

EWM COMMENTS  
1/7

1712 Sample Lesson 10: Chinese Railroad Workers

1713 Theme: Systems of Power

1714 Disciplinary Area: Asian American and Pacific Islander Studies

1715 Ethnic Studies Values and Principles Alignment: 1, 2, 4

1716 Standards Alignment:

1717 HSS Analysis Skills (9–12): Historical Research, Evidence, and Point of View 2;

1718 Historical Interpretation 1

1719 CA CCSS for ELA/Literacy: RH.9–10.1, 2, 6, 9, SL.9–10.1.A, 1.B, 1.C.

1720 Lesson Purpose and Overview:

1721 The contributions of people of color to the development of the economic development

1722 and infrastructure of the United States are too often minimized or overlooked. Chinese

1723 Americans are Americans and have played a key role in building this country. Had it not

1724 been for this work force, one of the greatest engineering feats of the 19th century (the *first transcon.*  
1725 railroad *and others that followed*), would not have been built within the allotted timeline. Asian Americans have

1726 been active labor organizers and *took action* strikers throughout history to fight racism and

1727 exploitation. The image of the transcontinental railroad *most popular* meeting at Promontory *X* on

1728 May 10, 1969, with no Chinese workers exemplifies the white supremacy view of U.S. *No!*

1729 *history. the often conscious refusal of the media to  
recognize the contributions of workers.*

1730 Key Terms and Concepts: systems of power, assimilate, transcontinental, Central

1731 Pacific Railroad Company (CPRR), congenial, amassed

1732 Lesson Objectives (Students will be able to...):

1733 1. Understand how Asian Americans have been active labor organizers and strikers  
1734 throughout history to fight racism and exploitation.

1735 2. Develop an appreciation for the contributions of Chinese Americans to U.S.

1736 history and infrastructure.

*laborers tend to  
be working for  
subcontractors not  
that many  
examples*

1737 3. Students will develop their speaking skills through a Socratic seminar discussion.

1738 Essential Questions:

1739 1. How have Asian Americans responded to repressive conditions in U.S. history?

1740 2. What role have Asian Americans played in the labor movement?

1741 3. Why is it important to recognize the contributions of immigrant labor in building  
1742 the wealth of the United States?

1743 4. Why is it important to remember the Chinese Railroad Strike?

1744 Lesson Steps/Activities:

1745 Overview:

1746 Day 1 – Transcontinental Railroad<sup>S</sup> and Chinese Immigration  
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1747 Day 2 – Chinese Labor and the Building of the Transcontinental Railroad S

1748 Day 3 – Commemoration of the Golden Spike

1749 Detailed Daily Lesson Procedures

1750 Day 1 – Transcontinental Railroad and Chinese Immigration

1751 1. Post the image of a Chinese railroad worker on the screen.

1752 a. Students are asked to estimate when the photo was taken, who is shown  
1753 in the photo, and what historical event or events they think are connected  
1754 to the photograph.

1755 b. Teacher will ask students what they know about Chinese Americans and  
1756 their contributions to the U.S.

1757 2. Introduce the lesson with the key overarching questions:

1758 a. To what extent did immigrant labor contribute to building the wealth of the  
1759 U.S.?

1760 b. To what extent did those laborers benefit from the wealth they helped  
1761 build?

There were probably multiple  
job actions and negotiations

Central +  
Union Pac.  
Great Northern  
Northern Pacific  
Santa Fe  
Southern Pacific  
Canadian  
Pacific  
etc

also Native American, African Am., Irish, etc

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- 1762 3. Read "The Chinese Experience in 19th Century America – Background for  
1763 Teachers", and the "Chinese Railroad Workers in North America Project" at  
1764 Stanford University.
- 1765 a. Have students read in pairs using any reading strategy for the level of the  
1766 class (annotation, mark the text, Cornell notes, choral reading, etc.)
- 1767 b. Respond to Key Questions and answer the questions on the students'  
1768 handout (see attached).

1769 Day 2 – Chinese Labor and the Building of the Transcontinental Railroad

- 1770 1. Teacher discusses the answers to the questions students have completed and  
1771 asks the question:
- 1772 a. To what extent have Chinese Railroad workers been given credit for their  
1773 contribution to the building of the transcontinental railroad?
- 1774 b. Have students look up "transcontinental railroad" in the index of their US  
1775 History textbook and have them look for text on Chinese laborers.
- 1776 2. Show on the screen the image of the May 10, 1869, Promontory Point  
1777 celebration.
- 1778 3. Have students analyze the photograph.
- 1779 a. Who is featured in the photo? Where and when was the photo taken? Why  
1780 was the photo taken?
- 1781 b. Who is not featured in the photo? Why do you think that is?
- 1782 4. Show video on YouTube: [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=rQUP8-](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=rQUP8-DJpMsandt=6s)  
1783 [DJpMsandt=6s](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=rQUP8-DJpMsandt=6s), tell the students to pay special attention to Connie Young Yu's  
1784 interview from 1:59–2:31. The whole video is 5:31 minutes.
- 1785 5. Provide students time to reflect on what they have seen in the video by having  
1786 students complete a five-minute free-write brainstorm on the following questions:  
1787 Based on the interviews in the video, why is it important to recognize of the  
1788 contributions of Chinese laborers? Why is that recognition meaningful to people  
1789 within the Chinese-American community? How does the exclusion of Chinese  
1790 and Chinese-American contributions to the United States including the railroad,  
1791 affect our understanding of history?

that is  
another location,  
not  
where  
the rails  
joined.

false assumption.  
Better to say "lack of recognition  
of Chi Am and other labor."

there were railroads and many other labor roles

1792 After students have completed their free-write, have students assemble in pairs  
1793 or groups of three. Have students share their responses with one another. When  
1794 the discussion begins to wind down, have the class reconvene as a whole group.  
1795 Have students share their thoughts and ideas with the whole class.  
1796 Tell students that this video shows the importance of recognizing the  
1797 contributions of Chinese laborers more than one hundred years after the building  
1798 of the railroad. Ask students these final questions: How do you think Chinese  
1799 laborers and Chinese immigrants were treated at the time? Provide students with  
1800 copies of excerpts from David Phillips' discussion of "The Chinese Question,"  
1801 Edward Holton's observations about Dennis Kearney, and "Enactments So  
1802 Utterly Un-American" by Constance Gordon-Cumming, which can all be found on  
1803 the Library of Congress website: sp. "Denis" (one "n")  
1804 [https://www.loc.gov/teachers/classroommaterials/presentationsandactivities/pres](https://www.loc.gov/teachers/classroommaterials/presentationsandactivities/presentations/timeline/riseind/chinimms/)  
1805 [entations/timeline/riseind/chinimms/](https://www.loc.gov/teachers/classroommaterials/presentationsandactivities/presentations/timeline/riseind/chinimms/). As students read, have them identify the  
1806 conflicting attitudes towards the presence of Chinese laborers in California,  
1807 noting the arguments presented for the exclusion and inclusion of Chinese  
1808 laborers.

1809 8. After students have read the document excerpts, explain to students that the  
1810 United States passed the Chinese Exclusion Act of 1882. Have students look up  
1811 this event in their textbooks and discuss with a partner whether or not they think  
1812 the information provided is satisfactory. Have students come up with a list of  
1813 questions they have about the Chinese Exclusion Act.

1814 Day 3 – Taking Action *Ch. Excl. Act has been the only immigr. law that singled out one ethnic group = racial policy*

1815 Every year on May 10, the Golden Spike Foundation commemorates the coming  
1816 together of the Central Pacific and Union Pacific Railroads to create the <sup>First</sup>  
1817 Transcontinental Railroad. *In the past, there has been* little to no representation of the  
1818 Chinese laborers who have built the central pacific railroad. With your group,  
1819 brainstorm a list of ways that the committee could recognize the contributions of  
1820 Chinese laborers and how they can increase awareness of their contributions. Then,  
1821 compose a professional, persuasive letter to the committee that explains why the

the commemoration committee

✓ but they have been acknowledging, if in a small way

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- 1822 Chinese contributions to the railroad should be recognized and how that can be achieved. Include concrete information from the resources you have examined over the course of this lesson, including specific quotes and examples.
- 1823
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- 1825 Address your letter to the Golden Spike Foundation, 60 South 600 East, Suite 150, Salt Lake City, Utah 84102.
- 1826
- 1827 Materials and Resources:
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- "150 Years Ago, Chinese Railroad Workers Staged the Era's Largest Labor Strike", NBC News, June 21, 2017 <https://www.nbcnews.com/news/asian-america/150-years-ago-chinese-railroad-workers-staged-era-s-largest-n774901>
  - "The Chinese Experience in 19th Century America – Background for Teachers" [http://teachingresources.atlas.illinois.edu/chinese\\_exp/introduction04.html](http://teachingresources.atlas.illinois.edu/chinese_exp/introduction04.html)
  - Chang, Gordon, Shelley Fishkin, *Chinese Railroad Workers in North America Project at Stanford University, Key Questions* <https://web.stanford.edu/group/chineserailroad/cgi-bin/website/>
  - Kwan, Rick, "CHSA tribute to the Chinese Railroad Workers", August 11, 2014. 1:59-2:31 (Connie Young Yu describes how Chinese are not recognized at the 100th anniversary of the May 10 Promontory Point Anniversary) <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=rQUP8-DJpMsandt=6s>
  - Image of the Celebration of the final golden spike being pounded in to the track at Promontory Point where the Union Pacific and Central Pacific railroads met to create the Transcontinental Railroad. (No Chinese laborers are in the picture) - But there are Chin. laborers at the actual joining of the rails
  - "Edward Holton's Observations About Denis Kearney, A Leading Advocate of Chinese Exclusion." Denis <https://www.loc.gov/teachers/classroommaterials/presentationsandactivities/presentations/timeline/riseind/chinimms/holton.html>
  - "Enactments So Utterly Un-American." <https://www.loc.gov/teachers/classroommaterials/presentationsandactivities/presentations/timeline/riseind/chinimms/cummings.html>

- 1850 • "David Phillips Discusses 'The Chinese Question.'"
- 1851 [https://www.loc.gov/teachers/classroommaterials/presentationsandactivities/pres](https://www.loc.gov/teachers/classroommaterials/presentationsandactivities/presentations/timeline/riseind/chinimms/phillips.html)
- 1852 [entations/timeline/riseind/chinimms/phillips.html](https://www.loc.gov/teachers/classroommaterials/presentationsandactivities/presentations/timeline/riseind/chinimms/phillips.html)
- 1853 Other sources:
- 1854 • Chew, William R., *Nameless Builders of the Transcontinental Railroad*, Trafford
- 1855 Publishing, 2004.
- 1856 • SPICE Lesson: Modules on the Chinese Railroad Workers.
- 1857 [https://spice.fsi.stanford.edu/multimedia/chinese-railroad-workers-north-america-](https://spice.fsi.stanford.edu/multimedia/chinese-railroad-workers-north-america-project)
- 1858 [project](https://spice.fsi.stanford.edu/multimedia/chinese-railroad-workers-north-america-project)
- 1859 • Gordon H. Chang and Shelley Fisher Fishkin, editors, with Hilton Obenzinger and
- 1860 Roland Hsu, *The Chinese and the Iron Road: Building the Transcontinental*
- 1861 *Railroad*, <https://www.sup.org/books/title/?id=29278>, Stanford University Press,
- 1862 2019.
- 1863

- 1864 Handout A
- 1865 Transcontinental Railroad and Chinese Immigration
- 1866 Read "The Chinese Experience in 19th Century America – Background for Teachers",
- 1867 [http://teachingresources.atlas.illinois.edu/chinese\\_exp/introduction04.html](http://teachingresources.atlas.illinois.edu/chinese_exp/introduction04.html)
- 1868 Answer the questions below:
- 1869 1. When did the Chinese first start emigrating to the U.S.?
- 1870 2. What were the push factors (conditions in China that pushed Chinese out) for
- 1871 why Chinese were immigrating to the U.S. in the ~~early~~ 1800s? *late (mostly*
- 1872 3. What were the pull factors (conditions in the U.S. the pulled Chinese in)? *mid-late 1800's, not early)*
- 1873 Use this source to answer the questions below:
- 1874 Read the Key Questions section [https://web.stanford.edu/group/chineserailroad/cgi-](https://web.stanford.edu/group/chineserailroad/cgi-bin/website)
- 1875 [bin/website](https://web.stanford.edu/group/chineserailroad/cgi-bin/website) (Gordon Chang and Shelley Fishkin, Chinese Railroad Workers in North
- 1876 America Project at Stanford University)
- 1877 1. Explain why and how Chinese were sought after to come to the U.S. to build the
- 1878 transcontinental railroad.
- 1879 2. Describe the types of repression and discrimination Chinese railroad workers
- 1880 endured under the railroad companies and management.
- 1881 3. Identify the key details of the Chinese railroad strike that occurred in 1867.
- 1882 4. Identify the strikers' demands.
- 1883 5. To what extent was the strike a success?
- 1884