Notable Trade Book Lesson Plan

Lost Childhood: My Life In A Japanese Prison Camp During World War II

Written by Annelex Hofstra Layson with Herman J. Viola

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Lost Childhood: My Life In A Japanese Prison Camp During World War II is a memoir. The events of World War II (WWII) took place around the world disrupting the daily lives of children. In school students often examine WWII only from the perspective of their own nation and thereby fail to learn and understand how their lives today were impacted by a war that began 70 years ago and continues to impact the world today. This lesson examines a detailed memoir of Annelex, a child in the Dutch East Indies during WWII and in its immediate aftermath. Annelex describes her fears and how her mother and grandmother helped her overcome uncertainties in living to survive and grow.

About the Author

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Book Title

Lost Childhood: My Life In A Japanese Prison Camp During World War II
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Book is appropriate for grades 5 and above.
Lesson plan is for grades 5 or 6 and will take five to eight days to complete.
Before WWII the nation of Indonesia was ruled by the colonial nation of the Netherlands. When WWII began in the Pacific the Dutch East Indies, an area rich in natural resources, was quickly attacked and conquered by Japan. Members of the colonial rulers were sent to concentration camps where they lived until the end of WWII. Annelex Horstra was four years old when she and her mother and grandmother were separated from her brother and sent to be inmates in a Japanese prisoner of war camp. Following the war, the family is united, but caught up in the events of a civil war that eventually leads to the family becoming refugees. The book relates Annelex’s memories of these times and adds new dimensions to the understanding of the impact of WWII on people and on the political changes to nations following WWII.

NCSS Standards

II. Time, Continuity, and Change
III. People, Places, and Environments
VI. Power, Authority, and Governance
IX. Civic Ideals and Practices

Materials

- Two world maps showing nations for two time periods: Today and a map showing nations after WWI and just before WWII.
- Internet connection to view pictures of Indonesia and other URLs.

Objectives

1. Students will identify changes in the nations on the world map before and after WWII.
2. Students will explain what happened to Dutch civilians in Indonesia during WWII.
3. Students will give examples of things that women did to survive in the prison camps.
4. Students will identify daily activities of children in the Dutch East Indies and group them as related to geographic factors or historical factors.
5. Students will describe the costs warfare brings to the lives of people and to nations.
6. Students will identify ways to express concerns to and for people whose lives are disrupted by tragic and fearful events and role-play appropriate action to take.

Procedures

Exploration/Introduction continued

1. Ask students: What are some of the differences in your daily activities and those your grandparents and great grandparents had in their youth?

2. Following the sharing of these ideas, tell students that the map of the nations of the world has also changed over time.
3. Divide class into groups of two or three students. Give each group two world maps, one showing the nations following WWI and the second showing the nations of the world today. Tell students to identify differences in the two maps and to be certain to refer to the legend to assist them.

4. Ask groups to share their differences while the teacher lists them on the white board. Ask:

   a. Why do you think the names and borders of nations might have changed?

   b. Is there a way to tell from the maps which nations were the most important or powerful in the different time periods? Do you think that the amount of land a nation controls makes the nation powerful?

   c. Which nations controlled the most land after WWI?

   d. What might have happened in the times between the two maps that caused some nations to get larger amounts of land or cause the amount of land to decrease in size?

If students do not identify war, point out that WWII took place in the time period between the two maps.

**Development**

1. Tell students that WWII made changes in the lives of people as well as changes on the world map. Ask students:

   a. What do you think might have happened to the lives of young children and youth during a war?

   b. Why might children living in different nations have had different experiences during a war?

2. Introduce the book *Lost Childhood* by asking for predictions based on its title and picture on the cover. Explain that this book is a memoir – A story a person relates about what he/she remember of episodes in their own life.

   a. Ask: Many people write memoirs. Why do you think a person would write such a book? (Assist students to conclude two things: 1. people might learn what happened and 2. how to respond and live through such times.)

   b. Locate the Dutch East Indies and present day Indonesia on the world map. Locate the island of Java. Examine the relative location of Indonesia to the equator and to Japan, Australia, The Netherlands, and the United States.
3. The teacher should read the book aloud to the students over several days using the questions provided to discuss the book. Use standard procedures for dealing with special and new vocabulary as these words appear. Use the websites in the reference section to illustrate the historic appearance of the Dutch East Indies when reading the end of the first chapter and the second chapter. These pictures are copyrighted but can be viewed in the classroom.

a. How many of you can remember things about your life when you were three or four years of age? Did Annelex remember the same types of things you remember? Why did she and her friends play outside so much? What in the book leads you to think Annelex enjoyed these activities? How were the activities of her mother different or like the activities of your mother?

b. What caused the dramatic change in Annelex’s life when she was four?

c. What things were packed into the wagon when they left home? What was left behind? Were these of help to the family in the camp? When Jack was taken to a different camp what did Mother promise the children? What did mother tell them to do every night?

d. How were the people controlled in the camp?

e. When Annelex was unhappy and afraid how did she escape the unpleasant situation? (see page 57)

f. How did the children help their families while they were in the camps? (see page 62)

g. What things for a normal childhood were missing in the camp?

h. Why did Annelex remember bedtime as the best time?

i. What were some of the worst experiences in the camp?

j. As a child Annelex did not understand all she observed, what did the women especially Oma and Mother try to do to help Annelex?

k. How were the lives of the people in the camp made uncertain and controlled by their Japanese captors?

l. Did all of the Japanese treat the Dutch people in mean ways? What does this suggest to you about people and groups of people that you may not know or whose language you may not understand?
m. Annelex mentions the Red Cross as coming with some help. What needed assistance did the Red Cross provide? Why do you think they did not provide more help? Malaria was a terrible disease that Annelex and many others got. Why didn’t the Red Cross give the people in the camps medical care for such illnesses?

n. The family was in a camp for about three and a half years and cut off from all information about WWII and even what was happening in their own nation and to their own extended families. In 1945 how did the families in Camp Halmahiera learn that the war was over?

o. How did the mood of the camp change as a result of the end of the WWII? What do you think were the expectations of the women in the camp? What were Annelex’s expectations?

p. Not all expectations were met because of a new event with new dangers. What was this new major danger to the people who remained inside the camp? (Define sniper and the role of a sniper.)

q. Annelex mentions that she had seen many people die. Why do you think the death of the Japanese guard stayed in her memory in such great detail?

r. Annelex describes in great detail the arrival of her brother and the other Dutch men and boys to their camp. What emotions do you think people had about these arrivals? What do you think were the “good things” that came with these arrivals what “bad things” came or happened?

s. What were Jack and his male cousins being trained for in their camp? Do you think they would have become “good soldiers” for the Japanese? Why or why not?

t. Annelex was soon sent to hospitals because her malaria had reached an advanced stage and her life was in danger. She describes her mother’s activities at this time in great detail. What are some words that you would use to describe her mother’s behaviors?

u. Annelex was lucky to recover from her malaria. What other great event happened to Annelex while she was in the hospital?

v. Annelex writes about how the civil war impacted her life and that of her friends. Activities were not back to what they were before WWII, but more normal than life in the camp. What was an “unscheduled sleepover?” Do you think these were a “good” thing or a “bad” thing? (Use a class vote by show of hands on this question.)
w. Trying to get life back to a normal life was attempted. Annelex writes about going to school and the things she particularly remembers and liked. Do you think these are the same things you will remember about your school days? What do you think you and your classmates would do if some curious animals like the monkeys came into your school and classroom?

x. Just about the time the family’s life was becoming back to normal, they faced the tragic death of their father in the Civil War. According to Annelex how did each family member Mother, Jack, Annelex, and Oma react? Annelex had what are called flash-backs in her dreams to events or possible events she feared while in the camps. Who helped her immediately deal with these?

y. Eventually the family leaves the East Indies and goes to The Netherlands. It is difficult again for Annelex to be separated from first her brother and then her Oma. She wrote that when she left her Oma she was so angry with her mother that she would not talk to her. Did that mean that she did not love her mother? Why do you think that there are times when children are angry with their parents?

z. Final Review: Tell the students to think back on this book. By the age of eight Annelex had experienced and lived through many difficult events and days, along with several joyous times that provided her with promises. Ask the class to identify the difficult events and list them on the white board. Then have students to indicate with a show of hands which of the events they thought was the most difficult. Ask several students to explain why they made this particular choice. Divide the class into groups and have these groups role play a conversation that might have taken place with Annelex during that time period that would help her through her fear, loss, and grief. Complete the role-play with sharing ideas about: How can people help others who face losses and great fears? Divide the suggestions into short-term responses and longer-term responses as you list them on the whiteboard or a chart. Re-read the last paragraph of the book.

In leaving their homeland knowing that they cannot return, Annelex and her mother and brother became refugees. WWII created many refugees, as do all civil wars.

Expansion

1. End the entire lesson by discussing the real outcomes of wars - civil wars or world wars. As a basis for the discussion use or paraphrase the quotation by General William Tecumseh Sherman, “There's many a boy here today who looks on war as all glory but it is all hell.”
2. Ask the children, “Do you think that Annelex Hofstra Layson would agree with this quotation? Do you think other generals would agree with Sherman? Why?” If there is time search the Internet for other quotations by people who agree with Sherman. Were there any other generals who made comments similar to General Sherman’s?

3. Learn what happened to the Dutch people living in the Netherlands during their long occupation in WWII. Read the trade book *Boxes for Katje*. This book tells what life was like for Dutch people immediately after WWII and the efforts of groups in the United States to provide them with assistance. Draw parallels between the help that people provided to those whose lives were disrupted in both the Netherlands and The Dutch East Indies that at the time was a colony of The Netherlands. Ask: “Do you think Annelex’s life would have been better if she had lived in the Netherlands rather than the colony in The Dutch East Indies during WWII? Why or Why not?”

**Assessment**

1. Honest and appropriate or correct answers to the questions and a willingness to discuss events in the story are strategies that lead to formative assessment throughout the lessons.

2. The role-play activity is a form of performance assessment and applies to both interpersonal and civic ideals and practices.

3. Formal assessments may include written journal entries and/or a short essay about the important message of the last paragraph in the book and the rights of all people.

**Suggested Extension Activities**

1. A short account in which another child survivor’s story (Aleida-Chana Benninga) is related on the Internet and several artifacts from her story are shown. See digital reference for URL.

   After reading this and looking at the pictures, compare the facts presented with what Annelex relates about her time in the Japanese Camp. Does this story help you assess the accuracy of Annelex’s memory?

2. Examine the problems of refugees from civil wars in today’s world. Students might want to take some type of action to support groups that work to help refugees. The United Nations Refugee Agency provides information about refugees throughout the world today. Many communities in the United States have people living in them who are refugees and might be willing to relate their stories to your students. See digital reference list for URL.

   Anne Frank, a Jewish child, hid in the Netherlands and is known for the writings in her diary during this time. Visit the museum in the house where she hid and examine her life through the exhibits there. See digital references list for URL.
**Tradebooks**

About children in World War II


**Weblinks**

Sherman, William Tecumseh Quotation

http://www.brainyquote.com/quotes/quotes/w/williamtec190611.html

Aleida-Chana Benninga’s story


Anne Frank’s home and diary

http://www.annefrank.org/en/Subsites/Home/

Children in the Ghetto

http://ghetto.galim.org.il/eng/street.html

Primary History Children of World War 2

http://www.bbc.co.uk/schools/primaryhistory/world_war2/

The rationing challenge

http://www.bbc.co.uk/schools/primaryhistory/world_war2/daily_life/

Scotland in World War 2

http://www.bbc.co.uk/scotland/education/as/ww2/

United Nations Refugee Agency

http://www.unhcr.org/cgi-bin/texis/vtx/home