

Lesson One: Abandoned Baby

Big Idea: When government intersects with families' lives.

Guiding Question: What are the generational consequences of China's one-child policy?

Our Challenge: Uncovering how a population policy affects families, society and a nation.

Guiding Activities: This lesson introduces students to the lives of Jennie Yuchang Lytel-Sternberg and Maya Xia Ludtke, Chinese girls abandoned as babies and adopted into Caucasian families in the United States. In meeting these two characters, students have the opportunity to explore the consequences of China's population policy on individuals – in China and America – and on the lives of families, the broader society, and the nations.

Setting the Scene

Read the opening section of [Abandoned Baby](#). (Stop at beginning of “Strong on Man, Light on Woman” section. For now, skip the embedded links if reading it on the *Touching Home in China* website.)

Ask students to react to what occurred in the opening of this story. Is this the first time they are hearing about this happening? If not, how else did they hear about it?

After sharing their initial learning, ask students to read information at [this link](#) and [this link](#) about the one-child policy and China's [laws](#) relating to the abandonment of children.¹ For upper- level middle school students, use this [one-child policy link](#).

In small groups have students complete a 3-2-1 exercise: List 3 new details you learned, 2 surprising details, and 1 question that remains. Discuss your 3-2-1 responses in pairs or in small groups. Ask each pair/group to share questions that surfaced with the class.

Guiding Resources: Hyperlinks in the website version of *Touching Home in China* direct students towards source material that expands contextual knowledge, prompts new inquiry, and guides them

¹ *Touching Home in China: in search of missing girlhoods* is published as an [iBook](#) and as a [website](#). While the content of the story is identical, some interactive elements in the iBook don't function in the same way on the website. An exception – and great advantage of the iBook in presenting these lessons – is the interactive graphic “From Mao to Now,” the population policy timeline. On the project's website, this timeline is a [link tab](#) on the navigational bar.

in responding to research questions. Direct students to source material appropriate to their age, reading level, conceptual understanding, and learning objectives.

Setting the Foundation

The interactive timeline in the iBook and the web version timeline, “[From Mao to Now](#),” provide students with a self-directed approach for understanding how the one-child policy fits into the broader context of China’s conception and implementation of various population policies.

Work through the timeline with the entire class, taking note of critical moments, key leaders and developments that explain turning points in the evolution of China’s population policies. Discuss with students what might be unfamiliar or confusing details, and then encourage them to engage in deeper level of self-directed investigation. For younger students, it will be helpful to direct them toward key dates/leaders/documents to facilitate deeper understanding of how and why the one-child policy came to be and to explore the societal changes it brought.

Engaging Our Challenge

To begin the research stage, divide the class into small groups. You will assign each group one of four consequences related to China’s one-child policy. Each is described, below. Depending on class size, topics might be assigned to more than one group.

Prepare each student and each group to do the following:

- Read and engage with the various media elements in the entire *Abandoned Baby* story with special attention paid to the group’s assigned consequence.
- Conduct independent research as a group on the assigned consequence, using primary sources provided in the curriculum and seeking independent sources of information.
- Develop and refine the group’s guiding questions. (The teacher provides support and encouragement.)
- Work collaboratively toward creating the group’s culminating Research Action Project. This project emerges out of what’s been learned about the group’s assigned consequence. Be sure to introduce and explain this final project to the students prior to their engaging in this research. A full description of possible culminating projects is shown in the “Reflection and Action Project” section at the end of the lesson.

Group A: China’s Gender Imbalance

One of the major identifiable shifts to result from China’s one-child policy is the rapid increase in this country’s gender imbalance. The long-standing cultural belief that daughters are not as valuable to families as sons combines with the government-enforced one-child policy to result in boys soon outnumbering girls starting at birth. Today, China leads the world with its highly distorted sex ratio at birth.

Students will examine China's population policies as they prepare to address the following questions:

- Describe what factors led to China experiencing its distorted gender imbalance during the decades of its one-child policy.
- Discuss as a group: Was this gender imbalance intentional? If not, should leaders have been able to predict that it would happen? Be prepared to state clearly your rationale and provide evidence used to reach your conclusion.
- What do you see as the consequences – cultural, familial, economical and cultural – of this gender imbalance?
- While out of the scope of this story, ask the students to explore factors that led the Chinese leadership to announce an end to its one-child policy in October 2015? What, if any, population policy is now operating in China?

Click [here](#) to explore the primary sources for Group A.

Group B: Impact on Girls' and Women's Lives

The one-child policy has disproportionately affected girls in China. For example, due to the decisions that this policy forced families to make, many girls are “[missing](#)” from the nation's population. Students will explore China's centuries-old cultural beliefs and the recent decades of its one-child policy to understand how girls' lives have been affected by this policy. Information is found in the main story and primary resources earmarked for this section. Students will focus their attention on the impact on girls' lives to prepare to address the following questions:

- What cultural beliefs and practices favor sons over daughters? What differences, if any, do you find in the attitudes of urban and rural families in China?
- What circumstances might lead families to abandon their daughters? Are there circumstances that have led families to abandon sons? ?
- When the term “missing girls” is used, what does it mean?
- When a couple raises a daughter as its only child are her the opportunities different than they were for girls raised in previous generations in China? If so, why and how.

Click [here](#) to explore the primary sources for Group B.

Group C: Care of the Elderly

Consequences of the one-child policy are not limited to girls or young parents. This policy's rippling effects are now reaching China's elderly. Students will explore what is happening to traditional patterns of elder care after nearly four decades of China's one-child policy. Students will examine the challenges that relate to elder care in preparing to address the following questions:

- How has the one-child policy affected the care of elderly people in China?
- What cultural beliefs, including those about gender, and economic considerations have led families to develop the traditional patterns of care for elders in China?

- Explore the 4-2-1: China's New Family Form interactive graphic in [*Daughter. Wife. Mother.*](#) (This graphic appears mid-way through the story.) What do you discover about a Chinese family's situation as it relates the potential challenges of elder care?

Click [here](#) to explore the primary sources for Group C.

Group D: Coming to America

Beginning in the 19th century, Chinese immigrants settled in the United States. Since then, distinct waves of immigrants have come from China, bracketed by the restrictive laws put in place by the American government from the late 19th century into the mid-20th century. As students learn about these various eras of Chinese migration to the United States, they will focus on the changing composition of the Chinese coming to America, up to and including the wave of recent adoptees.

- What factors have affected the migration experiences of Chinese people to America during different periods of time?
- Prior to the early 1990s, the adoption of Chinese children by Westerners did not exist. What factors in China contributed to the rise in international adoptions?
- With most adoptees from China being raised in Caucasian families, what are some of the likely challenges they experience growing up in America? Are there things their families do to help their adopted children integrate their Chinese heritage into their American lives?
- Why would adoptees want to go back to a country where they were abandoned?

Click [here](#) to explore the primary sources for Group

All Groups: Closing Brainstorm

As a class, come together to discuss if other consequences of China's one-child policy stood out to individual students or groups? If so, what are they? Ask students to reflect on how the one-child policy was responsible for these consequences.

Reflection and Action Project

A critical element of the curriculum involves students completing a culminating Research Action Project to assess and demonstrate their learning. In doing this project, students have an opportunity to conceptualize an approach to solving an issue/problem at the core of their research. (Solving a problem does not necessarily mean coming up with a definitive solution; it can include finding fresh approaches to drawing greater public awareness to a policy and/or its consequences.)

Student groups will come up with a concept that visually represents a challenging idea from their research. (Keep in mind that the content in this lesson might be emotionally sensitive for class members or others who are part of your school or greater community. Be aware of how ideas and individuals might be visually represented.) Students will sketch their concept, develop a proposal for its completion and, depending on time allotted, created some elements of their visual expression for display in an in-class gallery.

Here are various inroads for students to take into designing their Research Action Project:

- Have students explore “Lonely Childhoods and Missing Girls” (Gallery 1 in *Abandoned Baby*) to learn how three contemporary artists use different forms of creative expression to convey emotional responses to the consequences of China’s one-child policy. (Each artist’s work is displayed in two slides with descriptive captions.) Students should also watch these videos: a *Touching Home in China* interview with artist [Meng Site](#) and a video produced by Prune Nourry, the artist who created [“Terracotta Daughters”](#)
- Ask students to learn about what happens to children in your community when their own families are no longer able to care for them. Ask them to research the various roles government agencies in America play in caring for and supporting children whose families cannot care for them. They should use this information to think about ways that the treatment of such children might be improved.
- Ask students do an oral history interview with a young person whose family recently immigrated to America. Why did his or her family come to America? What has been easy about the transition to life in America and what’s been difficult? Does he or she hope to return to the place they came from? When? Why? Based on what you learn in doing this oral history, choose an evocative “moment” that conveys an immigrant’s perspective and write it as a scene in a play, bringing to life the characters that portray this what happened in this person’s life as an immigrant.
- Consider the following observation made by a Beijing mother, and then read the two stories cited, below:
 - *“As one Beijing mother told reporter Alexa Olesen, citing child-rearing constraints faced by wage-earning parents who live in costly cramped apartments and are accustomed to raising one child, “having a second kid isn’t as simple as adding another pair of chopsticks.”*
 - Ask students to read [this story](#) about how a region in South Korea increased its birth rate and [this one](#) about challenges that China is experiencing as it tries to convince families to have more children.

Students should reflect, discuss, and use this information as a springboard to developing a policy outline for government leaders, such as those in China, trying to increase the birth rate after decades of restricting family size. To help students connect this exercise to their own country, have them consider how U.S. leaders might do this in ways reflecting local and national values and culture. Would this be possible to do in the United States?

