



TITLE

# ANALYZING “THE END OF WHITE INNOCENCE” WITH CATHY PARK HONG

GRADE LEVEL: 11-12TH GRADE

**DISCIPLINE:** English, History

**TOPIC:** Asian-American identity, racial trauma, immigration.

**STANDARDS:** CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.WHST.11-12.2.B, | CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.WHST.11-12.2.C  
CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.WHST.11-12.2.D | CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.WHST.11-12.2.E

**OBJECTIVES:**

- Understand the history behind the 1965 Immigration Act and its impact on demography, politics, and historical development.
- Rethink the notion of “shame” in relation to the Asian-American identity and to the end of white innocence.
- Recognize how the author uses personal anecdotes to support her argument on racial trauma.

**ESSENTIAL QUESTIONS:**

- What is the 1965 Immigration Act and its legacy today?
- How can literature be used to empower the Asian-American identity?

**MATERIALS NEEDED:**

- Diversify Our Narrative’s “[Difficult but Necessary Conversations](#)” Webinar.
- The essay, “[The End of White Innocence](#)” from Cathy Park Hong's collection of short stories/essays, [Minor Feelings](#).
- [Video on the 1965 Immigration Act](#)”

**CLASSROOM HOURS NEEDED:**

- 3 or 4 class periods of about 45 minutes.
- Several activities can be adapted into take-home assignments.

**FINAL ASSESSMENT TYPE:**

Literary Journaling Assignment, Socratic Seminar

**KIT INCLUDES:**

- Read-aloud of “The End of White Innocence” from author Cathy Park Hong
- Educator Instructions + Resources
- Discussion Questions
- Literary Journaling Assignment + Socratic Seminar

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## EDUCATOR NOTE: BEFORE THE LESSON

This lesson plan analyzes the feelings of shame, race, and racism that are presented in "The End of White Innocence" from Cathy Park Hong's *Minor Feelings*, along with its connections to the 1965 Immigration Act. Prior to the lesson, it is important to establish classroom norms that will facilitate a safe space for the discussions and questions contained in this lesson plan. If you have not yet established classroom norms, please utilize this [webinar](#) by Diversify Our Narrative to help guide that discussion with your classroom.

These resources may also be helpful in understanding further context for the essay/novel:

[Racial Trauma by Mental Health America](#)

["Cathy Park Hong on \*Minor Feelings\*" by The Yale Review](#)

[SuperSummary](#)

["Minor Feelings" and the Possibilities of Asian-American Identity by The New Yorker](#)

## INTRODUCTION (ABOUT 45 MINUTES)

### Classroom Norms & Introduction to *Minor Feelings* (10-15 minutes)

Take time to remind students of the classroom norms you have established (Respect, Kindness, Compassion, etc.). Ask students to **briefly** share the classroom norms with a partner. (5 minutes)

To begin, introduce the lesson plan, explaining that you will be reading Cathy Park Hong's *Minor Feelings* and discussing feelings of shame, race, and racism. Short summaries of the *Minor Feelings* and "The End of White Innocence" can be found in the articles from the "Educator Note" section (5-10 minutes).

### The 1965 Immigration Act Video + Discussion (30 minutes)

As a class, watch this [video](#) on the 1965 Immigration Act, and ask your students to answer these questions below in groups:

- 1) How did the 1965 Immigration Act change the makeup of the U.S. population?
- 2) How did the Civil Rights Movement by African Americans assist Asian Americans in changing laws that restricted their immigration and ability to become U.S. citizens?



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### READING "THE END OF WHITE INNOCENCE" (45 MINUTES)

Here is a [link](#) to a read-aloud of "The End of White Innocence" by the author, Cathy Park Hong. The video is approximately 40 minutes long, but can be broken up to fit in two different class periods depending on what fits best with your classroom schedule.

If you are able to check out the book or a copy of the chapter from your local library, this can be a take-home assignment! This method is highly preferred, and can reduce the amount of class time required for this lesson plan.

### DISCUSSION: BOOK + IMMIGRATION ACT VIDEO (20-30 MINUTES)

**Continue the discussion from the video about the 1965 Immigration Act with the following questions:**

- 1) What does Cathy Park Hong claim in "The End of White Innocence" to be the real shared root of all immigrants in the U.S? Begin to think about how this argument connects to the overall theme regarding shame in this chapter.
- 2) Define what "White Innocence" means. Discuss as a class why the urgency of addressing "white innocence" has become more relevant than before. Considering this, who is the intended audience of this chapter? What is the call to action?



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## LITERARY JOURNALING ASSIGNMENT (40 MINUTES)

As a class, read the paragraph: “Rather than look back on childhood, I always looked sideways at childhood. If to look back is tinted with the honeyed cinematography of nostalgia, to look sideways at childhood is tainted with the sicklier haze of envy, an envy that ate at me when I stayed for dinner with my white friend’s family or watched the parade of commercials and TV shows that made it clear what a child should look like and what kind of family they should grow up in.”

**After reading the paragraph, ask students to journal for 10 minutes on these discussion questions, allowing them to pick the questions they are most drawn to:**

- What literary devices does the author use in this passage and how does it strengthen the author’s argument?
- What passages highlight feelings of shame?
- What literary devices does the author use to highlight shame?
- How does shame relate to broader themes of this novel/passage?
- What is the argument the author makes about childhood and innocence? How does the author use experiences from her own childhood to connect this argument to race?

Next, read aloud the paragraph in *The End of White Innocence* that starts with “The indignity of being Asian in this country has been underreported...”

**Ask students to journal for 5 minutes on the following topic:**

- Build on the author’s argument and write about a personal experience that exemplifies what shame means to your community. Challenge students to incorporate the literary devices used by the author into their writings.

**\*The second prompt can also be assigned as a take-home assignment!**



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### ACTIVITY DEBRIEF: SOCRATIC SEMINAR (30-40 MINUTES)

Briefly review the concept and definitions of racial trauma as outlined in the [Mental Health America resource](#). It can be helpful to ask students to reflect on the examples provided prior to this activity.

. Bring the class back together and encourage students to share what they wrote in a “Socratic Seminar” style. Have students move their desks in a circle in the classroom (if possible) for the discussion.

. Have students who are comfortable share with the group some passages in this chapter they related to. You can use the following discussion questions:

. Do you have any personal experiences relevant to the overall theme of this chapter?

. Was there any particular literary device that evoked a strong emotion in you? How, and why?

. If you don’t have a particular personal experience that relates to the chapter, how do you think you’ve gained new understanding for people of different backgrounds?

-Finally, ask students to consider the quote “My shame is not cultural but political. It is being painfully aware of the power dynamic that pulls at the levers of social interactions and the cringing indignity of where I am in that order either as the afflicted–or as the afflictor.”

. What do you think the difference between cultural shame and political shame is, based on Hong’s quote?

. Connecting this quote to the earlier video we watched, what do you think are some of the “levers” that pull at social interactions that Hong describes? Think about political and economic factors especially.

. How does this connect to the overall themes the author addresses in relation to immigration, shame, and innocence?



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