



**“Other”: A Brief History of American Xenophobia
Instructions for Classroom Activity 2
Phrase-Word and Blackout Poetry**

Purpose: To narrow the focus on xenophobia and racism to a particular event in U.S. history: the incarceration of people of Japanese ancestry during World War II..

This activity uses oral histories that are available through [Densho](https://densho.org), a Japanese American history organization dedicated to preserving, educating, and sharing the story of the World War II incarceration of people of Japanese ancestry. Over 900 oral histories, including transcripts, are available on the Densho website for classroom use.

Oral histories are primary source, first person accounts that are a powerful way to increase awareness and knowledge about xenophobia and racism and to connect emotionally with the personal stories of real people.

The two oral histories link the xenophobia video to real-life stories of people who were affected by xenophobic and racist policies of the U.S. government.

In the [first clip](#), Jun Kurumada describes an incident that happened to him in Utah during the war. Kurumada was born in 1913 in Ogden, UT, and established a dental practice in Salt Lake City, UT, prior to the war.

In the [second clip](#), Hope Omachi Kawashima describes how she was treated during the war by other children when she was an elementary school student in Twin Falls, Idaho. Kawashima was born in 1937 in Auburn, CA, and was incarcerated in the Tule Lake Concentration Camp and the Topaz Concentration Camp.

This activity is a combination of two different thinking routines. Thinking routines are simple strategies that teachers can use to cultivate thinking and deepen learning for students.

The first part of the activity, Phrase-Word, is adapted from a thinking routine from *Making Thinking Visible* by Ron Ritchhart, Mark Church, and Karin Morrison.

The Phrase-Word thinking routine helps students identify and hone in on the essence of the oral histories. After students have identified the parts of the oral history that “speak” to them, they use a second activity, Blackout Poetry, to distill the essence of the text even further.

Blackout poetry is created when someone takes a document, reads it, and crosses out, or redacts, a majority of the text, leaving a “poem” that reveals new layers of meaning. Versions of blackout poetry date back to the 1700s, but it has been made popular in recent years by Austin Kleon’s book, *Newspaper Blackout*.

Part 1 (10 minutes)

- If you would like to share some background information about WWII Japanese American incarceration, consider showing this TedEd video first.
- Show [Jun Kurumada clip](#)
- Show [Hope Omachi Kawashima clip](#)
- Ask students to choose one of the oral histories.
- Distribute Word or Google doc copies of transcripts to students ([Jun Kurumada transcript](#) | [Hope Omachi Kawashima transcript](#))
- Ask students to read *only* the transcript for the person they’ve chosen
- Using the underline tool, ask students to underline several phrases (you may need to explain what a phrase is--and how it’s different from a sentence) that are meaningful to them or that capture the essence of the oral history.
- Next, ask students to underline two or three words that stood out for them. *Point out that there is a racial slur, the word “Jap,” in both transcripts that should NOT be underlined, repeated, or said aloud.*

Part 2 (10 minutes, plus time for discussion)

- Once students have completed this task, ask them to use the highlighter tool to black out all the text around their boxes, leaving only the phrases and words that stood out for them. (You may need to demonstrate this.)
- (At this point, you may want to divide students up into two breakout groups: one for the Jun Kurumada oral history and one for the Hope Omachi Kawashima oral history.)
- Have students share their poems with each other.

- After students have shared, invite comments or discussion--e.g. "What did you notice?" "Were there similarities/differences in the poems?" "How did creating blackout poems change or reinforce the meaning of the oral histories?"