

Public Input–2020 Ethnic Studies Model Curriculum May 2019 Draft

(Download and use to provide specific recommendations)

Include the chapter of the model curriculum, the page number, and line number(s) to ensure that the California Department of Education and Instructional Quality Commission can reference the content of the document when reviewing your comments. Please email this document as a Word document to ethnicstudies@cde.ca.gov. You may contact Kenneth McDonald, Education Programs Consultant, at kmcdonal@cde.ca.gov with any questions regarding this template or the public input process.

Chapter of Model Curriculum	Your Name and Affiliation	Comment (include page and line numbers where applicable)
2	Noah Scott Goldman Student Teacher Santa Monica, CA	<p>This comment is about the Asian American Studies curriculum and the coverage of the Chinese-American experience (Sample Lesson 3, pp. 171-178) in particular. I have two suggestions: the first has to do with scope/erasure, and the second with the inclusion of thinking skills.</p> <p>Sample Lesson 3, which is the only lesson covering Chinese-Americans, narrowly focuses on Chinese railroad workers of the 1800s and completely excludes the second and third waves of Chinese immigration. While the construction of the Transcontinental Railroad was certainly important, the four-day span of the lesson elbows out any coverage of recent Chinese-American history. This myopic focus creates the erroneous impression that Chinese-American history is over. Yet so much has happened since then: Chinese involvement in the civil rights movement, Maya Lin's Vietnam War memorial, refugees from Taiwan and mainland China escaping Maoist oppression between 1949 and 1976, the use of Chinese-American Abacus Bank as a scapegoat for the subprime mortgage crisis ("small enough to jail")... Obviously, not all of Chinese-American history can be covered in four days. But does that mean all four of those days should to be devoted to railroad strikes?</p>

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2	Noah Scott Goldman Student Teacher Santa Monica CA	<p>One of the “key questions” on day 3 is “Why is it important to remember the Chinese railroad strike?” (p. 174, line 3591) This is a leading question; it assumes that remembering the strike <i>is</i> important – important enough to justify not talking about anything else Chinese-American. Despite their <i>historical</i> importance, railroads are not particularly relevant to students’ lives <i>today</i>. When’s the last time you rode a railroad? This is likely to alienate Chinese-American students whose personal and family histories do not date back to the 1800s. You want to tap into more recent stories so you can connect to students’ prior knowledge as much as possible.</p> <p>I suggest that one day be devoted to studying the railroad and the other three days to more recent developments.</p>
2	Noah Scott Goldman Student Teacher Santa Monica CA	<p>The idea that Chinese-Americans have had an unequivocally sunny relationship with organized labor (p. 171, lines 3529-3530) is a fantasy. The reality is more complex. Union opposition to Chinese culminated in the North Adams strike of 1870 (Cronin, 2018), in which Chinese workers were brought in to replace strikers from the Knights of St. Crispin union. In the newspapers, proponents of organized labor invoked “yellow peril” rhetoric to delegitimize Chinese presence in the labor force. See this Thomas Nast cartoon. This is just one instance of unions painting Chinese workers as “strikebreakers” and “scabs”, and union opposition to the hiring of Chinese is widely regarded as a major contributing factor to the passage of the Chinese Exclusion Act.</p>

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2	Noah Scott Goldman Student Teacher Santa Monica CA	<p>The content of the lesson is less of a travesty than the way in which it's presented. Good teaching imparts thinking skills – habits of mind – in addition to content. According to Sam Wineburg, “history teaches us a way to make choices, to balance opinions, to tell stories, and to become uneasy – when necessary – about the stories we tell.” (2001, Kindle Locations 47-48) The thought processes practiced by historians include skepticism towards their own preconceptions and the narratives presented by others. Historians take multiple sources, possibly with conflicting views, and synthesize them into a coherent picture. They hold back their opinions until the very end of their analysis.</p> <p>Sample Lesson 3 (pp. 171-178) does not encourage students to think like historians. They do not “make choices” in this lesson because all the questions are either fact-based or extremely leading. For example, on p. 174, lines 3591-3593, two questions take the form “Why is it important to [believe this thing that our curriculum has decided is important]?” The burden of proof does not lie with the students! Nor does this lesson require students to “balance opinions”, because only one overarching narrative – that of the big evil railroad against the poor heroic Chinese – is presented as correct to them. They are allowed only to “become uneasy” about the narrative in a conventional history textbook (p. 173, lines 3573-3574), not about the narrative presented in this very curriculum!</p> <p>I would recommend more opportunities for students to employ the habits of historical thinking as described by Wineburg (2001). The material they look at and the questions they ask/answer should not be controlled so rigidly; they should receive many documents and sources and be encouraged to synthesize something out of the mess.</p>

References

- Cronin, M.M. (2018). When the Chinese Came to Massachusetts: Representations of Race, Labor, Religion, and Citizenship in the 1870 Press. *Historical Journal of Massachusetts* **46**(2) 72-105.
- Okihiro, G. (1994). Is Yellow Black or White? In *Margins and Mainstreams: Asians in American History and Culture*. University of Washington Press, Seattle, WA.
- Wineburg, S.S. (2001). *Historical Thinking and Other Unnatural Acts: Charting the Future of Teaching the Past*. Temple University Press, Philadelphia, PA.