

Becoming American: the Chinese Experience

OPPORTUNITY AND DISCRIMINATION, A DREAM OF GOLD

developed by Gail Egbert

GRADE LEVELS 4	Activities focus on <i>Episode 2, Becoming American, The Chinese Experience</i> . Students will understand the influence of economic and social factors to the changing attitudes toward Chinese immigrants and the law in the early days of California statehood. Students will explore the meaning of citizenship.
SUBJECTS History, American Studies	
TIME ALLOTMENT 4 to 5 days, depending on activity selected.	
OVERVIEW	<p>Students will learn the meaning of democracy and the impact of the Exclusion Law to Chinese immigration. While the focus is on the first half of <i>Episode 2, Becoming American, The Chinese Experience</i>, it is recommended that the students view Episode 1 for background information.</p> <p>The lesson focuses on what it means to be a citizen of the United States and why the Chinese Exclusion Act is important when considering the concept of racism. It provides critical thinking activities directed at understanding how the Chinese used the legal system and the Constitution of the United States.</p> <p>The Chinese Exclusion Act was passed in 1882 –the culmination of over thirty years of increasing anti-Chinese sentiment. Driven by increased competition in the job market of Gold Rush California, the goal of the Exclusion Act was to stop Chinese Laborers from entering the country and to stop those here from gaining citizenship.</p> <p>In the lesson, students use a “Mock Trial” to examine the Chinese Exclusion Act and the 14th Amendment. The lesson begins by asking students to give their own ideas of what it means to be a citizen. The heart of the lesson is the study of the Exclusion Act and why it was passed. What does it mean to be a citizen of the United States?</p>
OBJECTIVES	<p>Demonstrate understanding of the concept of citizenship</p> <p>Demonstrate understanding of the Chinese Exclusion Act</p> <p>Explore the meaning of prejudice and racism</p> <p>Examine how government policies and actions can be racist</p>

Understand the impact of the 14th Amendment

Develop an understanding of how political, economic, and social factors influence changing attitudes toward immigration

MATERIALS

Becoming American: The Chinese Experience, A Bill Moyers Experience
3 DVD Pack available for \$99.95 at: <http://shop.pbs.org/products/BACE400>
4 VHS Pack available for \$89.95 at: <http://shop.pbs.org/products/BACE800>
Or call 800-PLAY-PBS (800-752-9727)

Handout: Focus for Media Interaction

Handout: Venn Diagram Organizer

Handout: Vocabulary

Handout: Debate worksheet

Overhead transparencies

Paper and pencils

United States Constitution

Available at <http://www.house.gov/Constitution/Constitution.html>

Mouffe, Chantal. "Citizenship." In Seymour Martin Lipset, Ed. *ENCYCLOPEDIA OF DEMOCRACY*, Volume 1. Washington, DC: Congressional Quarterly, Inc., 1995, 217-221.

ACTIVITY 1
What is a Citizen?

Begin this lesson by asking each student to write a short definition of "citizen."

Hold a class discussion with question such as:

What is a citizen?

What are some benefits of being a citizen in your town or city?

Are there any disadvantages?

Are there any people in your community who are not citizens?

Who, if anyone, represents their interests? Is this fair?

Can these people become citizens if they want?

If so, what does the procedure involve?

Explain to students that democracy must meet three conditions

(1) meaningful competition among individuals and groups (i.e. political parties) for positions of power

(2) an inclusive level of political participation in the selection of leaders and policies

(3) the existence of civil and political liberties

Provide a handout from the Encyclopedia of Democracy defining Citizenship (or similar information from classroom resources).

Use a Venn diagram to illustrate the ideas listed for the definition of citizenship, divided by "Rights" and "Responsibilities."

Referencing the video, illustrate that in order to exercise rights, people must first be aware of what they are.

ACTIVITY 2
The Chinese Exclusion
Act: A Classroom
Debate

Initially only a ten year policy, the Chinese Exclusion Act was extended and made permanent in 1902. It was not repealed until China became an ally of the U.S. against Japan in 1943. As a result of the financial instability of the 1870s, many young Chinese men made the difficult decision to immigrate.

Have students investigate print and online resources to learn about the history of immigration legislation. Create a timeline to illustrate the important changes. For each point, list the important points and indicate legal, social and economic factors.

Create two classroom debate teams who will develop arguments for each side of the case for a "mock trial."

For each team:

Develop themes/concepts/key words. Why did the team select these words?

What is the important documentation required to support the argument?

Develop evidence to support the argument

Define questions that will bring out important information for your side of the case.

Come up with points that may damage the information presented by the other side.

Create a worksheet that will support and elicit information. The worksheet will include

1) Elements of the claim,

2) Facts to be proven

Debate Format:

Opening Statement from each team

Questions for each team and response from opposing team.

Break so teams can discuss responses and prepare for closing statement

Closing Statements from each team.

ACTIVITY 3
Making a Choice

Many Chinese laborers returned to China. Should they have returned to their families or stayed in the U.S. in spite of the challenges and obstacles they faced.

As evidenced in *Becoming American: The Chinese Experience*, what was daily life like for the Chinese Americans? Hard economic conditions, as a result of war and poverty, caused young men from China to travel to America. They sought to "make it rich" in the land of the Gold Mountain. As the economic atmosphere changed in the gold fields with the Exclusion Act and other pieces of legislation, the atmosphere changed from one which was welcoming and work easy to find to one of hostility. By the 1860s life for the Chinese immigrants became very difficult.

Have students review the events in the film and visit the Angel Island Web site to read the poetry of the Chinese immigrants of the time.

Divide the class into two groups: One to take a stand to stay in California and the other to return to China. They should consider:

Why did the Chinese immigrants travel to America?
What were they expecting in the new land?
What was their daily life like and how was that different from their expectations?
Why were the Chinese Exclusion Act and other similar laws passed?
How did Chinese immigrants respond to these laws both on an individual and community basis?

Each group will present their findings and conclusions to the class. Individually, the students will do a quick write about their reasons for staying or leaving, supporting their position with evidence.

Follow-up activities and assignments:
Interview an immigrant family (videotape); share with class.

REFERENCES

For other relevant online sources for these lessons, visit the web sites below.

Becoming American: The Chinese Experience

<http://www.becomingamerican.org/>

Is Everyone Protected by the Bill of Rights? A lesson plan.

<http://www.thirteen.org/edonline/lessons/billofrights/b.html>

Text of the Exclusion Act

<http://www.camla.org/history/exclact.htm>

Immigration Station, information on the Chinese and Angel Island, CA

<http://www.angelisland.org/immigr02.html>

Barbara J. Fields, "Ideology and Race in American History" at
<http://www.chss.montclair.edu/english/furr/essays/fieldsideolandrace.html>

A Dialogue on Race with President Clinton (1998) at
http://www.pbs.org/newshour/bb/race_relations/OneAmerica/transcript.html

Bill of Rights at the National Archives and Records Administration
<http://www.nara.gov/exhall/charters/billrights/billmain.html>

A PBS Race, The Power of Illusion
<http://www.pbs.org/race>

ASSESSMENT

Students can be assessed for their participation in whole-class discussions. Did they participate often? Did their comments reflect their ability to use new concepts?

Evaluate completion of the Venn diagram for Activity 1. Students should show evidence of understanding by identifying ideas for each segment of the diagram.

Evaluate participation on a team basis for Activity 2 checking for completion of each step in the process: Develop the position argument, completion of the worksheet, response during debate. Assessment can include peer evaluations.

Students will complete an individual quick write in Activity 3 about their reasons for staying or leaving. Ask students to defend the position they take for returning to China or staying in America.

STANDARDS

History Content Standards for California Public Schools
(<http://www.cde.ca.gov/standards/history>)

Grade Four –California: A Changing State

4.3 Students explain the economic, social, and political life in California from the establishment of the Bear Flag Republic through the Mexican-American War, the Gold Rush, and the granting of statehood.

4.4 Students explain how California became an agricultural and industrial power, tracing the transformation of the California economy and its political and cultural development since the 1850s.

4.5 Students understand the structures, functions, and powers of the local, state, and federal governments as described in the U.S. Constitution.

FOCUS QUESTIONS

Please use another piece of paper if you need more space to record your answers.

What was the impact of the Snake River Massacre?

How did the Chinese become "scapegoats" ?

What did the "Society of Men" mean?

What was the "old idea" that was given new life by the Exclusion Law?

How was family life impacted by the Exclusion Law and the family traditions of China?

How were women treated differently both by the Chinese and the law?

Could they be considered "slaves" ?

What were the motivating factors for the implementation of the Exclusion Laws?

Is there an element of racism to the laws?

How do the images presented in the film reflect anti-Chinese sentiment?

How did the Exclusion Act limit opportunities for the Chinese Immigrants?

Was the impact the same for all Chinese?

What were the different occupations of the Chinese in San Francisco?

VOCABULARY

Immigration

Legislation

Naturalization

Multicultural

Queue

Famine

Civil War

Citizenship

Coolies

Yellow peril

Constitution

Amendment

Transcontinental railroad

Patriarchal

Bound Feet
