

Angel Island: A Lesson Plan Using Poetry and Art to Explore a Difficult Topic

Carrier Shell Curriculum

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Summary

Aimed for 4th-6th grade, this lesson touches on a difficult historical subject, the treatment of Chinese as they immigrated to California in the early 1900's. This lesson plan explores the history and poetry at Angel Island. In the style of Chinese woodblock prints, students will create styrofoam engravings and prints to deepen their connection with the immigrants poetry. This lesson plan is designed to work with Unit 4 of *California Out of the Box* curriculum.

1 History: Angel Island

Angel Island Immigration Station is an important piece of the California Chinese immigrant story, post-gold rush.

- Look for some photos of the station to show student.

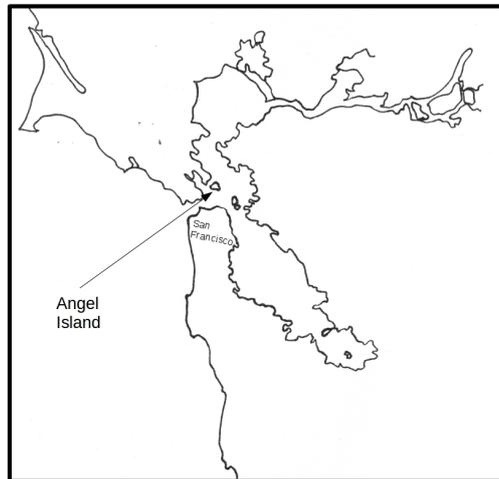
1.0.1 Mapwork

Use Google Earth to locate Angel Island. What other cities and/or places are close? *Tiburon, Alcatraz, Sausalito, Golden Gate Bridge, and Treasure Island.*

- Have student locate and label Angel Island on blank Bay Area map.



KEY:



1.0.2 Overview

Located off the coast of San Francisco, 3,000 years ago coastal Miwoks lived and foraged for food on the island.

After gold was discovered on the American River, increasing numbers of Chinese immigrants came to the state; they represented an ever-growing part of the California workforce. During the Civil War (1861-65), Chinese helped to build the Transcontinental Railroad that extended from Omaha, Nebraska to San Francisco, California. After the war ended, the economy slowed, and there was a shortage of jobs: Rebuilding was a necessity. White Americans became jealous of immigrants and blamed them for a demise in their fortune. In response, President Arthur passed the Chinese Exclusion Act of 1882. Under this act, Chinese could not come into the United States as skilled or unskilled labor for 10 years. As a result, upon arrival, the new immigrants often made up reasons for entry that were not forbidden by the Exclusion Act. If an immigrant's papers were not in order, beginning in 1910, they were taken to Angel Island. Chinese as well as other newly arrived immigrants were housed at the station, and their story examined through interrogation.

Popular Chinese American author Lawrence Yep has written *The Dragon's Child*, which provides a historical fiction account of life on Angel Island. This island is known as the "Ellis Island" of the West Coast.

1.0.3 Student Research

In class (or for homework), have students spend 20-30 minutes researching Angel Island history. Look at these websites for more information.

Angel Island Immigration Station Foundation:

<https://www.aiisf.org/education/station-history/journey-to-america>)

This National Park Service site has a good account of Immigration Station history:

https://www.nps.gov/nr/travel/asian_american_and_pacific_islander_heritage/us-immigration-station-angel-island.htm

1.0.4 History Discussion

1. What is the story of Angel Island Immigration Station?

Angel Island Immigration Station is a place where immigrants were taken to be processed to come into the United States. At this station, they came mostly from Asia. Most were of Chinese descent. Because there were not as many jobs, and white people felt that the Chinese were getting the work, laws were drafted that prevented Chinese from coming to the US. The station became a way to enforce those limits.

2. What years was the immigration station open? *1910-1940*
3. What other people lived on the island before it was an immigration Station? *Coastal Miwoks, Spanish explorer Ayala, and the US army.*
4. What countries were immigrants from that were sent to the station? *China, Japan, India, Philippines.*
5. If you were detained at Angel Island, how might you feel?

Bonus What is a “paper son” or “paper daughter”? *Potential Chinese immigrants often found sponsors in the US that would say they were their father or mother, in exchange for money. The immigrant and the “parent” would have to memorize their story well to hold up through the interrogation, where other family members would also have to come in and vouch for the story. If it was not believed, the immigrant was deported.*

2 Poetry

Note: Have a word list of adjectives available for this section. The Institute for Excellence in Writing has a helpful List of Banned Words (with good word choice alternatives).

2.0.1 Poetry Backstory

One of the unique facets to the Angel Island story are the poems that were found inscribed on the walls of the detention center. Restoration crews have found in some areas 7 layers of putty covering the inscriptions. Use Google Images to look photos of the Angel Island engravings.

Look at the following website which has transcriptions of various poems. Print out a copy of them. Have students read a few of them.

Angel Island Immigration Station Foundation:

<https://www.aiisf.org/education/station-history/poetry>

2.0.2 Poetry Discussion

After reading a few, discuss the following questions:

1. What are some of the feelings the detainees are experiencing? What words would you use to describe them? To aid student: use list of adjectives. Create a list of words. *Despairing, angry, hopeless, hopeful, poor, suffering, bitter.*
2. How do the detainees see their current physical location? *They see it like a prison. They are frustrated and feel alone.*
3. How do they feel about their home they left? *They think they were poor at home-but now they are poor in a new country*
4. What do they wish for? *They want to get out of the immigration station.*
5. What frustrates them the most? *They feel alone.*

3 Art: Poetry Printmaking

Why printmaking? There is a rich tradition in Asian, and Chinese art in particular of woodblock printing. It was used to spread Buddhist ideals as far back as the 7th Century AD.

- Look in Google Images for pictures of Chinese woodblocks to show student during the project introduction.

3.0.1 Materials:

- Styrofoam pieces - 4x4 to 5x7 in size (restaurant take out boxes from Smart & Final, foam meat trays, or the flat part of styrofoam plates work well)
- Tempera or acrylic paint (see Color Note)
- Tray for paint
- 8x10" Colored Printer or Construction Paper (see Color Note)
- Sharp pencil
- 4x6 Index cards, blank
- For Display Mounting: use 12x18" construction paper.

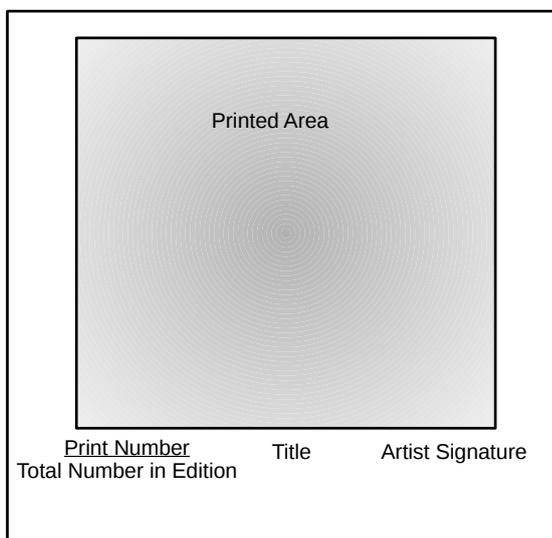
Color Note: Before starting this project, take some time to consider your color choices. If students will use light color paint, choose a dark color paper to print on. If you will use dark paint, use white or light color paper.

3.0.2 Project

1. Have students choose 1 poem. Students should copy the pertinent stanza or whole poem on blank index card, with the poem number.
2. Students will design an illustration for their poetry choice. How does the poem make them feel, and what images do they see when they read it? How might the poet see the world? What does he or she mention in their poem?
3. Show student photos of other Chinese woodblocks.

3 ART: POETRY PRINTMAKING

4. On piece of styrofoam, with sharp pencil, deeply press down and draw picture. If student desires, they can sketch their design with a Sharpie marker. Remind students that any deep lines they draw will show in their final printed print. Also, any letters will need to be written in reverse order to print correctly.
5. Once they finish creating their plate, they should dip it in tempera or acrylic paint. Student should get a thin, even covering of paint. If needed, student can use a paint brush to help over the plate. On colored paper, use plate like a stamp. Press the back evenly and firmly to get an even print. They can wash and dry plate and make another print with another color of paint and paper. Try different color combinations.
6. Once the prints are dry, label them with a pencil under print, as indicated below. For the title, label it "Poem #_____, Angel Island". The edition number would be the total number of prints created by student, with the specific number being that print.



7. Using 12x18" construction paper, print and poetry card can be mounted and displayed.

Add to Timeline



- Year Angel Island Immigration Station opened: 1910

4 Bay Area Map

