

Ideas for Art and Craft classes, exploring the experience of internment in prison camps in the Far East during World War II...

Quilt workshop

One of the ways the imprisoned women kept boredom and fear for their survival at bay was the making of large patchwork quilts formed of individually embroidered squares. Contributors were asked to put ‘something of themselves’ into their square and to embroider their name. When the finished quilts from the women interned in Changi, Singapore, were given with permission of the Japanese Commandant to the Military Hospital at Changi Barracks, the quilt provided detail of who was still alive. The Changi quilts were made during the first 6 months of 3½ years of internment.

Activity:

Ask each class member to create a square to go towards the making of a class quilt. Ask them what they would have included had they been interned. What threads, stitches, colours, textures and shapes will they choose? Who is their square a message for and what is that message? Encourage discussion of their thoughts as they stitch and the thoughts they intend to stitch into the square.

Illustrations and paintings

Some of the women produced illustrations during their internment: Agnes Keith (*Three Came Home*) drew caricatures of herself and her fellow camp-mates; Margaret Dryburgh made pencil sketches of the camp surroundings; while Rita Wenning made an abstract painting, chiefly using shoe polish, which was an artistic interpretation of the vocal orchestra’s *Largo*, as a gift to Norah Chambers.

Activity: Ask the class to create recycled ‘mixed media’ artwork (illustrations, paintings or sculptures) using only those resources that would have been available to the internees: charcoal, plants, wood and tree bark, sand, small stones, rubbish, scraps of metal, small bits of material, shoe polish, dye from wetted covers of old cloth books, beetles and other insects.

Foliage weaving

In order to keep the unrelenting sun off their heads, some of the prisoners weaved themselves coolie-style hats out of coconut or palm leaves. Straw hats were also made out of native grass bags, indeed two Australian nurses Mavis Hannah and Jessie Simons made a cottage industry out of making these.

Activity: Weave hats, placemats, baskets or other artistic creations out of different types of leaves. There are many ideas for foliage weaving at <http://bit.ly/18GigWP> and several hat-making tutorials on YouTube.

Written resources

There are many references to relevant books, films and television programmes to supplement your class teaching on the Singing to Survive website: <http://singingtosurvive.com/links/>