

Asian Americans and the Model Minority Myth

Theme: History and Movement

Disciplinary Area: Asian American Studies

Ethnic Studies Values and Principles Alignment: 1, 2, 5, 7

Standards Alignment:

CA HSS Analysis Skills (9–12): Historical Research Evidence and Point of View 1-3

CA CCSS for ELA/Literacy: RH.9–10.1, 2, 8, 9; WHST.9–10.1A and B; SL.9–10.1A-D, 9-10.3

CA ELD Standards: ELD.PI.9–10.1, 5, 9, 10a

Lesson Overview:

This 3 day lesson introduces students to the complexity of the term ‘Asian American,’ ultimately coming to understand the various ethnic groups and politics associated with the identity marker. Additionally, students will also be exposed to the concept of the model minority myth. This course will provide for students the implications that result when lumping all Asian groups together and labeling them the Model Minority. For example, marginalized groups (i.e. Pacific Islanders, Southeast Asians) suffer from being cut out of programs and resources. It presents a false narrative that Asian Americans have overcome racism and prejudice. It glosses over the violence, harm and legalized racism that Asian Americans have endured, i.e. the Chinese massacre in Los Angeles 1871, the annexation of Hawaii, shooting of Southeast Asian school children in Stockton. Furthermore, students will understand how this label for the Asian American becomes a hindrance to expanding democratic structures and support, and worst how it creates a division among the Asian American community and places a wedge between them and African Americans and other oppressed groups.

Key Ethnic Studies Terms and Concepts: assimilation, stereotype, identity, model minority, racism, anti-blackness

Lesson Objectives: Students will be able to

1. Analyze the misconceptions of the model minority to describe Asian Americans and Pacific Islanders.
2. Differentiate the various identities, nationalities, and ethnicities that make up the Asian American and Pacific Islander community.
3. Learn to analyze legislation that directly impacts communities of color.
4. Actively dispel stereotypes and the model minority myth

Essential Questions:

- What does Asian American mean? And who is Asian American?
- How has the model minority myth been used to oppress and/or stymie certain Asian American and Pacific Islander communities?
- What are the dangers of the model minority myth?
- What are ways you can dispel the model minority myth?

Lesson Steps/Activities:

Day 1

1. Place four large pieces of flip chart paper in each corner of the room along with three to five markers. Engage the class by asking students **What does Asian American mean?**
2. Before delving too deeply into discussion, divide the class up into four groups. Each group is assigned to a corner and instructed to take ten minutes as a group to respond to the

aforementioned question. Also ask the groups to **list the various ethnic groups that comprise ‘Asian American’**.

3. After about ten minutes, signal for the groups to stop what they are doing. Allow each group to share what they discussed with the class. After each group has shared, provide a definition for Asian American and begin listing some of the various ethnic groups (see below for a sample list).

Sample Ethnic Groups (this list is in no way exhaustive - listed in the order of population according to the 2010 Census)

Chinese
Filipino
Indian
Vietnamese
Korean
Japanese
Pakistani
Cambodian
Hmong
Thai
Laotian
Bangladeshi
Burmese
Indonesian
Malaysian
Fijian
Samoan
Hawaiian
Micronesian
Polynesian

Definition of Asian American: The term Asian American was born out of the Asian American Movement (1968-1975) as a means of identifying people of Asian descent living in the United States. During the late 1960s, the term was largely seen as radical and unifying, a rejection of ‘oriental’ and other pejoratives that were associated with people of Asian descent. The collective

coining of the term was an act of self-naming and self-determination, and aligned with the broader goals of the Asian American movement—equality, justice, and anti-racism.

4. After sharing the definition and ethnic groups listed above, reiterate that Asian American is a loaded term that encompasses dozens of different Asian ethnic groups that have settled in the U.S., with large populations settling in California.
5. While still in groups, also ask students to name some stereotypes about Asian Americans that they have heard. Before asking this question, remind students to be respectful and considerate. After writing down some of the various on the board, emphasize that this exercise is not to validate said stereotypes, but to highlight how stereotypes can be harmful. Of the various stereotypes listed are, “Asians are smart” “Asians are good at math” and “Asians are successful”. State that these stereotypes are a product of the model minority myth.
6. Project images of William Petersen’s 1966 New York Times article, “Success Story: Japanese American Style” on the board or screen. Also provide a quick summary of the article’s main point. Note that this article inherently pitted Japanese Americans (arguably Asian Americans more broadly) against African Americans, with Petersen identifying the latter group as the “problem minority.” Following internment, Japanese Americans were able to achieve some level of social and economic mobility, rendering them the “model minority,” for their ability to thrive in the face of adversity unlike their African American counterparts. Petersen believed Japanese Americans were able to achieve this success because of their value of education, pride in heritage, tight knit family structures and community, and respect for authority. Have students read the article for themselves, reminding them to ask for help if they need support defining any unfamiliar words or terms. After reading the piece, explain to students that this article is the first time the term “model minority” was used (or coined) and marks the beginning of the

stereotyping of Asian Americans as inherently “smart” and “successful”. Teacher models counter arguments.

7. For homework, ask students to read the article [“ 'Model Minority' Myth Again Used As A Racial Wedge Between Asians And Blacks' in Code Switch](#) (see link in resource list) list three counter arguments refuting Petersen’s article.

Create a chart of arguments and counter arguments

Sample Chart (Create more arguments and counter arguments through class discussions)

Arguments of the Model Minority Myth	Counter Arguments to the Model Minority Myth
All Asians are smart and successful	Not all Asian Americans are successful and rich, in fact the majority are working class and live in poverty. Especially when data is disaggregated by ethnic group for example the poverty rate among Pacific Islanders, Cambodian and Hmong Americans is considerably higher than Indian and Chinese Americans. Lumping all Asians together, covers over the disparities within and among the Asian American population. It renders these groups invisible and hurts the poorest groups who need financial aid and assistance. (if there are Asian students in the class, make an effort to draw out their experiences in group and whole class discussions as a part of sharing their stories)
Asians are the model minority because they overcome adversity better than African Americans	It’s a form of anti-black racism. The model minority myth has been used to put a wedge between the Asian American and African American communities and is an effort to peel off Asian Americans from the Civil Rights Movement. It has also been used by the media to disparage the African American community for standing up for their rights. "During World War II, the media created the idea that the Japanese were rising up out of the ashes [after being held in incarceration camps] and proving that they had the right cultural stuff," said Claire Jean Kim, a professor at the University of California, Irvine. "And it was

	<p>immediately a reflection on black people: Now why weren't black people making it, but Asians were?"</p> <p>These arguments falsely conflate anti-Asian racism with anti-black racism, according to Kim. "Racism that Asian-Americans have experienced is not what black people have experienced," Kim said. "Sullivan is right that Asians have faced various forms of discrimination, but never the systematic dehumanization that black people have faced during slavery and continue to face today." Asians have been barred from entering the U.S. and gaining citizenship and have been sent to incarceration camps, Kim pointed out, but all that is different than the segregation, police brutality and discrimination that African-Americans have endured." (Chow, Kat)</p> <p>It is important that Asian Americans not only stand up for their rights but also stand with African Americans in support of the Black Lives Matter Movement and support the end to police brutality. Justice for one oppressed group leads to justice for all.</p>
All Asians are good at math and computers, they are nerdy.	Not all Asians are good at math or want to be mathematicians or scientists. Parent, peer, media pressure to do well in math and become a scientists, doctor or lawyer is very limiting to Asia American youth, and causes them to feel like failures, if they don't live up to these stereotypes.
All Asians are... _____	(Counter Argument)

Day 2

1. Start the class by asking students to share their counter arguments with the groups that they were in yesterday. After each group mate has shared their counter arguments, ask the groups to share what they believe to be the strongest counter argument with the entire class.

2. Be sure to provide your own analysis of Petersen's article and a counter argument. Stress that Petersen's article and the term 'model minority' helped render 'Asian American' monolithic. Also point out that the experience that Petersen mentioned was not reflective of all Asian Americans, as Southeast Asian and Pacific Islander ethnic groups remain largely marginalized and are disproportionately impacted by poverty, mental health issues, low-wage jobs, access to higher education, among other barriers.
3. To better illustrate the problems with 'model minority,' play a short video, "Why Data Matters When It Comes to Asian Americans and Pacific Islanders and Education" (see resources). Following the screening, explain what it means to disaggregate data and its connection to the model minority myth.
4. Point back to the flip chart papers around the room that lists the various ethnic groups within Asian American. Underscore how this term that was intended to be a unifying identity-marker has created some problems, including rendering smaller ethnic groups (often those in the most need) less visible, and not being inclusive enough of a term, especially for those of the Asian diaspora that have origins from islands in the Pacific (i.e. Filipinos, Melanesians, Polynesians, etc.), hence the more updated identity-marker, Asian Americans and Pacific Islanders.
5. During the second half of class hand out copies of the law signed by Governor Brown on September 25, 2016 California Assembly Bill 1726 (Data Collection). Have students take turns reading the bill aloud popcorn style. After the in-class reading, provide necessary context on what a bill is, and summarize how bills become laws. Additionally, define any words or terms students may be struggling with. In groups, have students discuss the purpose of the bill, impact

that it will have on Asian American communities, and how the legislation helps dispel the model minority myth.

6. As homework, ask students to complete a “mini bill analysis” of Assembly Bill 1726 using the worksheet below.

Day 3

The key method to dispel the model minority myth is by telling the true stories of yourself, your family and your community. By writing down, speaking aloud and sharing your stories, you actively counteract the stereotypes and master narrative developed to pigeon hold Asian Americans as a monolithic group with one identity, one experience and one role. No Asian American individual fits the model minority stereotype in all its facets. Take time in your class for students to first Think, Write, and then Share on 3 questions:

1. What is your ethnic background?
2. What stereotype is there of your ethnic group that you do not identify with? Why?

Explain in detail with facts about your experience, your background, your values, your goals, your dreams, your family, your community.

3. How will you actively dispel these stereotypes?

Application, Action, and Reflection: ·Students will read and analyze an article and legislative document, providing their own informed critiques, opinions, and feedback on the sources.

Students will further analyze how the document supports or argues against the model minority myth. Students will also tell their stories as a way to dispel the harmful stereotypes that the media and society imposes on their ethnic group.

Materials and Resources

“Why Data Matters When It Comes to Asian Americans and Pacific Islanders and Education”
Article and videos

<https://www.nbcnews.com/news/asian-america/why-data-matters-when-it-comes-asian-americans-pacific-islanders-n621196>

“How Does a Bill Become a Law?” Infographic/Handout

<https://www.usa.gov/how-laws-are-made>

Asian Americans Are Still Caught in the Trap of the ‘Model Minority’ Stereotype. And It Creates Inequality for All

<https://time.com/5859206/anti-asian-racism-america/>

Petersen, William. “Success Story, Japanese-American Style” New York Times, 1966.

Digital pdf download:

http://inside.sfuhs.org/dept/history/US_History_reader/Chapter14/modelminority.pdf

California Assembly Bill 1726 (Approved by Governor September 25, 2016. Filed with Secretary of State September 25, 2016.)

https://leginfo.legislature.ca.gov/faces/billNavClient.xhtml?bill_id=201520160AB1726

·Chow, Kat, 'Model Minority' Myth Again Used As A Racial Wedge Between Asians And Blacks', Code Switch, April 19, 2017

<https://www.npr.org/sections/codeswitch/2017/04/19/524571669/model-minority-myth-again-used-as-a-racial-wedge-between-asians-and-blacks>

Wu, Ellen. The Color of Success: Asian Americans and the Origins of the Model Minority. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2014

Bill Analysis Worksheet

*Bill Information (Name, Legislative Year, and Author):

·What does this bill aim to do? What does it address?

·What, if any, are the social and/or economic benefits of this bill?

·Does this bill directly or indirectly impact your community and/or family? If so, how?

·Do you agree with what this bill seeks to do? Please explain.

·Beyond legislation, what can be done to address the issue this bill calls attention to?
