley Burrell, wife of Billy Burrell



Corporal Mack, antagonist  
 “Bambino” Hirose, internee from Hawaii  
 Joe Johnson, proprietor of store in Parker  
 Nori Morita, elderly internee; gambler  
 Emi Nomura, mother of Lyle  
 Kaz Nomura, father of Lyle  
 Lane Nomura, son of Kaz and Emi Nomura; aspiring pitcher  
 Lyle Nomura, son of Kaz and Emi Nomura; joins 442nd Regimental Combat Team  
 Corporal Norris, camp guard  
 Jumbo Tanaka, camp internee  
 Ed Tully, first baseman for Parker team; barber  
 Jackie Tully, son of Ed Tully; serving U.S. military  
 Walter Watson, director of Topaz Relocation Camp

4. Show *American Pastime*. Note that the film is 106 minutes in length.
5. After viewing the film, you may choose to have each student (or pairs of students) share a two-minute summary of its assigned topic or character. Alternatively, you may want to have students write short summaries of their assigned topics or characters. These could be compiled, bound, and circulated for student reviews.
6. The following questions are recommended for debriefing *American Pastime*. Students can either discuss the questions or students can choose one of the questions to write a “Film Reflections” essay.
  - How does the filmmaker use newsreel documentary footage and created footage in the film?
  - How does the film illustrate the “Americanness” and “Japaneseness” of the *nisei*, e.g., Lyle Nomura?
  - What are some examples of U.S. perspectives on World War II that are presented in the film? Students may want to consider statements made by the Army recruiter in Topaz and by Director Watson.
  - What are some examples of conflict between the following groups of people:
    - internees and residents of Abraham
    - internees and camp administrators
    - siblings
    - couples
    - parents and children
    - issei* and *nisei*
  - What are some of the main themes of the film? *redemption, tolerance, humanity, patriotism*
  - What are some important concepts in the film? *civil liberties, melting pot, racism, scapegoating*
  - Why do you think the filmmaker used subtitles for some Japanese spoken in the film and not others?
  - What did you like about the film? What didn’t you like about the film?
  - Many people have compared the Japanese-American experience after the Japanese attack of Pearl Harbor to the Arab-American experience after the terrorist attacks of 9/11. What are your thoughts on this?
  - Have you had experiences similar to the ones depicted in the film? Some examples might include: seeing someone off to war; discrimination; name-calling; being pre-judged; racism; seclusion or exclusion
7. The suggested activities on pages 4 through 13 can be assigned during third and fourth classroom periods or as homework.

## Activity: What would you take?

The Nomura family had ten days to prepare for the evacuation. Have students work in “family groups” of three to four, and make a list of items they would take to a destination unknown. Point out that they can only take what they can carry. Also, no pets are allowed. Allow the groups to consider items from the present day, e.g., CD player, laptop computers. They should also provide a rationale for taking the items.

**Possessions with family identification number tags.**



## Activity: Culture

The film depicts examples of the blending or coexistence of Japanese and American culture. Ask students to discuss some examples of this.

Some examples of Japanese culture and language presented in the film:

- *Senninbari*: a Japanese term that means “thousand-person-stitches”; Japanese women created these senninbari for their men to confer courage, good luck, and protection from injury upon their wearers especially during war. In the film, a senninbari was given to Lane as he departed Topaz Relocation Center to fight for the U.S. Army in Europe.
- *okagesama de*: This phrase can be loosely translated as “thanks to you I am fine”; in the film, Lane says this to his parents when departing Topaz Relocation Camp and then follows the statement with “I am what I am because of you.”
- *origami*: Japanese paper-folding art
- *onigiri*: rice balls; at the beginning of the film, onigiri are served along with some American foods.
- *Obon*: a Japanese Buddhist festival during which the spirits of deceased ancestors are honored; Obon was celebrated in the “relocation camps.”

***Senninbari* were often presented by parents to Japanese-American soldiers who volunteered or were drafted from “relocation camps.”**





## Activity: Music

There are many examples of U.S. music used in *American Pastime*, e.g., jazz, country music, Hawaiian, and traditional Christmas songs. Ask students to locate lyrics for one of the following songs and rewrite the lyrics (considering the situation of Japanese Americans in the “relocation camps”). They should prepare to perform the song for the class.

- Take Me Out to the Ballgame
- American the Beautiful
- Battle Hymn of the Republic
- Don't Fence Me In
- The Star Spangled Banner

**Music (both Japanese and Western) was a popular pastime for many internees. School dances were held as well as Japanese traditional dances in celebration of holidays such as Obon, a Japanese Buddhist holiday to honor the departed (deceased) spirits of one's ancestors.**



## Activity: Baseball Metaphors

Kerry Yo Nakagawa, Associate Producer, *American Pastime*, has referred to baseball as a metaphor for life. He has also drawn parallels between playing baseball within the confines of a “relocation camp” and playing baseball in its traditional settings. For example, he has drawn comparisons between sandstorms and rainouts, barbed wire and homerun fences, and inter-camp and inter-league play. Have students write poetry that is reflective of “baseball as a metaphor for life.”

**Many “relocation camps” had baseball diamonds. Internees tried to create a sense of “normalcy” in very trying circumstances.**



## Activity: Question of Loyalty

In January 1943, federal officials announced that Japanese Americans, including those held in “relocation camps,” would be allowed to volunteer for a racially segregated U.S. Army unit. In February 1943, the U.S. War Department and the War Relocation Authority (WRA) decided to test the loyalty of all people of Japanese ancestry who were interned in the WRA camps. They required all those 17 years of age and older to answer a questionnaire that became known as the “loyalty questionnaire.” Their answers would be used to decide whether they were “loyal” or “disloyal” to the United States. Two questions became the focus of concern and confusion for many people. Note that many people (like Black Pants in *American Pastime*) protested the questionnaire because they didn’t think it was fair to ask such questions of them while they were behind barbed wire and interned by their own country. Many answered “no” to both questions not out of disloyalty to the United States but because they refused to serve in the armed forces until their civil liberties had been restored. Many who answered “yes” to both questions went on to serve in the 442nd Regimental Combat Team in Europe and the Military Intelligence Service in the Pacific War. Ask students in small groups to discuss how they would have answered these questions. Engage the students in a debate between those who would have answered “yes” to both questions and those who would have answered “no” to both questions.

- Question #27: Are you willing to serve in the armed forces of the United States on combat duty, wherever ordered?
- Question #28: Will you swear unqualified allegiance to the United States of America and faithfully defend the United States from any and all attack by foreign or domestic forces, and forswear any form of allegiance to the Japanese Emperor or any other foreign government, power, or organization?



## Activity: Analysis of Quotes

The following are important quotes from *American Pastime*. Ask students to imagine that they are writers for the Topaz Relocation Camp newsletter, *The Topaz Times*, or a newspaper in Abraham, Utah. They should write editorials based on one or more of these quotes.

Public address (P.A.) system voice: “This is a ‘relocation center,’ a ‘pioneer community’ provided for your own safety.”

Director Watson: “Every effort has been made to make your transition here as easy as possible. The government has created this camp with your well being in mind. The camp will give all of you an opportunity to work here and to establish constructive lives as close to your former lives as possible.”

Billy Burrell: “I told him that the one thing I took pride in was that I never cheated the game [of baseball], never shortchanged it.”

Nori Morita: “When they make the rules, we can’t win. . . .”

Lane Nomura: “Everyone here has had everything taken from them. But we’re all trying to deal with it, trying to make it as good as it can possibly be.”

Lane Nomura: “I have to do this [volunteer for the U.S. military]. We have to do this. We have to prove we’re more American than other people by showing them that we accept what’s happened to us here. . . .”

Kaz Nomura: “It’s like war’s going on right here in town. They still think of us as the enemy. Every time I go there, I can feel it.”

Kaz Nomura: “For the people here in town, it’s the first time a lot of them are really seeing us. Tonight’s not just about the game, it’s more than that. Each one of you is representing something bigger than just yourselves here. Each one of you represents how they see all of us. Whatever happens tonight—win or lose—we represent the pride of who we are, and we honor the dignity of the game. . . .”

Kaz Nomura: “I’m proud of you. Proud as I can be. Far as I’m concerned, we’ve already proved ourselves out here tonight. All of us, all of you and all of them out there. . . .”

End of film: “The last of the ten relocation camps closed on March 20, 1946, four years after the first of the 120,000 persons were incarcerated.”

End of film: “In World War II, the Japanese-American 442nd Regimental Combat Team suffered 9,486 dead and wounded in some of the fiercest fighting in Europe. Man for man, no American unit in any war this nation has ever fought took greater casualties or earned more commendations of honor.”

End of film: “During the entire war, there was not a single incident of espionage or sabotage reported in America involving any person of Japanese descent.”

## Activity: Internment on the U.S. Mainland vs. Hawaii

In the early 1940s, there were approximately 158,000 people of Japanese descent in the territory of Hawaii, or approximately 37 percent of Hawaii's total population. They played a significant role in the economy of Hawaii. There was a limited internment in Hawaii in places like Sand Island (Honolulu Harbor) and Honouliuli (Oahu). Approximately 2500 people of Japanese descent from Hawaii were interned and approximately 2200 were placed in the U.S. mainland camps. For an excellent review of internment in Hawaii, refer students to the book, *Judgment Without Trial: Japanese American Imprisonment During World War II*, by Tetsuden Kashima, University of Washington Press, 2003. In *American Pastime*, "Bambino" Hirose is an internee from Hawaii. Have students discuss some of the cultural differences between "Bambino" and the Japanese Americans from the mainland such as Lane and Lyle. Have students discuss why there might have been a limited internment in Hawaii.

**Some internees from Hawaii were brought to U.S. mainland "relocation camps."**





## Activity: Film Reviews

Have students write a film review of *American Pastime* and post a blog at Warner Brothers Studios, <[www.warnerhomevideo.com/americanpastime](http://www.warnerhomevideo.com/americanpastime)>.



## Activity: Documentary

Show the documentary, *Days of Waiting*, by Steven Okazaki, <[http://www.farfilm.com/web/title\\_dow.htm](http://www.farfilm.com/web/title_dow.htm)>. *Days of Waiting* is a documentary about Estelle Ishigo, one of the few Caucasians to be interned during World War II. Estelle Ishigo was married to a Japanese American and joined him in Heart Mountain Relocation Camp, Wyoming. Ask students to compare Estelle's relationship with her husband (in *Days of Waiting*) to that of Lyle's relationship with Katie Burrell (in *American Pastime*).

You may also want to encourage students to compare *American Pastime* with other Hollywood films that focus on Japanese-American internment. Other films include:

*Come See the Paradise*, 1990, Twentieth Century-Fox Corporation

*Farewell to Manzanar*, 1976, Universal Studios

*Go For Broke!*, 1951, Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer (MGM)

*Only the Brave*, 2005, Mission from Buddha Productions

*Snow Falling on Cedars*, 1999, Universal Pictures



# Activity: Web-based Research

Encourage students to visit these websites to do further research on the topics covered in this film.

## *Pearl Harbor attack*

National Park Service <<http://www.nps.gov/usar/>>

*Franklin Roosevelt's "Day of Infamy" Speech* <<http://www.archives.gov/education/lessons/day-of-infamy/>>

## *Japanese-American Internment*

Densho: The Japanese American Legacy Project <<http://densho.org>>

Go For Broke National Education Center <<http://www.goforbroke.org>>

Japanese American National Museum <<http://www.janm.org>>

The National Archives <<http://www.archives.gov/research/alic/reference/military/japanese-internment.html>>

National Japanese American Historical Society <<http://www.njahs.org>>

National Japanese American Memorial Foundation <<http://www.njamf.com>>

## *Japanese-American Baseball*

Nisei Baseball Research Project <<http://www.niseibaseball.com>>

**The documentary, *Diamonds in the Rough*, examines Japanese-American internment through the prism of baseball. Available through Nisei Baseball Research Project.**



# Terminology

The following is some of the terminology used in *American Pastime*. The list is not meant to be a comprehensive.

**Boyle Heights:** a district just east of downtown Los Angeles on the east side of Los Angeles; prior to World War II, Boyle Heights had a significant Japanese-American, Jewish-American, and Mexican-American population. *American Pastime* opens with scenes from Boyle Heights.

**Colored people:** a term once used as a description of African Americans; now seen as derogatory except in certain instances, e.g., National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP).

**Concentration camps:** sometimes used to describe the “relocation camps” for people of Japanese descent during World War II; other terms include: “relocation centers,” “internment camps,” “detention camps,” “incarceration camps.”

**442nd Regimental Combat Team:** a unit comprised of mostly Japanese Americans who fought in Europe during World War II.

**Go for Broke:** risk everything, go all out; motto of the 442nd Regimental Combat Team.

**Issei:** first-generation Japanese immigrants; were not eligible to U.S. citizenship until 1952.

**Jap Hunting Licenses:** a sign “Jap Hunting Licenses Sold Here” can be seen in the store in Abraham. These “licenses” could be found throughout the United States following the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor. Many people in the United States did not distinguish between the Japanese from Japan and Japanese Americans.

Some examples of “Jap Hunting licenses” can be found on the following website.

<<http://clioweb.org/openseason/animals.html>>

**Japs:** a disparaging term for a person of Japanese birth or descent.

**“Loyalty” questionnaire:** In January 1943, federal officials announced that Japanese Americans, including those held in “relocation camps,” would be allowed to volunteer for a racially segregated U.S. Army unit. In February 1943, the U.S. War Department and the War Relocation Authority (WRA) decided to test the loyalty of all people of Japanese ancestry who were interned in the WRA camps. They required all those 17 years of age and older to answer a questionnaire that became known as the “loyalty questionnaire.” Their answers would be used to decide whether they were loyal or disloyal to the United States. Two questions became the focus of concern and confusion for many people.

- Question #27: Are you willing to serve in the armed forces of the United States on combat duty, wherever ordered?
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**Krauts:** a disparaging term for a German.

**Lost Battalion:** the 1st Battalion, 141st Infantry, which was surrounded by German forces in the Vosges Mountains on October 24, 1944 and rescued by the 442nd Regimental Combat Team in a battle from October 26 to 30, 1944; the 442nd suffered over 800 casualties, rescuing 211 members of the 141st.

**Nip:** a disparaging term used to describe people of Japanese descent. It comes from Nippon, which is a Japanese word for Japan.

**Nisei:** second-generation Japanese American

**“no-no boys”:** those who answered “no” to questions 27 and 28 on the “loyalty questionnaire.”

**100th Infantry Battalion:** a battalion comprised of primarily Japanese Americans from Hawaii

**Quakers:** a Christian sect founded by George Fox about 1660; many Quaker groups helped people of Japanese descent in the United States during World War II.

**Relocation camps:** detention camps for Japanese Americans during World War II; also referred to as “concentration camps,” “relocation centers,” “internment camps,” and “incarceration camps.”

**Santa Anita Assembly Center:** one of 15 temporary camps for people of Japanese descent; used until the “relocation camps” were completed.

**Stockade:** jails within “relocation camps”; sometimes referred to as a jail within a prison.

**Tojo:** a general in the Imperial Japanese Army and prime minister of Japan during much of World War II; sometimes used disparagingly against people of Japanese descent in the United States especially during World War II.

