



# Ernie Kim

(1918–1997)

Teacher Packet

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## Biography: Ernie Kim

Born in Manteca, California, in 1918, Ernie Kim originally attended Los Angeles City College to become a dentist. However, when the United States entered World War II, he left his studies to serve as an Army parachute lieutenant. Injured during the Battle of the Bulge, Kim was left to die in the snow but was eventually captured and held in a German POW camp, where he barely survived as the only remaining member of his unit: “When he was finally rescued, Kim weighed only sixty-five pounds and suffered from severe depression” (Chang, Johnson, and Karlstrom 2008, 352). As part of his occupational therapy after the war, Kim took ceramics classes through the Veterans Administration and found a new path: “[In 1946] I encountered a fascinating experience with a medium I was particularly adapted to. It was then that I realized I could serve myself and the community by becoming a ceramic artist” (quoted in Chang, Johnson, and Karlstrom 2008, 351). After moving to the Bay Area in 1949 and studying with artist-designer Marian Hartwell, Kim became a ceramics teacher who taught in the Palo Alto Unified School District in 1952, served as the head of the ceramics department at the California School of Fine Arts (now the San Francisco Art Institute) in 1956, and then directed the Richmond Art Center from 1970 to 1980. As an artist, Kim was praised for creating “quietly beautiful” vessels featuring “subtle manipulation of surfaces” (Polley 1964). Having endured extreme isolation during his incarceration as a prisoner of war, Kim immersed himself in community throughout his teaching career. After his death in 1997, the Richmond Art Center created the annual Ernie Kim Award in his honor.



*Ernie Kim teaching.*

# Lesson 1. Ernie Kim: On the Surface

**Grade Levels:** K–8, with extensions for older students

**Lesson Duration:** One 50-minute class period (can be broken into two shorter periods for younger students)

**Objective:** Learn about two techniques Ernie Kim used to decorate the surfaces of his ceramics.

## Common Core State Standards (California):

**1.VA:Cr2.1.** Explore uses of materials and tools to create works of art or design.

**1.VA:Cr2.2.** Demonstrate safe and proper procedures for using materials, tools, and equipment while making art.

## Materials:

- Device with Internet access and projection capability
- White construction paper
- Crayons
- Toothpicks
- Watercolors and cup of water
- Paintbrushes

## Procedure:

1. Introduce Lesson: In creating his ceramics, Ernie Kim often used *sgraffito* and wax resist techniques to decorate their surfaces. In this lesson, we will learn about both of these techniques and use simpler materials to create the same effects. We will also look at some of the calligraphic and abstract designs on Kim’s ceramics.
2. Show examples of Kim’s ceramics to illustrate the terms. (Use downloadable pdf of slideshow).

Discuss: How would you describe the decorations on Kim’s vessels? What words come to mind?

3. Watch video of *sgraffito* technique: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=oYIAXDQHggI>
4. Directions to give students for first activity:
  - a. Using a variety of crayons, cover a piece of white construction paper with blocks of colors; make sure to color in every part of the paper’s surface.
  - b. Use a black crayon to color over the blocks of color. Add several layers of black crayon to the page, so that none of the colors come through.
  - c. Use a toothpick to scratch out a drawing on the now-black surface of the paper. Try to create an abstract or calligraphic design like the kinds Ernie Kim made on his ceramics. Your drawing should come out in the original colors you used.

5. Watch video of wax resist technique:  
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=N4D55VQ8v7A>

Explain that when the vessel is fired in the kiln, the wax burns off, and thus the surface of the vessel remains smooth.

6. Directions to give students for second activity:
  - a. Use your crayons to draw another abstract or calligraphic design on a piece of white construction paper. Go over the outline of your drawing a few times, so that the wax layer is thick.
  - b. Wet your paintbrush in your cup of water and use the watercolors to paint around or over your crayon drawing. Watch how the wax resists the paint.
7. Share out: Have students share their *sgraffito* and wax resist pieces. Did they try to imitate Ernie Kim's designs; if so, where/how?

### **Possible extensions:**

#### *For all grades*

1. Experiment with other forms of resist art, as seen in this short tutorial by the Asian Art Museum's Art Speak Interns: <https://www.instagram.com/p/CAJLYfKg8xm/>

#### *For grades 6 and above*

2. Compare/contrast Kim's ceramics with those of another California artist of the same period, Jade Snow Wong: <https://education.asianart.org/resources/jade-snow-wong/>  
Can you see how they emphasized different techniques in their vessels?
3. Kim saw the Swedish designer [Stig Lindberg](#) and the American artist [Peter Voulkos](#) as important influences. Look through their works and see if you can identify any connections to Kim's ceramics.
4. Investigate other techniques for decorating ceramics:  
<https://discover.goldmarkart.com/10-types-ceramic-decoration/>  
See if you can identify any of these techniques in the slideshow of Kim's artworks.
5. "Sgraffito" and "graffiti" come from the same Italian word meaning "to scratch."  
Research the beginnings of graffiti as scratched inscriptions and images on ancient walls. For an interesting discussion of graffiti that makes reference to *sgraffito* and calligraphic design, see this blogpost by 3-D pavement artist Kurt Wenner:  
<https://kurtwenner.com/blog/2012/10/09/qa-on-graffiti/>

## Lesson 2. Korean Americans and World War II

**Grade Levels:** 9–12

**Duration:** To be decided by teacher; could be a week-long unit.

**Objective:** To understand the contributions of Korean American soldiers during World War II.

**Introduction:** Before World War II, tensions escalated between Japan and the United States during the 1930s. This hostility ultimately culminated in the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor in 1941. A consequence of the attack was rising anti-Japanese sentiment and, later, the persecution of Japanese Americans with Executive Order 9066. The order imprisoned approximately 120,000 Japanese immigrants and Japanese Americans. While only Japanese immigrants and Japanese Americans were incarcerated, the anti-Japanese sentiment also extended to immigrants and Americans of other Asian descent groups, like Korean American.

Although Asian Americans faced intense discrimination in the United States, they served the nation at home and in the armed forces. Ernie Kim, for instance, was a parachute lieutenant in the U.S. Army and fought at the Battle of the Bulge during WWII. As the sole survivor of his unit, he was captured and imprisoned at the German POW camp in Heppenheim. In the POW camp he received no medical care and very little food. When he was finally rescued, Kim weighed only sixty-five pounds and suffered from severe depression (Chang, Johnson, and Karlstrom 2008, 352). The injustice of an individual soldier sacrificing life and limb for the nation while suffering discrimination at home needs to be furthered explored in Asian American history.

In this lesson, you will read passages from different secondary sources, conduct your own research, and write on the contextual themes and historical events that shaped the experiences of Korean Americans during WWII. This lesson is intended to be taught in tandem with a WWII curriculum.

### **Common Core Standards (California):**

Writing Standards for Literacy in History/Social Studies (Grade 9-12):

WHST 9-12.1: Write arguments focused on discipline-specific content.

WHST 9-12.4: Produce clear and coherent writing in which the development, organization, and style are appropriate to task, purpose, and audience.

WHST 9-12.5: Develop and strengthen writing as needed by planning, revising, editing, rewriting, or trying a new approach, focusing on addressing what is most significant for a specific purpose and audience.

WHST 9-12.7: Conduct short as well as more sustained research projects to answer a question (including a self-generated question) or solve a problem; narrow or broaden the inquiry when appropriate; synthesize multiple sources on the subject, demonstrating understanding of the subject under investigation.

### **Content Standards (California):**

History/Social Science (Grade 11):



HSS 11.7: Students analyze America’s participation in World War II.

HSS 11.7.3: Identify the roles and sacrifices of individual American soldiers, as well as the unique contributions of the special fighting forces (e.g., the Tuskegee Airmen, the 442nd Regimental Combat team, the Navajo Code Talkers).

HSS 11.7.5: Discuss the constitutional issues and impact of events on the U.S. home front, including the internment of Japanese Americans (e.g., *Fred Korematsu v. United States of America*) and the restrictions on German and Italian resident aliens; the response of the administration to Hitler’s atrocities against Jews and other groups; the roles of women in military production; and the roles and growing political demands of African Americans.

**Materials:**

- Video, [“For Susan Ahn, WWII Was a Fight for America and Korea”](#)
- Selected passages (Appendix A)
- Internet and computer access

**Procedure:**

1. Review the elements that escalated the tension between Japan and the United States, leading up to World War II.
2. Watch [“For Susan Ahn, WWII Was a Fight for America and Korea”](#) to introduce the role of Korean Americans during WWII.
3. Read selected passages (Appendix A) on Korean Americans during WWII.  
(*Note: This step can be assigned as homework the night prior to lesson day.*)
4. Discuss as a group the themes and historical events that emerge from the video and selected passages.
5. Independently, conduct further internet research on life for Korean American civilians or Korean Americans’ participation in the U.S. military during WWII. Find at least two scholarly articles.
6. Reflect and write a brief essay that address the following questions:
  - a. What was the relationship between Korean Americans and Korea?
  - b. What was the relationship between Korean Americans and Japan?
  - c. What barriers did Korean Americans face during WWII in and outside the United States? What are the similarities to other minority groups in the United States?
  - d. What were possible ramifications of Executive Order 9066 on Korean Americans?
  - e. How did anti-Japanese sentiment during WWII create tension between Japanese Americans and Korean Americans?
  - f. *Optional:* What are possible remnants of WWII in today’s experience for Korean Americans?

### **Possible Extension One:**

Ernie Kim was introduced to ceramics through a Veterans Administration class that provided occupational therapy after World War II. This experience helped Kim to find a new path in life: “I realized I could serve myself and the community by becoming a ceramic artist” (quoted in Chang, Johnson, and Karlstrom 2008, 351). What role can art play in the reintegration of combat soldiers into civilian life? Research the topic of art therapy for veterans to understand how Kim benefited from such a program. You can start with the following sources:

American Art Therapy Association. n.d. “Art Therapy, Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder, and Veterans.” *Americans for the Arts*. Accessed May 21, 2020. <https://www.americansforthearts.org/node/99938>.

Veterans Families United. n.d. “Art Therapy: Visual, Performing, Written.” Accessed May 21, 2020. <https://veteransfamiliesunited.org/art-therapy-visual-performing-written/>.

### **Possible Extension Two:**

Korean Americans were not the only ones facing injustice. Many other minority groups served in the armed, but continued to face discrimination at home during WWII, notably African Americans. Research the experiences at the U.S. home front of another minority group.



## Lesson 3. Richmond Art Center and the WPA

**Grade Levels:** 11–12

**Duration:** To be decided by teacher; could be a week-long project.

**Objective:** Create a WPA-inspired poster based on one or more current economic or political issues in the U.S.

**Introduction:** On March 4, 1933, Franklin D. Roosevelt was sworn in as president. In his inaugural address, he declared that his goal was to tackle the economic collapse from the effects of the Great Depression. This goal manifested as a reform program called the New Deal and the Second New Deal. From the Second New Deal, the Works Progress Administration (WPA) was created. A massive work relief program, the WPA employed roughly 8.5 million Americans. While it is best known for its public works and infrastructure initiatives, the WPA also sponsored projects in the arts. With support from the WPA, artists created motivational posters and painted murals of “American scenes” in public buildings. Sculptors created monuments, and actors and musicians were paid to perform. This investment in the arts was not only to put artists back to work but to also entertain and inspire the American people, disillusioned by the economic turmoil.

From the WPA, the Richmond Art Center was established in Richmond, CA. Founder, Hazel Salmi, wanted a space “to maintain and further in the community an active interest in the arts, graphic and plastic, and an interest in the creative hand-crafts.” That is, she wanted a “community studio workshop” (LaRocco and Faylor 2019). In 1962, Ernie Kim began teaching at the Richmond Art Center and served as the center’s director from 1970-1980. In 1998, the Richmond Art Center instituted an annual prize for artists in craft media that bears his name. Today, the Ernie Kim Award is still awarded annually, and the center still runs art classes and workshops and holds exhibitions.

In this lesson, you will dive deeper into the WPA and the new jobs that it provided artists. You will also take inspiration from the Richmond Art Center’s community-oriented mission to create your own inspirational message, program, or event.

### **Common Core Standards (California):**

Writing Standards for Literacy in History/Social Studies (Grade 11-12):

WHST 11-12.4: Produce clear and coherent writing in which the development, organization, and style are appropriate to task, purpose, and audience.

WHST 11-12.5: Develop and strengthen writing as needed by planning, revising, editing, rewriting, or trying a new approach, focusing on addressing what is most significant for a specific purpose and audience.

WHST 11-12.7: Conduct short as well as more sustained research projects to answer a question (including a self-generated question) or solve a problem; narrow or broaden the inquiry when appropriate; synthesize multiple sources on the subject, demonstrating understanding of the subject under investigation.

**Content Standards (California):**

History/Social Science (Grade 11):

HSS 11.6: Students analyze the different explanations for the Great Depression and how the New Deal fundamentally changed the role of the federal government.

HSS 11.6.2: Understand the explanations of the principal causes of the Great Depression and the steps taken by the Federal Reserve, Congress, and Presidents Herbert Hoover and Franklin Delano Roosevelt to combat the economic crisis.

HSS 11.6.4: Analyze the effects of and the controversies arising from New Deal economic policies and the expanded role of the federal government in society and the economy since the 1930s (e.g., Works Progress Administration, Social Security, National Labor Relations Board, farm programs, regional development policies, and energy development projects such as the Tennessee Valley Authority, California Central Valley Project, and Bonneville Dam).

Visual Arts:

VA 1.2.2: Make art or design with various art materials and tools to explore personal interests, questions, and curiosity.

VA 1.2.3: Apply knowledge of available resources, tools, and technologies to investigate personal ideas through the art-making process.

VA 2.3.7: Apply visual organizational strategies to design and produce a work of art, design, or media that clearly communicates information or ideas.

VA 2.3.8: Select, organize, and design images and words to make visually clear and compelling presentations.

**Materials:**

- Device with projection capability
- Internet and computer access

**Procedure:**

1. Review the development of the First and Second New Deal.
  - a. What were the primary objectives of the First and Second New Deal?
  - b. What were the three major efforts to address short- and long-term goals that were articulated in the New Deal?

2. Visit PBS website and read [The Works Progress Administration](#).

Discuss: What was the purpose of the Works Progress Administration? How did it assist artists and art centers?

3. Browse [the collection of WPA Posters](#) from the Library of Congress
4. As a group, list major economic or political issues the U.S. is facing today.
5. Based on the list, develop what kind of exhibit, community activity, theatrical production, or health or educational program you would like to see.

6. Create a WPA poster to attract audiences to invest or participate in your program or event.
7. Write an artist statement and proposal to accompany your poster. Your written statement should address the following questions:
  - a. What is the mission of your event or program?
  - b. Who will benefit from your event or program?
  - c. How will your event or program serve your intended audience?
  - d. In what ways will your event or program build community?
  - e. *(Optional)* How will your program or event ignite action?
  - f. What was the inspiration for the artwork?
8. After everyone's posters are finished, share out: present your poster and proposed program to the class. Discuss: How might you work to make these proposals a reality? Whom might you write or speak to next?

# Resources

## General Resources

Chang, Gordon H., Mark Johnson, and Paul Karlstrom, eds. 2008. *Asian American Art: A History, 1850-1970*. Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press: 351-352.

The Marks Project. n.d. “Ernie Kim.” *The Dictionary of American Studio Ceramics, 1946 Onward*. Accessed May 21, 2020. <https://www.themarksproject.org/marks/kim>

Polley, Elizabeth M. “Ernie Kim, Sung Woo Chun, John Richards, John Battenberg at the Richmond Art Center.” *Artforum* (Dec. 1964). Accessed May 21, 2020.

## Cover Page and Biography

*Cover Image:*

*Ernie Kim*, approx. 1950s. Courtesy Asian American Art Project, Stanford University. Taken from Chang, Gordon H., Mark Johnson, and Paul Karlstrom, eds. 2008. *Asian American Art: A History, 1850-1970*. Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press: 351-352.

*Biography Image:*

*Ernie Kim teaching*. Taken from: Rehistoricizing.org. n.d. “Ephemera from Rehistoricizing at the Luggage Store Gallery.” *Rehistoricizing the Time Around Abstract Expressionism in the San Francisco Bay Area, 1950s-1960s*. <http://rehistoricizing.org/ephemera-from-rehistoricizing-at-the-luggage-store-gallery/>.

## Lesson 1. Ernie Kim: On the Surface

Art Speak Interns. “Watercolor Resist Painting Tutorial.” 2:20. May 14, 2020. <https://www.instagram.com/p/CAJLYfKg8xm/>.

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Goldmark Guide. “Buying Pots: 10 Types of Ceramic Decoration.” *Discover Goldmark*. March 2016. <https://discover.goldmarkart.com/10-types-ceramic-decoration/>.

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<https://americanart.si.edu/artist/peter-voulkos-5183>.

“Q&A: On Graffiti.” *Kurt Wenner: Master Artist*. October 9, 2012.  
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“Scandinavian Designer Stig Lindberg— the multitalented craftsman active during the golden design years.” *Zimmerdahl Antiques and Design AB*. 2020.  
<https://www.scandinaviantimeless.design/designers/stig-lindberg-scandinavian-design>.

## Lesson 2. Korean Americans and World War II

Armstrong, Charles K. 2007. *The Koreas*. Philadelphia: Routledge. Retrieved from <http://books.google.com>.

Asian Americans. “For Susan Ahn, WWII Was a Fight for America and Korea.” *PBS* video, 1:48, May 11, 2020, <https://www.pbs.org/video/susan-ahn-cudd-korean-american-pioneer-and-woman-warrior-akb/>

Chang, Gordon H., Mark Johnson, and Paul Karlstrom, editors. *Asian American Art: A History, 1850-1970*. Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2008: 351-352.

Lutz, Amy. 2013. “Race-Ethnicity and Immigration Status in the U.S. Military.” In *Life Course Perspectives on Military Service*, edited by Janet M. Wilmoth and Andrew S. London, 68-96. Philadelphia: Routledge. Retrieved from <http://books.google.com>.

Lynn, Martha Drexler. *American Studio Ceramics: Innovation and Identity, 1940-1979*. New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2015.

POV. “History of Comfort Women — The Apology | POV | PBS.” *YouTube* video, 2:20, November 8, 2018. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=k4SSC4YBWnA>.

Sik, Kim Young. “The Korean Americans in the War of Independence: The left-right confrontation in Korea – Its origin.” *Association for Asian Research*. November 9, 2003.  
<https://web.archive.org/web/20100918010308/http://asianresearch.org/articles/1633.html>.

Takaki, Ronald T. *Double Victory: A Multicultural History of America in World War II*. New York: Little, Brown and Company. 2000.

## Lesson 3. Richmond Art Center and the WPA

Chang, Gordon H., Mark Johnson, and Paul Karlstrom, eds. 2008. *Asian American Art: A History, 1850-1970*. Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press: 351-352.

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<https://www.loc.gov/item/today-in-history/april-08/>.
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<http://richmondartcenter.org/>.

# Appendix A (Lesson 2)



## **Lesson 2. Korean Americans and World War II – Selected Passages**

Sik, Kim Young. “The Korean Americans in the War of Independence: The left-right confrontation in Korea – Its origin.” *Association for Asian Research*. November 9, 2003. <https://web.archive.org/web/20100918010308/http://asianresearch.org/articles/1633.html>.

“There is no question that many Koreans in America have made valuable contributions to our war of independence. Dr. Suh Jae Pil, Dr. Rhee Syngman, Ahn Chang Ho, and many others made inspiring speeches and wrote articles for Korea’s independence.

The Koreans in America were small in number before our liberation and America was a long way from the killing fields of China and Siberia. Although about 100 Koreans enlisted in the US Army during World War II, few Koreans in America shed blood in our war of independence.”

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Lutz, Amy. 2013. “Race-Ethnicity and Immigration Status in the U.S. Military.” In *Life Course Perspectives on Military Service*, edited by Janet M. Wilmoth and Andrew S. London, 68-96. Philadelphia: Routledge: 85. Retrieved from <http://books.google.com>.

“Korean immigrants were in a unique position during World War II. Because their homeland had been occupied by Japan since 1910, they were highly supportive of the United States in the war. Nevertheless, like Japanese immigrants and their children, they were often treated by the U.S. government as ‘enemy aliens’ (Takaki 2000). Korean participation in the war took several forms, from purchasing large numbers of war bonds to translating documents from Japanese, which they had learned in school in Korea during the occupation, into English; many also served in the Korean “Tiger Brigade” unit of the California National Guard (Takaki 2000). Those who were working in the defense industry in Hawaii were forced to wear badges indicating their Japanese classification; however, ultimately, they were allowed to include a printed notation on their badges: ‘I am Korean’ (Takaki 2000: 127).” (Lutz 2013, 85)

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Armstrong, Charles K. 2007. *The Koreas*. Philadelphia: Routledge. Retrieved from <http://books.google.com>.

“After 1910, Koreans were officially treated as Japanese subjects by the U.S. government.... This created a paradox after Pearl Harbor—whereas the Korean community in the United States was largely pro-independence, Koreans as Japanese subjects should have been considered enemy aliens. Nevertheless, unlike Japanese-Americans, Koreans in the United States were not sent to internment camps. U.S. Military Order No. 45, promulgated in December 1943, exempted Koreans from enemy alien status.

By 1945 the Korean immigrant population in the United States numbered only a few thousand, a miniscule population compared to the ethnic Korean communities in Japan, China, and Russia, and far smaller than the population of Americans of Chinese or Japanese descent. Nevertheless, the United States had been a haven for some of the most prominent pro-independence leaders.... [T]he Korean independence movement in the United States was quite different in character than that of Russia, China, or Japan. In the United States, there was no

large independent political organization of Koreans, no government-in-exile, or ethnic Korean guerilla army. In America, the Korean independence movement was led by highly educated.... In particular, there was no organized left-wing party in the United States that was instrumental in mobilizing the Korean independence movement as was the Communist Party in China, Japan, and the Soviet Union. Like the Korean-American community as a whole, indeed like the United States as a whole, the Korean independence movement in America was predominantly Christian, urban, and liberal.” (Armstrong 2007, 104-105)