

# Japanese American History: A Short Course for a Japanese Junior College Seminar

日本の女子短期大学のゼミで「日系アメリカ人の歴史」  
を教える意義と教授法

EDWARDS, Michael

Associate Professor, Department of English Communication

## 抄録：

この論文は、日本の女子短期大学の2年生18人を対象に、授業で「日系アメリカ人の歴史」、を教える意義と教授法について述べる。

学生は、通常、ゼミと呼ばれる授業に参加し、英語のレベルは、CEFRのA2からB1のレベルの学生である。授業で使われるすべての資料やビデオは英語であるが、授業はEFLの授業のように、すべてが英語だけで行われるレベルの授業ではない。この授業を担当する教員は、英語の資料について、丁寧に英語から日本語への翻訳をしながら授業を行う。

この授業の目的は、学生が「日系アメリカ人の歴史」についての基本的な理解を深めてもらうことにある。

## Abstract：

This paper discusses methods and benefits of teaching Japanese-American history to 2nd-year female students at a Japanese junior college in Tokyo, Japan. The students were all participants in a course known more commonly as a 'zemi', with the majority of students' English ability falling in the A2 to B1 level of the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR). A 'zemi' is a course for graduating students, whether at a four-year institution or enrolled in a two-year curriculum as in the case of this review. It is managed by one instructor who is responsible for student guidance as well as teaching a course on a topic related to their respective field. Though all reading materials and videos used for instruction were in English, the course should not be labeled a pure content-based English as a foreign language (EFL) course. Lectures employed as much paraphrasing of material as it did English to Japanese translation, as the aim of the course focused on a complete understanding of the historical material and English exposure in equal fashion. Survey results revealed a high level of satisfaction among students as

well as a perceived increase in English language ability.

キーワード：EFL、日系アメリカ人の歴史、ゼミ、日本の短期大学、教育の為ビデオ

**Keywords** : EFL, Japanese American history, zemi, Japanese junior college, educational videos

## 1. Introduction

Given the fact that much of what students enrolled at Japanese universities or junior colleges study is limited to the major and courses within a particular curriculum, exposure to fields outside that field of study is often limited. As most anyone who has attended university in the United States knows, enrollment in courses in faculties other than one's major is not uncommon. Interests in subject matter that does not have a direct relation to one's major, may invariably take precedence over a 'speedy' graduation. There is merit in graduating in a timely fashion, as tuition at higher institutions is certainly not an investment where costs are declining. Administrations at higher institutions in Japan are wholeheartedly in favor having students graduate 'on time', which means either two years for junior colleges or four years for universities. With this in mind, the when the opportunity arises where subjects Japanese students likely would not otherwise be exposed to can be taught to pique interest, it would seem beneficial. The freedom to do this might be found in a 'zemi'. The Global Leadership Fellows Program at Waseda University, a leading institution in Japan, characterizes its 'zemi' as a unique Japanese-style seminar with an internationally acclaimed small-group pedagogical method where students work on the subject in a specific discipline in either Humanities or Social Science under close supervision of a professor. This type of definition leaves room for an instructor to broaden the range of subject matter and expose students to a myriad of topics.

In the case of second language teaching professionals, a course on the fundamentals of language teaching and learning is certainly an option, but for this particular group of students, the technical subject matter was deemed not to be something which necessarily would pique their interest. History, on the other hand, is a field which is easily accessible, will expose students to new language and historical occurrences, help them to develop a global perspective, and foster intrigue. Japanese American history is one such historical area which suits these aims.

Immigrants from Japan began to enter Hawaii in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century for labor on sugarcane plantations and made up a sizeable portion of the population before the bombing of Pearl Harbor on December 7<sup>th</sup>, 1941. After this date, Japanese Americans were subject to the extraordinary injustice of forced incarceration in both Hawaii and the mainland United States. The 'zemi' course described in this paper covers many of the most important and poignant events concerning this rich history.

## 2. History teaching methods

Teaching history is an important activity, should be treated as scholarly work, and is considered more rewarding when brought alive in the classroom. These are all tenets deemed as necessary for the successful history teacher (Booth, 2003). An instructor's enthusiasm about a particular history must be channeled and fashioned in a way that will pique and cultivate interest among students. Teaching history to students whose major is not history can pose the challenge of how best to get them interested in the unfamiliar and is deepened, as in the case of this review, by students for whom English is a foreign language.

Two frameworks and history teaching rules were examined during the course of the semester in which the 'zemi' was taught. The first of those focused on an unorthodox method of a student-centered approach. Maloy and LaRoche (2010) review how a more student-centered approach can be targeted and offer a 3-part framework for history teacher candidates for middle schools. The first component of their approach is *ideas*, which are the learning outcomes a teacher believes will result because of one's approach; the second is *issues*, which encompass the array of problems that can potentially occur when actually implementing one's *ideas*. Teachers need to recognize the positive and negative outcomes of the methods employed which leads to their final point, *insights*, which is where a teacher reflects on the ideas and issues of a teaching method and discovers new strategies which can improve the educational process.

A set of rules for 'bringing life' to history teaching introduced by Formwalt (2002) lists seven essentials for teaching history, five of which are pertinent for the context of this particular course. These 'rules' are enthusiasm, less reliance on textbooks, relating the topic to the present, the use of film, and computer literacy. These ideas on how best to teach a history course were considered while developing an approach to teaching Japanese American history to a group designated to study content which, at the outset, may or may not have been in their range of interest.

## 3. Course material selection

With an abundance of Japanese American historical literature, newspaper articles, documentaries, and historically accurate movies to choose from, the selection of which to use within a short 14-week semester might not be a difficult endeavor for a seasoned history professor, but for a second language professional the selection of material takes on factors not necessarily considered by a pure history professional. Though the sequencing of materials is a vital component of any course, particularly a history course, but for second language courses the first consideration is to accommodate the level of the language ability of the students. Ideally, if the course was designated as an English as a foreign language (EFL) course, material written for native English speaking junior high school students could be utilized and may be a consideration for a future syllabus. In case of this review, many easily accessible online materials were employed as several classes of the 14-week semester were conducted online with required materials being uploaded to the

institutions learning management system (LMS) and class meetings taking place on the web-based application, Zoom.

### 3.1 *Reading materials*

Reading materials were sourced from a number of online websites, history texts, as well as newspapers. Online readings about the history of Japanese Americans was not difficult to find. Students studying history in their native language might prefer to watch videos to gain an understanding of a particular history in a more speedier fashion. This is not possible with a group of low-intermediate second language learners. Providing weekly reading material accompanied by in-class review is an efficient way of ensuring the material is accessible. Japanese students of English are known for having reading abilities which exceed the other three skills of writing, speaking, and listening. This can be attributed to the amount of exposure and practice they receive in their secondary education. Providing reading articles also provides students the opportunity to consult dictionaries and process the language at a reduced pace while studying autonomously. Six of the following seven selections were sourced online and posted on the LMS where they were accessible throughout the semester. The reading list can be found in Appendix 1.

### 3.2 *Video materials*

The extensive use of video has been shown to be beneficial in helping students to learn and remember the content in an EFL context. (Demirdirek. N & Salataci. R. 2010). With this in mind, a large percentage of class time was spent watching videos accompanied by teacher explanations with both paraphrased English, and English to Japanese translation. Video viewing material was curated from three resources: YouTube, authentic self-made videos, and a historically accurate movie. With much of the course taking place online with the Zoom platform, YouTube became an efficient, if not vital resource.

Authentic videos were taken and edited using iMovie by the instructor and consisted of interviews with Japanese Americans living in San Francisco and Sacramento in 2008. Interviewees were asked to reflect on their being evacuated from internment camp experiences with the aid of a few simple questions. First-hand material can be very impressionable. One on one interviews bring the depth of significance and real sense of humanity to the classroom.

The one full-length movie shown, *Farewell to Manzanar*, was chosen for its depiction of numerous historically significant points and its review of life before and during the forced evacuation of over 110,000 first and second generation Japanese and Japanese Americans and offers numerous scenes and situations that can be highlighted to help explain the realities of the life in the Manzanar internment camp.

The combination of text and authentic audiovisual material helped to solidify not only the factual history of Japanese Americans, but at the same time widen the global perspective of students who otherwise might not have an opportunity to learn such important history.

#### 4. Assignments

The grading for the course consisted of several assignments throughout the semester and an individual presentation. All assignments required submitting writings in English to the institution's LMS where deadlines could be set. All assignments except the first quiz allowed students to write freely anything they learned from the video in question. This not only lessened pressure on the students, but at the same time allowed the instructor to gauge how much the students were taking from the content. The assignments topics were as follows:

1. PowerPoint title page submission
2. Short quiz (see Appendix 1).
3. 442<sup>nd</sup> educational video review
4. 3 Varsity Victory Volunteers video review
5. Reaction to authentic interviews
6. Farewell to Manzanar film review

Guidelines for individual presentations required students to speak for a minimum of 4 minutes while presenting slides on their topics. Students were instructed, from the beginning, that their presentations were to help their classmates better understand Japanese American history as a whole and their topic was one very important part of the whole. The presentation topics were as follows:

1. Plantation life in Hawaii
2. Picture brides
3. Early Japanese communities in the mainland U.S
4. The bombing of Pearl Harbor and martial law
5. Internment camps in Hawaii
6. The Varsity Victory Volunteers
7. Tanforan
8. Conditions in the U.S. mainland camps
9. The 100<sup>th</sup> Battalion
10. The 442<sup>nd</sup> Regiment
11. The M.I.S. (Military Intelligence Service)
12. Manzanar
13. Poston
14. Topaz
15. Daniel Inouye

- 16. Fred Korematsu
- 17. Gordon Hirabayashi
- 18. George Takei

## 5. Results and discussion

Though the course was taught in both English and Japanese, at the end of the semester students were asked to express their thoughts on the course with a questionnaire concerning any perceived improvement in their English listening and reading skills. Additionally, they were asked to reflect on what they believed to be the most important aspect learned in the course. The results show that the methods employed and content presented were received positively.

Students were required to listen to videos and short lectures by the instructor in most class sessions. And despite the limited time of English exposure students believed their listening skills had improved. Comments about perceived listening improvement are listed in Table 1.

**Table 1. Students' perception of improved listening ability. (n=18)**

strongly agree	agree	no change	disagree	strongly disagree
5	12	1	0	0

- \* *It was hard at first, but I feel like I'm getting used to the videos.*
- \* *The teacher's speaking really helped to understand the videos.*
- \* *Even though the speaking was fast, I felt I was getting better at understanding.*
- \* *My listening is better than before I took this class.*
- \* *I learned not only about Japanese Americans, but also improved my listening.*

The small number of readings required may have been challenging for this particular level of English language learners, but students' overall reactions to them was positive as can be seen in Table 2.

**Table 2. Students' perception of improved reading ability. (n=18)**

strongly agree	agree	no change	disagree	strongly disagree
4	13	1	0	0

- \* *The newspaper article on Manzanar really helped me understand something I didn't know about WWII.*
- \* *I tried to read the articles without translating them so I became better at reading.*
- \* *Since there were so many readings, my skill level went up.*
- \* *Even though I didn't know many words, I continued reading and became to understand more and more sentences.*
- \* *I started to want to understand everything in the readings posted on the learning management system LMS.*

Without regard to category, students were also asked to write freely anything they wished about the semester-long course and their responses revealed what students felt about the course and thus revealing the efficacy of the methods and materials employed. Several students expressed how they were pleased to have been exposed to this particular part of history and the awareness of the importance of understanding Japanese American history. Students' responses can be seen in Table 3.

**Table 3. Students' open comments regarding the course. (n=18)**

Frequency	Comment Category
9	didn't know anything about the topic
4	became interested in the topic
5	teacher explanations were helpful
2	wanted subtitles for video

- \* I felt the need to tell Japanese people about Japanese American history (3).*
- \* When I researched my topic I was shocked.*
- \* I felt sorry that I didn't know about this topic.*
- \* Japanese American history has a heavy story but it was good to learn.*
- \* I'm glad that I now know about this history.*
- \* I felt my own growth during this class.*
- \* I learned some things that I will never forget.*
- \* I learned how wrong discrimination is.*
- \* I am somehow proud of the efforts Japanese Americans made.*

## 6. Conclusion

The opportunity to expose Japanese junior college students to important topics they may not have otherwise been exposed to can successfully be carried out in a 'zemi'. Teaching history is a task that is not only rewarding, but also requires strategic planning, especially when tailoring instruction for non-history students studying in a foreign language. Not to be confused with a pure content-based language course, the use of paraphrasing and translation utilized in equal measure when appropriate can yield positive outcomes for increased language proficiency as well as help to develop new perspectives on important issues of race, discrimination, and justice.

## References

---

- Booth, A. (2003). *Teaching History at University: enhancing learning and understanding*, London,: Routledge.
- Demeirdirek, N, Salataci. (2010). N., *E-documentaries in content-based instruction (CBI) in an academic EFL setting*. *Procedia a Social and Behavioral Sciences* 3 (2010) 203-209
- Formwalt, L., (2002). Seven Rules for Effective History Teaching or Bringing Life to the History Classroom. Organization of American Historians.
- Maloy, R., LaRoche, I., (2010). Student-Centered Teaching Methods in the History Classroom: Ideas, Issues, and Insights for New Teachers, *Social Studies Research and Practice*.  
The Global Leadership Fellows Program, Waseda University (2021)  
<https://www.waseda.jp/inst/cie/en>

## Appendix 1. Readings

---

- Reading 1: Japanese laborers arrive  
<http://www.hawaiihistory.org/index.cfm?fuseaction=ig.page&PageID=299>
- Reading 2: Japanese immigrants to Hawaii  
[https://www.hiroshimapeacemedia.jp/?insight=20120828152042375\\_en](https://www.hiroshimapeacemedia.jp/?insight=20120828152042375_en)
- Reading 3: Hawaii: Life in a Plantation Society  
<https://www.loc.gov/classroom-materials/immigration/japanese/hawaii-life-in-a-plantation-society/>
- Reading 4: The Varsity Victory Volunteers  
<https://www.nvlchawaii.org/varsity-victory-volunteers-organized-labor-battalion-oahu>
- Reading 5: Tule Lake (edited)  
[https://encyclopedia.densho.org/Tule\\_Lake/](https://encyclopedia.densho.org/Tule_Lake/)
- Reading 6: Manzanar Relocation Center (edited)  
<https://encyclopedia.densho.org/Manzanar/>
- Reading 7: Japanese-Americans visit relocation camp  
THE JAPAN TIMES Wednesday, April 28, 2004

## Appendix 2. Videos

---

- Executive Order 9066 – Japanese American Internment 3:23  
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=O-iVxs2xuYc>
- This Man Filmed Life Inside an Internment Camp 2:42  
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=DYxEv95uuBk>
- 442<sup>nd</sup> educational video 26:21  
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=z0PS2YUg-Ng>
- Video from Topaz, Utah, Japanese internment camp during WWII 9:55  
[https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Yr\\_fckAJ2\\_8](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Yr_fckAJ2_8)
- Hirakawa: A Japanese American Family History 35:40  
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=W51xMWqg3aA>
- 1950s, Japanese Immigrants in Hawaii, USA (silent) 2:22  
[https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=KvZnrOTBJ\\_8](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=KvZnrOTBJ_8)
- Picture Brides 2:38  
[https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=iF\\_IsX6E4Us](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=iF_IsX6E4Us)
- Varsity Victory Volunteers part of UH legacy 3:06  
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=PQyFy5qsy6Y>
- Pearl Harbor 75<sup>th</sup> Special Varsity Victory Volunteers 5:10  
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=zJSIR0-nTzg>
- Before the 442<sup>nd</sup>, there were Varsity Victory Volunteers 2:05  
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=42YN464gRpU>