The Chinese Exclusion Act

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ABOUT THIS LESSON

Examining the history and impact of the Chinese Exclusion Act (1882-1943), students will understand diverse American experiences and reflect on racial relations and diversity in contemporary society.

GRADE LEVEL

9-12

CLASSROOM TIME

1-2 50-minutes class periods

RESOURCES

The Chinese Exclusion Act, directed by Ric Burns and Li-Shin Yu, 2018, a co-production of Steeplechase Films and the Center for Asian American Media for PBS PBS, DVD (160 minutes), The Chinese Exclusion Act | Asian Americans | PBS LearningMedia

"Chinese Exclusion Act: Primary Documents in American History", Virtual Programs & Services, Library of Congress

Warner, Andy. "Fear of Foreigners: A Cartoon History of Nativism in America" KQED

BACKGROUND

The Chinese Exclusion Act was signed on May 6, 1882 by President Chester Arthur. It was the first law used to limit immigration based on race. The Chinese Exclusion Act reflected the stereotyping of the Chinese workers. This law prohibited Chinese workers from entering the country and prevented those who were already in the country from gaining citizenship. The law was not officially repealed until 1943.

This lesson aims to examine the historical background of the Chinese Exclusion Act and its impact. Students are asked to analyze the factors that led to the creation of the Chinese Exclusion Act. Students will also reflect on the examples of xenophobia in the late 19th century and contemporary society. Xenophobia is defined as fear and/or hatred of anything foreign, including people.

OBJECTIVES

Students will:

- **Analyze the factors that led to the creation of the Chinese Exclusion Act.**
- **Examine the effects of the Chinese Exclusion Act.**
- **Reflect on the examples of xenophobia in the late 19th century and contemporary society.**
- **Demonstrate their understanding of the Chinese Exclusion Act and the forming of Chinatowns.**
- **Connect the Chinese Exclusion Act with current issues related to immigration and exclusion.**

STANDARDS

Wisconsin Standards for Social Studies

SS.Inq1.a.h
Frame researchable, complex, and open-ended questions, integrating multiple social studies strands that call for investigation.

SS.Inq1.b.h
Construct questions that support the research and identify the sources that will be used in the student-developed research proposal.

SS.Inq2.a.h
Explore evidence discovered through personal research through a variety of disciplinary lenses (e.g., economics, history, political science) and multiple perspectives (e.g., race, gender, ethnicity, language, ability, sexual orientation, family background, and/or family income) with a variety of sources including primary and secondary sources and media resources.

SS.Inq5.a.h

Explore opportunities, informed by the knowledge and methods of the social sciences, for personal or collaborative civic engagement with community, school, state, tribal, national, and/or global implications.

SS.BH3.a.h
Analyze the means by and extent to which groups and institutions can influence people, events, and cultures in both historical and contemporary settings.
Become critically aware of ethnocentrism, its manifestations, and consequences in a world that is increasingly interconnected.

LESSON

1. Opening Activity
Students will reflect on their own family and their ancestors' country of origin. They will share in pairs and discuss

- **Were there countries subsequently banned from immigration to the U.S.?**

Students will discuss the concept of xenophobia, Chinese Exclusion Act, and anti-Asian racism during the covid-19 period in a large group. Suggested discussion questions are:

- **What is the concept of xenophobia?**
- **What are the examples of xenophobia in the late 19th century (Chinese Exclusion Act) and contemporary society (anti-Asian racism during the covid-19)**
- **What are the causes of anti-Asian hate incidents? How do these incidents relate to racial equity issues?**
- **What will affect a country when it bans immigration from certain countries?**

2. Background of Chinese Exclusion Act
Students will

- **Watch the video related to Chinese Exclusion Act.**
  Resource:
  1. **https://wisconsin.pbslearningmedia.org/resource/the-chinese-exclusion-act/asian-americans-video/**
  2. **The Chinese Exclusion Act, DVD, directed by Ric Burns and Li-Shin Yu, 2018, PBS**
- **Read the text on Chinese Exclusion Act in small groups. (b6064680-e994-42d7-9855-ea5cb093b730.pdf (pbslearningmedia.org)**

After students have watched the video and read the text, students can share their responses with the whole class.

3. Debates
Class debates on current immigration policies

POST LESSON ACTIVITIES

Research Projects
Students can work on a research project in small groups and present to the class. The suggested topics include:

- **Early Chinese American history in the 1800s (California Gold Rush in Mid-1800s, building of the first transcontinental Railroad, etc.)**
- **Consequences of the Chinese Exclusion Act**
- **Chinese Exclusion Act and the establishment of Chinatowns**
- **Chinese Exclusion Act and paper sons**
- **Immigration policies**
- **Anti-Asian racism during the Covid-19 period**

ASSESSMENT OPTIONS

Speech/Presentation
Students can create a speech or multi-media presentation on Chinese Exclusion Act, paper sons, establishment of Chinatowns, Anti-Asian racism, immigration policies, etc.

Essay Writing
Students can be challenged to write a three-paragraph essay that evaluates the causes and consequences of Chinese Exclusion Act or the change or continuity of U.S. immigration policy past and present.

Short Answer Assessment
Students could answer these questions as part of a unit assessment.

- **What is the historical background and effects of the Chinese Exclusion Act?**
- **What are effects of the Chinese Exclusion Act?**
- **Discuss current immigration policy**
- **Discuss racial equity issues**