

NEH Unit/Lesson Plan: Voices from Angel Island and Chinatown

Written by: Cristin VanderPlas, intended for an 11th grade Global Studies class “field trip”

Resources Considered:

- Chapter Two of *Angel Island: Immigrant Gateway to America* by Erika Lee and Judy Yung
- Poems written by Chinese people whilst detained on Angel Island
- Images of various primary source documents--photographs and AIIIS records
- Chinese American: Exclusion / Inclusion Exhibit Resources [link](#)
- Chinese Poetry of Angel Island info [link](#)
- Angel Island Immigration Station Poetry 1910-1940 [link](#)

Standards:

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.9-10.6

Analyze a particular point of view or cultural experience reflected in a work of literature from outside the United States, drawing on a wide reading of world literature.

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RH.11-12.2

Determine the central ideas or information of a primary or secondary source; provide an accurate summary that makes clear the relationships among the key details and ideas.

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.SL.11-12.1

Initiate and participate effectively in a range of collaborative discussions (one-on-one, in groups, and teacher-led) with diverse partners on grades 11-12 topics, texts, and issues, building on others' ideas and expressing their own clearly and persuasively.

Materials needed:

- Texts and documents
- Student journals
- “Home” objects

Context, Unit Goals, and Guiding Questions:

Prior to this field trip experience, students will have studied the history of Angel Island and San Francisco's Chinatown. They will understand the importance Angel Island held in the broad scope of immigrants entering the U.S. between 1910-1940. As well, students will have studied the specific function that Angel Island served for the Chinese in those years, and the context of Chinatown as the “new home” for many.

Within that context, students will be asked to grapple with the questions:

- What identifies who we are--nationality, family, name, cultural expression, ethnic background, ethical framework, etc.?
- How do we create community and take up space?
- What represents “home” to us?
- What role does art play in communicating human loss, connection, resilience, and community?

Learning Outcomes

- Building empathy: a continual journey to listen to others, de-center self, and understand oneself in the global context.
- Honing skills of poetry analysis, critical thinking, and collaborative engagement in complicated texts.
- Drawing on previous knowledge, identifying common themes from coursework overall, such as: identity, family and community structures, artistic expression, inclusion and exclusion, etc.

Instructional Plan

1. In the morning, we will take the ferry to Angel Island from San Francisco. After disembarking on the island, we will take a few minutes as a group to review goals for the visit. Intentional tone-setting will be important here so students can best frame their experience. Themes of curiosity, empathy, inclusion, exclusion, and identity could be recalled and discussed.
2. From there, we will go on a guided tour of the Angel Island Immigration Station and Museum. We will take a few breaks throughout so that students can reflect and respond to themes in their journals.
3. Post tour, we will debrief as a class. Students are invited to share their impressions and observations. In small groups, students will then share their “Home” object with classmates (This is an object they brought with them that represents the concept of home to them). They’ll be sure to share why and how they’ve associated that object with their sense of community, family, safety, etc.
4. We will transition to some background info on the Angel Island poetry, which we all would have seen carved throughout the tour on the walls and barracks. I’ll hand out pictures of the poem carvings, copies of the translations, and various other accompanying documents.
5. We will spend some time discussing the poems. Students should notice the emotion, tone, and theme variations in the different poems—depressed and lonely, pensive and reflective, hopeful, angry and resentful, etc. We will spend time analyzing what those poems communicate about life on the island during those years. Students should attempt to make connections to larger themes of home and identity.

What might it have been like to understand one’s self in this new place and then to forge a whole new identity and community, honoring the past and embracing the reality of the present/future? (This part of the lesson is really time-dependent; the more time spent, the better.)

6. Take the ferry back to the city and head to Chinatown for lunch at a local restaurant (yum!).
7. Visit the Chinese Historical Society of America Museum and tour the Chinese American: Exclusion / Inclusion exhibit. Following this, we will head out on a walking tour of the surrounding neighborhood led by museum staff. Emphasis will be on students thinking about space and reflecting on the experiences of the former Chinatown residents. Again, building on the experiences of the day, we will take a few breaks for students to record thoughts, musings, and observations in their journals.
8. Eventually, we will make our way home.

Assessment and Next Steps:

Assessment for this lesson is mostly informal for this lesson. It will combine students’ active participation and engagement in the experiences of the day, especially in discussion and journaling. The more formal project will require students to produce some artistic expression, communicating how their understanding of “Home” has been challenged, reinforced, or reframed from the day’s experiences.

Our next unit will include examining the concept of Human Dignity and studying the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. Students should work to make connections between these “units.”