

## **The Mysterious Box of Photographs: A 50-minute Class Project for Grades 4–8**

In this activity, middle grade students will study a group of photographs “found in a neighbor’s attic” with only a few hints of what they might be about—enough to know that they are all from the same place and about the same time. Students will use Social Studies skills to arrive at a conclusion about where and when the photographs were taken and at what kind of place—a very real place that they’ve likely not heard about before.

In fact, the photographs are of the Crystal City Internment Camp for Japanese and German families interned during World War II. All are from the Photo Archives at UTSA’s Institute of Texan Cultures, and they are available for you to print free from our online catalog. Have fun making your “Mysterious Box” and the photographs in it seem as authentic as any old box that has ever been found in a neighbor’s attic.

Have fun exploring our online Photo Archive Catalog, too; you may want to use it again someday!

### **Preparation**

(Allow two hours)

1. Print out the box top design and mount it onto an appropriate shallow cardboard box. (A box which holds printing paper or other 8.5”x11” printing materials is a good choice.) For a more realistic alternative, create your own old, stained box with a partly illegible label similar to our design.
2. Go to UTSA’s Institute of Texan Cultures Library/Photoarchive Catalog at <http://uitclib.utsa.edu/cgi-bin/Pwebrecon.cgi?DB=local&PAGE=First>
3. Search for Crystal City Internment Camp by Subject Heading. From the listing, select “Crystal City Internment Camp (Crystal City, Tex).” You will get 93 (as of 4/30/07) images on four pages. Print the 40 photos identified on the attached list and perhaps others that you choose.
4. For yourself, print the “long view” of each image. (Print page 1 only for adequate reference and to save paper.)
5. For students, use the “click to enlarge” feature, then print each image on a separate page. Trim and laminate each photograph if desired.
6. Place photographs in box in random order.

## Photo Print List

(Photos are catalogued in alphabetical order. Use titles to locate image; click title, then use call number to confirm correct photo.)

1. Aerial view of administration building and main entrance... 098-0958
2. Aerial view of Crystal City Internment Camp... 098-0953
3. Aerial view of Crystal City Internment Camp... 098-0955
4. Aerial view of Federal High School... 098-0963
5. Aerial view of German school... 098-0959
6. Aerial view of the southwest corner... 098-0956
7. Barbers and beauticians... 098-0990
8. Boy Scout leaders... 098-0992
9. Children's rhythm band... 079-0136
10. Christmas program in classroom... 098-0968
11. Cub Scout troop... 098-0993
12. Entrance to classrooms... 098-0964
13. Exterior of laundry... 098-0987
14. Federal High School graduates, 1943... 079-0139
15. Federal High School graduates, 1945... 079-0137
16. German child looking towards the German School... 098-0960
17. German internees constructing swimming pool... 098-0996
18. German internees constructing swimming pool... 098-0995
19. German internees filling the swimming pool... 098-0997
20. Girl Scout dramatic presentation at Hinamatsuri... 098-0976
21. Girl Scout dramatic presentation at Hinamatsuri... 098-0977
22. Grammar school graduates... 079-0138
23. Group portrait of Japanese students... 079-0135
24. Group portrait of staff and guards... 079-0133
25. Group portrait of students and teachers at German School... 079-0140
26. Guard tower at the Crystal City Internment Camp... 079-0385
27. Interior of laundry... 098-0986
28. Japanese cooks and supervisor in kitchen... 098-0988a
29. Japanese students in handicraft class... 098-0980
30. Japanese teenagers around small Christmas tree... 098-0969
31. Japanese women in needlework class... 098-0982
32. Members of the Internal Relations Department... 079-0382
33. Page from ROUNDUP 1945 showing photographs of students in various... 086-0322
34. Page from ROUNDUP 1945 showing photographs of the coach and... 086-0318
35. Page from ROUNDUP 1945 showing photographs of the "yell and... 086-0319
36. Rob Rossington and Dow Harp, guards at the... 079-0387
37. Santa Claus delivering Christmas gifts in the Japanese section... 098-0972
38. Sewing factory at Crystal City... 098-0983
39. Tailor shop at Crystal City... 098-0984
40. Title page of ROUNDUP 1945, the yearbook published at Federal High... 086-0315

## Lesson Plans: The Mysterious Box of Photographs

### Learning from Photographs/Making Observations

#### Guided Classroom Discussion—25 minutes

Show box and say: **“My neighbor gave me this box of old photographs she found in the attic and asked if I could tell what they were about. Can you help me? Let’s see what we can figure out about them!”**

Pass photos around, starting a handful down each row. Allow students to trade so that everyone gets to view a variety of the photos and discuss them or make guesses about them. (Of course, responses and questions may not come in this order, but use this guide as a checklist.)

1. **When do you think these photographs were taken? What decade?** (Clues: cars, clothing styles, old sewing machines, old hairdryer, school desks and blackboard, date on graduation photograph, homes, electrical poles...)
2. **Can you tell what kind of place this is?** (Good guesses might be: housing development, prison, school, factory of some kind, military installation ...)
3. **Who was there?** (Good answers include: Boy Scouts, Asians, Japanese, teenagers, women, children, non-Japanese, high school students, hairdressers, seamstresses, tailors, laundry workers, cooks, white people...)
4. **Can anyone find the name of a town? Where is Crystal City? Are these pictures from the whole town of Crystal City?** (Note aerial view with camp rectangle showing clearly but other buildings and farmland outside.)
5. **What other words or dates can you find?** (Internal Department Internment Camp, Federal High School, other words and names on yearbook pages, O Tower, FHS 45...)
6. **Can anyone find the name of the high school? What does “Federal” mean? Why might a school be named that?**
7. **Why do you think there are so many pictures with Japanese people in them? But still, there are other people, too. I wonder who they could be?** (Administrators, teachers, supervisors... Of course, some are Germans also interned in the camp.)

#### Making sense of what we’ve observed: grouping activity—15 minutes

1. **Let’s see if we can group pictures that seem to be connected. What kinds of pictures did you notice?** (Possible groupings could include Christmas, yearbook, school activities, children and teenagers, exterior of buildings, interior of buildings, Boy Scouts,

construction, Japanese play, adult group shots, things that don't seem to belong with others...)

*As students name groups or recognize that a picture they have goes with a certain group, let them come up to stand photos together on the chalk tray or lay out on a table or desk.*

2. **What else can you think of that happened in the 1940s, around the time these pictures were taken?** (World War II, grandparents born ...)
3. **What kind of place would need or have all of the scenes and people photographed in the 1940s during World War II?**

**Closure: 10 minutes.**

If students are beginning to arrive at a solution to the title of the box, help them to the complete answer:

***“Photographs from Crystal City Internment Camp, Crystal City, Texas, 1942-1945.”***

Ask what students think that could mean. Listen to their responses, then tell briefly about the Japanese Internment/Relocation during World War II.

1. **Look at the pictures grouped in categories. How might (a high school, a laundry, Christmas decorations...) fit into camp life.** (Use printouts from catalog or help verbally with identifying specific photographs; however, for this question and #12, student conjectures need not be historically accurate; we are looking for good use of Social Studies skills.)
2. **What about those pictures that don't seem to fit into a group? What can you say about them?**
3. **I wonder what you think about Japanese Americans being isolated in camps during World War II? Would anyone care to comment?**

**Optional Writing Assignment:** Pass out the photographs again, one for each student, then the “long view” of the photo description that goes with each. The student will write a descriptive paragraph entitled “The Big Picture,” describing the photograph s/he received and telling how it illustrates one aspect of camp life. Encourage students to use terms such as “perhaps” and “possibly” when making generalizations and predictions or drawing inferences and conclusions based on incomplete data.

**Further Reading:** For students interested in knowing more about Japanese/Japanese American internment, see the “Enduring Communities” bibliography for excellent picture books, juvenile novels, and nonfiction resources.