Educational Guide

for High School

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http://pbs.org/mosthonorableson
# Table of Contents

- Program Description .............................................. 3
- Essay on *Shame, Honor, and Duty* .......................... 4
- Lesson Plan on *Shame, Honor, and Duty* ............... 6
- Lesson Plan on *Debating U.S. Policy* ....................... 10
- Photo Gallery .................................................. 15
Program Description

During the Second World War, he flew 30 European missions aboard B-24s and 28 more in the Pacific on B-29s. But U.S. Army Air Force Technical Sergeant Ben Kuroki also waged a 59th mission against prejudice, bias, and ignorance, struggling to be accepted in his own country.

Most Honorable Son relates the story of this Nebraska-born Nisei (a first generation American of Japanese descent) who volunteered to fight the Axis powers after the bombing of Pearl Harbor to demonstrate his loyalty to America. This moving story is told through rare and little-seen footage, as well as emotional recollections from Kuroki and his fellow airmen of the 8th and 20th Army Air Forces.

The hour-long documentary follows the personal odyssey of this first Japanese American war hero, from his enlistment and deployment to the European theater and beyond. As an aerial gunner, Kuroki flew on missions out of North Africa, including the 1943 attack on the Nazi oil fields of Ploesti, Rumania. When he returned to the United States, Kuroki faced discrimination from all sides. In San Francisco, he feared walking the streets even in uniform. Sent to Japanese internment camps to recruit soldiers for the U.S. army, he was treated more as a traitor than a hero. He escaped by re-entering combat, this time flying missions in the Pacific, and ultimately on bombing runs of Japan itself. While Most Honorable Son culminates with the moving ceremony of Kuroki being awarded the Distinguished Service Medal in August 2005, the issues that the program explores — such as the search for cultural identity, loyalty to country and a commitment to one’s convictions — are still vital today.

Most Honorable Son is a production of KDN Films, Madison Heights, MI, and NET Television, Nebraska’s PBS station, a service of NET. It is funded in part by the Independent Television Service (ITVS), the Corporation for Public Broadcasting (CPB) and the Center for Asian American Media.

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NET Television: NET1 is Nebraska’s first public television broadcast service and includes PBS and award-winning, locally produced public television programming; NET2 offers live coverage of the Nebraska Unicameral, Spanish language programming and other acquired or locally produced programs; NET3 is a 24-hour channel featuring the most popular how-to, travel and lifestyle series; and NET-HD presents high-definition digital broadcast programming displayed in a wide-screen format.
When we talk about the concepts of Japanese shame, honor, and duty, one of the first things you might think of is *harakiri* (suicide by cutting one's own belly). To Americans, this may seem to be a barbaric, painful, and horrifying act. Today, people in Japan do not commit *harakiri*; however, shame, honor, and duty still prevail within the society. How did this importance of honor and shame start?

*Bushido* (meaning “Way of the Warrior”) was developed between the 11th and 14th centuries in Japan. This code of conduct that *samurai* (aristocratic Japanese warriors) followed included: loyalty, courage, humility, forbearance, generosity, and self-control. In the pursuit of these moral principles, *samurai* maintained their dignity and honor, which was considered to be as much their duty as protecting their *Shogun* (Japanese feudal lords). If you were *samurai* and lost your honor, you had only one way to preserve it: *harakiri*. By killing yourself in such a painful, but at the same time, fearlessly heroic way, you were able to sustain your honor and eradicate shame.

Why does shame have to be avoided at all costs? In Japan, relationships between people are greatly affected by duty and obligation. In duty-based relationships, what other people believe or think has a more powerful impact on behavior than what the individual believes. Shame occurs through others' negative feelings towards you or through your feelings of having failed to live up to your obligations. In contrast, the culture of the United States and most of the West is based on guilt (Benedict, 1946), where truth, justice, and the preservation of individual rights are more important components of consciousness. In western culture, guilt can be relieved through confession, self-righteousness, or the justice system, but in Japanese culture, shame cannot be removed until a person does what society expects, which may include drastic measures such as committing suicide. For example, if you are falsely accused of a crime, your guilt will be removed when you are proven innocent in court, but shame will stay as long as other people are suspicious of your actions or think negatively of you.

The desire to preserve honor and avoid shame played a key role among Japanese Americans during World War II. The bombing of Pearl Harbor on December 7, 1941 shamed many Japanese Americans. It also resulted in intense racism and discrimination against Japanese Americans by some other Americans.
110,000 Japanese and their descendents on the U.S. west coast were imprisoned in internment camps; two thirds of them were American citizens. At first, Japanese American military volunteers were rejected; young men of draft age were classified as “enemy aliens.” In spite of prejudice, young Nisei (second generation Japanese in the U.S.) were eager to fight against Japan. They wanted to remove the shame caused by Pearl Harbor, and they were determined to prove their loyalty to their country, thus bringing honor to their Japanese community in the U.S. In January 1943, the U.S. military began to admit Nisei. As sons set off to war, so many mothers and fathers told them, “Live if you can; die if you must; but fight always with honor, and never, ever bring shame on your family or your country (Clinton, 2000, p.2).”

The 442nd Infantry Regimental Combat Team, the largest all-Nisei unit in World War II, fought in Italy and Southern France. Their bravery and conviction helped end the war in Europe, and the 442nd became the most decorated military unit of its size and length of service in World War II. One of the ironies was that Japanese Americans were among the first Allied troops to liberate a concentration camp in Germany, while some of them had family members kept in internment camps back in the U.S. (Clinton, 2000).

Meanwhile, on mainland Japan, a negative effect was being drawn from the shame/honor tradition: Japanese turned to suicide tactics, the use of kamikaze bombers, to evade the humiliation of defeat. Japanese pilots deliberately attempted to crash their aircrafts onto Allied ships because they believed that surrender was the ultimate dishonorable act. Young men volunteered to be kamikaze pilots in the hopes of showing patriotism and bringing honor to their families. Kamikaze pilots composed and read “death” poems, a custom from the samurai, who had done the same before committing harakiri.

Over 60 years have passed since World War II, and Japan has gone through many post-war changes. If you saw many young Japanese today showing their individuality through outrageous fashion and non-conformist behavior or if you watched television programs that bring audiences pleasure by humiliating individuals, you might assume that the shame/honor tradition has been eroded. However, obligations to family, school, employer, and friends still tend to guide most Japanese behavior. For instance, students are encouraged to work hard and enter prestigious colleges with the goal of bringing honor to their families. Television news occasionally broadcasts a president of a bankrupt company weeping and bowing his head in shame as he apologizes for the failure of his company. Japan still remains a culture of shame, honor, and duty.

References:

http://frwebgate1.access.gpo.gov/cgi-bin/waisgate.cgi?WAISdocID=491702311531+0+0+0&WAISaction=retrieve
Lesson Plan

Shame, Honor, and Duty
By Takako McCrann, Ph.D.
Director, English as a Second Language, Bellevue University

Grade Level: High School
Length: 4 days

McRel National Social Studies Standards:
http://www.mcrel.org/compendium/SubjectTopics.asp?SubjectID=5

U.S. History 25.4.2
Understands events that led to the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor (e.g., why Japan set up the East Asian Co-Prosperey Sphere, U.S. reasons for cutting off oil to Japan, U.S. response to the November 10 proposal from Japan)

U.S. History 25.4.4
Understands how World War II influenced the home front (e.g., the impact on science, medicine, and technology; how Americans viewed their achievements and global responsibilities at the war’s end; how minorities contributed to the war effort and the contradiction between their treatment at home and the goals that they were fighting for in Europe; the effects of the relocation centers on Japanese American families)

http://www.mcrel.org/compendium/SubjectTopics.asp?SubjectID=6

World History 41.4.7
Understands Japan’s “greater East Asia co-prosperity” sphere and the support of this idea in European colonies in East Asia

World History 41.4.7
Understands the climax and moral implications of World War II (e.g., the moral implications of military technologies and techniques used in the war, statistics of population displacement caused by the war, debates surrounding the use of the atomic bomb to end the war with Japan)

Nebraska State Social Studies Standards:
http://www.nde.state.ne.us/ss/DOCUMENTS/TheHistory-SocialStudiesStandardsPDF.pdf

U.S. History 12.1.4
By the end of twelfth grade, students will analyze the impact of immigration on American life, identifying factors.

U.S. History 12.1.8
By the end of twelfth grade, students will recognize and explain the origins and effects of World War II.

World History 12.2.10
By the end of twelfth grade, students will analyze major 20th century historical events.
Objectives:
1. Students will examine the psychological conflicts experienced by Japanese Americans during World War II.
2. Students will research several events that led to the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor.
3. Students will examine the contributions made by Japanese Americans during World War II.

Terms:
duty  honor  internment camp  Nisei  shame

Materials and Resources:
- Video: Most Honorable Son
- Essay on Shame, Honor, and Duty (in this guide)
- Possible web sites
  - PBS Conscience and the Constitution: Profile of Ben Kuroki
    http://www.pbs.org/itvs/conscience/the_story/characters/kuroki_ben.html
  - PBS Most Honorable Son
    http://pbs.org/mosthonorableson
  - Militarism and World War II (1912-1945)
    http://www.japan-guide.com/e/e2129.html
  - World War II: The War Against Japan
  - 100th Battalion, 442nd Infantry
    http://www.globalsecurity.org/military/agency/army/100-442in.htm
  - History: 442nd RCT
    http://www.katonk.com/442nd/442/page1.html
  - Japanese Internment Camps
  - San Francisco State University: Japanese Internment Camps Lesson Plans
    http://bss.sfsu.edu/internment/lessonplans.html

The Process:

DAY ONE
I. Ask students to generate their own questions about Japanese American status during the war. List those questions on the board.

II. Watch the video, Most Honorable Son, if available. If not, use the resource web sites for information.
DAY TWO

I. Go over the list of questions and ask the students which questions were answered by the video or web sites. Then discuss how the information enhanced their existing knowledge.

II. Pair up the students, and assign them to a research project on any of the following:
   1) some of the questions unanswered by the video
   2) causes of the war between Japan and the U.S. (e.g., Japanese military aggression in South East Asia, U.S. oil embargo against the Japanese.)
   3) contributions of Japanese Americans to the war effort (e.g., the 100th Infantry Battalion, the 442nd Army Infantry Unit.)

DAY THREE

I. Have students read the essay, *Shame, Honor, and Duty* (in this guide). Have them engage in small group discussions based on the information from the reading and the video or web sites. Each group selects one of the following issues:
   a. Ben Kuroki was determined to show his loyalty to his country, but not to his heritage. Discuss situations where a person is trapped between two conflicting values such as nationality and heritage.
   b. Discuss and evaluate the concept of honor, shame, and duty that influenced Ben Kuroki and his decision to fight against Japan, particularly his involvement in dropping bombs over Tokyo.
   c. Japanese Americans who were imprisoned in the internment camps did not welcome Ben Kuroki. How did their psychological bond to honor, shame, and duty influence their issues with him?
   d. Discuss what kinds of rituals serve to claim honor and erase shame.
   e. Define those types of actions that surround honor, shame, and duty in modern American society.

II. Have each group present the results of their discussion.

DAY FOUR

I. Have each pair present their assigned project from Day Two.

II. Engage in a final class discussion regarding the findings.

**Assessment:**
See Rubric at the end of this lesson plan.
### Rubric

**Student __________________**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Participation</th>
<th>2</th>
<th>1</th>
<th>Points</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Pre-research Questions</td>
<td>Fully participated</td>
<td>No participation</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Post-viewing or post-research discussion</td>
<td>Fully participated</td>
<td>No participation</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pair Research</td>
<td>Fully participated</td>
<td>No participation</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Small Group Discussion on Shame, Honor, and Duty</td>
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<td>No participation</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Final Class Discussion</td>
<td>Fully participated</td>
<td>No participation</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Small Group Presentation</td>
<td>Fully participated</td>
<td>No participation</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Pair Presentation</th>
<th>4</th>
<th>3</th>
<th>2</th>
<th>1</th>
<th>Points</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Expression &amp; Enunciation</td>
<td>Tone fits purpose and audience well. Clear and understandable</td>
<td>Tone could be altered slightly to better fit; mostly clear</td>
<td>Tone is appropriate; sometimes not understandable</td>
<td>Lacks tone; not understandable</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pacing</td>
<td>Speed varies appropriately</td>
<td>Talks at a constant speed no matter what is said</td>
<td>Zips or drags through parts</td>
<td>Consistently too fast or too slow</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Volume</td>
<td>Volume enhances presentation</td>
<td>Volume is appropriate most of the time</td>
<td>Inappropriate volume at times</td>
<td>Consistently inappropriate volume</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Eye Contact</td>
<td>Looks around at the whole audience</td>
<td>Looks at a couple of areas most of the presentation</td>
<td>Stares at one spot most of the presentation</td>
<td>Lacks eye contact</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Content 6 facts</td>
<td>Completely fit report topic</td>
<td>At least 4 relevant facts</td>
<td>At least 2 relevant facts</td>
<td>At least 1 relevant fact</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Organization</td>
<td>Stated purpose clearly and supported it well</td>
<td>Purpose and support there, but not well organized</td>
<td>Lacking in either purpose or support</td>
<td>No purpose or support</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Total Points ____________
Lesson Plan

Debating U.S. Policy

Is it acceptable for the U.S. government to limit participation in the military because of a person’s ethnicity?

By John Moody, Seward High School, Nebraska

Grade Level: High School

Length: 4 days

McRel National Social Studies Standards:
http://www.mcrel.org/compendium/SubjectTopics.asp?SubjectID=5

U.S. History 25.4.4

Understands how World War II influenced the home front (e.g., the impact on science, medicine, and technology; how Americans viewed their achievements and global responsibilities at the war’s end; how minorities contributed to the war effort and the contradiction between their treatment at home and the goals that they were fighting for in Europe; the effects of the relocation centers on Japanese American families)

U.S. History 31.4.2

Understands how recent immigration and migration patterns, and demographic shifts, impacted social and political issues (e.g., major issues that affect immigrants and conflicts these issues engendered; changes in the size and composition of the traditional American family; demographic and residential mobility since 1970)

Nebraska State Social Studies Standards:
http://www.nde.state.ne.us/ss/DOCUMENTS/TheHistory-SocialStudiesStandardsPDF.pdf

American History 12.1.14

By the end of twelfth grade, students will demonstrate verbal and written skills that focus on enduring issues, divergent viewpoints, and excerpts from famous speeches and documents in United States history.

Objectives:

Students will research and debate the actions of our government to prevent or limit Japanese Americans from actively serving in WWII.

Terms:

Nisei prejudice racism discrimination
Materials and Resources:
- The Most Honorable Son: Ben Kuroki video
- Guidelines for creating the debate (at the end of this lesson plan)
- Access to the Internet to research the topics

PBS Most Honorable Son
http://pbs.org/mosthonorableson

Nebraska State Dept. of Education: Profile of Ben Kuroki
http://www.nsea.org/news/KurokiProfile.htm

PBS Conscience and the Constitution: Profile of Ben Kuroki
http://www.pbs.org/itvs/conscience/the_story/characters/kuroki_ben.html


Organization of American Historians: Incarcerating Japanese Americans
http://www.oah.org/pubs/magazine/ww2homefront/daniels.html

Japanese Internment Camps

San Francisco State University: Japanese Internment Camps Lesson Plans
http://bss.sfsu.edu/internment/lessonplans.html

A Nisei on Corregidor
http://www.thedropzone.org/pacific/akune.html

Japanese American (Nisei) Students at University of Nebraska-Lincoln
http://www.unl.edu/ibr/ibr-spec/exhibits/NiseiSite/index.html

Wertheimer, Andrew B., Admitting Nebraska’s Nisei: Japanese American Students at the University of Nebraska, 1942-1945, Nebraska History Magazine, Volume 83, No. 2. Summer 2002
http://www.nebraskahistory.org/publish/publicat/history/back02.htm

Rules of Debate
http://www.triviumpursuit.com/speech_debate/what_is_debate.php
http://ontology.buffalo.edu/smith/courses98/DEBATERULES.htm

Discrimination against Arab Americans
http://faculty.ncwc.edu/TOConnor/soc/355lect14.htm

Immigrants from the Middle East

San Francisco Weekly, Suffer the Little Muslims

The Treatment of Arab Americans Today (May 2001)
http://academic.udayton.edu/race/06hrights/WaronTerrorism/Arabs01.htm

Arab American Institute: About Arab Americans
http://www.aaiusa.org/arab-americans

The Process:
DAY ONE
I. Introduce the topic: Was it appropriate to prevent or limit Nisei from serving in WWII? Students should research this question while keeping in mind a broader question: Should the U.S. prevent or limit Americans with ethnic ties to a warring nation from serving in the U.S. military? This second question will lead into the lesson extension at the conclusion of this lesson plan.

Optional: View the video, Most Honorable Son
II. Introduce the format for the debate (see Guidelines at the end of this lesson plan). The class will be divided into small groups, each consisting of 3 people. Each of those three people will be assigned a role of judge, affirmative spokesperson, or dissenting spokesperson.

DAY TWO
All students research the question looking for supporting and opposing views.

DAY THREE
I. Students engage in a structured debate in groups of three.

II. After the debate, judges should be given time to process all of the information that was given during the debate and make a decision. Following the judges’ decisions, the judges collectively should write a policy for our government to follow when deciding whether to allow Americans with ethnic ties to a warring nation to serve in the U.S. military.

III. While judges are making a decision and writing a new policy for our government, each spokesperson should write a summary of their position with reasons supporting it.

DAY FOUR
I. Judges will share the results of the debate and the new policy with their spokesperson.

II. The teacher will lead the class in a discussion of the new policies. What are the difficulties in implementing the new policies? Has anyone’s mind been changed by either the debate or the new policies? Why or why not?

Assessment:
The teacher should circulate from group to group during the debate to keep students on task. At the conclusion of the debate, the teacher will collect from each spokesperson all of their research that includes arguments and sources used during the debate. The judges will hand in their decisions along with the rationale for that decision.

While assessing the spokespersons’ arguments, the teacher should determine if their position is supported by the research they found, if they have omitted any information, can they refute their opponent, and whether they have documented their sources.

Assessing the judges should focus on logical explanations and reasoning for why they chose the side they did.
Extension:
The teacher can lead a class discussion on Middle Eastern American treatment today or provide questions for students to answer as homework. Suggested questions:
1. In the U.S. today, are Middle Eastern Americans treated the same as other Americans?
2. Should Middle Eastern Americans serve in the U.S. military? Will the policy the judges wrote following the debate be effective today?
3. What is your personal view on Middle Eastern Americans serving in the military?
4. Has the U.S. progressed since WWII in the treatment of minorities?
5. What Constitutional issues arise from this debate?
Guidelines and Set-up for Debate

This style of debate allows for total class involvement. All students are accountable for participation, unlike most full class debates. This style of debate will work with any topic of a controversial nature.

1. Divide the class into several groups of 3 people each. Assign a role to each person in the group: judge, affirmative spokesperson, or dissenting spokesperson.

2. Each member in each group is responsible for researching the topic and being prepared to participate in a small group debate.

3. After researching the topic, each small group of three meets to share information to bolster their argument. The judges will meet and develop a rubric on points they feel need to be covered during the debate. If points are not addressed by the spokespersons during the debate, the judges will ask each spokesperson to elaborate (see #6 below).

4. On debate day, one spokesperson from each group will meet with a single judge. Each spokesperson will share their point of view without interruption from the other spokesperson.

5. After each spokesperson has expressed their view, each side may refute any or all of the arguments presented by their opponent.

6. Judges will then ask any questions they have of either spokesperson.

7. Judges will make a decision based upon the effectiveness of the spokespersons.

8. Judges will write up a policy for our government to follow when deciding whether to allow Americans with ethnic ties to a warring nation to serve in the U.S. military.

Possible suggestions to research:
- Was preventing Nisei from serving a matter of national security?
- Was preventing Nisei from serving blatant discrimination?
- Is racism justified when it is a matter of national security?
Photo Gallery

The Kuroki family in the late 1920s, Hershey, Nebraska. Ben is second one standing on the left. Younger brother Fred is first on the left.

Shosuke (Sam) and Naka Kuroki had ten children. During World War Two, brothers Fred, Bill, and Henry also joined the U.S. military service.

*Courtesy George Kuroki*

Japanese-Americans were fond of baseball before the war. On the West Coast, there were organized leagues of *nisei* teams. Nebraska fielded its own team of *nisei*, which included Ben and Fred Kuroki. Both brothers were strong athletes, playing three sports each in high school.

*Courtesy Ben Kuroki*
The Tupelo Lass crew prior to the Ploesti, Rumania raid of August 1, 1943. Second from left, bottom, is pilot Jake Epting. Epting was originally not going to fly, having finished his 25 missions. Col. Jacob Smart, the architect of the Ploesti attack, was to take Epting’s place. Smart was removed from the flight because he knew of the D-Day plans, which could be at risk if he was captured. Ploesti became Epting’s 26th mission.

*Courtesy William Hubbard*

On August 1, 1943, the Army Air Corps attacked the Ploesti, Rumania oil fields, the largest aerial assault ever at that time. While the raid caused significant damage, it was not considered a success because the Air Corps suffered major losses. Only two of the B-24s from Ben Kuroki’s squadron returned to base.

*Courtesy Ed Weir*

After completing 25 missions, Ben Kuroki volunteered for five more. On his 30th mission over Munster Germany, flack hit his top turret. He lost his oxygen mask and was delirious. The pilot realized something was wrong when Kuroki’s guns kept firing after the enemy threat had passed. Crewmen had to fight to pull him from his turret. Kuroki was revived and the plane returned to base without incident. Oddly, Ben didn’t get a scratch but the evidence of the impact on the turret itself is visible in this picture.

*Courtesy Ben Kuroki*
The *Honorable Sad Saki*, piloted by Jim Jenkins, was a B-29 with the 505th Bomb Group, 484th Bomb Squadron, 20th Air Force, based on Tinian Island in the Pacific. While Kuroki was called *Most Honorable Son* while flying on B-24s in Europe, his nickname in the Pacific was "Sad Saki", a name his crew also gave their plane. "Sad Sack" was a common term for an army recruit. "Saki" referred to Japanese rice wine, which should have been spelled sake and pronounced SAH KAY.

Ben Kuroki is welcomed into the Veteran of Foreign Wars in Omaha, Nebraska in 1944. Others in photo unidentified.

Photo by the War Relocation Authority

*Courtesy Tom Parker, National Archives, College Park MD*
Japanese-Americans arriving at Santa Anita by train from San Pedro California April 5, 1942. The government commissioned photographs of the evacuation. However, more oppressive-looking photos, like this one by Clem Albers, were impounded. In his book, Impounded, Gary Okihiro notes standard procedure was for photographers not to show certain scenes, such as soldiers with bayonets on their guns. This photo, while censored, does not reveal any bayonets.

*Courtesy* National Archives, College Park, MD

Ben Kuroki speaks at an event at the Heart Mountain, Wyoming relocation center. Coming from Nebraska as a poor dirt farmer, Kuroki thought he was not cut out for public speaking. Reports of his excellent speaking skills proved otherwise.

*War Relocation Authority photo. Courtesy Ben Kuroki and the National Archives. College Park, MD*

While he was visiting three relocation camps (Heart Mountain in Wyoming, Minidoka in Idaho, and Topaz, Utah), Ben Kuroki became a celebrity among the younger *nisei* internees, who were as captivated by Air Corps flyers as the rest of America. Some of the older *nisei* and immigrant Japanese had far different feelings.

*War Relocation Authority photo Courtesy National Archives, College Park, MD*