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*Addressing invisibility of Asian-American history and cultural  
heritage in North American school curricula:*

*A curriculum guide*

by

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## Abstract

This study presents a curriculum guide for upper elementary students [5<sup>th</sup> grade] including rationale and background research on need for critically informed multicultural education; an overview of the history of Chinese immigrants in the United States, origin and prevalence of Asian-American stereotypes; and underrepresentation of Asian-Americans in curriculum. with an original curriculum exploring the experiences of Chinese-Americans in the west coast regions of the United States (1850-1924 CE). The curriculum consists of a photograph-inspired creative writing project on Angel Island; book groups; a field trip to two historic houses; a role play activity on the ways Asian-Americans organized and fought for their civil rights; a research project; and a wide range of annotated resources and supplementary materials.

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## ***I. Introduction***

## **I. Introduction**

Education does not occur in a vacuum. All educational materials reflect, to varying degrees, the biases, beliefs, experiences, frameworks, and perspectives of the people assembling those materials. This is true of those who create curriculum standards and of those who create education policies; this is true of educators, as well as people in general. We are all products of how we were raised, where we came from, and who we are. Jerome Bruner (1996) elaborates:

School curricula and classroom “climates” always reflect inarticulate cultural values as well as explicit plans; and these values are never far removed from considerations of social class, gender, and the prerogatives of social power...The school can never be considered as culturally “free standing.” *What* it teaches, what modes of thought and what “speech registers” it actually cultivates in its pupils, cannot be isolated from how the school is situated in the lives and culture of its students. For a school’s curriculum is not only *about* “subjects.” The chief subject matter of school, viewed culturally, is school itself. That is how most students experience it, and it determines what meaning they make of it... [E]ducation does not stand alone, and it cannot be designed as if it did. It exists in a culture. And culture, whatever else it is, is also about power, distinctions, and rewards (pp 27-28).

This thesis offers a resource based on my own experience and research in critically informed pedagogies to address cultural and racial bias and counter stereotypes still present in many curriculum materials. My project--*Guests of Gold Mountain: The First Chinese-Americans*--provides educators with a way of helping upper elementary school students explore the social-historical dynamics in late 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> century through the perspective of Asian-American immigrants and their descendants. Students will be able to investigate subjects such as immigration, the transcontinental railroad, and the California Gold Rush through primary documents, a field trip, research projects, and novels all centering on Chinese-Americans.

It is my hope that this curriculum and its accompanying research will be used to develop and teach curricula that presents a richer version of United States history and more accurately represents the demographics of communities and schools across the country.

### ***A. The need for multicultural education***

The 20<sup>th</sup> – 21<sup>st</sup> centuries have seen a marked increase in the cultural groups, languages, and religions that comprise society in the U.S. and Canada. According to statistical evidence, white people are rapidly becoming a minority in the United States, and political factors, such as more relaxed immigration policies for South, East, and Southeast Asians, have ushered in waves of immigrants with a different set of motivational factors than those who arrived in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century. By 2020, 50% of the public school population will consist of students of color, but teachers and administrators are expected to remain predominantly white (Amos, 2011, pg 481).

“As U.S. society becomes more and more multilingual and multicultural, educators are not well prepared to work in such diverse contexts,” writes San Francisco State University linguistics professor Masahiko Minami (Ovando, 2000, pg 190). Statistics, research, and personal narratives over the past few decades indicate that the mainstream educational system is not meeting the needs of these newly arrived immigrant families. Research suggests that in addition to issues such as language barriers and lower socio-economic status, textbooks, literature, and other curricular materials reflect white, middle-class cultural paradigms to the exclusion of children of color (Delpit, 1995). Executive Director of the Center for Urban Educational Excellence Lisa Delpit has documented many narratives in which education students and teachers of color are ignored or dismissed, their experiences trivialized by white peers and professors. According to a black teacher Delpit interviewed, white people

think they know what’s best for everybody, for everybody’s children. They won’t listen; white folks are going to do what they want to do anyway... I’m not going to let any man, woman, or child drive me crazy--white folks will try to do that to you if you let them. You just have to stop talking to them, that’s what I do (21-22).

Another problem stems from the idea that all children, regardless of background, require the exact same instruction with the exact same materials using the exact same methods.

Cultural differences in communication styles, frames of reference, and experience challenge this idea of uniformity in educational practice. Linda H. Chiang (2000) observes:

Many educators may argue good teaching is good teaching no matter what type of learners it is aimed at. The fact is that during the teaching process, social interaction has a big impact on certain types of learners. In addition, the content of the curriculum portrays values that may influence students' perceptions of their race or ethnicity. Plus, the hidden curriculum, such as school atmosphere or teachers' nonverbal messages, influences students' self worth. Understanding this concern, there is no doubt that there is a relationship between culture and teaching styles.

If everyone is unique in his or her own way, each teacher certainly brings a unique self to the classroom. This uniqueness is reflected in his or her professional decision making, which includes classroom structure, teaching methods, curriculum selection and delivery, and classroom management.

Many African-American and low income students, for example, differ from white middle-class children in their beliefs regarding how an authority figure should act. Many white middle-class parents give their children indirect instruction; instead of ordering children to "Pick up the pen," these parents are far more likely to say "Does the pen belong on the floor?" or "Who can show me where the pen goes?" When white middle-class teachers speak to their students in this manner, their white students understand that their teachers are not giving them options; those questions are actually commands. To a child whose parents issue explicit directives--whose parents say "Pick up the pen"--a directive phrased as a question may in fact seem to be a question, implying that the child does not in fact have to obey the teacher. Delpit notes that teachers using indirect commands in order to lessen the power difference between themselves and their students do not give certain groups of students--particularly low-income students and African-American students--the explicitness they need to learn the codes of power operating in the classroom. "Black children expect authority figures to act with authority ...teachers acting like friends of the students send the message that they have no authority, and black students respond to that" (pg 35). These sorts of cultural miscommunications often result in teachers



labeling students as slow, developmentally disabled, or having behavioral problems (Gay, 2000).

A growing body of research points to a direct relationship between teachers affirming cultural identity and language with academic success for all children (Agirdag, 2002) – supporting Jerome Bruner (1996), in that:

A system of education must help those growing up in a culture find an identity within that culture. Without it, they stumble in their effort after meaning. It is only in the narrative mode that one can construct an identity and find a place in one's culture. Schools must cultivate it, nurture it, cease taking it for granted (pg 42).

The current mainstream educational system in the United States seems to have largely failed in providing this kind of cultural support. Studies of curriculum content (Gay), reveal that textbooks and other curriculum materials rarely include or depict people of color in an accurate, multi-dimensional way to the extent that white people are portrayed. (The status of textbooks when it comes to diversity is particularly distressing, as textbooks form the basis of 70%-95% of all classroom instruction). According to various studies (Gay), textbooks published in the 1980s and 1990s rarely show people of color interacting with each other, and there is a severe imbalance in representing a range of people of color, with African-Americans by far receiving the most attention and middle class men having the most representation. Content is designed to encourage harmonious relations across racial groups and ignores controversial issues. Finally, discussions about people of color focus on historical issues, rather than contemporary ones, implying that ethnically diverse peoples' history lacks validity or significance. To counter this imbalance, Gay states:

[A]uthors and publishers [should] reorient their focus to deal with more authentic and substantive human experiences and contextualize specific subject-matter skills in more meaningful cultural content... The inadequacies of textbook coverage of cultural diversity can be avoided by including accurate, wide-ranging, and appropriately contextualized content about different ethnic groups' histories, cultures, and experiences in classroom instruction on a regular basis (pg 117).

Asian-Americans in particular find themselves under- and misrepresented in curricular materials. In a 1994 study looking at Asian representation in 24 books for 11-17 year olds published between 1988 and 1993, characters of only 6 of the 11 Asian countries in the study were represented, with Chinese-Americans leading at 32% and Cambodian and Taiwanese-Americans the least represented, each at 8% (Gay, pp 118-119). All of the books except one contained the following stereotypes: Asians as “mysterious, inscrutable foreigners;” characters of all Asian ethnicities possessing the same physical traits; Asian of both genders depicted as alluring sex objects; the “model minority” stereotype; wanting to be like white people and/or relying on white people to resolve conflicts; stereotypical speech patterns; inaccurate, token mentions of cultural specifics; and superficial historical references that further neither plot nor character development (p 120). In Jean Yonemura Wing’s (2007) study of Asian-American high school students, one student told her that he “almost started a riot in my World History class last year” (pg 473). He continues:

I asked, “Why do we spend a semester and a half talking about European history? Are the European people really that important? Why do we spend just one week on Asia? The Great Wall, China, and that’s it! And the same thing with Africa. Why?” (pg 473).

Thoreson (2011) elaborates on the impact of this underrepresentation:

Students are rendered invisible by their under-representation in school curricula. Traditional Asians are encouraged to assimilate and parents withhold native language to encourage children to speak "perfect" English. Interracially adopted and biracial youth navigate a complex identity process in a system of racism that does not acknowledge them as being real Asians. Those Asian students who are aware of systemic oppression more often than not find a need to downplay or ignore interests that may be stereotypically Asian. And routinely, students are not supported around educational challenges (pg 52).

There is a clear need to address this bias. Vivian Wu Wong (2011), chair of history and social studies at Milton Academy in Massachusetts, points out the need for schools to focus on a more complete view of American history:

[A]s our independent schools become more diverse, as our international Asian student populations continue to grow, and as we become increasingly invested in global education... school teachers need to be cautious about shifting away from more diverse surveys of American history in favor of more global perspectives. I understand the growing interest in globally focused education as our world continues to shrink through improved connectivity. Yet, at the same time, I also see how these new initiatives can provide a convenient "out" for our schools when it comes to diversity work within our own communities. From my perspective, a diverse narrative of the American experience should take precedence over a broad global focus--since it can provide an important window through which all students can learn about the politics of race in this country while simultaneously helping Asian and Asian American students form their own racial identities (pp 24-26).

### ***B. Racism, white privilege, and Asian-Americans***

Since Chinese immigrants first arrived in California in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century, Asian-Americans have faced over a hundred years of systematic oppression, ranging from physical attacks on themselves and their property, to racist city and state legislation, to federal government policies, such as the Exclusion Acts that severely limited Asian immigration to the United States and sought to outright ban those from China, and the forced internment of anyone of Japanese descent, including American citizens, who resided in Western states during World War II (Tsai, 1986, pp 56-57). Two myths about Chinese-Americans--the idea that Chinese-Americans are a hardworking "model minority" and that they are a "yellow peril" threatening white Americans--have plagued the immigrant group since the first Chinese landed in California, and these myths quickly became applicable to other Asian immigrant groups. Until the 1960s, the "yellow peril" myth permeated white American consciousness. The myth originated in the economic hardships of the late 19<sup>th</sup> century; was perpetuated by laws against Asian immigration, Japanese farmers in California owning land, Asians becoming American citizens, and interracial marriage; and culminated in the anti-Japanese propaganda of World War II. In light of increased Asian immigration due to new immigration laws in 1965, white America took note of apparent Chinese-American "success stories" and wrote countless magazine and newspaper articles

holding up this group as a model for other immigrant groups--particularly other immigrant groups of color--to emulate. According to a U.S. News and World Report article from the 1960s (as cited in Wong, 2011):

Visit Chinatown U.S.A. and you find an important racial minority pulling itself up from hardship and discrimination to become a model of self-respect and achievement in today's America. At a time when it is being proposed that hundreds of billions be spent to uplift Negroes and other minorities, the nation's 300,000 Chinese-Americans are getting ahead on their own, with no help from anyone else (pg 27).

The next few decades saw white America continue to praise Asian-Americans for their abilities to “overcome” racism by achieving good grades, getting into prestigious colleges and universities, and providing for their families--all without raising the same complaints about injustice, racism, and white privilege coming from other racial groups. However, many Asian-American parents lived in poverty, worked long hours in sweatshops and restaurants, and spoke little or no English. The 1980 U.S. Census revealed that there were more Chinese, Korean, and Vietnamese-Americans living below the poverty line than white Americans, and that Asian-Americans had high numbers of unemployment; on average, Asian-American families were no better off than white families (Wong, pg 27). In the 1990s, the model minority myth and the “yellow peril” myth converged, as many white Americans insisted that they were losing spots in college admissions, caught between African-Americans, Latinos, and Native Americans benefiting from affirmative action policies, and Asian-American overachievers snapping up places in top colleges and universities. Wing (2007) explains:

Whether in the 1960s at the height of the Black Power Movement, or in the 1990s in the backlash against affirmative action, Asian Americans—via the model minority myth—have been used as a wedge between whites and other people of color. This is a primary reason why this stereotype is dangerous. In some cases, the myth has served as a tool to castigate other people of color and to discredit their struggles for equality and social justice. In other cases, Asians have become targets for white anger at affirmative action or “foreign” competition, and simultaneously have become targets of anger from other people of color who see Asians as benefiting from aligning with whites (pg 460).

White people have thus used Asian-Americans to absolve themselves of white privilege, while at the same time creating tensions between Asian-Americans and people of color--if Asian-Americans can succeed, so can other people of color, provided they work hard enough.

Although the dual model minority and yellow peril myths persist today, numerous studies have shown that Asian-Americans are not a monolith of math geniuses and well-behaved students. The term "Asian-American" encompasses a vast range of cultures, languages, religions, geographic regions, and immigration experiences. The four major Asian groups are: East Asians (Chinese, Japanese, Koreans); Pacific Islanders (native Hawaiians, Samoans); Southeast Asians (Vietnamese, Thai, Cambodians, Laotians); and South Asians (Indians, Pakistanis, Bengalis) (Chiang, 2000). Some Asian-Americans have been in the United States for generations; others arrived yesterday. Some are native English speakers with a working knowledge of their heritage languages; others have little to no English. Some come to the U.S. as college or graduate students; some come as adults with families; some as children. Although the U.S. Census recognizes 24 different Asian and Pacific Islander groups in the U.S., the majority of institutions, including educational institutions, group all Asian-Americans together; in public discourse, differences between Asian groups are ignored and the academic and economic successes of many Chinese, Japanese, and Korean families applied to all Asian-Americans (Zhao, 2008, pg 340). While education is valued overall in Asian countries, the range of educational attainment across Asian-American groups is large: 88% of Japanese-Americans have completed high school or higher, while 31% of Hmong-Americans have (Chiang).

Asian achievement, particularly in math, often has a genetic explanation, but the experiences of Asian-American students--including those who are not at the top of their classes--indicate otherwise. In a study of Asian-American students in an interracial high school, Asian-

American students spanned a full range of GPAs in every grade, including ones with low GPAs. Some of the high GPA Asian-American students reported working long hours every night to maintain their high grades; some suffered from severe test-anxiety, none of them said their grades were easy to get or that high grades came without substantial sacrifice, and some received their lowest grades in math (Wing, pp 463-465). Moreover, academic achievement is one of the few avenues many Asian-American students have to become successful. Many top universities have been discriminating against “overrepresented” Asian-Americans, even holding them to a different, higher standard. Patrick F. Bassett (2011) recalls:

I've heard the story of an Ivy League university leader who once told an independent school crowd, "off the record," that if academic merit were the only consideration (i.e., SAT scores, grades, and class rank), the university's entire freshman class would be made up of Asian Americans from one or two zip codes in the Los Angeles area (pg 9).

Since many Asian-American students are the children of immigrants or are immigrants themselves and therefore unlikely to have a parent who attended a prestigious American college or university, they generally don't have access to the benefits of legacy; nor do they often qualify for affirmative action programs. Rather than focus on sports as a path to college--a path made difficult due to Asian male stereotypes of physical weakness and lack of coordination--many Asian-American families feel that academic excellence is their only way towards financial security (Bassett, pg 10). Jun Li's findings (2001) from a Canadian study of seven Chinese immigrant families in Toronto supports this point:

New forms of racism are expressed and implemented in subtle and covert ways. They might appear to be invisible in Canadian society, but are evident to minority groups. Given inveterate racial prejudice and discrimination in Canadian history, and the denial of racism in the present day, to achieve true multiculturalism is by no means an easy task. The worries and fears the parents expressed send a clear message that ethnicity is a factor they have to consider when making career choices and life decisions for their children. Their unique minority ideology is a product of perceived institutional racism, a pattern emerged from social practice and exercise of power (pg 491).

Asian-Americans actually have the lowest admissions rate of any racial group: 17.6%, as compared to 23.8% for white Americans, 33.7% for African Americans, and 26.8% for Latinos (Zhao, pg 342). Even so, not all Asian parents pressure their children to earn perfect grades and are actively involved in their education; many, especially recent immigrants from Southeast Asian countries, are uneducated and want their children to be financially successful, but are unfamiliar with the process, while some highly educated Asian-American parents don't want their children to study to the exclusion of enjoying life (Wing, pg 468).

The stereotype linking academic success to genetics, especially in math and science, places tremendous pressure on Asian-Americans: if they succeed, it's not an accomplishment, and if they fail, it makes them somehow deficient (Zhao, pg 341). I've often heard my Asian-American friends joke about being "bad Asians" that "China didn't want" because math didn't come easy to them. This pressure also encourages many Asian-American students to avoid pursuing careers in the humanities in favor of math and science, where they feel more confident due to social pressure, internalized stereotypes, and teacher encouragement. As a Korean-American growing up outside of Salt Lake City, Utah, Natalie J. Thoreson (2011) fit perfectly into the model minority stereotype, and her high school guidance counselor pushed her into a mechanical-aerospace engineering program, even though she also excelled in--and enjoyed--literature and social studies and wanted to "talk to people for a living" (pg 52). Thoreson lost her mechanical-aerospace scholarship by the end of her first year, failed a class in her second year, and quit the program in her third year because she hated it so much (pg 52). East Asians earn disproportionately fewer bachelor's degrees in the humanities than whites, African-Americans, and Latinos, outnumber whites in engineering and computer science, and, according to a 2004

Cornell study, are more likely to rate themselves lower in public speaking and writing ability, as well as being more likely to require remedial English work (Zhao, pg 339). Wing furthers:

To this day, only a relatively small number of even U.S.-born Asian Americans who attend college will choose majors in the humanities and social sciences; most Asians are deterred by the need for English language skills in these fields of study, and by the occupational outcomes that tend to require extensive public contact. This is in part a process of self-selection, as well as a response to a history of discrimination in the job market (pg 480).

While it is easy to gloss over the model minority myth as being a “good stereotype” benefiting Asian-Americans, in reality the model minority myth presents Asian-Americans as a monolith, ignoring the many differences between and amongst Asian-American groups, preventing Asian-Americans from taking full credit for their successes, absolving white Americans of racism, and creating hostility and resentment between Asian-Americans and other people of color, as well as between Asian-Americans and white Americans. In schools, Asian-Americans rarely see themselves in their teachers and administrators, or in curricula, textbooks and other educational materials, yet their academic achievements are taken for granted, and any low-achieving Asian-Americans are seen as isolated anomalies. Wing argues:

In many ways, it is more urgent to understand the factors influencing low-achieving Asian students, because they are the ones most in need of educational intervention and support. ...[I]f we were to believe the model minority myth, such students do not even exist (pg 457).

I have chosen to focus this curriculum guide on Chinese-Americans who have recently immigrated from mainland China or Taiwan for various reasons. The model minority and “yellow peril” myths originated around Chinese-Americans; as the oldest Asian immigrant group in the United States and Canada, much of the Chinese-American experience lays the groundwork for the experiences of other Asian immigrant groups, particularly once Chinese immigration to the United States became restricted and eventually banned in the late 19<sup>th</sup> and



early 20<sup>th</sup> centuries. Chinese-Americans and Chinese-Canadians make up the largest Asian immigrant group in the United States and Canada; mainland China has been one of the top three sources of immigration to Canada since 1996, and the top country since 1998 (Li, pg 480). Moreover, recent press regarding China's growing economic strength, coupled with new attention towards Chinese educational systems that produce students who far surpass American students on standardized math and science exams, help perpetuate fears of a "yellow peril" from China on two fronts. This latest view of China as a potential threat compounds the model minority and "yellow peril" myths Asian-American students already suffer from. Finally, I am personally more familiar with Chinese-Americans and Chinese cultures and languages than I am of other Asian immigrant groups, cultures, and languages, and I have a personal investment in studying such issues.

With that in mind, there is still a need for similar academic and curricular work to be done for other immigrant groups, especially Asian immigrant groups. Ronald Takaki (1998) argues:

Eurocentric history serves no one. It only shrouds the pluralism that is America and that makes our nation so unique, and thus the possibility of appreciation our rich racial and cultural diversity remains a dream deferred. Actually, as Americans, we come originally from many different shores--Europe, the Americas, Africa, and also Asia. We need to "re-vision" history to include Asians in the history of America, and to do so in a broad and comparative way (pg 19).

Takaki's "broad and comparative way" requires educators to research and teach the histories of a range of Asian-American groups, rather than only focusing on Chinese-Americans or Japanese-Americans; they may be historically the largest Asian-American groups, but their stories should not stand for all Asian-Americans. Southeast Asian groups in particular are routinely overlooked, lumped in with East Asian groups, or ignored. Because Southeast Asian immigrants are more likely to be refugees, in poverty, and have less education than immigrants from China, Japan, or

South Korea, their mere existence refutes the model minority myth--which greatly contributes to their invisibility. I strongly encourage educators, especially those with Southeast Asian students, to familiarize themselves with the cultures, struggles, and experiences of Southeast Asian immigrants and look for ways to bring Southeast Asian-American/Canadian history into their curricula.

### ***C. Multicultural education today***

“Multicultural education” is a broad term that for many educators simply means celebrating cultural holidays, referencing “ethnic heroes,” and possibly reading a historical fiction book about life under slavery. This approach to multicultural education, while well-intentioned, barely touches on the wealth of knowledge, discussions, perspectives, and simple awareness that multicultural curricula can bring to a classroom. Leading multicultural educator and founding director of the University of Washington, Seattle’s Center for Multicultural Education James A. Banks (1993) calls this interpretation of multicultural education the “Contributions Approach” and argues its “serious limitations” include glossing over concepts critical to fully understanding victimization, including “the oppression of ethnic groups and their struggles against racism and for power” (pg 200). He adds that this approach causes students to view different cultures as having “strange and exotic characteristics,” which reinforces stereotypes and misconceptions (pg 200). Akintunde (1999) explains:

The overwhelming majority of present-day multicultural research and strategies does not address the real issue that problematizes equity and diversity: The construction of race and Whiteness in the creation of "other." Therefore the majority of multicultural education literature builds on a false, humanly constructed epistemological base where race and "difference" are natural states and thus does not focus on the evolution of the histories, systems, and circumstances which erected these constructions. Instead, contemporary multicultural literature regards "differences" as inherent realities and thus seeks ways for us all to just "appreciate" each other.

Playing dreidel during Hanukkah, helping students identify their Chinese zodiac signs during the Lunar New Year, and conducting read-alouds about Harriet Tubman during Black History Month gives Jewish, East Asian, and African American students the chance to share important traditions and figures from their cultures with the rest of the class, but it presents those cultures as being extraneous to the curriculum as a whole: fun diversions that lack explicit ties to any subject matter or the students' personal lives--including students belonging to the featured cultural group.

Moreover, this “heroes and holidays” take on multiculturalism views the cultures of historically victimized groups divorced of the white institutions and systems of privilege that are responsible for leaving those groups out of mainstream American curricula in the first place. Celebrating cultural heroes and holidays in a vacuum of sanitized good cheer actively ignores the role that white privilege played in the experiences of those heroes and the struggles to maintain cultural traditions that many immigrants of color face daily. W.E.B. DuBois, Henry Louis Gates, Jr., and Marion Anderson grew up in specific time periods that were filled with specific political and social climates and events that affected their experiences, and failing to explore those socio-historical contexts robs their experiences and eventual successes of their power.

Curricula that contain multicultural concepts and themes but fail to integrate them structurally suffer from similar pitfalls. This method, which Banks terms the “Additive Approach,” provides the voices of people of color as part of the standard curriculum--reading *Sadako and the Thousand Paper Cranes* while studying World War II, for example, or learning the Native American perspective in a unit on western expansion (pg 201). Again, this method presents perspectives of people of color through a Euro-American view, using Eurocentric criteria and often mainstream voices. Banks cites the example of studying western expansion: so long as the unit is called something like “The Westward Movement,” rather than “The Invasion

from the East,” students are automatically locked into the white, Euro-American perspective--rather than the Native American one--in learning about the event and its Native American response (pg 201). Banks continues:

The additive approach fails to help students view society from diverse cultural and ethnic perspectives and understand the ways that the histories and cultures of the nation’s diverse ethnic, racial, cultural, and religious groups are interconnected... [The approach] can be problematic when cultural issues are appendages and not integral to the unit; students lack concepts, content background, and emotional maturity to deal with the complex problems and issues (pg 202).

In order to devise a multicultural curriculum that gives adequate attention, respect, and value to people of color and their perspectives, teachers need to place multiculturalism at the heart of their lesson, unit, and curriculum planning. Gay (2000) furthers:

Much more cultural content is needed in all school curricula about all ethnic groups of color... This means designing more multicultural literacy programs in secondary schools and more math and science programs at all age levels; teaching explicit information about gender contributions, issues, experiences, and achievement effects within ethnic groups; and pursuing more sustained efforts to incorporate content about ethnic and cultural diversity in regular school subjects and skills taught on a routine basis (pg 142).

Banks puts forth two approaches to multicultural education that achieve these goals: the Transformative Approach, and the Social Action Approach. In the Transformative Approach, the fundamental goals, structure, and perspectives of the curriculum are designed with multiculturalism at their core; students are able to view concepts, issues, and themes from different ethnic perspectives, including the perspective of the group that was most affected by the event, concept, or issue in question (pg 203). Through looking at concepts from a myriad of cultural perspectives, students gain a more complex view of American culture and society--not in terms of how marginalized groups have contributed to the mainstream culture, but how those groups, along with mainstream Anglo-Protestant cultures, synthesize in a complex way to form American culture and society (pp 203-204). Wong (2011) points out that while Asian-American

Studies programs have been thriving at colleges and universities for thirty years, mention of Asian-Americans in history textbooks are still limited to cursory mentions of Chinese-American railway workers and Japanese-American internment; the presence of Asian-American history on the periphery ensures that “those stories still seem like anomalies unattached to a larger story” (pg 28). She argues:

An integrated narrative that (1) offers a more complete outline of the Asian experience in America, and (2) identifies moments of ethnic and racial intersection would provide a more historically accurate and culturally significant history (pg 28).

Failure to place Chinese-American railway workers or Japanese-American internment at the center of a curriculum or unit prevents students from gaining a full understanding of such moments in history, trapping exploited railway workers and internees into the positions of victims needing white people to save them, rather than participants of history who made choices, took political actions, and fought to save themselves (Wong, pg 28).

Banks’ Social Action Approach builds on the Transformative Approach; in addition to providing students with curricula that center on multiple racial and cultural perspectives, the Social Action Approach educates students for social change, giving them the tools and decision-making skills to connect curricula with the outside world and take action (pg 205). Teachers have great potential to be agents of social change, and “must see change as their responsibility” (Reichert, 1969, pg 16); moreover, “schools are the most important social institution for assimilation” (Chiang, 2000). Helping students identify when their curriculum materials are written from a white point of view is the first part of empowering students to deconstruct the white narrative and create their own. Akintunde (1999) provides three components to this process:

1. Expose white supremacy as opposed to fostering and understanding "others";
2. Eradicate the notion of race and all of its attendant syndromes; and

### 3. Deconstruct the Western canon as the dominant, "neutral" cultural epistemology.

An interdisciplinary view of curriculum design adds to this approach, since it enables students to more easily make connections between the subject matter and themselves, as well as to the world around them--which is vital in helping students become active participants in a democracy. The deconstruction of a "correct" narrative, which the students reconstruct as historians, Gay calls "research-teaching;" this can "produce grassroots knowledge and perspectives that challenge official ideologies in school" (pg 144). Banks suggests that teachers teach direct activism through the following lesson format: a decision problem or question; an inquiry providing data to the decision problem or question; value inquiry and moral analysis (where educators and students reflect on prejudice and discrimination on a personal and societal level); and decision making and social action (pg 207). Such activism can also help students navigate their own cultural and racial identities, as well as their place in the world as an agent of change. Bruner (1996) writes:

The importance of narrative for the cohesion of culture is as great, very likely, as it is in structuring an individual life...It seems evident, then, that skill in narrative construction and narrative understanding is crucial to constructing our lives and a "place" for ourselves in the possible world we will encounter (pg 40).

The sample curriculum in this guide draws on both the Transformative and Social Action Approaches. I strongly believe that education is inherently rooted in a specific socio-historical context and colored by the backgrounds, cultures, experiences, and preconceptions of educators, administrators, and students. If we seek to recognize, address, and fight against white privilege and its resulting stereotypes, we need to arm our students with the knowledge, courage, and tools to build on what American history--including the histories of Americans of color--is trying to teach us.

## **II. Historical background and the challenge of stereotypes**

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### ***A. The Chinese diaspora***

The Chinese diaspora--communities of Chinese immigrants who have maintained their cultural traditions--is unique in its spread, origins, and nature. Unlike other diasporas, the Chinese diaspora is largely unmarked by forced exile: there are no ongoing persecutions, mass exoduses, or mass enslavement or transportation (Chan, 1999, pg 81). Ancient Chinese emperors deployed explorers into nearby regions to establish trade routes, and migration within and out of China continued through modern China (Shen, 2010, pg 25). In the mid to late 19<sup>th</sup> century, Chinese laborers left for the West Coasts of the United States and Canada with the intention of working hard for a few years before returning to their families with money earned from the Gold Rush or railroad construction.

Immigration from China came to a standstill during World War II, and once the People's Republic of China was established in 1949, its isolationist policies kept immigration from the mainland from resuming (Shen, pg 26). Until the People's Republic of China loosened restrictions in 1979, all Chinese immigrants came from Hong Kong or Taiwan. Over the past few decades, Chinese immigrants to the United States and Canada have generally been highly educated professionals or students, migrating from the People's Republic of China as well as Hong Kong and Taiwan. Chinese communities are thriving on every continent; Southeast Asia contains the largest Chinese diaspora, but Chinese immigrants make their homes in European, South American, and African countries, as well as in Australia, New Zealand, and North America.



### ***B. Expectations of Chinese immigrant parents***

Like many immigrant groups, Chinese immigrants and their children must navigate the often conflicting norms of a new educational system, a new society, and the cultures and beliefs from their home countries. This adjustment can be difficult for immigrant parents, whose previous experiences with the Chinese educational system can heavily influence their expectations of their children's school system and teachers. University of Toronto Assistant Professor and Research Scientist at the Centre for Addiction and Mental Health Hayley A. Hamilton (2011) explains:

[P]arents may have different ideas of what constitutes positive school environment, which might not match those of school personnel. Immigrant parents' ideas may originate in their home country thus influencing their perceptions of the school. Teachers who are unaware of the potential influence of cultural dynamics on parental involvement may regard immigrant parents as "apathetic" with regard to their children's education. Such negative beliefs by teachers could contribute to further distancing by immigrant parents. Immigrant parents' perceptions of school environment may also reflect perceptions of the larger society and be a window into the level of acculturative stress being experienced with respect to schools, family, and other factors (pg 314).

American and Canadian studies show that Chinese immigrant parents overwhelmingly emphasize success and academic achievement in parenting their children, providing encouragement and home environments to facilitate studying. Many Chinese immigrant parents pass on the Confucian values of hard work and family honor they grew up with in pressuring their children to achieve academic success, which they believe will secure their children steady jobs as adults. In an interview (Braxton 1999), a 19-year-old Chinese-American describes the interplay between his parents' traditional values and his Western context:

Family face, one of the worst face is just the family honor and making sure your family looks good. That is a big part of Chinese culture, your identity and your family. Let's say, if I went to a small unknown community college, my father would lose face, with his friends, relatives, and my mom also. And also, they look at how well your kids do is how

well of a job your parents did. So, if your son or daughter goes to Harvard, wow, you must have awesome parents. Even though they have nothing to do with it or maybe they did? But obviously, you know, but if your son or daughter go to some unknown community college your parents, wow, your parents must have failed and so that is another reason your parents would lose face, with their friends. And also, they must have dumb kids or something [laughter] and lose face.

In a study of Chinese immigrant families who had moved to Toronto within the previous decade (Li, 2001), researchers found that every family attributed their Chinese-born children's academic successes to the children's previous education in China, believing that the high cultural standards and challenging learning environment kept them motivated. One parent felt that his Canadian-born daughter was not as serious about her studies as her older, Chinese-born brother was (pg 482). One of the parents points out that:

Our five thousand years of Confucian heritage have formed a firm belief that nothing is more important than formal education [*wei you du shu gaol*]. This influence is fundamental to both the Chinese at home and abroad. Confucianism regards education as the most important thing in one's life. Probably this is why Chinese parents are willing to invest money and energy in their children's education (pg 482).

Another parent adds:

Chinese children desire to honour their families and ancestors. If they fail, they would lose face in front of their families....Chinese children want to succeed, to feel good, and to bring honour to their families. Whereas Western kids rarely have this kind of thinking. ... The ultimate goal of Chinese children is to strive for a good position in society. They want people who know them, such as their parents, teachers, and friends, to be proud of them.... Chinese children have a sense of shame. This is their strength (pg 842).

Immigrant parents, including ones who have spent years in the United States or Canada, are well aware of discrimination and temper their aspirations for their children accordingly. Li adds:

Although the high educational expectations of these parents were rooted in their cultural beliefs and shaped by their life experiences, their career aspirations and minority ideology were directly related to the disparity between their dreams of success and the constraint of minority disadvantages in Canadian society (492).

One parent Li interviewed explains why she wants her daughter to work in the sciences, despite her daughter's dreams of being a lawyer:

I do not support my daughter to become a lawyer. In Canada, although multiculturalism is written into the government policy, you can feel racial discrimination everyday, everywhere... I advise my daughter not to choose lawyer as a career because a lawyer represents justice, but how can you argue with the dominant society if they believe that the "truth" is on the side of the white majority, not on the side of visible minority? It will be very difficult for my daughter to pursue such a career. If she wants to become a doctor or a computer expert, that will be easier (pg 486).

Immigrant parents also have preconceptions of how parents and teachers should interact, as well as preconceptions of the school system itself and the role it should have in their children's lives. Some parents may have difficulty understanding that teachers have different expectations for achievement and behavior for different students, and may expect their children to succeed equally in every academic subject (Lee, 2001, pg 40). Moreover, since Chinese immigrant parents may be reluctant to challenge teacher authority, they may be hesitant to contact teachers, feeling their role is to listen to the professional judgment of teachers and administrators and fearing questioning teachers and administrators would seem disrespectful. Parents who are recent immigrants can particularly have many barriers to school involvement: language barriers, including a lack of confidence in their English skills; unfamiliarity with school norms; feeling unwelcome or that their involvement in school activities isn't appreciated; long workdays; the lack of encouragement from other, especially native English speaking, parents; and concerns about their children's abilities to adapt to a new environment can all play a vital role in preventing parents from being as proactive as they might be otherwise. "[I]n China," Hamilton notes, "parents are focused and assertive in the creation of opportunities to interact with teachers and schools, whereas immigrant Chinese parents in the United States are relatively passive with regard to contacts with schools and school personnel."

Educators can do much to make Chinese immigrant parents feel more welcome and involved in their children's school. Simply making it clear that the school welcomes parental

involvement and providing specific ways for parents to be involved can go a long way in helping immigrant parents feel more at ease. Additionally, allowing parents to communicate with educators through email, being aware of the importance of nonverbals during in-person communications, helping parents learn more about the school system, its policies, and instructional styles, and actively supporting their children in being bilingual and bicultural is important. Educators also need to be aware that many Chinese immigrant parents believe their students' academic difficulties and psychological issues reflect on them as parents. While white and African-American parents are more likely to think the school failed if their children are having academic or behavior trouble, Chinese parents are more likely to think they themselves failed (Tsai, 1986, pg 163). If resources allow, schools should also assist immigrant parents in learning enough English to help their children and be able to talk about school policies, as well as helping parents learn more about school and any American traditions and customs that would greatly improve their comfort level and ability to communicate and become more involved with the school (Lee, pg 45).

### ***C. The personal and academic challenges of Chinese immigrant students***

The children of Chinese immigrants--many of whom are immigrants themselves--often feel themselves pulled in different directions by traditions and expectations they are unable to choose between. Elaine Chan (2010) describes their unique situation:

These students have their own ideas of how they should be in their school context, shaped by interaction with peers, exposure to popular culture and media, and prior experiences of schooling, schools, and teachers. At the same time, they are evaluated by teachers and supported by parents whose experiences of schooling may be vastly different, by nature of social and political influences as well as personal circumstances of the societies of which their own childhood schools were a part (pg 113).

Second generation Chinese-Americans, and especially child immigrants, constantly receive conflicting messages on how to be a good student, a good Chinese son or daughter, and a good American or Canadian, often without assistance in integrating those messages and often at an age where they are too young to fully process these cultural conflicts. These pressures and influences converge within students differently: age of immigration, previous school experiences in China, and length of time in the United States or Canada all play a part. May Paomay Tung (2000) writes:

From my observations, there seems to be a basic difference between the American-born and the China-born (including Taiwan and Hong Kong) youth regarding self-identity. If migration takes place after the children's memory is stabilized, usually by ten or twelve years of age, and especially if the Chinese language is maintained, the young immigrants may not suffer from that fundamental identity confusion. They may be homesick, feel like misfits, as if they are alienated and 'homeless,' but they know they are Chinese who now live in America (pg 37).

An in-depth study in 2001-2003 of a middle school girl who immigrated to Canada when she was seven reveals many of the stresses she experienced in transitioning between school, where she spoke English except in her Mandarin class, and home, where her parents strongly urged her to speak to them and her younger sister in their native dialect of Fujianese (Chan, pg 117). At school, her Mandarin teacher pressured her to maintain her perceived advantage over her Canadian-born Chinese classmates in having spent the first few years of her education in China. Socially, the student felt pressured to be included in her peer group and have native English speaking friends, and she felt pressured to be a better student and daughter due in part to her mother regularly comparing her to a friend's daughter. One of the strongest conflicts this student felt was between her family's need for her to spend nights and weekends helping at the family's dumpling restaurant, and her teacher's concern that the student was coming to school exhausted without her work done, causing her to fail exams (pg 118). At age 12, the student found herself

in a position where she could help her family with the restaurant--which provided her parents with the money to bring her grandparents to Toronto--and fail her classes, or do well academically and not feel like she was contributing to the family. Since her parents also wanted her to succeed in school, the student felt she would be letting her parents down no matter what (pp 118-119). The many stressors this student tried to navigate, largely on her own, and the subsequent dilemma is common for many young Chinese immigrants, who often have to take care of younger siblings while their parents work long hours, serve as translators for their parents, and deal with disruptions due to immigration issues (Wing, 2007, pg 466).

On top of these pressures, student immigrants face white privilege and struggle with classroom cultural norms on a daily basis. "Many of the Chinese Americans I listened to in therapy recalled, as children, that they wanted to be 'like everybody else,'" Tung points out. "What they meant was to be like white people. It is ingrained in our society that the white race is the criterion by which everyone else is judged" (pg 25). A parent in a Canadian study of recent Chinese immigrants (Li, 2001) concurs:

As a visible minority in Canada, only if we do our best can we compete with mainstream people. I mean we can never stand at the same level with those Western people. Only if we are better than them can we be treated as the same class and at the same level. So as a minority student, my son should not act like those white students, playing and enjoying every day. They can do whatever they want in the future but he does not have the same privilege as they do. If he does things like the whites, in the future, even though he achieves at the same level, he won't get the same benefit as they do because there are some other factors involved. That's why he needs to compensate this disadvantage with other means. The easiest way is through education. If his educational level is higher than them, for sure he will be able to compete with them. It is this consciousness that motivates Chinese parents to hold high educational expectations (pp 487-488).

Immigrant children are often thrown into classrooms without being taught the school culture and what is expected of them in their specific classroom(s), which can be overwhelming and significantly interfere with their academic and social development. Self-consciousness about

language abilities and cultural differences, as well as a different set of academic expectations, can severely affect immigrant participation:

School culture, no matter how big or small, rural or urban, has a certain behavior norm. It requires conformity, quietness, teacher-focused activities, and the individualized, competitive participation of students. Asian American students generally meet the requirements from the school and the expectations of the teachers. However, Asian American students usually will not volunteer in giving answers, sharing feelings, or involving in debates. They are quiet students who may or may not raise the questions that concern them. Teachers need to invite such students to participate and share (Chiang, 2000).

Differences in the Chinese educational system--which immigrant parents have certainly experienced--strongly shape Chinese immigrant students' classroom behavior and learning styles. While many Western educators tend to believe that children all have unique limitations--that students have different strengths and abilities--Chinese educators feel that all children can achieve anything, and that success is a question of effort, rather than ability (Ovando, 2000, pg 190). The fact that Chinese children are more likely to be raised in families that de-emphasize individual boundaries, with children allowed to share in adult social activities and with both children and adults free to use each other's possessions, coupled with this belief in success stemming from effort makes group work and cooperation a common and effective learning strategy for many Chinese-Americans and Canadians (Tsai, 1986, pg 162). Wing (2007) describes a study demonstrating the effectiveness of collegiate Asian-American "study gangs:"

In his ground-breaking, 18-month study in the mid- 1970s of 20 black and 20 Chinese students taking Calculus at UC Berkeley, math professor Uri Treisman found that Chinese students taking Calculus routinely formed what they called "study gangs" and "got used to kicking problems around...There was a friendly competition among them, but in the end, they shared information so that they could all excel" (Jackson, 1989, p. 24). Learning from the study habits and the seamless blend of social and academics found in the Chinese "study gangs," and believing that all students were capable of learning calculus, Treisman created a program that instilled "study gang" practices among multi-racial groups of students, with remarkable results. Thus, as Treisman demonstrated, group study practices of some Asian students that result in higher academic achievement are

neither genetic in origin nor exclusive to certain Asian cultures, but are socially constructed and can be learned and taught (pg. 476).

Group work can help some Chinese-Americans excel. These students prefer collaborative and negotiated problem solving, animated discussions in which all group members propose solutions and understand suggestions, and where the eventual solution is a compromise of different options. Group studying can also be highly productive for Chinese-Americans: a University of California--Berkeley study of group studying Chinese-American math students showed that students all explained their solutions to the group, making sure that everyone understood how to get the right answer (Gay, 2000, pg 95). This affinity for group work, however, can be at odds with the instructional styles students' schools support, forcing immigrant students--and students of color in general--to adapt to an instructional style more based in individualism and competition than on collaboration while attempting to learn subject matter that is not in their native language:

Collective and situated performance styles require a distribution of resources (timing, collective efforts, procedures, attitudes) that can collide with school norms; for instance, much of how student achievement is assessed occurs in tightly scheduled arrangements, which do not accommodate stage setting or collective performance. Students of color have to learn different styles of performing, as well as the substantive content to demonstrate their achievement. This places them in potential double jeopardy--that is, failing at the level of both procedure and substance (pg 95).

Many Chinese immigrant students express themselves in ways different from how Western students are taught: they will take moderate stances in written and oral presentations, provide factually rich descriptions of issues, prefer contemplative instead of action words, try to convey feelings instead of being direct, be reluctant to state personal opinions, and appear to show incomplete thinking. These discourse styles stem from values that “emphasize collectivism, saving face, maintaining harmony, interdependence, modesty in self-presentation, and restraint in taking oppositional points of view” (Gay, pp 103-105). Chinese immigrant students also appear



quieter and less confrontational than middle class white students, which can cause many educators to believe that they are passive, do not need assistance, or are disengaged from the material. Since listening is considered active instead of passive, however, many students who may not be verbally participating are actually just as involved (Ovando, 2000, pg 194). Conflict in many Chinese families is considered a private affair and one best to avoid, and Chinese students are consequently taught to not speak out and confront teachers and classmates. Tung conveys Frances Hu's observations of the American school system's emphasis on verbal expression:

American schools foster a desire and a skill for self-expression that is little known in the Chinese schools... When I compare American youngsters with those I have known in China, I cannot help being amazed at the ease and the self-composure of the former when facing a single listener or a sizable audience, as contrasted with the awkwardness and the self-consciousness of Chinese youngsters in similar circumstance ( pg 41).

One Chinese-Canadian parent experienced this contrast firsthand:

My daughter is not good at painting. From kindergarten to elementary school in China, whenever the school exhibited student artwork, my daughter's painting would not be chosen. We went to see the exhibition, always only two or three students' paintings were presented on the wall because those were evaluated as excellent products. The work of other students was not chosen. For our daughter, her painting would not be selected even if half of the paintings of her class were presented. She was weak at it. Usually she painted poorly. Her painting was never chosen for presentation. After we arrived in the States, she invited us to the school lobby in the first week. To our surprise, one of her paintings was presented on the wall! It was not because she painted better after coming to the States, but because all the paintings were exhibited [laughs]. In this way, my daughter became very proud of herself. Everything she did, she could show it to other people. She did not feel embarrassed about her poor painting. She felt that her work was appreciated by others.... Uh, I think it's bad that in China they only showed good ones (Li, pg 485).

Chinese-American students tend to not ask their teachers for help, preferring instead to seek help from friends; this, combined with their reluctance to argue with or challenge authority figures and their avoidance of direct eye contact, often causes educators and administrators to believe that these students are doing fine or that they are unresponsive to assistance (Chiang). The

model minority myth gives educators false evidence to assume that not asking for help means Chinese immigrant students don't need any. Delpit (1995) elaborates:

There is a widespread belief that Asian-American children are the “perfect” students, that they will do well regardless of the academic setting in which they are placed. This stereotype has led to a negative backlash in which the academic needs of the majority of Asian-American students are overlooked. I recall one five-year-old Asian-American girl in a Montessori kindergarten class. Cathy was dutifully going about the task assigned to her, that of placing a number of objects next to various numerals printed on a cloth. She appeared to be thoroughly engaged, attending totally to the task at hand, and never disturbing anyone near her. Meanwhile, the teacher's attention was devoted to the children who demanded her presence in one form or another or to those she believed would have difficulty with the task assigned them. Small, quiet Cathy fit neither category. At the end of work time, no one had come to see what Cathy had done, and Cathy neatly put away her work. Her behavior and attention to task had been exemplary. The only problem was that at the end of the session no numeral had the correct number of objects next to it. The teacher later told me that Cathy, like Asian-American students she had taught previously, was one of the best students in the class. Yet, in this case, a child's culturally influenced, nondisruptive classroom behavior, along with the teacher's stereotype of “good Asian students,” led to her not receiving appropriate instruction (pp 170-171).

The best way for educators and administrators to help Chinese immigrant students is to learn more about their cultures, family situations, and the best way they learn. Communicating with students on an individual basis; allowing them choice of group work and partners; giving clear directions with structure; providing methods of evaluation and assessment that don't rely on verbal performance; creating an environment of support, especially for students who may have significant stressors outside of school; and affirming students' cultural and linguistic backgrounds can all be instrumental in improving students' academic experiences and performance (Chiang).

Wing furthers:

The number of Asian Pacific American students is growing rapidly, mostly through immigration, and more of the recent immigrant groups are poor and not well educated. Most schools are ill prepared to address the needs of the Asian students, in part because they fail to perceive the educational crisis facing this diverse and expanding population due to the prevalence of the Model Minority Myth. Schools and districts, once aware of the needs and challenges of Asian students, can take steps to address such issues as: English language acquisition, including proficiency and comfort in spoken English;

services and programs for students who have experienced war and trauma or whose families have been separated for many years; early and intensive college counseling for students who will be the first in their families to graduate high school and/or go to college (pg 481).

Gaining a more complete picture of Chinese immigrant issues, experiences, and tensions can help educators become an ally for their students, rather than another source of stress. A multicultural curricula that directly addresses Asian-American history and centers on Asian-American experiences, cultures, and languages can help immigrant students feel at the center of their education, not at the margins. Such a curriculum can also help all students view the different experiences of immigrant students as strengths that enrich the classroom community and help all students, especially immigrants and students of color, deconstruct narratives of oppression and reconstruct those narratives as their own. Gay argues:

Because of the dialectic relationship between knowledge and the knower, interest and motivation, relevance and mastery, Native Americans, Latinos, African Americans, and Asian Americans must be seen as co-originators, co-designers, and co-directors (along with professional educators) of their education. If the “creator, producer, and director” roles of students of color are circumscribed and they are seen as only “consumers,” then the levels of their learning will also be restricted. This is too often true of present educational conditions. To reverse these trends, ethnically diverse students and their cultural heritages must be the sources and centers of educational programs (pg 111).

As educators, we have the power and the ability to prevent cultural misunderstandings, racial stereotypes, acculturation tensions, and linguistic barriers from impeding the academic and personal well-being of Chinese immigrant children. Not quite first generation, as their parents are, but not exactly second generation either, given their prior years in China, Hong Kong, or Taiwan, these students--these 1.5ers--have experiences and challenges that are unique from those of American- and Canadian-born Chinese students, as well as from those who immigrate as college or graduate students. It is our responsibility to recognize these students for who they are and affirm their aspirations and their identities.

### **III. Guests of Gold Mountain: The first Chinese-Americans**

**A curriculum guide for upper elementary students**

### **III. Guests of Gold Mountain: The first Chinese-Americans: A curriculum guide for upper elementary students**

#### ***A. Curriculum overview***

*Guests of Gold Mountain: The First Chinese-Americans* is a year-long curriculum designed for 5<sup>th</sup> grade that focuses on the first wave of Chinese immigration to California, from the California Gold Rush in 1850 to the creation and the Immigration Act of 1924. The curriculum covers the following topics:

- the political, social, and economic conditions of 19<sup>th</sup> century China its role in Chinese immigration
- the journey from China and arrival in San Francisco
- the experiences of Chinese railway workers, miners, agricultural workers, restauranters, and laundry workers, and the labor injustices they faced
- geographical differences and similarities between southern China and northern California and their impact on Chinese occupations in California
- bachelor societies and life in early California Chinatowns
- anti-Chinese riots, the 1882 Chinese Exclusion Act, the 1924 Immigration Act, and anti-Chinese legislation and policies
- the Chinese Six Companies and Chinese resistance to racism and discrimination
- the creation of the Angel Island Immigration Station, its impact on Chinese immigration, and the experiences of those detained there
- differences between the Chinese immigrant experience and the experiences of white immigrants
- different views of what it means to be American and the implications of those views
- differences and similarities between 19<sup>th</sup> century Chinese immigration and the experiences of Chinese immigrants today

Takaki (1994) explains the significance of a curriculum on 19<sup>th</sup> century Chinese immigration:

Many existing history books give Asian Americans only passing notice--or overlook them entirely... [M]any history books have equated "American" with "white" or "European" in origin... As Americans, we have origins in Europe, the Americas, Africa, and also Asia... About one million people entered the United States between the California gold rush of 1849 and the 1924 immigration act that cut off the flow of peoples from Asian countries. After a break of some 40 years, a second group numbering about four million came between 1965 and 1990. How do we compare the two waves of Asian immigrants? To answer our questions... we must study Asian Americans as men and women with minds, wills, and voices. By "voices" we mean their own words and stories as told in their oral histories, conversations, speeches, and songs as well as their own writings--diaries, letters, newspapers, novels, and poems. We need to know the ordinary people... Their stories can enable us to understand Asians as actors in the making of history and as people entitled to dignity (pp 9-11).

Although Chinese immigration during this time period was an overwhelmingly West Coast affair, it is important for children across the United States to learn about, just as children all over the country learn about the colonization of America and the 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> century waves of European immigrants to New York. The stories of Asian immigrants are just as much a part of American history as the stories of European immigrants are; there is no reason to leave them out just because a classroom may not contain Asian-American students, or because a school is located nowhere near California. Additionally, Chinese-Americans made up a sizable part of the economy in many western states and made lasting contributions in a variety of fields, such as agriculture and of course the transcontinental railroad.

Moreover, a curriculum on the experiences of 19<sup>th</sup> century Chinese immigrants raises issues relevant to many students. The individual racism and racism policies Chinese-American immigrants experienced and their struggles to reconcile their home languages, cultures, traditions, and their own views of themselves with the realities of 19<sup>th</sup> century California may ring true for many students, particularly students who are immigrants themselves. Curricula centered on the experiences of marginalized people not only validates the experiences of students

belonging to marginalized groups; they also help such students to reflect on their own experiences and choices. Levstik and Barton (2005) elaborate:

Students who do not see themselves as members of groups who had agency in the past or power in the present, who are invisible in history, lack viable models for the future...When history is silent about these sorts of issues, it is often perceived as separate from ordinary life, divorced from the puzzles of culture and change that absorb us on a daily basis...If history helps us think about who we are and to picture possible futures, we...need a vibrant history curriculum that engages children in investigating significant themes and questions, with people, their values, and the choices they make as the central focus (pp 3-4).

Throughout the curriculum, students discuss texts, classroom experiences, and informal learning experiences, in order to identify bias, critically examine what information is being conveyed and the choices used to present the information, and ultimately present that information themselves--being mindful of their own biases. This approach to history helps students understand that history consists of narratives, and that those who construct those narratives control how history is written, taught, and remembered. Levstik and Barton note that “historical narratives always involve interpretation: Someone decides *how* to tell the story” (pg 6).

They continue:

The historical narratives that students encounter at school... focus almost exclusively on the political and diplomatic history of the United States... Information that does not fit into these categories is rarely afforded much (if any) importance. As a result, those who traditionally have had little access to politics... have largely been excluded from the narrative interpretation of American history... African Americans, for example, have been considered an important part of history only when their presence had an impact on European American politics;... developments within African American society have not been considered a part of the country’s story (and still less have Latinos, Asian Americans, or other people of color been accorded a prominent place within that story) (pp 7-8).

The activities, museum trip, and texts within *Guests of Gold Mountain: The First Chinese-Americans* place a marginalized group of Americans at the center of American history while giving students the tools to examine why this group was marginalized in the first place and what they can do to counteract such marginalization.

With this overview in mind, the following sections will present selected instructional activities:

- *Introduction: Images and Narratives from Angel Island. Students will analyze photographs of early 20<sup>th</sup> century Chinese immigrants taken at Angel Island Immigration Station, the Pacific coast's entry point into the United States, and using them as a basis to write their own historical fiction narratives (ongoing--3-6 weeks).*
- *Book Groups. Students will read one of three novels (two historical fiction, one contemporary) centering on the Chinese immigrant experience and collectively create a timeline setting the events of the historical fiction novels against their larger socio-political context (ongoing--3-6 weeks).*
- *Field Trip to Yin Yu Tang House and the Gardner-Pingree House, part of the Peabody Essex Museum in Salem, Massachusetts. Through visiting these historic houses, students will compare and contrast family structure and homes in 18<sup>th</sup> century China and New England (around a week, including pre- and post-lessons).*
- *Role Play: The Struggle for Asian-American Rights in the 19<sup>th</sup> Century. Students will play either Chinese immigrants or members of Congress; students playing Chinese immigrants will appeal to Congress for legal protections against discrimination, enabling them to explore the ways Chinese immigrants could self-advocate (1-2 days).*
- *Research Project. Students will pick a topic to research and present; this project is the culmination of the curriculum (at least 2-3 weeks).*

The curriculum meets the following New York Common Core Standards:

#### Social Studies:

- The study of New York State and United States history requires an analysis of the development of American culture, its diversity and multicultural context, and the ways people are unified by many values, practices, and traditions. (1.1, 1.1a)
- Important ideas, social and cultural values, beliefs, and traditions from New York State and United States history illustrate the connections and interactions of people and events across time and from a variety of perspectives. (1.2, 1.2a, 1.2b, 1.2c)
- The study about the major social, political, economic, cultural, and religious developments in New York State and United States history involves learning about the important roles and contributions of individuals and groups. (1.3, 1.3a, 1.3b)
- The skills of historical analysis include the ability to: explain the significance of historical evidence, weigh the importance, reliability, and validity of evidence, understand the concept of multiple causation, and understand the importance of changing and competing interpretations of different historical developments. (1.4, 1.4a, 1.4b, 1.4c)
- The study of world history requires an understanding of world cultures and civilizations, including an analysis of important ideas, social and cultural values, beliefs,



and traditions. This study also examines the human condition and the connections and interactions of people across time and space and the ways different people view the same event or issue from a variety of perspectives. (2.1, 2.1a, 2.1b, 2.1c)

- The study of the major social, political, cultural, and religious developments in world history involves learning about the important roles and contributions of individuals and groups. (2.3, 2.3a)
- The skills of historical analysis include the ability to investigate differing and competing interpretations of the theories of history, hypothesize about why interpretations change over time, explain the importance of historical evidence, and understand the concepts of change and continuity over time. (2.4, 2.4a, 2.4b, 2.4c)
- Geography can be divided into six essential elements, which can be used to analyze important historic, geographic, economic, and environmental questions and issues. These six elements include: the world in spatial terms, places and regions, physical settings (including natural resources), human systems, environment and society, and the use of geography. (3.1, 3.1a, 3.1d, 3.1e)
- The study of economics requires an understanding of major economic concepts and systems, the principles of economic decision making, and the interdependence of economies and economic systems throughout the world. (4.1, 4.1a, 4.1b, 4.1c, 4.1e, 4.1f)
- The study of civics, citizenship, and government involves learning about political systems; the purposes of government and civic life; and the differing assumptions held by people across time and place regarding power, authority, governance, and law. (5.1a, 5.1b, 5.1c, 5.1d, 5.1e)
- Central to civics and citizenship is an understanding of the roles of the citizen within American constitutional democracy and the scope of a citizen's rights and responsibilities. (5.3a, 5.3b)
- The study of civics and citizenship requires the ability to probe ideas and assumptions, ask and answer analytical questions, take a skeptical attitude toward questionable arguments, evaluate evidence, formulate rational conclusions, and develop and refine participatory skills. (5.4a, 5.4b, 5.4c, 5.4d, 5.4e, 5.4f)

New York City K-8 Social Studies Scope and Sequence, 2009, pp 35-40

English Language Arts:

- Standard 1: Students will read, write, listen, and speak for information and understanding.
- Standard 2: Students will read, write, listen, and speak for literary response and expression.
- Standard 3: Students will read, write, listen, and speak for critical analysis and evaluation.
- Standard 4: Students will read, write, listen, and speak for social interaction.

New York State English Language Arts Core Curriculum, 2005, pp 38-44

***B. Lesson plans and commentary******I. Curriculum Introduction: Images and Narratives from Angel Island****Teaching goals:*

Students will experience reading and interpreting visual primary sources and using those sources as a springboard for their own creative narratives. Students will end the unit with a work of historical fiction--in the form of a short story, a series of poems, or a graphic novel--which they will revise and publish. This aspect of the curriculum will also help students make personal connections to the material and strengthen their understanding of how public policies and events affect the private lives of individuals.

Angel Island Immigration Station is often described as “the Ellis Island of the West,” but the experiences of those detained there greatly differ from those entering the United States through Ellis Island. While Ellis Island overwhelmingly saw white immigrants from European countries, Angel Island was the gateway to the United States for the vast majority of Asian immigrants. With increased restrictions on Chinese immigration, immigrants at Angel Island endured invasive medical exams and incredibly specific interviews to ensure immigrants were who they claimed they were. Immigrants--including children--had to answer questions about the number of steps in their home in China, the locations of their great-grandparents’ graves, and the names and ages of their neighbors in China. Any hesitation or wrong answer could result in being detained for up to two years--or in being sent back to China.

*Resources:*

Photographs and handouts to use in the lesson can be located in Appendix A. These handouts include:

- graphic organizer to help students analyze the photographs
- instructions for the narrative project

- graphic organizer for peer-editing sessions
- graphic organizer for student/teacher writing conferences
- rubric for evaluating students' narratives

Additional photographs can be found on the California State Parks Museum Collection website: <http://www.museumcollections.parks.ca.gov/code/eMuseum.asp?page=collections>.

Appendix E contains photographs of San Francisco's Chinatown taken in late 2012; students may use these photographs as references as they write their narratives.

*Instructional strategies:*

At the start of the lesson, show the class a photograph of Chinese immigrants at Angel Island Immigration Station. Ask the class questions about the photograph, and guide the class in writing a collective poem about the photograph, using imagery and phrases from multiple students. You may also review the strategies the class used to make sense of this photograph and discuss the process of turning students' impressions of the photograph into a poem. This would also be an excellent time to talk about perspective: is the poem written from the point of view of a specific person in the photograph, from the viewer's perspective, or from the perspective of someone else entirely? What are the different implications of those different perspectives? How has your understanding of the photograph changed since writing the poem?

After this discussion, pass out a series of photographs to the students, who are sitting in groups. In pairs or in small groups, the students will select one photograph to analyze. Students will fill out a graphic organizer (see Appendix A) to help them "read" their photograph and present their conclusions to the class. Then discuss where the photographs actually come from and who the people in the photographs may have been, and provide a little background on 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> century Chinese immigration, as well as background on Angel Island. While the photographs are from the mid-1920s, they are an accurate representation of the Angel Island experience, and the photographs and the related project will help students see how immigration policies change over time and will let them extrapolate from their study of slightly earlier time periods.

At the end of the lesson, students will each receive their own copy of the photograph they chose, which they will cut out and tape to the cover of their journals for the unit. For homework, students will pick one person in their photograph to focus on, and write a poem, short story, or graphic novel panels expressing who their character is, what they think is happening in the photograph, and what their experience at Angel Island is like, and what their plans are once they finally arrive in San Francisco. At the start of the unit the next day (or whenever the assignment is due), students will be able to share their narratives and discuss the writing process. Throughout the unit, students will add "chapters" to their narratives, continuing their characters' stories based on prompts I will provide. These prompts, designed to span a range of issues, would give students flexibility to accommodate their specific characters and storylines, while ensuring that they address key elements of the Chinese immigrant experience in 1920s California. Potential

prompts include writing a letter to someone in China encouraging them to either join your character in America or stay at home; someone offering your character a business opportunity outside of San Francisco; and describing where your character lives.

Students will periodically share their narratives with each other, especially through peer editing sessions, as well as with the teacher through one-on-one and group writing conferences. Students will also have a minimum required “free write” chapters, in which they add whatever plot or character developments they would like. As the unit comes to a close, students will wrap up their narratives, go through the editing process, and formally publish them. Published books may be on display in a library in the classroom created for this purpose, and students can share their books with each other in a variety of ways. Students may give short presentations of their stories (either in groups or to the whole class) or have class time where students can read each others’ books and provide some feedback, written or otherwise--this can also be done as homework. Students may also write a reflection of the writing process, why they made their narrative choices, what about their photograph appealed to them, what sources they found helpful, and how they feel the process has affected the way they write stories (and/or use non-fiction information and/or personal experiences in their stories). Students may also make connections between their stories and their book club book and/or other components of the curriculum. The level of involvement can vary depending on the students’ experience with the editing and publishing process and the level of attention the educator wants to devote to it.

The photographs included were all taken in 1925--the very end of the time period this curriculum is designed to cover. Consequently, it would be advisable to explain this to the students and make sure they understand how the Chinese immigrant experience had changed since the 1880s--which students should understand by the end of the unit, anyway. Students may write about their characters in 1925, but another option would be to let the students know the photographs were taken in 1925 but allow them to set their character at any year between 1850 and 1925. Alternatively, educators should feel free to locate other photographs from an earlier decade that may serve their purposes better.

*Notes:*

*While other parts of the unit should provide students with enough information to construct their stories relatively accurately, students should be encouraged to seek out additional resources and not let gaps in their knowledge prevent them from pursuing their ideas, and students should also be encouraged to use their imaginations as much as possible. Since so much of this unit is research-based, strengthening research skills is an added benefit of this project, not the main objective. Rather, the focus on this project is on developing students’ abilities to connect to early Chinese immigration on a more personal level, and to enable them to construct their own personal narratives in this specific time period. This project could also be about the process of writing historical fiction, though there is room for students’ stories to incorporate elements from other genres, such as fantasy or mystery.*

*From my experiences using photographs as a foundation for student writing, I recommend providing students with as high-quality photographs as possible--if the photographs are originally in color, give the students versions that are in color. Since some students may have trouble focusing on a photograph that contains a lot of figures, make sure that you have some simpler photographs available. Finally, if your class does not have much experience working with images, a separate lesson on the skills of reading a photograph would be immensely helpful, especially for students who are not strong visual learners.*

## II. Book Groups

### *Teaching goals:*

The three novels for this curriculum are *Dragon's Gate* by Laurence Yep; *The Dragon's Child: A Story of Angel Island*, by Laurence Yep and Dr. Kathleen S. Yep; and *Honeysuckle House*, by Andrea Cheng. The books encompass three different aspects of the Chinese-American immigrant experience. *Dragon's Gate* is about Chinese laborers on the transcontinental railroad in 1867, focusing specifically on a boy who joins his uncle and father on a railroad crew. *The Dragon's Child* traces the journey of a ten-year-old boy crossing the ocean to San Francisco and being detained at Angel Island with his American-born father in 1922. *Honeysuckle House* is the contemporary story of two fourth grade girls--one newly arrived from China, the other third generation Chinese-American--who slowly become friends. While *Honeysuckle House* is contemporary and takes place in Ohio, not California, the story offers a valuable look at the Chinese immigrant experience from the perspective of a ten-year-old girl, which could help students understand past immigration issues and experiences on another, more personal, level.

### *Resources:*

Divide the students into three different reading groups, with each group reading either *Dragon's Gate*, *The Dragon's Child*, or *Honeysuckle House*. *Dragon's Gate* is the longest of the three and deals with more serious issues, such as physical abuse and death, although it is not too difficult a read for many mid-level readers. *The Dragon's Child* and *Honeysuckle House* are easier reads, but they deal with issues of racism, prejudice, and identity that even very strong readers could get a lot out of. A mix of reading levels would be appropriate for those two books, while *Dragon's Gate* should be for strong and middle readers.

For the timeline activity, students will need three different colors of construction paper, drawing materials, and reference books for students to research their timeline assignments. An annotated bibliography of age-appropriate reference books is located in Appendix D.

*Instructional strategies:*

Students will meet in their groups to discuss their book assignment, possibly twice a week, and work on periodic group projects. As their reading progresses, groups reading different books would share the plot and themes with each other. This would occur on an individual group level through discussion and the sharing of projects, as well as through presentations in front of the entire class. There would also be regular class-wide discussions of both books, encouraging students to compare and contrast the three and make connections between Otter's experience in *Dragon's Gate*, Gim Lew's experience in *The Dragon's Child*, and Sarah and Tina's experiences in *Honeysuckle House*--as well as connections between all four characters and the larger socio-historical context of Chinese immigration. At the end of the historical fiction component of the curriculum, students will create individual projects on any one of the three books or a comparison of the three.

One project for the class to collaborate on is a timeline of the events in the two historical fiction novels, *Dragon's Gate* and *The Dragon Child*, as well as significant events in American history during the time periods of both novels, as well as the intervening period. The timeline, which will adorn the walls of the classroom, will begin with the discovery of gold in California in 1849 and end with the Immigration Act of 1924. The groups reading these two books will decide amongst themselves which events belong on the timeline--provided there they select enough events for each individual student (or pair of students) to be responsible for one event--while the group reading *Honeysuckle House* will work on historical events, with each individual (or partnership) responsible for one event. Each strand will inhabit the same timeline, helping students gain a larger context for the books they're reading and reinforcing the connections between the general backdrop of 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> century America and California and the personal experiences in *Dragon's Gate* and *The Dragon Child*. While the historical strand of the timeline will primarily focus on California and events relating to the Gold Rush, the transcontinental railroad, and immigration policies, larger events affecting the United States as a whole--such as the Civil War--are important to include to help students make connections to the rest of American history during those years.

On a piece of construction paper, students will display the year of their assigned event and an image or a series of words that clearly represents the event in question. Each timeline strand--*Dragon's Gate*, *The Dragon Child* and Chinese-American immigration--will have a different colored background in order to clearly distinguish amongst the three strands. With each strand having a differed colored background, students will quickly be able to see how they fit into one integrated timeline without getting confused as to which events belong to which timeline strand. The timeline will remain along the classroom walls for the duration of the curriculum, as a constant reminder of how the personal and political intersect and as a reference for Chinese-

American immigration policies and the events of the two books historical fiction novels the students are reading in groups.

Since the timeline project would commence not long after students have started reading their assigned novels, students will not yet have many events from the books to include on their timeline; nor will they have an accurate sense of which events are the most important to include. As the students progress in their reading, they will have periodic sessions to update their timeline. Although each student reading *Dragon's Gate* or *The Dragon Child* will have each contributed one event to the timeline by the end of their books, the students will discuss which events to include within their reading groups to support each individual student responsible for the event in question. Students in the group focusing on historical events will also update their strand periodically, as they engage in further guided research. Students will take turns according to a predetermined schedule, so there will be no question as to whose turn it is. While one group works on their timeline, the rest of the class will continue their usual book discussions or engage in other book-related projects.

All three groups will share their newly added event as they add it to the timeline; this will give those students practice in articulating what they feel are important plot developments, while the rest of the class learns more about the book they aren't reading. Since students reading *Honeysuckle House* have the added task of research in creating their timeline, students working on the historical fiction strands of the timeline will have to compose a paragraph explaining why they chose their events and why they chose to represent it on the timeline as they did.

The following books would also be excellent for book groups, read-alouds, or independent reading:

Chetin, H. (1982). *Angel Island prisoner 1922*. Berkeley: New Seed Press.

Currier, K. S. (2004). *Kai's journey to Gold Mountain*. Tiburon: Angel Island Association, 2004.

Hoobler, D. & T. (1994). *The Chinese American family album*. London: Oxford University Press.

Lee, M. (2006). *Landed*. New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux.

SPICE (2011). *Angel Island: The Chinese-American experience*. Palo Alto, California: SPICE Publications.

Tan, S. (2007). *The arrival*. Arthur A. Levine Books.

Wong, D. H. T. (2012). *Escape to Gold Mountain: A graphic history of the Chinese in North America*. Arsenal Pulp Press.

Wong, L. K. (2006). *Good fortune: My journey to Gold Mountain*. Atlanta: Peachtree Publications.

*Notes:*

*In the fifth grade classroom where I student taught, book groups were a regular fixture--one that all students eagerly looked forward to, including students who were struggling readers. My cooperating teacher would give the class a brief summary of each book, including the gender of the protagonists, and the next day she would put multiple copies of each book in a pile at the front of the room. Students would then have a chance to look through the books and select the one they wanted to read. Since she made certain to include book options for stronger readers, average readers, and struggling readers--and since the students were very familiar with this selection process--students effectively sorted themselves into appropriate groups while having the responsibility of choosing their own book group book.*

*She also would consult with students who were unsure of which book to choose, helping guide them to books she knew would be a good match in terms of reading level while giving them the freedom to pick books that may be slightly challenging. I found that the many discussions and group projects helped struggling readers gain a deeper understanding of their texts and give them multiple ways to participate in a group context.*



**Yep, L. (1993). *Dragon's gate*. New York: HarperCollins Publishers.**

When fifteen-year-old Otter accidentally kills a Manchu soldier, his mother believes he can only be safe if he leaves the country--which, in 1867 China, means joining his father and uncle in California, where they're at work on the transcontinental railroad. While initially excited at the prospect of joining his father and uncle in a strange new country, Otter quickly realizes that a land with so much opportunity can also be filled with hardships and oppression. The themes in this book include racial and cultural tension and prejudice, labor injustices, friendship, and sacrifice. The book also gives readers a powerful look at the experiences of Chinese railroad workers, the conditions they left behind in China, and why many Chinese immigrants stayed in America despite the intense difficulties they faced.

The vivid descriptions of railroad work and the process of blasting through the mountains can help students gain a better, more concrete understanding of the kind of labor Chinese railroad workers did, how incredibly dangerous it was, and how their white employees exploited them. The white Irish foreman is an unlikable character in a lot of respects, but was written as a developed person, instead of a cartoonish, over-the-top racist. The generational differences between Otter and his father and uncle, and the tensions they all felt between China and America, are a major focus of the story, showing different ways the Chinese fought against their oppression. Moreover, the book uses a lot of interesting narrative techniques, such as indicating characters speaking English with italicized text, which would be interesting for the class to explore.

**Yep, L. & Dr. Yep, K. S. (2008). *The dragon's child: a story of Angel Island*. New York: HarperCollins Publishers.**

When Gim Lew's American-born father hears that the U.S. government will soon make it nearly impossible for Chinese immigrants to enter America, he decides his youngest son will follow in the footsteps of his much older brothers and join them in San Francisco. Ten-year-old Gim Lew is reluctant to leave behind his mother, his older sister, and the life he knows in his Chinese village to live with a father he barely knows, but over the course of the trip across the ocean, he and his father begin to understand each other a little better. Moreover, the dreaded interview at Angel Island forces Gim Lew to confront his fears and believe in himself. Themes in this book include self-confidence, family tension, the process of immigration, and overcoming fears.

A curriculum would ideally not include two books by the same author, but *Dragon's Gate* and *The Dragon's Child* compliment each other extremely well: where *Dragon's Gate* focuses on life as a railway worker in 1867, *The Dragon's Child* concentrates on the trip across the Pacific and the experience of Angel Island in 1922, giving students much to compare and contrast. Angel Island alone can be an entire curriculum, and it is important in understanding Chinese immigration from 1910 to World War II. This book is a great opportunity for students to study (and do projects on) the poems Chinese immigrants carved into the walls of the immigration station, as well as to compare the current U.S. immigration process.

**Cheng, A. (2004). *Honeysuckle house*. Asheville, NC: Front Street.**

Within 24 hours, ten-year-old Sarah sees her best friend suddenly move away--with no explanation or indication as to where she's going--and is given responsibility of Ting, a new student from China... even though Sarah has never been to China and speaks no Chinese, and her family has been in the United States for three generations. Ting isn't thrilled with the situation either: it's clear Sarah doesn't like her, the other students make fun of her clothes and her eyes, her parents keep fighting, and she misses everything about Shanghai. Over time, Sarah and Ting learn how to handle their differences and navigate for themselves how to be both Chinese and American, all while investigating the disappearance of Sarah's best friend. The themes in this book include identity, racism, classism, leaving and finding home, and friendship.

Although this book does not take place between 1850 and 1924, it's important for students to recognize that Chinese immigrants still face the same kinds of prejudice they encountered over a hundred years ago. Many students--particularly students of color--may find themselves relating to Sarah and Ting to varying degrees, and hopefully the way the characters initially view each other can help students understand both perspectives a little better. Moreover, the casual racism many of the white characters display--from teachers mixing up the names of Asian students to one of Sarah's friends wishing she were Chinese because, unlike Sarah's, her own face is "so ordinary"--demonstrates the micro-aggressions of white privilege in a concrete way. One fascinating element of this book is how each chapter alternates between Sarah and Ting's perspectives, each written in first person. Discussing why the author made this choice and how it contributes to the story would be a great way for students to explore their own writing techniques and become more aware of the choices authors make in their work.

### III. Field Trip: Yin Yu Tang House and Gardner-Pingree House, Peabody Essex Museum

#### *Teaching goals:*

For groups in the Northeastern United States--particularly in the New England area--one possible field trip that strongly ties into *Guests of Gold Mountain: The First Chinese-Americans* is the Yin Yu Tang House at the Peabody Essex Museum in Salem, Massachusetts. Originally built at the turn of the 19<sup>th</sup> century and in continuous use until 1982, the Yin Yu Tang House--whose name means "Hall of Plentiful Shelter"--is the only complete Chinese house in the United States. The house was home to eight generations of the Huang family, a typical family in the rural village of Huang Cun in Xiuning County in the Huizhou region of Anhui province; the village is located roughly 250 miles southwest of Shanghai. By 1982, all of the house's inhabitants had moved to other villages or to Shanghai for work, and in 1996, the Huang family sold the house to Nancy Berliner, a Chinese art scholar who happened to be visiting the village when the Huang family had put the house up for sale. Berliner, who would later become the Peabody Essex Museum's Curator of Chinese Art and Culture, helped broker the agreement that would bring the entirety of the Yin Yu Tang House to the Peabody Essex Museum, as well as establish further projects to help protect and promote architecture in Huizhou.

The house has been preserved to look as it did when last inhabited in 1982, with artifacts from various periods of the house's hundred or so years of use, its original construction and design, and no electricity or running water. To further visitors' experience of the house, the museum has two accompanying galleries, lectures, and films on the house's history and construction. There is also a self-guided audio tour (in English and Mandarin) that gives visitors information on the specific rooms in the house, its artifacts, and the way the rooms were used, as well as primary sources such as letters and excerpts from interviews.

Because the Yin Yu Tang galleries are closed for renovation at the time of this writing, this trip pairs visiting the Yin Yu Tang House with visiting the Gardner-Pingree House, located a few feet away from the Peabody Essex Museum. Both houses were built in the early 19<sup>th</sup> century and owned by merchants, and both are fairly representative of their time periods and respective locations. Moreover, both have been well-preserved, and both are furnished. While 19<sup>th</sup> century California merchants did not live in houses that looked exactly like the Gardner-Pingree House, the house would give students an idea of the differences between the living situations most Chinese immigrants were familiar with in China and the living situations of many 19<sup>th</sup> century Americans. Furthermore, viewing a 19<sup>th</sup> century house in Salem helps students from the Northeastern United States, particularly students from New England, make a more concrete, personal connection to the subject. Using a New England site in this curriculum gives educators the option of exploring the Chinese immigrant experience in New England and the Northeast, which may feel more relevant to Northeastern students and which could more strongly connect to curriculum standards in Northeastern school districts.

The Peabody Essex Museum in general allows educators to build on this local connection: in addition to its many 18<sup>th</sup>, 19<sup>th</sup>, and early 20<sup>th</sup> century buildings, the museum boasts one of the finest collections of Asian Export art and Asian art in the country. The oldest continuously operating museum in the United States and one of the first to collect artifacts from around the world, the Peabody Essex Museum contains a number of galleries that can challenge and expand students' preconceptions of 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> century relations between Asia and Europe, the United States, and Canada. Educators may choose to focus on Chinese Export art so students can explore the way Chinese artists and manufacturers portrayed themselves to Western consumers, the way they might have seen said consumers, and the way the Chinese adapted their designs,

methods, and materials to accommodate Western tastes in making luxury goods for Europe, the U.S., and Canada. Educators can also use the galleries and Yin Yu Tang to study the use of symbols in Chinese art and architecture and in Chinese-produced Western luxury goods.

This trip focuses on the relationship between housing design and family structure. Comparing and contrasting two houses built in the same time period and inhabited by merchants' families is a clear way for students to investigate how immigration can be disorienting even on a level as basic as family structure, what your house looks like, and who lives with you. Looking at how Chinese immigrants went from living in fairly self-contained homes with multiple generations in the same house to a society where the 20<sup>th</sup> century idea of a nuclear family--a couple and their children living in one house--was taking shape can give students a deeper understanding of the loneliness many Chinese immigrants felt and how an upended living situation could have compounded that loneliness and the feelings of isolation and alienation many immigrants experienced. Students may also make connections between Chinese family structure and immigration laws prohibiting men from bringing their children and wives from China, and the difficulty and stress many immigrants found in being part of bachelor societies. Additionally, family structure and living situations are things that all students can relate to, including those with living situations many may consider atypical. This personal connection may assist students in relating to this aspect of the Chinese immigrant experience, as well as help students be more mindful of any classmates (present or future) who may be experiencing something similar.

With any field trip, in-classroom pre- and post-lessons are critical. Pre-trip lessons help prepare students for the field trip experience and help them view the trip as solidly building on the curriculum and on previous lessons, rather than being an optional diversion. By introducing

the trip in the classroom, educators can make clarify the focus of the trip and make connections between the trip, its focus, previous lessons, and the curriculum as a whole. Devoting class time to preparing for the trip also gives students the chance to ask questions, learn more background about the site, and think further about the role the trip has in the curriculum. Pre-trip lessons also serve to orient students to new spaces and locations, giving them a familiarity that students often need when encountering a new physical space, and helps avoid overwhelming students with new information. Post-lessons can help students process the trip experience and give them the opportunity to build on it, further cementing the connections between the trip and the curriculum.

*Resources:*

Appendix B includes:

- photographs of Yin Yu Tang
- floor plans of Yin Yu Tang
- sample floor plan of an apartment
- graphic organizers for the museum trip

Photographs of Yin Yu Tang and the Gardner-Pingree House can be found on the Peabody Essex Museum's website: <http://www.pem.org/collections/10-architecture>. A floor plan of the first floor of the Gardner-Pingree house is online here: <http://calliope.simmons.edu/pem/archive/files/791aa065dabeea0740cb629dd001c110.jpg>. A video giving background on Yin Yu Tang is here: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Kg2O-bdi2Ms>; this video shows students what the house looked like in its original location in China, and provides information on how the house was purchased. Appendix E includes photographs of San Francisco's Chinatown, taken in October 2012; students may use these photographs to better compare living conditions in China to how immigrants may have lived in San Francisco. Additionally, Appendix D

contains links to more information on the Yin Yu Tang House, as well as links to relevant exhibitions at the Peabody Essex Museum.

For more field trip ideas, consult Appendix F for a list of Asian-American and Chinese-American museums and organizations in various parts of the country.

*Instructional strategies:*

As a pre-lesson for this curriculum, ask the students if they'd heard of a floor plan, if they know what one is, and where they might have heard the term. Discuss as a class who would use a floor plan and what general information one might get from a floor plan. Then show a floor plan of your apartment--this can be hand-drawn or created on a computer, but it should be large enough or displayed in a way that the students can see it. The floor plan can be fairly detailed, although readability is most important, and it should be fully labeled. Ask the students what they can tell about the person living here from the floor plan--the number of bedrooms, for example, or the number of bookcases, if the floor plan seems to be of a house or an apartment, or if there seems to be a TV. Then reveal that the floor plan is of your home and talk about how the floor plan (and the labeled objects in the floor plan) is representative of who you are and the way you live. (Whether or not you use a floor plan of your actual home is up to you; what matters is that students see the connection between the layout of a person's home/a few of their possessions and who the person is.) Ask the class for examples of something in their home they feel best represents them.

Afterwards, show the class a floor plan of the Yin Yu Tang House, without telling them what type of building it is. Use the floor plan that is labeled with letters (see Appendix B), but do not let students know what the letters are for. This way, the letters would serve as a guide to help the students figure out the rooms of the house; the highest number of rooms labeled with the same letter would probably be bedrooms, for example. Each group or pair can have their own copy of the floor plan (without the legend), and students will discuss in their groups/partnerships what type of building they think it might be, and will label the floor plan the best they can. Each group will briefly share their floor plan decisions and their thought process. The activity will end with the class watching a video of Nancy Berliner giving a little bit of background information about Yin Yu Tang (<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Kg2O-bdi2Ms>). Now that the students know what the building is, when and where it was built, and who lived there, the class can accurately fill out the floor plan and create a chart of what kind of information the students needed to fill out the floor plan and what the students can deduce about the people living there from the completed floor plan (see Appendix B).

A possible homework assignment is for students to create a labeled floor plan of their home, with as much detail as legibility allows. The next day, students would switch floor plans with other members of their group, and everyone would have to guess which floor plan belongs to who. Student could also fill out their own chart about what prior information helped them guess who the floor plan belonged to (such as knowing if someone belongs to a big family) and speculative deductions about the person from the floor plan.



To introduce the Gardner-Pingree House, show photographs of the interior and exterior of the house and an old floor plan of the first floor. Knowing only basic information about the house and that they will be visiting the house on the same day they visit Yin Yu Tang, students will fill out the floor plan and write about who they think might have lived there for homework. Students may also draw a floor plan of what they think the second floor might be like, or list rooms they think might be on the second floor, and why.

To conclude this pre-lesson, discuss as a class how growing up in a home like Yin Yu Tang would influence family structure and relationships, and if Chinese immigrants in California would be able to live in similar homes. How might immigrants have lived? In what types of homes, and with whom? Would it have been easy or difficult for immigrants used to living with generations of relatives to adjust to such a new living situation?

Because this pre-lesson is fairly extensive, educators should feel free to eliminate or add activities depending on the needs of their students and on their time and curricular constraints. These activities can occur over several days or a week, or the entire pre-lesson could take place over a day or two. Any activities that help students start thinking about what living in Yin Yu Tang and the Gardner-Pingree House might be like and how housing design and artifacts can reveal information about a house's inhabitants would do much to prepare students to visit both houses.

For the trip itself, divide the students into two groups: one going to Yin Yu Tang, while the other group visits the Gardner-Pingree House. Before splitting into the two groups, instruct the students to select one room in each house and think about how the people living in the houses would have used their selected rooms. After at least half an hour, students would switch locations. Students will also pick one object in each selected room they feel conveys the values of the people who lived there, or that is representative of the houses' respective societies. For homework, students will compare and contrast the two rooms and draw and describe how they would alter one room to fit into the other house; what would they change, what would they keep the same, and why? A variation on this assignment could be for students to compare and contrast one or both rooms with a room in their own home, and diagram and explain how they would change that room to fit Yin Yu Tang or the Gardner-Pingree House. If time allows on the trip, allow students to explore the rest of the museum, especially the Yin Yu Tang galleries (although this particular trip does not require those galleries).

One potential post-lesson activity is for students to apply the trip experience to their ongoing immigrant narratives, based on the Angel Island photographs they selected. Students can create a floor plan for their character's home in the United States and write an installment that compares their current living situation with their living situation in China, and how this living situation in America has affected them.

Soon after returning from the trip--ideally the next day or before the end of the week if possible--everyone, teacher included, should share what the trip was like for them and discuss one interesting thing they learned or experienced on the trip. This discussion can occur as a whole class or in groups, and the discussion does not have to take up a great deal of time. The object is for the class to have an opportunity to verbally process the experience and to share any

connections to the curriculum or to their prior experiences that they may have made while on the trip. Students may also write longer reflections on the trip; later in the curriculum, it may be useful for students to write about how the trip affected the way they worked on their own projects, such as the research paper or the role play.

#### *Notes*

*Given the possible sensitivities when dealing with students' housing and family situations, it may be better for your students to have them create a floor plan for their ideal home, or the home of a fictional character. It would be easier for many students to create floor plans of their actual homes, rather than to create one from their imaginations, but floor plans of students' homes risks students feeling ashamed or embarrassed for having a smaller home than other students, or for having any kind of housing or family situation other students could consider atypical. If students do create floor plans of imaginary homes, they should write a short paragraph explaining who would live in this home, where the home is located, and how the floor plan expresses the people living there. For the floor plan swap, students can only see what information about the people living there they can figure out from the floor plan.*

*As a museum educator, it is my experience that students greatly prefer to have as much freedom over their museum experiences as possible. Therefore, letting students explore the houses independently (with chaperone supervision, of course), would increase the chances of students enjoying their trip and experiencing it in their own ways. Moreover, since many students hate filling out worksheets while at a museum, it's okay if not all students fill out their charts completely; some students may prefer to take notes in their own notebooks. Making sure students know that they will use their observations and notes from the trip on a follow-up project is a more effective way to ensure that students stay focused.*

#### IV. Role Play: The Struggle for Asian-American Rights in the 19<sup>th</sup> Century

##### *Teaching goals:*

The purpose of this lesson is for students to put themselves in the position of Chinese immigrants who seek action against the daily injustices they face, as well as in the position of the politicians of the time. With racial prejudice prevalent throughout the curriculum, it's important for students to understand that many Chinese-Americans fought for social justice and spoke out against the way their employers, coworkers, and politicians treated them.

A role play lesson gives students the chance to explore Chinese immigration without relying heavily on research, writing, or reading. Providing students a different way to connect to the material gives those who are more kinesthetic learners the chance to enter the material in a way that they can more easily excel at and connect to. A lesson that doesn't focus on reading and writing can also help English language learners, who often aren't as comfortable expressing themselves through text. A more collaborative and orally-based lesson can give such students the opportunity to practice their English in a safe, structured context. Additionally, role playing as immigrants or politicians lets students put themselves in the situation Chinese immigrants were in giving them a glimpse of the choices and strategies available to oppressed groups. Because students playing both immigrants and politicians will have specific characters and backstories to consider, students will ideally be able to put the bigger issue of prejudice and discrimination in a more personal, individual context--to better understand both the perspective of Chinese immigrants, and the different factors the white male politicians considered when faced with the immigrants' appeals for legal protection. This exercise and its following discussion should help students deconstruct the different factors involved in discrimination, the extent of systemic racism

and the effects it has on people's daily lives, and the vested interest of many legislatures in perpetuating institutionalized discrimination.

The role play is modeled after the Chinese Six Companies' efforts to lobby Congress for legal protections against the discrimination and violence Chinese-Americans experienced in California. The Chinese Six Companies was comprised of six groups, each representing a different region in China where many San Francisco Chinese emigrated from. In addition to helping new immigrants find work and housing and culturally adjust to their new lives in America, the Chinese Six Companies advocated for an end to the economic and social injustices that plagued the daily lives of Chinese-Americans. Specifically, this role play is based on the Chinese Six Companies collaborating on a letter they sent to Congress requesting legislation to protect them from discrimination and anti-Chinese violence. In this role play, students will replicate the process of the Chinese Six Companies composing their letter to Congress, and Congress' deliberation over the letter and how to proceed.

*Resources:*

Before the lesson, students should be familiar with the discussion skills role playing requires, as well as some guidelines for role playing. Sample guidelines are provided in Appendix C, and are available for educators to use for this activity and any other role play or discussion activities. It is important for students to understand that they are playing an assigned character whose assigned opinions may be different from their own; in order for the role play to be effective, however, students must commit to their characters and not be afraid to advocate ideas they do not personally agree with or to disagree with each other. Students also need to be prepared to handle difficult material while being sensitive to their own feelings and the feelings of

their classmates. Ideally, educators conducting this role play would be largely hands-off, but educators should be prepared to step in if necessary.

*Instructional strategies:*

Pass out character assignments. Students will be either a Chinese immigrant in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century or a member of Congress from this time period. Their character assignments will include names, occupations, and brief backstories. Assignments will also include information that may affect how the immigrants work together (such as family or business disagreements) and Congress members' political considerations (such as the interests of their constituents or any deals with corporations); this information may affect how students work together and what positions they take during the role play. Students will have time to read over their assignments and share them with nearby classmates. Then pass out information about the role play and go over it as a class.

Students are assigned as either Chinese immigrants or members of Congress. Students who are Chinese immigrants must meet together as a group and plan out what they're going to ask Congress for, and in what manner--that is, if they're going to give an in-person presentation, write a letter, send a petition, etc. Once they've decided on that, one person will serve as a moderator, and they will decide what specifically they'll ask Congress for, and will work together to put together their request in whatever form it takes. Students will keep in mind their characters' perspectives and backgrounds in their suggestions; for example, a laundry worker would have different requests than an orchard worker, and characters from the same region of China may have an easier time working together than those from different regions. While these students are collaborating, students playing members of Congress can work on their other projects, such as their timeline, research project, narrative project, or any other work related to the curriculum. Students may also participate in a separate activity of your choosing.

Once the students are finished creating their request, the rest of the class will join the role play, with the students playing members of Congress in character. Representatives from the immigrant group will present their request and provide members of Congress with a written form of their requests (this will look different depending on the students' choice of presentation). The immigrant group will then go into a different room or a different part of the classroom to work on other projects, while the Congress group will discuss the presentation and decide how they will react. Students should speak from the perspectives of their characters and be mindful of the interests of the people who elected them, as well as their own political interests. If the Congress group decides to grant any of the immigrant group's requests, they must create a statement for each request to serve as a law. For example, if the immigrant group wants equal pay for doing the same work as white workers, the Congress group's law can be that no employer can pay employees differently based on race or nationality. Once the Congress group has their decisions, they will present them to the immigrant group. The class will then engage in a discussion of the process, with members from each group sharing their experiences and thoughts. Students will be encouraged to draw connections between this experience and what they've learned in other projects. The class will also discuss the real appeal the Chinese Six Companies made to Congress, and Congress' real response. For homework, students may write personal

reflections of the experience, as well as their thoughts about issues such as how effective such legislation actually was for Chinese-Americans, and what other means Chinese-Americans had to fight for their civil rights.

This activity may occur over the course of two days, so that students receive their assignments the day before the role play, in order to have more time to study them. Students may also do a little writing based on their assignment to practice taking on their character's perspective. Educators may also assign students specific roles during the role play, so that students already know who will act as moderators and presenters; there may be other roles, as well. Designating roles will not only save time, but will also ensure that students who may be more passive in a group situation--particularly students who are English language learners--have a clearly defined role and are more able to participate. Before this lesson, students may also learn a little about the role of Congress and the legislative process; if students already have this information from a previous unit, this activity can go more in-depth in that regard.

*Notes:*

*Depending on your class' experience with role play, students may be hesitant to play a character, or they may be fully involved and excited about the opportunity. When student teaching fifth grade, I designed a role play as a way to conclude a unit on Confucianism, Taoism, and Buddhism: students were in groups of three, with each student in a group portraying Confucius, Lao Tzu, or the Buddha, and each group had a different philosophical question to discuss as their philosophers. Since these students had been working on a play in their Spanish class, they were very familiar with the idea of playing a character, and a few students created their own props and accessories. Giving each group a specific question to consider--instead of having them come up with an issue on their own--was a great help for students who were not as comfortable with having to create their own skit, since it gave them something concrete to focus on. Giving your students more specific guidelines or scenarios can help students who find such a lack of structure overwhelming.*

## V. Research Project

### *Teaching Goals:*

The curriculum will culminate in each student completing a research project in the form of a multi-paragraph informative essay. The students will begin with their own questions relating to Chinese immigration between 1850 and 1924, will conduct research using at least three different sources, and will write an essay answering their questions. Before students embark on their own research, however, model looking for sources and note-taking with a sample question the entire class will work on. The model question--What factors made it difficult for Chinese women to immigrate to the United States?--will help students learn how to narrow their focus in note-taking by taking them through the process of identifying relevant information. Since the students are learning how to write informative essays--not argumentative essays--their questions should be ones research can clearly answer, and that have clear correct answers. The object of this project is teach students how to research and how to express that research in a multi-paragraph essay; students will learn how to write argumentative essays at a later time.

This particular question is a valuable model question for a few reasons. First, because the curriculum is extremely male-centric, the model essay question is a perfect opportunity for the class to learn why the first wave of Chinese immigrants was almost exclusively male, and to learn a little about the experiences of Chinese women who did immigrate. Because this research is done as a class and incredibly guided, educators can easily prevent students from reading about prostitution. Second, this question involves factors from Chinese culture at the time, the socio-economic statuses of immigrants, and American immigration policies, causing students to draw on a wide range of sources on a variety of topics. Third, the question is extremely straightforward, with a clear way to divide each paragraph; each paragraph would be a different

factor. Fourth, researching this question might help students have a deeper empathy for the characters in *Dragon's Gate* and *The Dragon Child*, since they would hopefully have more of an understanding of why most Chinese immigrants were apart from their families for many years and how that added to the sacrifices those immigrants had to make.

#### *Resources:*

Students will require age-appropriate books to conduct their research; these books should be available in the classroom for the duration of the curriculum, but students may also find relevant books in the school library. Appendix D contains an annotated bibliography of age-appropriate books and online resources. Additionally, Appendix F provides a list of local resources for further research. Students will also need large notecards, notebooks, or some other system for note taking.

#### *Instructional Strategies:*

Begin the research component of the project after students have finished reading *Dragon's Gate*, *The Dragon Child*, and *Honeysuckle House*, and when the timeline is fully complete. Introduce the research project by mentioning that throughout the curriculum, you had been wondering about why the class was only learning about male immigrants, and ask the students where you would find out why there didn't seem to be any female immigrants to America. After making a list of possible sources--such as books, specific sites on the internet, and library archives--ask the students for search term suggestions. Talk about what kind of information would be relevant to researching the factors keeping women out of the United States, such as Chinese family structure and culture, the economic situations of many immigrant families in China, and American policies determining who was allowed into the country from China.

Pass out photocopies of the title page, table of contents, and index of our first source--one of the many trade books on Chinese-American immigration in the classroom--as well as a stack of large index cards for each student. On one card, students will write #1 and the book's title, author, and date of publication. The students will then look at the table of contents and index, and will share where they think they will find information on barriers to Chinese women immigrating to America. Then pass out the section of the book that mentioned female immigration and the students will take notes, labeling each notecard with a #1 and the page number. Direct students to write all notes taken from the same page on the same notecard; if their notes from one page spill onto a second notecard, they will number the cards, making sure to put a circle around those numbers or otherwise differentiate between those numbers and the number indicating which source the notes are from. If students need a third notecard for one



page, they will be required to show me their notes before proceeding, since needing that many notecards for one page suggests the students may be taking notes on more than the relevant information. Students will also have enough rubber bands to keep their notecards separated by source, and to keep all their notecards together in one large bundle. Educators can have students take notes on notebook paper or on notecards. Notecards enable students to physically manipulate the information more easily; some students, particularly visual and kinesthetic learners, being able to physically sort information in this way may help them organize their essays better.

When the students are finished, go around the room, with each person contributing one of their notes; make a list for the class. Ask the students what kind of source to look at next, and I will pass out the title page, table of contents, and index of a different source. The students will have to repeat the note-taking process that night for homework, and the next day in class, share notes as you did for the first source. In looking at this source, however, talk about where the students have found information that is similar to or different from the notes they took from the first source, why any differences exist and the credibility of both sources, particularly when compared to each other. Repeat the process a final time with the third source. Students will take notes for homework and share them in class, where students will continue to compare the sources and their information with each other.

Once this part of the research is finished, break the students into groups of three. Each group will construct an outline for a multi-paragraph essay that answers the question, “What factors made it difficult for Chinese women to immigrate to the United States?” Students will share their outlines with the class and then vote on which outline they think is the most effective way to organize the information they’ve collected. Collectively, students will refine the outline, and for homework, they will pick one paragraph to write on their own. Students will not be allowed to pick the introduction or conclusion, however; they will work on both paragraphs in class and discuss how the introduction and conclusion function in an informative essay. The next day, each student will have to find people who wrote different paragraphs so that they can put together the essay on their own; each group will share their constructed essay with the class.

After this experience, students will begin research on their own questions, which they had been thinking about throughout the curriculum. Students will have one final chance to change their topic before beginning research, and students who have not yet formulated the specific wording of their question will be required to do so over the next few days. When students have completed their research papers, they will each present their question and their findings in front of the class. This presentation will give their classmates the chance to ask questions, as well as provide the presenter with the experience of verbally communicating her or his project to other people. Grade the overall research project on research quality (by looking at the students’ notecards, which they will turn in along with their paper), the paper itself, and the presentation. To wrap up the curriculum, parents will come by either one morning or one evening to view the work students have produced over the course of the curriculum, including the research papers.

### Potential Research Topics

- Chinese contributions to California agriculture
- why so many Chinese immigrants became laundry workers
- political organizations in Chinatown and their role (especially the Chinese Six Companies)
- Chinese immigrants in Hawaii
- California Chinatowns and bachelor societies
- the history of Angel Island
- how Chinese immigrants interacted with other immigrant groups in California
- the impact of the 1906 San Francisco earthquake on Chinese immigration
- the Chinese Exclusion Act, the 1924 Immigration Act, and other immigration policies directed at the Chinese
- the impact on U.S./Chinese relations on immigration
- child immigrants
- Chinese laborers on the transcontinental railroad
- Chinese resistance to discrimination
- the new wave of Chinese immigration post-1965
- the model minority and yellow peril myths in late 19<sup>th</sup> century California
- compare and contrast the experiences of European immigrants and Chinese immigrants in California/the Ellis Island and Angel Island experiences

### *Notes*

*My fifth grade students embarked on their first research project while I was student teaching. They each selected a topic from a list, and took notes from research packets that I compiled from books in the school library. Providing each student with a packet containing only information on their subject ensured that each student would have a variety of quality sources, and that they would easily be able to find the information they needed. Since this method spares students from having to sort through books to find relevant information themselves, students reach the writing stage of the research project more quickly than they would otherwise. My cooperating teacher and I found this strategy worked well for our purposes, since we wanted to focus more on teaching students how to write an*

*informative essay than on how to research, but this may not be the best path for you and your students. If you want to focus on research skills as well as how to construct an essay, it might be preferable to have students look through books themselves. However, I would recommend younger students--fourth graders and first semester fifth graders--to work off research packets. Second semester fifth graders, especially if the research project takes place in the last few months of the school year, may be more prepared to research from books directly. Either way, it all depends on what works best for your students and what you intend them to take away from the research project.*

*Some students have trouble learning the structure of a multi-paragraph essay while learning how to come up with a question, research it, take useful notes, and turn those notes into informative paragraphs. Constructing an outline of an essay with the class--and keeping that outline in a visible place in the classroom, or creating a handout to give to students--gives students a clear idea of the skeleton of a multi-paragraph essay, as well as a concrete resource for them to refer to throughout the process. Two versions of the outline--one that is a generic framework, and one filled in with the model essay the class worked on--can be even more helpful to students who have trouble connecting the generic skeleton of an essay structure to the information they're researching.*

*While it is important for students to learn about citing sources as soon as they begin researching, do not worry about teaching students how to write a full bibliography at this stage. I also discourage telling students to use websites that will generate citations for them. Writing citations correctly is a vital academic skill that students need to be able to do on their own, but it is a skill they can learn after gaining more experience in researching and writing essays. For such an early research experience, students should only focus on recording the author, title, year of publication, and page numbers of each source.*

## **IV. Reflection**

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Seven years ago in my final semester of college, I took a class called Comparative Modern East Asian Literature. Within the first week, I was shocked to realize how little modern Chinese, Japanese, and Korean history I knew. My classmates, largely East Asian Studies majors, were well versed in the May Fourth Movement of 1919 and Korean resistance to Japanese rule; I had a vague understanding of the Cultural Revolution, and everything I knew about the westernization of Japan came from a Sondheim musical. The fact that I knew more about 17<sup>th</sup> century England than I did about 20<sup>th</sup> century China, Japan, or Korea was greatly distressing to me--particularly since prior to taking that class, I had barely registered that an entire continent was virtually non-existent from my knowledge base. I was the product of an acclaimed public school system in a diverse suburb of Boston--my high school classes had been filled with students of East, Southeast, and South Asian descent--yet I had made it to my last few months of college with only a hazy impression of modern Asia. My familiarity with Asian-American history was even more embarrassing, consisting of mere awareness that Chinese immigrants in California built the railroads and that Japanese-Americans in the western United States were interned during World War II. I studied neither subject in school.

This invisibility of modern Asia and Asian-Americans continued to frustrate me. It was as though Asia only existed in modern history for a European nation or the United States to attack, trade with, or colonize; Asian-Americans seemed to only exist in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century and during World War II--and only in California, and only to be oppressed. Generations of Asian-American students have grown up seeing themselves as nothing more than a footnote in American history--a footnote locking them in the role of an oppressed minority immigrant group, waiting passively for white people to save them.

At Bank Street, I took every opportunity to contribute to Asian-American visibility in education. My Child Development project featured narratives from half-Asian children, teenagers, and college students on how being biracial shaped their identities and experiences; I designed a unit, including pre- and post-trip lesson plans, on a trip to New York's Museum of Chinese in America; I created a year-long curriculum for fifth grade on Japanese-American internment. Putting Asian-Americans at the center of elementary school curricula was and is important to me as an educator--I hate that some students never see themselves in their educational materials, and that all students are learning an incomplete version of American history. Now that I am in a serious relationship with someone who immigrated from Taiwan when he was seven, however, Asian-American visibility has become a much more personal issue.

The research and lessons in this project are my contribution to the body of research and curricula that addresses Asian-American issues. Working on this project taught me a great deal about the educational experiences of children in immigrant families, and how the choices educators make--from the way they reach out to immigrant parents to their support of their students' home languages--can help students feel fully involved in the classroom, rather than on the periphery. Educators' ability to play such a crucial role in the lives of immigrant students and students with immigrant parents can be an overwhelming responsibility, but it is also a hopeful one. It means that Asian-American students do not have to be seen as emotionless, number-crunching robots destined to be computer programmers, doctors, and engineers. It means that the Asian-Americans can be the basis of a full curriculum that showcases their voices, experiences, and decisions--not a footnote.

19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> century Chinese immigrants called California "Gold Mountain." The immigrants themselves were known as "guests:" visitors who came to a new land, struck it rich

mining gold, building railroads, and farming orchards, and returned to their home villages to share their newfound splendor. Gold Mountain was a way out of poverty and oppression while giving young Chinese men the money to take care of their families back home. Few early Chinese immigrants intended to stay in California.

The reality of the Chinese immigrant experience was nothing like the myth of Gold Mountain. What seemed like riches in a small Chinese village barely supported one man in California, and any prestige immigrants may have had at home had no meaning to their white coworkers, employers, and political leaders. The experiences of these Guests of Gold Mountain--their hardships and their triumphs--comprise a valuable portion of American history that all students have the right to investigate, research, and make their own. Asian-Americans in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century were not foreign visitors, but integral members of a changing American society. Through designing and teaching multicultural curricula, educators can show that the same is true for Asian-Americans today.

## **V. References**



## V. References

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## **VI. Appendices**