



Teaching LGBTQ History

a project of Our Family Coalition

Chinese Laborers and the California Gold Rush

The Racialization of Masculinity of Chinese Laborers

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Subject: History

Topic: Integrated

Grade Level: Elementary: 4th Grade

Overview

This lesson seeks to introduce students to the racialization of masculinity of Chinese workers since their arrival during the Gold Rush in the 1850s. This lesson asks students to think about how race and gender was used to frame Chinese workers as an economic threat to white American men, as well as a threat to dominant gender norms in the United States.

Time: 50 minutes

Lesson Objectives:

- Students will develop an understanding of why Chinese workers migrated to California during the Gold Rush.
- Students will engage with gender stereotypes and its relationship with race.
- Students will analyze how physical differences of Chinese men were used to discredit their masculinity.

Essential Questions:

1. How did U.S society view Chinese workers and what kind of images/stereotypes were created?
2. Did these images/stereotypes affect the way gender expectations were placed on Chinese men?
3. How was race and gender weaponized to label Chinese laborers as a threat to American workers?

Standards:

HSS 4.4.1 Understand the story and lasting influence of the Pony Express, Overland Mail Service, Western Union, and the building of the transcontinental railroad, including the contributions of Chinese workers to its construction.

HSS 4.4.3 Discuss immigration and migration to California between 1850 and 1900, including the diverse composition of those who came; the countries of origin and their relative locations; and conflicts and accords among the diverse groups (e.g., the 1882 Chinese Exclusion Act).

CCSS SL 4.1 Engage effectively in a range of collaborative discussions (one-on-one, in groups, and teacher- led) with diverse partners on *grade 4 topics and texts*, building on others' ideas and expressing their own clearly.

Vocabulary:

California Gold Rush: A period of time when thousands of migrants arrived in California to mine and search for gold.

Stereotypes: An unfair and untrue belief that many people have about a group of people with certain qualities (such as race or gender).

Masculinity: Characteristics, behaviors, and roles that boys and men are expected to have.

Femininity: Characteristics, behaviors, and roles that women and girls are expected to have.

Gender Roles: A set of social and cultural beliefs or expectations about appropriate behavior for men/boys or women/girls.

Gender Stereotypes: A commonly, culturally held belief (often incorrect or overly generalized) about a specific gender. This includes ideas on what masculinity and femininity should look like in men and women.

Teacher Background:

This lesson plan does not teach about the California gold rush; rather, it is focused on the migration of Chinese workers during this time. The teacher should be familiar with what gender roles are in the United States. The teacher should have knowledge about the migration of Chinese laborers during the gold rush, their motivations, and why migrants were mostly men. The teacher should also understand how race can intersect with gender to further discriminate against communities of color.

Materials:

- Computer
- Projector

Instruction:

Presentation (1 hour total, including discussion)

- Begin presenting the [Chinese Laborers and the California Gold Rush slide deck](#).

Discussion Activity #1 (10 minutes)

- Ask students about their ideas on gender roles, and if there are different expectations for being a boy or girl. Encourage class discussion.

Discussion Activity #2 (10 minutes)

- After the previous discussion, refer back to the slides on masculinity in traditional Chinese society. Ask students if these expectations are different from the U.S. Encourage class discussion.

Video on Chinese Exclusion Act (5 minutes)

- After the slide on the Chinese Exclusion Act, watch this TEDx video to provide further context for students.
- <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=2K88pWCimZg>

Group Discussion (20 minutes)

- Divide students into groups of 4. Refer to the slides for the prompts. At the end of the allotted time, ask students to share their responses.

Relevant Resources:

Lucier- Keller, Emma. "The Visual Production of Chinese Masculinity in Political Cartoons, Photography, and Laundry." *New Errands: The Undergraduate Journal of American Studies*, vol. New Errands Volume 5, no. Issue 2, 2018, <https://doi.org/10.18113/P8ne5260899>.

American Experience. "Chinese Immigrants and the Gold Rush." *American Experience* | PBS, 10 Oct. 2017, www.pbs.org/wgbh/americanexperience/features/goldrush-chinese-immigrants.

Yung, Judy, et al., editors. *Chinese American Voices: From the Gold Rush to the Present*. 1st ed., University of California Press, 2006, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/10.1525/j.ctt1pppwn>. Accessed 8 Apr. 2022.

"Gold Rush and Anti-Chinese Race Hatred - 1849." *Sfmuseum*, www.sfmuseum.org/hist6/chinhate.html. Accessed 2 Oct. 2021.

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