Generations of Chinese in America, 1880s–1990s

Unit 1 of 2: 1880s-1940s



The family of Lim Lip Hong a.k.a. Lim Tye, by Robert F. Lym, San Francisco, CA, May 1914 (National Archives, 296488)



THE GILDER LEHRMAN INSTITUTE of AMERICAN HISTORY

Generations of Chinese in America, 1880s–1990s Unit 1 of 2: 1880s–1940s

BY NINA WOHL (created in 2023)

Nina Wohl taught high school social studies in the New York City Department of Education for thirty years. She was a senior education fellow at the Gilder Lehrman Institute of American History during the 2022–2023 academic year.

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GRADE LEVELS: 7-12

RECOMMENDED TIME FOR COMPLETION: Three 45-minute periods. You may choose to teach two lessons each period and assign the summative assessment as homework.

UNIT OVERVIEW

This unit is one of the Gilder Lehrman Institute's Teaching Literacy through HistoryTM (TLTH) resources, designed to align with the Common Core State Standards. These units were developed to enable students to understand, summarize, and evaluate original materials of historical significance. Through a step-by-step process, students will acquire the skills to analyze, assess, and develop knowledgeable and well-reasoned viewpoints on primary and secondary sources.

This unit explores how the different generations of Chinese in America made the US their home despite racism and exclusionary governmental practices. The lessons in this unit provide a small window into a much broader and more complex area of study. They are not meant to capture the entire scope of this topic or time period. The individual lessons are not in chronological order but follow a thematic and pedagogical path. You may choose to use all or portions of the lesson materials.

Over the course of six lessons in three days, students will identify, examine, and analyze the language and imagery of primary sources related to Chinese in America. Students will work with a variety of documents including first-hand accounts, photographs, opinion pieces, and government documents.

Students will demonstrate what they have learned through their analysis and assessment of the primary sources orally in small-group and whole-class discussions and by writing responses to the essential questions posed in the lessons.

Students will be able to

- Analyze primary and secondary sources using close-reading strategies
- Interpret, analyze, and demonstrate understanding of visual and multimedia materials
- Compare and contrast different types of evidence



- Demonstrate understanding of both literal and inferential aspects of written text
- Explain how Chinese people in America responded to legislation targeting them for exclusion
- Identify ways in which Chinese immigrants and their children created businesses, formed communities, and petitioned for rights

ESSENTIAL QUESTIONS

- How were Chinese in America affected by changing immigration laws?
- How did Chinese in America respond to exclusion?
- What opportunities for continuity and change did Chinese immigrants seize?

COMMON CORE STATE STANDARDS

CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RH.11-12.1: Cite specific textual evidence to support analysis of primary and secondary sources, connecting insights gained from specific details to an understanding of the text as a whole.

CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RH.11-12.2: Determine the central ideas or information of a primary or secondary source: provide an accurate summary that makes clear the relationships among the key details and ideas.

CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RH.11-12.9: Integrate information from diverse sources, both primary and secondary, into a coherent understanding of an idea or event, noting discrepancies among sources.

CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RH.11-12.7: Integrate and evaluate multiple sources of information presented in diverse formats and media (e.g., visually, quantitatively, as well as in words) in order to address a question or solve a problem.

CCSS.ELA-Literacy.SL.9-10.1.C: Propel conversations by posing and responding to questions that relate the current discussion to broader themes or larger ideas; actively incorporate others into the discussion to broader themes or larger ideas; actively incorporate others into the discussion; and clarify, verify, or challenge ideas and conclusions.

CCSS.ELA-Literacy.SL.11-12.1: Initiate and participate effectively in a range of collaborative discussions (one-on-one, in groups, and teacher-led) with diverse partners on [grade-level] topics, texts, and issues, building on others' ideas and expressing their own clearly and persuasively.

CCSS.ELA-Literacy.W.9-10.1 and 11-12.1: Write arguments to support claims in an analysis of substantive topics or texts, using valid reasoning and relevant and sufficient evidence.

MATERIALS

- Optional: Historical Background: "Chinese Immigration to the United States in the Late Nineteenth and Early Twentieth Centuries" by Jane Hong, Associate Professor of History, Occidental College
- Activity Sheet 1: Analyzing an Essay
- Source 1: Excerpts from Lee Chew, "The Biography of a Chinaman," The Independent 55, no. 2829 (February 19, 1903): 417–423. Available at the Internet Archive: archive.org/details/sim_independent_1903-02-19_55_2829.
- Activity Sheet 2: Positive and Negative Experiences
- Source 2: Sue Chung Kee's Store in Hanford, California's China Alley, unknown photographer, 1899, San Joaquin Valley Library System. Available at the Online Archive of California, oac.cdlib.org/ark:/13030/kt5n-39q3v4/?brand=oac4.
- Source 3: Officers of the Six Companies, Chinatown, San Francisco, CA, unknown photographer, [ca. 1900], Roy D. Graves Pictorial Collection: Chinese and Chinatown, 1889–1971, The Bancroft Library, University of California, Berkeley. Available at the Online Archive of California, oac.cdlib.org/ark:/13030/tf3870072s/?brand=oac4.



- Source 4: Multi-Generation Family of Lim Lip Hong a.k.a. Lim Tye, by Robert F. Lym, San Francisco, CA, May 1914, National Archives, catalog.archives.gov/id/296488.
- Activity Sheet 3: Analyzing a Photograph

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- Activity Sheet 4: Identifying Cultural Values
- Source 5: Excerpts from Saum Song Bo, "A Chinese View of the Statue of Liberty," New York Sun, June 30, 1885.
- Activity Sheet 5: Drawing Inferences
- Activity Sheet 6: Arriving in the United States through Angel Island Immigration Station
- Source 6: Soo Hoo Lem Kong's Declaration to Enter the United States, 1930, Record Group 85, Records of the Immigration and Naturalization Service, San Pedro Office. Chinese Exclusion Act Case Files, Box 128, Folder 14036/638-B. Held by the National Archives & Records Administration -- Pacific Region [Riverside]).
- Activity Sheet 7: Reading the Declaration of Soo Hoo Lem Kong
- Source 7: Transcript of Soo Hoo Lem Kong's Interview to Enter the United States, 1930, Record Group 85, Records of the Immigration and Naturalization Service, San Pedro Office. Chinese Exclusion Act Case Files, Box 128, Folder 14036/638-B. Held by the National Archives & Records Administration -- Pacific Region [Riverside]).
- Activity Sheet 8: Interviewing Soo Hoo Lem Kong at Angel Island
- Activity Sheet 9: Creating an Oral History Interview



HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

Chinese Immigration to the United States in the Late Nineteenth and Early Twentieth Centuries

by Jane Hong

Like millions of migrants from Europe, India, and elsewhere, most ordinary, non-elite Chinese immigrants arriving in the United States before the 1890s had no intention of staying long term. The plan was to access economic opportunities, accumulate some savings for a time, and eventually return to their homeland with greater resources to support their families and communities. Because these migrations were largely economically motivated, men dominated the immigrant stream from the start, with only small numbers of women seeking entry.

Many factors made migration a major undertaking. The first was the cost. Families saved for years to afford one boat trip to the United States. Others borrowed or signed contracts with brokers in order to afford the trip. In the 1870s, however, a new major barrier arose: race-based immigration restrictions. The Page Act (1875) targeted Chinese women suspected of being brought to the US for "lewd and immoral purposes." While the law had a limited impact since most migrants were men, it had a chilling effect on the number of Chinese women seeking entry, as they were often subjected to humiliating examinations and interrogations. The Chinese Exclusion (or Restriction) Act of 1882 and subsequent laws targeting Chinese workers made it increasingly difficult for Chinese to gain entry to the US by the late 1880s. Significantly, these laws were class based, barring Chinese workers while exempting diplomats, merchants, and students, and allowing these groups and US-born Chinese American citizens to sponsor close relatives.

Chinese migrants developed myriad strategies to evade US restriction and exclusion laws. Some Chinese crossed the Mexican or Canadian borders without permission. In coastal cities with larger Chinese populations, people seeking entry could look to well-established local Chinese associations for some assistance. For example, the San Francisco–based Chinese Six Companies, or Chinese Consolidated Benevolent Association, sponsored many of the early court cases challenging the constitutionality of Chinese restriction and exclusion laws. The Six Companies often served as a voice for Chinese in the United States, negotiating with local and federal governments on behalf of Chinese interests.

The "paper son" system rapidly became the main system for entry. "Paper sons" claimed false identities in order to gain entry to the US as the sons of Chinese merchants and US citizens of Chinese descent. The state subjected migrants to harsh interrogations and establishing false identities required significant effort. Once in the United States, migrants and their sponsors had to maintain the fiction of familial connection, hiding their true identities and family ties.

Perhaps the greatest irony of Chinese restriction and exclusion was how it encouraged many Chinese to stay in the United States long term rather than return to China, as earlier migrants had done. As gaining entry into the United States became increasingly costly and difficult, many Chinese chose to stay rather than risk the possibility of future exclusion. This led to the creation of thousands of transpacific families divided by the US exclusion regime, with fathers and sons living and working in the United States and sending money to support wives and children still in China. Many remained separated for decades, with lasting legacies for thousands of Chinese American families into the present day.

Jane Hong is an associate professor of history at Occidental College and the author of Opening the Gates to Asia: A Transpacific History of How America Repealed Asian Exclusion (2019). She serves on the editorial board of the Journal of American History, the executive board of the Immigration and Ethnic History Society, and the Gilder Lehrman Scholarly Advisory Board.



HISTORICAL BACKGROUND ON CHINESE IMMIGRATION IN THE LATE NINETEENTH AND EARLY TWENTIETH CENTURIES

BY NINA WOHL (created in 2023)

OVERVIEW

This lesson introduces students to historical information that will help them understand the meaning of later documents.

Students will be able to

- Analyze a secondary source using close-reading strategies
- Understand why Chinese immigrants chose to move to the United States
- Identify key legislation that targeted immigrants from China
- Identify ways in which Chinese immigrants and their children created businesses, formed communities, and petitioned for rights

Nina Wohl taught high school social studies in the New York City Department of Education for thirty years. She was a senior education fellow at the Gilder Lehrman Institute of American History during the 2022–2023 academic year.

GRADE LEVELS: 7–12

Recommended Time for Completion: Three 45-minute periods. You may choose to teach two lessons each period and assign the summative assessment as homework.

UNIT OVERVIEW: This unit is one of the Gilder Lehrman Institute's Teaching Literacy through History[™] (TLTH) resources, designed to align with the Common Core State Standards. These units were developed to enable students to understand, summarize, and evaluate original materials of historical significance. This unit explores how the different generations of Chinese in America made the US their home despite racism and exclusionary governmental practices.

ESSENTIAL QUESTIONS

- How were Chinese in America affected by the changing immigration laws?
- How did the Chinese in America respond to exclusion?
- What opportunities for continuity and change did Chinese immigrants seize?

MATERIALS

- Optional: Historical Background: "Chinese Immigration to the United States in the Late Nineteenth and Early Twentieth Centuries" by Jane Hong, Associate Professor of History, Occidental College
- Optional: Activity Sheet 1: Analyzing an Essay

PROCEDURE

- 1. You may choose to discuss the context or share the Historical Background with the class to provide them with a general overview of Chinese in America. Students need to have prior knowledge that includes but is not limited to
 - the push/pull factors that brought Chinese immigrants to the United States
 - the ways in which both circular migration patterns and the Page Act (1875) contributed to a gender disparity among immigrants, with more men than women living in the United States
 - the fact that the Chinese Exclusion Act of 1882 was one of the United States' first constraints on immigration
 - the fact that Chinese immigrants arrived over the course of many decades, ensuring that new immigrants moved into communities that already included Chinese Americans

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- 2. You may read the Historical Background out loud, have the students read it to themselves, or "share read" the text with the class. To "share read" the text, distribute the handout and have the students follow along silently while you begin to read aloud, modeling prosody, inflection, and punctuation. Then ask the class to join in with the reading after a few sentences while you continue to read aloud, still serving as the model for the class. This technique will support struggling readers as well as English language learners (ELL).
- 3. Distribute Activity Sheet 1 and have the students select at least three important or informative phrases or sentences. Reconvene the class to discuss their selections.
- 4. You may choose to introduce one or more of the Essential Questions to guide class discussion centering on the history of Chinese immigration to the United States.



IMMIGRATION AND ECONOMIC OPPORTUNITIES, 1903

BY NINA WOHL (created in 2023)

OVERVIEW

This lesson explores how an immigrant from China made the US his home despite racism and exclusionary governmental practices.

Students will be able to

- Analyze a primary source using close-reading strategies
- Demonstrate understanding of both literal and inferential aspects of written text
- Explain how Chinese people in America responded to anti-Chinese racism
- Identify ways in which Chinese immigrants created businesses and formed communities

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GRADE LEVELS: 7–12

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ESSENTIAL QUESTION

• What opportunities for continuity and change did Chinese immigrants seize?

MATERIALS

- Source 1: Excerpts from Lee Chew, "The Biography of a Chinaman," *The Independent* 55, no. 2829 (February 19, 1903): 417–423. Available at the Internet Archive: archive.org/details/sim_independent_1903-02-19_55_2829.
- Activity Sheet 2: Positive and Negative Experiences

PROCEDURE

- 1. Ask students what the experience of new immigrants to the United States might have been at the end of the nine-teenth century: Where would they live? How would they make a living? Where they might find a community?
- 2. Distribute Source 1, excerpts from Lee Chew's biography, with Activity Sheet 2: Positive and Negative Experiences.
 - a. You may read the text out loud, distribute it and have the students read it to themselves, or "share read" the text with the class as described in Lesson 1.
 - b. Students complete the activity sheet by identifying the positive and negative experiences described by Lee Chew. This can be done as a group activity, in pairs, or individually.
 - c. Students will then put those experiences in context by answering the following: To what extent was Lee Chew affected by anti-Chinese attitudes and exclusion? This can be done as a group activity, in pairs, or individually. Review students' findings with the whole class.
- 3. Review the Essential Question: What opportunities for continuity and change did Chinese immigrants seize? This can be done as a whole-class activity or as a pair/share.



CHINESE AMERICANS AND CULTURAL VALUES, 1899-1914

BY NINA WOHL (created in 2023)

OVERVIEW

This lesson explores three group portraits featuring Chinese immigrants and asks students to consider the cultural values that the people in these photographs aimed to communicate through their comportment, choice of surroundings, and attire.

Students will be able to

- Demonstrate understanding of photography as a collaboration between photographer and subject
- Richly describe what they see in a photograph and infer the significance of what they see
- Identify ways in which Chinese immigrants and their children created businesses, formed communities, and petitioned for rights

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GRADE LEVELS: 7-12

Recommended Time for Completion: Three 45-minute periods. You may choose to teach two lessons each period and assign the summative assessment as homework.

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ESSENTIAL QUESTION

• What opportunities for continuity and change did Chinese immigrants seize?

MATERIALS

- Source 2: Sue Chung Kee's Store in Hanford, California's China Alley, unknown photographer, 1899, San Joaquin Valley Library System. Available at the Online Archive of California, oac.cdlib.org/ark:/13030/kt5n-39q3v4/?brand=oac4.
- Source 3: Officers of the Six Companies, Chinatown, San Francisco, CA, unknown photographer, [ca. 1900], Roy D. Graves Pictorial Collection: Chinese and Chinatown, 1889–1971, The Bancroft Library, University of California, Berkeley. Available at the Online Archive of California, oac.cdlib.org/ark:/13030/tf3870072s/?brand=oac4.
- Source 4: Multi-Generation Family of Lim Lip Hong a.k.a. Lim Tye, by Robert F. Lym, San Francisco, CA, May 1914, National Archives, catalog.archives.gov/id/296488.
- Activity Sheet 3: Analyzing a Photograph
- Activity Sheet 4: Identifying Cultural Values

PROCEDURE

1. Review the Historical Background or context and the previous lesson's activities and conclusions. If you did not have the students read the Historical Background in Lesson 1, you may choose to distribute the essay and Activity Sheet 1 as part of this lesson (see Materials and Procedure for Lesson 1).



2. Photo Analysis

- a. Distribute Sources 2–4 (the photographs of Sue Chung Kee's Store, the Officers of the Six Companies, and the Multi-Generation Family of Lim Lip Hong) and Activity Sheets 3 and 4 (1 per photograph per student).
 - i. Many Chinese immigrants earned a living as domestic servants, running laundries and restaurants. Sue Chung Kee's herbalist store in Hanford, California's China Alley represents businesses that were opened to serve the Chinese community.
 - ii. Chinese set up benevolent associations to facilitate their integration into American society. They supported Chinese American interests and promoted Chinese culture. The Six Companies of San Francisco were organized in the 1850s and formally established in 1882. The Six Companies provided services including a safety net for sick Chinese workers, a Chinese-language school, the settlement of disputes among members, maintenance of a Chinese census, and help for members sending money to their families and home villages.
 - iii. The multi-generation family photograph was taken in May 1914 by Robert F. Lym. This photograph is representative of the ability to thrive despite exclusion and the primarily male composition of immigrants. Family members are identified on the back of the photograph: "Family of Lim Lip Hong alias Lim Tye (?hard to read): 1. Lim Lip Hong, father; 2. Chin Shee, mother; 3. Lim Yook, daughter; 4. Lim Young, daughter; 5. Lim Fook Sing (?hard to read), son; 6. Lim Fook Dean (Robt F. Lym), son; 7. Lim Fook Yin (Arthur F. Lym); 8. Lim Fook Wing; 9. Lim Fook Wah; 10. Lee Shee (wife of Lym Fook Sing, #5); 11. Soo Hoo Shee, Ruby Soo Hoo (wife of Robt F. Lym); 12. Lim Lum Quai, son of Lim Sing; 13. Lim Ching, daughter of Lim Sing; 14. Lim Ying, daughter of Lim Sing; 15. Lim Lum Quong, son of Lim Sing; 16. Dewey Glenn Lym, son of Robt F. Lym; 17. Lee Shew Hong, son of #3; 18. Lee Choy Lin (?hard to read), daughter of #3; 19. Lee Choy Toe, daughter of #3; 20. Emma Lee, daughter of #3; 21. Emily Lee, daughter of #3; 22. Henry Wong, son of #4; 23. Willie Wong, son of #4; 24. Jimmie, son of #4; 25. Worley (or Wosley ? hard to read) Wong, son of."
- b. Students will analyze the photographs by detailing observed evidence on Activity Sheet 3 and explaining the meaning of the observed evidence. This can be done in pairs or individually.
- c. After studying the photographs, students will identify associated cultural values found in the images on Activity Sheet 4 in order to address the essential question:
 - What opportunities for continuity and change did Chinese immigrants seize?
- d. In a general discussion you may choose to address some of the following questions:
 - i. What do these images tell us about Chinese people in America?
 - ii. How do these images provide evidence of a desire to hold onto traditional Chinese values?
 - iii. What common theme was used to select the photographs chosen?
 - iv. What do these photographs tell you about living and/or working conditions at the time they were taken?
 - v. What might motivate someone to take such a photograph?
 - vi. What other images would you like to have if you were a historian creating a narrative of that time period?
 - vii. What generalization can one make about immigration and this time period based solely on the three photographs selected?
 - viii. Can a thesis statement be created based on this generalization?



CHINESE AMERICANS SEEKING CITIZENSHIP, 1885

BY NINA WOHL (created in 2023)

OVERVIEW

The lesson highlights the response of one Chinese immigrant when he was asked to donate for the Statue of Liberty's pedestal despite being legally barred from citizenship himself.

Students will be able to

- Analyze a primary source using close-reading strategies
- Demonstrate understanding of both literal and inferential aspects of written text
- Explain how Chinese people in America responded to legislation targeting them for exclusion and barring them from citizenship
- Identify ways in which Chinese immigrants petitioned for rights

Nina Wohl taught high school social studies in the New York City Department of Education for thirty years. She was a senior education fellow at the Gilder Lehrman Institute of American History during the 2022–2023 academic year.

GRADE LEVELS: 7-12

Recommended Time for Completion: Three 45-minute periods. You may choose to teach two lessons each period and assign the summative assessment as homework.

UNIT OVERVIEW: This unit is one of the Gilder Lehrman Institute's Teaching Literacy through HistoryTM (TLTH) resources, designed to align with the Common Core State Standards. These units were developed to enable students to understand, summarize, and evaluate original materials of historical significance. This unit explores how the different generations of Chinese in America made the US their home despite racism and exclusionary governmental practices.

ESSENTIAL QUESTIONS

- How were Chinese in America affected by changing immigration laws?
- How did Chinese in America respond to exclusion?
- What opportunities for continuity and change did Chinese immigrants seize?

MATERIALS

- Source 5: Excerpts from Saum Song Bo, "A Chinese View of the Statue of Liberty," New York Sun, June 30, 1885.
- Activity Sheet 5: Drawing Inferences

PROCEDURE

- 1. Distribute Source 5. You may read the text out loud, have the students read it to themselves, or share read it.
 - a. In groups or pairs or individually, students will develop three inferences about the text and provide evidential support for each inference. Be sure students understand that inferences are conclusions reached on the basis of evidence and reasoning. Inferences include but are not limited to: Americans value liberty above all other values, Chinese are unwelcome in the US, the future of Chinese in America is unknown.

You may choose to pair this text with Frederick Douglass's "Our Composite Nationality" speech (1867) or his "What to a Slave Is the Fourth of July" speech (1852).

- b. In a whole-class discussion, students share their inferences and discuss how Saum Song Bo responded to anti-Chinese attitudes and exclusion.
- 2. Address the Essential Questions building on previous classwork and class discussions.

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UNDERSTANDING IMMIGRATION PROCEDURES, 1910-1940

BY NINA WOHL (created in 2023)

OVERVIEW

This lesson helps students understand the obstacles to Chinese immigration, and how some Chinese immigrants were able to circumvent those obstacles. They will learn about the immigration process on Angel Island and the hurdles to entry into the US.

Students will be able to

- Demonstrate understanding of both literal and inferential aspects of written text
- Identify what factors made immigration from China particularly difficult
- Explain how Chinese people in America responded to legislation targeting them for exclusion

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GRADE LEVELS: 7-12

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ESSENTIAL QUESTIONS

- How were Chinese in America affected by changing immigration laws?
- How did Chinese in America respond to exclusion?

MATERIALS

• Activity Sheet 6: Arriving in the United States through Angel Island Immigration Station

PROCEDURE

1. You may choose to define and explain the development of "paper sons" and "paper daughters" at any point in the lesson:

Men of Chinese ancestry who had been born in the United States could say that they had wives and children in China. These children were then eligible to enter the United States. Many of these claims were fictitious. The 1906 fire in San Francisco destroyed public records, making it easier for Chinese men to claim they had been born in America. Middlemen would sell forged papers to help Chinese immigrants claim that they were children of Chinese Americans, thereby circumventing exclusionary policies. Immigrants who used these forged documents were referred to as "paper sons/daughters."

- 2. Distribute Activity Sheet 6. Ask students to put themselves in the shoes of an immigration official. What questions do you think would be important to ask immigrants coming to America? Make a list of questions and place them on the board/or overhead. Discuss why students think these questions would be necessary.
- 3. Divide the class into pairs of students. The students will alternate interviewing each other using the question in part II of the activity sheet: Student #1 asks odd questions and answers even questions and student #2 asks even questions and answers odd questions. How many of these questions could they answer?



PAPER SONS AND PAPER DAUGHTERS, 1910–1940

BY NINA WOHL (created in 2023)

OVERVIEW

This lesson focuses on one Chinese immigrant's experience overcoming the hurdles at Angel Island Immigration States in 1930.

Students will be able to

- Demonstrate understanding of both literal and inferential aspects of written text
- Identify what factors made immigration from China particularly difficult
- Explain how Chinese people in America responded to legislation targeting them for exclusion

ESSENTIAL QUESTIONS

- How were Chinese in America affected by changing immigration laws?
- How did Chinese in America respond to exclusion?
- What opportunities for continuity and change did Chinese immigrants seize?

MATERIALS

- Source 6: Soo Hoo Lem Kong's Declaration to Enter the United States, Record Group 85, Records of the Immigration and Naturalization Service, San Pedro Office. Chinese Exclusion Act Case Files, Box 128, Folder 14036/638-B. Held by the National Archives & Records Administration -- Pacific Region [Riverside].
- Activity Sheet 7: Reading the Declaration of Soo Hoo Lem Kong
- Source 7: Transcript of Soo Hoo Lem Kong's Interview to Enter the United States, Record Group 85, Records of the Immigration and Naturalization Service, San Pedro Office. Chinese Exclusion Act Case Files, Box 128, Folder 14036/638-B. Held by the National Archives & Records Administration -- Pacific Region [Riverside].
- Activity Sheet 8: Interviewing Soo Hoo Lem Kong at Angel Island

PROCEDURE

- 1. Distribute Source 6, Soo Hoo Lem Kong's Declaration of Nonimmigrant Alien, and Activity Sheet 7. Students will read the declaration and fill in the activity sheet using the information from the declaration. This may be done as a whole-class activity, in groups, in pairs, or individually.
- 2. Distribute Source 7, the transcript of Soo Hoo Lem Kong's interview, with Activity Sheet 8.
 - a. Students will conduct the interview, taking the roles of the immigration official and Soo Hoo Lem Kong.

City Department of Education for thirty years. She was a senior education fellow at the Gilder Lehrman Institute of American History during the 2022–2023 academic year. GRADE LEVELS: 7–12

Nina Wohl taught high school social studies in the New York

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This can be done with two volunteers in front of the class or by dividing the class into pairs and having them conduct the interviews.

- b. Students will then answer the reflections and analysis questions. This may be done as a whole-class activity, in groups, in pairs, or individually.
- c. As an alternative or an addition (Part II on the activity sheet), ask students to identify
 - details about Chinese immigration that they found in the text
 - one ethical issue about Chinese immigration found in the text
 - a big idea about Chinese immigration found in the text
 - one unanswered question found in the text.
- 3. Closing Activity
 - a. Students respond to the critical thinking questions in Part III of the activity sheet.
 - b. As a whole class, discuss their conclusions.



GENERATIONS OF CHINESE IN AMERICA, 1880s-1940s

BY NINA WOHL (created in 2023)

OVERVIEW

In this lesson, the students will integrate what they have learned from the sources, activities, discussions, and assessments completed in the previous six lessons to demonstrate their understanding of what life was like for Chinese immigrants between the 1880s and the 1940s.

Students will be able to

- Demonstrate understanding of both literal and inferential aspects of written text
- Explain how Chinese people in America responded to legislation targeting them for exclusion

ESSENTIAL QUESTIONS

- How were Chinese in America affected by changing immigration laws?
- How did Chinese in America respond to exclusion?
- What opportunities for continuity and change did Chinese immigrants seize?

MATERIALS

• Activity Sheet 9: Creating an Oral History Interview

PROCEDURE

- 1. Based on the primary and secondary sources they have read in the previous six lessons, class discussions, and responses to activity sheets 1–8, the students will create an oral history interview with a Chinese immigrant who entered the United States between 1883 and 1940.
 - a. Students will pretend to interview a fictitious Chinese every-person (man or woman) by developing three to five comprehensive questions and responses.
 - b. They will cite the sources and evidence used in previous lessons to develop their questions and responses. Their questions and responses should address the Essential Questions:
 - How were Chinese in America affected by changing immigration laws?
 - How did Chinese in America respond to exclusion?
 - What opportunities for continuity and change did Chinese immigrants seize?

Nina Wohl taught high school social studies in the New York City Department of Education for thirty years. She was a senior education fellow at the Gilder Lehrman Institute of American History during the 2022–2023 academic year.

GRADE LEVELS: 7-12

Recommended Time for Completion: Three 45-minute periods. You may choose to teach two lessons each period and assign the summative assessment as homework.

UNIT OVERVIEW: This unit is one of the Gilder Lehrman Institute's Teaching Literacy through HistoryTM (TLTH) resources, designed to align with the Common Core State Standards. These units were developed to enable students to understand, summarize, and evaluate original materials of historical significance. This unit explores how the different generations of Chinese in America made the US their home despite racism and exclusionary governmental practices.



HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

Chinese Immigration to the United States in the Late Nineteenth and Early Twentieth Centuries

by Jane Hong, Occidental College

Like millions of migrants from Europe, India, and elsewhere, most ordinary, non-elite Chinese immigrants arriving in the United States before the 1890s had no intention of staying long term. The plan was to access economic opportunities, accumulate some savings for a time, and eventually return to their homeland with greater resources to support their families and communities. Because these migrations were largely economically motivated, men dominated the immigrant stream from the start, with only small numbers of women seeking entry.

Many factors made migration a major undertaking. The first was the cost. Families saved for years to afford one boat trip to the United States. Others borrowed or signed contracts with brokers in order to afford the trip. In the 1870s, however, a new major barrier arose: race-based immigration restrictions. The Page Act (1875) targeted Chinese women suspected of being brought to the US for "lewd and immoral purposes." While the law had a limited impact since most migrants were men, it had a chilling effect on the number of Chinese women seeking entry, as they were often subjected to humiliating examinations and interrogations. The Chinese Exclusion (or Restriction) Act of 1882 and subsequent laws targeting Chinese workers made it increasingly difficult for Chinese to gain entry to the US by the late 1880s. Significantly, these laws were class based, barring Chinese workers while exempting diplomats, merchants, and students, and allowing these groups and US-born Chinese American citizens to sponsor close relatives.

Chinese migrants developed myriad strategies to evade US restriction and exclusion laws. Some Chinese crossed the Mexican or Canadian borders without permission. In coastal cities with larger Chinese populations, people seeking entry could look to well-established local Chinese associations for some assistance. For example, the San Francisco–based Chinese Six Companies, or Chinese Consolidated Benevolent Association, sponsored many of the early court cases challenging the constitutionality of Chinese restriction and exclusion laws. The Six Companies often served as a voice for Chinese in the United States, negotiating with local and federal governments on behalf of Chinese interests.

The "paper son" system rapidly became the main system for entry. "Paper sons" claimed false identities in order to gain entry to the US as the sons of Chinese merchants and US citizens of Chinese descent. The state subjected migrants to harsh interrogations and establishing false identities required significant effort. Once in the United States, migrants and their sponsors had to maintain the fiction of familial connection, hiding their true identities and family ties.

Perhaps the greatest irony of Chinese restriction and exclusion was how it encouraged many Chinese to stay in the United States long term rather than return to China, as earlier migrants had done. As gaining entry into the United States became increasingly costly and difficult, many Chinese chose to stay rather than risk the possibility of future exclusion. This led to the creation of thousands of transpacific families divided by the US exclusion regime, with fathers and sons living and working in the United States and sending money to support wives and children still in China. Many remained separated for decades, with lasting legacies for thousands of Chinese American families into the present day.

Jane Hong is an associate professor of history at Occidental College. She serves on the editorial board of the Journal of American History, the executive board of the Immigration and Ethnic History Society, and the Gilder Lehrman Scholarly Advisory Board.



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Activity Sheet 1: Analyzing an Essay

Which phrases or sentences in this essay are the most important or informative? Select three and give the reason for each selection.

Phrase 1:

Why is this phrase important or informative?

Phrase 2:

Why is this phrase important or informative?

Phrase 3:

Why is this phrase important or informative?



Source 1: Excerpts from "The Biography of a Chinaman" by Lee Chew, 1903

... When I got to San Francisco, ... [a] man got me work as a house servant in an American family, and my start was the same as that of almost all the Chinese in this country.

The Chinese laundryman does not learn his trade in China; there are no laundries in China. . . . All the Chinese laundrymen here were taught in the first place by American women just as I was taught. . . .

It was twenty years ago when I came to this country, and I worked for two years as a servant, getting at the last \$35 a month.... I saved \$50 in the first six months, \$90 in the second, \$120 in the third and \$150 in the fourth. So I had \$410 at the end of two years, and I was now ready to start in business.

When I first opened a laundry it was in company with a partner, who had been in the business for some years. We went to a town about 500 miles inland, where a railroad was building. We got a board shanty and worked for the men employed by the railroads... We had to put up with many insults and some frauds, as men would come in and claim parcels that did not belong to them, saying they had lost their tickets, and would fight if they did not get what they asked for. Sometimes we were taken before Magistrates and fined for losing shirts that we had never seen. On the other hand, we were making money, and even after sending home \$3 a week I was able to save about \$15. When the railroad construction gang moved on we went with them.

The men were rough and prejudiced against us, but not more so than in the big Eastern cities. It is only lately in the New York that the Chinese have been able to discontinue putting wire screens in front of their windows, and at the present time the street boys are still breaking the windows of Chinese laundries all over the city, while the police seem to think it a joke...

The reason why so many Chinese go into the laundry business in this country is because it requires little capital and is one of the few opportunities that are open. Men of other nationalities who are jealous of the Chinese . . . have raised such a great outcry about Chinese cheap labor that they have shut him out of working on farms or in factories. . . . He cannot practice any trade, and his opportunities to do business are limited to his own countrymen. . . .

Source: Lee Chew, "The Biography of a Chinaman," The Independent 55, no. 2829 (February 19, 1903), 417-423.



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Activity Sheet 2: Positive and Negative Experiences

Describe positive and negative experiences Lee Chew included in his biography:

Positive Experiences	Negative Experiences

To what extent was Lee Chew affected by anti-Chinese attitudes and exclusion?



Source 2: Sue Chung Kee's Store in Hanford, California's China Alley, 1899



(San Joaquin Valley Library System, from the Online Archive of California)



Source 3: Officers of the Six Companies, Chinatown, San Francisco, [ca. 1900]



(The Bancroft Library, University of California, Berkeley)



Source 4: Multi-Generation Family of Lim Lip Hong a.k.a. Lim Tye, San Francisco, CA, 1914



Photograph by Robert F. Lym (National Archives, 296488)



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Activity Sheet 3: Analyzing a Photograph

Photograph title:

Photograph date:

	Observed Evidence	Meaning of the Observed Evidence
Setting		
Central Figures or Objects		
Action		
Mood or Theme		



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Activity Sheet 4: Identifying Cultural Values

Date of Image:

Date of Image:

Identify cultural values reflected in each photograph.

Source 2:

Title of Image:

Cultural Value(s):

Evidence from photo to support your answer:

Source	3:

Title of Image:

Cultural Value(s):

Evidence from photo to support your answer:

Evidence from photo to support your answer:

Source 4:	
Title of Image:	
Cultural Value(s):	

Date of Image:

What do these images tell us about Chinese people in America?

How do these images provide evidence of a desire to hold onto traditional Chinese values?



Source 5: Excerpts from "A Chinese View of the Statue of Liberty" by Saum Song Bo, 1885

Sir:

A paper was presented to me . . . for subscription among my countrymen toward the Pedestal fund of the . . . Statue of Liberty. . . . Seeing that the heading is an appeal to American citizens, to their love of country and liberty, I feel that my countrymen and myself are honored in being thus appealed to as citizens in the cause of liberty. But the word liberty makes me think of the fact that this country is the land of liberty for men of all nations except the Chinese. I consider it as an insult to us Chinese to call on us to contribute toward building in this land a pedestal for a statue of liberty. That statue represents Liberty holding a torch which lights the passage of those of all nations who come into this country. But are the Chinese allowed to come? As for the Chinese who are here, are they allowed to enjoy liberty as men of all other nationalities enjoy it? Are they allowed to go about everywhere free from the insults, abuse, assaults, wrongs and injuries from which men of other nationalities are free?

... By the law of this nation ... a Chinaman, cannot become a citizen.

... And this statue of Liberty is a gift to a people from another people who do not love or value liberty for the Chinese....

Whether the statute against the Chinese or the statue to Liberty will be the more lasting monument to tell future ages of the liberty and greatness of this country, will be known only to future generations.

Liberty, we Chinese do love and adore thee, but let not those who deny thee to us make of thee a graven image and invite us to bow down to it.

Source: Saum Song Bo, "A Chinese View of the Statue of Liberty," New York Sun, June 30, 1885.



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Activity Sheet 5: Drawing Inferences

Identify at least three inferences you can draw from "A Chinese View of the Statue of Liberty."

Inferences are conclusions reached on the basis of evidence and reasoning, a conclusion or opinion that is formed because of known facts or evidence.

Inferences	Evidence (from the text)
(1)	
(2)	
(3)	

How did Saum Song Bo respond to anti-Chinese attitudes and exclusion?



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Activity Sheet 6: Arriving in the United States through Angel Island Immigration Station

NAME

From 1910 to 1940 Chinese immigrants to the US passed through Angel Island in San Francisco. In order to enforce the immigration laws limiting their ability to enter the US, most underwent extensive interrogations to prove they qualified for certain exemptions to the Exclusion Act. Many Chinese immigrants had to prove they had family members already in the United States. Immigration officers would compare the answers of family members to look for discrepancies that might show someone was lying. Many immigrants stayed on Angel Island from several weeks to even years while they waited for proof to arrive to validate their stories. There were no standard questions on Angel Island.

I. What questions do you think would be important to ask immigrants coming to America? Make a list of at least 5.

Why would these questions be necessary?



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II. Here is a sampling of 10 questions. Interview your partner: How many can they answer?

- 1. What are the marriage and birth dates of your grandparents?
- 2. What furniture is in your living room?
- 3. What is your father's name, age, date and place of birth, occupation, and present whereabouts?
- 4. What is your mother's name, age, date and place of birth, occupation, and present whereabouts?
- 5. How many aunts, uncles, and cousins do you have?
- 6. What direction does the front of your house face?
- 7. How many people live in your village?
- 8. Who lives in the northernmost part of your village?
- 9. How much money do you have? How will you support yourself and your family?
- 10. Do you plan to live in the US permanently?



Source 6: Soo Hoo Lem Kong's Declaration to Enter the United States, 1930, p. 1

Form No. 257-Consulan Revised March, 1929 General Instruction No. 925, Sec. 3) DECLARATION OF NONIMMIGRANT ALIEN ABOUT TO DEPART FOR THE UNITED STATES AMERICAN CONSULAR SERVICE General, Hong Kong. December 30, 1930. AMERICAN CONSULATE, (Place) I.Soo Hoo Lem Kong { citizen of The Republic of China. ..., a bearer of passport October 28, 1930. dated affidavit issued by my father, Soo Hoo Quin, Public Irwin Merril before Notary. am about to go to the United States accompanied by I was born January 17, 1923. Sin (Date) (City) Sin Lau village, Chek Hom, District A (Provin o) China. My occupation for the last two years was _student(1929). and at present is ______unoccupied. Mysfixed domicile which I have no intention to abandan isx I desire to proceed to the United States for the purpose of ...studying, to remain for unknown months, and my address in the United States will be c/o Wing Wah Lung Co., No.711 Oxnard Blvd., Oxnard, California. My references are my father, Soo Hoo Quin, at the above address. (In the United States) Soo Hoo Sze Kai, Siu Chong Wing firm, 218 Queen's Road Central, Hongkong My relatives in the United States and ship to applicant. Strike out in case of applicant under Sec. 3 (1) or 3 (6) I have never been refused an immigration or passport visa at any American Consulate. I do not intend to emigrate to the United States and I consider myself as a nonimmigrant under the provisions of the Immigration Act of 1924 on the following grounds: Because I am the minor son of a domiciled Chinese merchant and admissible under Section 3 Subd. 6 of the Immigration Act of 1924. and offer for inspection the following documents in support of my claim: affidavit cited Reproduced from the National Archives and Records Administration - Pacific Region (Laguna Niguel)

Record Group 85, Records of the Immigration and Naturalization Service, San Pedro Office. Chinese Exclusion Act Case Files, Box 128, Folder 14036/638-B, National Archives & Records Administration -- Pacific Region (Riverside).



Soo Hoo Lem Kong's Declaration to Enter the United States, 1930, p. 2

I have informed myself of the provisions of the Act of February 5, 1917, particularly of the exclusion provisions of Section 3 of that Act, and of the Immigration Act of 1924, and am aware that the latter provides: "The admission to the United States of an alien excepted from the class of immigrants * * * * shall be for such time and under such conditions as may be by regulations prescribed, including, when deemed necessary, the giving of bond with sufficient security to insure that, at the expiration of such time or upon failure to maintain the status under which admitted, he will depart from the United States." I have also informed myself of the provisions of the Deportation Act of March 4, 1929, and am aware that Sections 1 (a) and 2 of that Act provide as follows: Sec. 1 (a): "That if any alien has been arrested or deported in pursuance of law, he shall be excluded from admission to the United States whether such deportation took place before or after the enactment of this Act, and if he enters or attempts to enter the United States after the expiration of sixty days after the enactment of this Act, he shall be guilty of a felony and upon conviction thereof shall, unless a different penalty is otherwise expressly provided by law, be punished by imprisonment for not more than two years or by a fine of not more than \$1,000 or by both such fine and imprisonment." Sec. 2: "Any alien who hereafter enters the United States at any time or place other than as designated by immigration officials or eludes examination or inspection by immigration officials, or obtains entry to the United States by a willfully false or misleading representation or the willful concealment of a material fact, shall be guilty of a misdemeanor and upon conviction, shall be punished by imprisonment for not more than one year or by a fine of not more than \$1,000, or by both such fine and imprisonment." I realize that if I am one of a class inadmissible to the United States under any of the provisions of the immigration laws of the United States, or if my classification as a nonimmigrant alien is not approved upon arrival in the United States, I may be deported or detained by the immigration authorities, and I am prepared to assume the risks of such deportation or detention. I solemnly swear that the foregoing statements are true to the best of my knowledge and belief. Soo Hoo Lem Kong. 30th Subscribed and sworn to before me this day of Decembei 1050 [SEAL] of the United States of America. 2:50 Passport visa granted January 7, ,1931 of 1924 (Minor Son of a Pomiciled Passport visa N Chinese merchant). American Consulate atHong. Kong. Passport visa refused . 19 (City)-(Country) SEEN Reasons: For the journey to the United States via anuary 1931. ralid for presents figh at United states page at any time durin tweive months from date evided parsport con-Stinues to be valid for 10 Fee Stamp. Reproduced from the National Archives and Records Administration - Pacific Region (Laguna Niguel)

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Activity Sheet 7: Reading the Declaration of Soo Hoo Lem Kong

What do you know about Soo Hoo Lem Kong?

Date of Declaration	
Date of Birth	
Place of Birth	
Reason for Entry	
Address in the US	
Father's Address	
Why was he considered a nonimmigrant?	
What does it mean to be a nonimmigrant?	
Passport visa granted status	



Source 7: Soo Hoo Lem Kong's Interview to Enter the United States, 1930, p. 1

-2-Q(By Chairman) State all your names? A. Soo Hoo Lem Kong, boyhood name; no other name When and where were you born? A. I was born in CR-11-12-1 (Jan. 17, 1923); In the Sheung On Lay, - Sin Lau village, HPD, China. How old are you at the present time, Chinese reckoning? A. 10. Of what country are you a subject, or citizen? A. China. Under what status do you seek admission to the U.S.? A. I dont know. Q Have you answered truthfully all questions shown opposite your name on this manifest Form 500 B? A. Tes. Q You have the right to have present with you during this hearing, a relative or friend, under certain conditions to be stipulated by this board; do you desire to avail yourself of this right? A. No. What witnesses will appear here to testify in your behalf? A. I don Is this your signature and photo? (referring to Exhibit "A") A. Yes. Q. A. I don't know. Q. (Note: There is also made part of the record and marked Exhibit "B" precis of American Vice Consul, Hong Kong, dated Jan. 7, 1931, in re. Soo Hoo Lem Kong, minor son of a domiciled Chinese merchant, to which is attached under seal, original copy of affidavit of Soo Hoo Quin, alleged father, before Inwin Merrill, Lowe, Hotary Public, Ventura, Calif., on Oct. 28, 1930, which bears endorsement of concession of exempt status of affiant by Acting Dist. Director of Immigration, LosAngeles, Cal., Nov.1, 1930, file #31160/25. Affidavit of Soc Hoo Quin bears photo of affigant and alleged minor son Soo Hoo Lem Kong, the photo of the latter being a good likeness of the applicant before the Board.) Q (By Chairman) Whose photos appear on this document (referring to affidavit attached to Exhibit "B") ? A. My father, Soo Hoo Gwing, and my own. What are your fathersnames, his age, date and place of birth, occupation, and present whereabouts? A. Soo Hoo Gwing, boyhood name; Soo Hoo You Gwing, marriage name; do not know his age; dont know his place of birth; is now doing business in the Wing Wah Lung Co., Ownard City, U.S. Mgme and describe your father's parents? A. My paternal grandfather Soo Hoo Sing Toon, died long ago I have never seen him; my paternal grandmother Dea Shee, is very old and I dont know her age; bound feet, now living in our home village. Did your father ever have any brothers or sisters? A. I don't know. Name and describe your mother? A. Fong Shee, do not know her age, natural feet, now living in home village. Name and describe your mother's parents? A. My maternal grandfather FongDip Moon; now living in his home village, name of which I do not know; my maternal grandmother's name I do not know, she is living with my maternal grandfather. Did your mother ever have any brothers or sisters? A. I don't know. Do you know how many times your father has been married? A. Twice. What was the name of his first wife? A. Woo Shee. When and where did Woo Shee die? A. I dont know; I have never seen her. 0 Q What is the name of your father's second wife? A. Fong Shee. Do you know when and where he married Fong Shee? A. No. Did your father have any children by his first wife, Woo Shee? A. Yes, one boy and one girl; (1) Soo Hoo Wah Gong, he is 20 yrs.old, dont know date of his birth; born in our home village; single; now here with me. (2) Soo Hoo Fung Jin; age 18 yrs.; born in home village; where she is now 3/14/31 31160/146/147 residing, single. -2-Reproduced from the National Archives and Records Administration - Pacific Region (Laguna Niguel)

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Soo Hoo Lem Kong's Interview to Enter the United States, 1930, p. 2

40300 Q What children has your father had by his wife Fong Shee? A. Two boys, no girls: (1) myself. (2) Soo Hoo Lem Sheck, is 3 yrs old, do not know date of birth; born in home village; now living at home, with my mother. Nave you ever had any brothers or sisters, who died? A. I dont kn Have you any recollection of your father? A. Wes, I remember him. A. I dont know. Do you think you would recognize him if you saw him now? A. Yes. Q When and where did you last see your father? A. I looked down to the Q wharf from the best when I arrived here . Did your father talk to you on the best? A. No. Who told you that was your father standing on the dock? A. No. I recognized him. Who was with your father when he was standing on the dock when you arrived 0 at this port? A. I don't know, 2 Did your father talk to you after you came off the boat? A. No. Did your brother talk to your father when you arrived on the beat? A. No. Who came with you on the beat from Ghina? A. My brother, Soo Hoo Wah Gong Anybody else come with you and your brother? A. Nobody else. When and where did you last see your father in Ghina? A. I dont remember. ą 0 Q. Then you have no recollection of your father in China? A. Yes, I saw my Q father at home, I do not remember when it was. What happened when on the occasion you last saw your father in Ghina, did he leave your home at that time, or did you leave? A. He was leaving for the U.S. Applicant excused. Reproduced from the National Archives and Records Administration - Pacific Region (Laguna Niguel)

Record Group 85, Records of the Immigration and Naturalization Service, San Pedro Office. Chinese Exclusion Act Case Files, Box 128, Folder 14036/638-B, National Archives & Records Administration -- Pacific Region (Riverside).



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Activity Sheet 8: Interviewing Soo Hoo Lem Kong at Angel Island

I. Reflections and Analysis

- 1. What did you learn about Soo Hoo Lem Kong?
- 2. Did you see any inconsistencies in the interview or declaration of nonimmigrant alien? If so, identify them.
- 3. How much of this information do you think an average child would know about their father's life?
- 4. How do you think Soo Hoo Lem Kong felt during the interview?
- 5. Do you believe he actually knew who his father was? What evidence supports your response?
- 6. What information is missing from this interview?
- 7. What are your general conclusions about Soo Hoo Lem Kong and the interview process?



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II. Identify

--> details about Chinese immigration that you found in the text

--> one ethical issue about Chinese immigration you found in the text

--> a big idea about Chinese immigration you found in the text

--> one unanswered question you found in the text

III. Critical Thinking

- 1. How should the experiences of Chinese immigrants who attempted to gain entry to the United States after the passage of the Chinese Exclusion Act be characterized?
- 2. What evidence is presented that might lead you to conclude that Soo Hoo Lem Kong is a paper son? What evidence is presented that might lead you to conclude that he is not a paper son?
- 3. How did immigrants and their families respond to Chinese exclusion?
- 4. How were Chinese people in America affected by changing immigration laws?



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Activity Sheet 9: Creating an Oral History Interview

Use the table below to create an oral history interview with a Chinese immigrant who entered the United States between 1883 and 1940. You are to interview a fictitious Chinese every-person (man or woman).

Develop three to five comprehensive questions and responses. Cite the sources and evidence used in class to develop your questions and responses. You should address the Essential Questions:

- How were Chinese in America affected by changing immigration laws?
- How did Chinese in America respond to exclusion?

Anyone reading your interview should understand some of the circumstances under which Chinese came to the US between 1883 and 1940 and what their lives were like.

Question #1:	
Answer:	Evidence from the text:

Question #2:		
Answer:	Evidence from the text:	



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Question #3:				
Answer:	Evidence from the text:			

Question #4:		
Answer:	Evidence from the text:	

Question #5:		
Answer:	Evidence from the text:	