



The Diverse American West

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Chinese Exclusion

Grades: 4-6

Background: Immigration is an important part of the American story. Most Chinese immigrants who arrived in the West in the 19th century entered the country through the government-run station at Angel Island located in San Francisco. These Chinese immigrants faced racism and legal exclusion even as they worked for a better life.

Objectives Students will become familiar with the Chinese Exclusion Act and understand the feelings of inclusion and/or exclusion surrounding the immigrants of Angel Island.

Source: Angel Island Immigration Station Foundation and Britannica Kids



Angel Island
Immigration Station Foundation

Background: Chinese Exclusion

Note: you can either read and discuss this backgrounder with students or share the information through a method of your choosing. Please make sure they understand the basics of the Chinese Exclusion Act and the circumstances of Chinese immigrants and their American-born children under this law before moving on to the activity.

The Chinese Exclusion Act (1882)

<https://kids.britannica.com/students/article/Chinese-Exclusion-Act/319548>

The Chinese Exclusion Act of 1882 was the first and only major U.S. law to ban immigration for a specific nationality. The law prohibited Chinese laborers—defined as “both skilled and unskilled laborers and Chinese employed in mining”—from entering the United States. Later amendments to the law prevented Chinese laborers who had left the United States from returning.

The Chinese Exclusion Act was signed into law by President Chester A. Arthur on May 6, 1882. It came after years of anti-Chinese hostility by white Americans, especially in California. Since the time of the California Gold Rush, Chinese immigrants had been widely stereotyped as exotic, dangerous, and competitors for jobs and wages. The act set the precedent for later restrictions against immigration of other nationalities. It was repealed in 1943 by the Magnuson Act. The new law permitted a quota of 105 Chinese immigrants each year.



For more information about the history of Chinese immigration and exclusion in the US, download the Angel Island Immigration Station Foundation curriculum guide <https://www.aiisf.org/curriculum>

ANGEL ISLAND IMMIGRANT JOURNEYS

EXCLUSION "ACT"IVITY

Objectives

To have students understand the feelings of inclusion/exclusion surrounding the immigrants of Angel Island.

Grades

4 -6

Time

One fifty-minute class period

Procedure

This lesson contains two different simulations to use with students:

1. Exclusion based on students answering questions or
2. Exclusion similar to what immigrants coming to America might have experienced.

Be aware of your students, their group dynamics, and what they can handle. The goal of these exercises is to introduce an experience where students are treated differently, sometimes based on factors that they can not control, and to discuss the kind of feelings people might experience when put in these situations where they are excluded bases on race or class. Some students might be very sensitive when put into these types of situations and the activity may require teachers to monitor for feelings, pausing or ending the simulation early based on students reactions, follow-up discussion.

Exclusion by Questioning

1. Anticipatory Set: Explain to students that they will be answering questions to compete for a reward. Optional: Let students know that they'll be comparing their feelings during this exercise to those who immigrated through Angel Island.
2. Instructions: Ask each individual student a question or short set of questions to determine who will be included or excluded. You might have students write down possible questions that get picked at random or you may want to construct your own. Some of the questions should be very easy and others should be very difficult. Examples:
 - Who sits to your right?
 - What day of the week was it on January 8, 1998?

This is necessary to establish a sense of unfairness. You could have the student who is answering the question stand while they answer. A different way to separate the students

ANGEL ISLAND IMMIGRANT JOURNEYS

would be to divide them by what they are wearing, or carrying, or another basis that is beyond their control. Be sure to use your own good judgment on this activity. "Know" your class and what they can and cannot handle.

3. Possible rewards: extra recess, candy, lunch with the teacher, other ideas pertinent to your students/school. Be sure to reward or include students who were not rewarded or were excluded after the discussion takes place. Inform the students that oftentimes people are excluded and included on a basis beyond their control. At Angel Island, Chinese immigrants faced longer interviews with more complex questions and had to stay at Angel Island longer. The U.S. government had policies that did not allow the majority of Chinese to come to the U.S. at that time and at Angel Island government officials put procedures in place that affected the Chinese immigrating at the time.
4. Check for Understanding: Have students on both "sides" discuss their feelings of what it felt like to be included/excluded.
5. Evaluation/Reflection: Have the students write about how their feelings compare to those who passed through Angel Island.

Journey to America Simulation

1. Background: Students will play the role of an immigrant arriving in America, either traveling as a first-class passenger or as a third-class or steerage passenger. The journey to America was different for members of different social classes. First-class tickets to America were expensive and the majority of immigrants traveled third-class or steerage. In the steerage area, travel was often crowded and uncomfortable, and food was bad. All steerage passengers went directly to Angel Island Immigration Station for processing, while first-class passenger had their papers processed on the ship and directly embarked in San Francisco. Most of the Chinese immigrants entering the U.S. came by way of steerage. Students will write about what it might be like for immigrants to travel this way base on their thoughts and feelings from the simulation.
2. Recreate first-class and steerage areas of a ship in various areas of the room. The first-class quarters might be students' desks or a comfortable reading area. You may chose to set out some drinks and snacks. For the steerage quarters, mask off a small section of the room that will barely hold most of the students (for example, 7 x 10-foot taped off rectangle might create a cramped area). Create simple tickets out of paper indicating either a first class or steerage passenger.
3. Because the element of surprise is important, arrange to do this activity at the beginning of the day or after students return from another class or lunch period. When students arrive at the door of the classroom, tell them that they will pretend they are immigrants coming to America on a ship. Have them imagine themselves as real passengers aboard a ship crossing the Pacific Ocean for the first time. Explain that they each will be receiving a ticket for a specific class on the ship and the different tickets will admit them to a different area in the room.

4. Hand out tickets. There should be a few students receiving first-class tickets with the majority of students receiving steerage tickets, similar to the ratios of passengers traveling in the late-19th and early-20th centuries. If there is a student with special needs who may not do well in crowded situation in the steerage area, teachers may want to make sure that the student receives a first-class ticket.
5. Admit first-class passengers to their quarters. They may put their belongings away and proceed to the first class seating area. If you are allowing them to eat snacks, they can help themselves to drinks and/or cookies.
6. Then admit steerage passengers to their area. Do not allow them to put away their belongings. Remind them that they all must fit in their designated area. Students may complain that this activity isn't fair. Respond by having them think about what it was like on a real sailing ship or steamship. You may even try and have them sway back and forth like the rocking of the ship at sea.
7. Have them stand in the cramped area for as long as they seem to be able to handle the experience (this could range from five up to ten minutes). You could have them do one of their regularly assigned activities, i.e. journal writing. How might the crowded conditions affect their work?
8. Afterwards, have them put their things away and return to their seats.
9. Have students reflect on the activity by writing about their experience in their journals. How did you feel during this activity? What might it have been like if you were an immigrant on the ship?
10. Ask for some volunteers to share by reading their responses out loud to the whole class. Try to have both the first class and steerage passengers disclose how they felt during their experiences. You may want to select about five students to share, more if you have the time.

Prepared by Brian C. Allen with the Angel Island Immigration Station Foundation.