



TITLE

ANGEL ISLAND IMMIGRATION STATION: “WELCOME” TO THE U.S.!

GRADE LEVEL: MIDDLE SCHOOL TO HIGH SCHOOL

SUBJECT: Social Studies

THEME: Bias and Stereotype, Civil Rights, Colonization, Identity and Culture, and Immigration

STANDARDS: UCLA Public History Initiative: Era 6: The Development of the Industrial United States (1870–1900), Standard 2: Massive immigration after 1870 and how new social patterns, conflicts, and ideas of national unity developed amid growing cultural diversity.

OBJECTIVES:

Students will be able to:

- Learn about the immigration experience for the Chinese who entered the United States on the West Coast through Angel Island, in the San Francisco Bay, between 1910 and 1940.
- Understand the impact of the Chinese Exclusion Act on the processing of Chinese immigrants at the station on Angel Island.
- Compare and contrast the immigrant experiences of Chinese and other Asians arriving in Angel Island to that of Europeans arriving through Ellis Island, N.Y.

ESSENTIAL QUESTIONS:

- How did the Chinese Exclusion Act of 1882 affect the immigration experience for people from China and other Asian countries entering the United States on the West Coast?

CLASSROOM TIME:

2 Class periods (including Film)

Note:

This lesson is meant as an introduction to the Angel Island Immigration Station located in the San Francisco Bay Area (California) which served as the main immigration facility on the West Coast of the United States from 1910 to 1940. For those who are interested in pursuing a deeper journey and research into the history of Angel Island, the Angel Island Immigration Station Foundation (AIISF: see Resources) has created a curriculum guide that provides opportunities for more extensive study.

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FOUNDATION

LAST UPDATE: JAN, 1ST, 2024



Background:

It is estimated that 500,000 immigrants from 80 countries- ranging from Australia, New Zealand, Canada, Mexico, Central and South America, Russia- were processed at Angel Island; however, most of the immigrants coming through Angel Island were from China and other Asian countries, and detained for extended periods of time and faced more rigorous process to arrive at the mainland due to the passing of the Chinese Exclusion Act in 1882, which barred Chinese laborers from coming to the United States, limited immigration to those who have relatives in the U.S., and prevented Chinese immigrants from becoming naturalized citizens.

After the passing of the Chinese Exclusion Act, customs service officers individually and arbitrarily implemented the law. By the first decade of the 20th century, a national system of procedures became standardized and enforcement fell on the Bureau of Immigration.

In 1906, earthquake and fire destroyed municipal records in San Francisco which opened the opportunity for the city's Chinese residents to claim that they were born in the U.S. and therefore American citizens. As citizens, these Chinese residents could travel to China and report their wives had given birth to children who would be eligible and provided documents for U.S. citizenship. Some of these documents would be used for their actual children or sold to family, friends, or strangers to immigrate to the U.S. The term for children immigrating under the pretense of a son/daughter were called "paper sons/daughters".

By 1910, immigration officials created a facility on Angel Island in San Francisco Bay to isolate Chinese immigrants from communication with people on the mainland, quarantine from diseases, and prevent escape. Chinese immigrants faced intense interrogations by the Board of Special Inquiry, which was composed of two immigrant inspectors, a stenographer, and a translator, responsible for preventing illegal entry of people who assumed identities as skilled workers or families of Chinese Americans. These interrogations would be conducted over the course of several hours or even days, where the immigrant would be asked about minute details regarding their family history, location of the village and homes. Their witnesses, other family members in the United States, would be called forward to corroborate these answers. Inconsistencies in testimonies would prolong questioning or give reason for deportation.

The wait for immigrants to get processed could take between weeks to years depending how long it would take to reach family members across the United States for testimony or appeal process for a rejected case. During detention, Chinese immigrants faced many emotions- disappointment, despair, loneliness, homesickness, and hope, which were expressed by poetry carved on the walls of the station, some which were preserved. More than 200 poems were recorded from the barracks of the immigration station, which is now a national historical landmark (established in 1997).



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ACTIVITY

1. Discussion or written reflection questions: What does it mean to be excluded or left out? Have you ever been in a situation where you were excluded or left out? How did it make you feel? Why do you think people sometimes exclude other people? (Questions to be modified based on grade level/age.)

2. Watch the film *Carved in Silence* by Felicia Lowe, which provides insight into the Chinese immigrants' experience at Angel Island. Discussion or written reflection questions:

- Why do you think the Chinese were denied citizenship in comparison to European immigrants?
- What are your thoughts on the interrogation process and the questions that were asked by the inspectors? Did you think the process/questions were fair?
- Imagine you and your parents are put into different rooms right now and asked the same questions regarding details of your home, how well would you and your parents do in providing the same/correct answer to these questions?
- A worksheet matrix to guide students in their viewing is also part of the AIISF curriculum guide:

https://static1.squarespace.com/static/5a81dadde9bdf9a97b0da7/t/5a85d4a4085229ab09ad5096/1518720164359/Curriculum_Guide_Lesson_05.pdf

If the film is unavailable, this activity can be skipped and, using the poems below, students can still offer reflections on the same questions.

3. Have students look through the selection of poems and oral histories from the book *Island* and allow students to reflect on two or more of them: Have them consider the tone of the poems or stories. Describe the feelings of the writer. Compare and contrast the selections. Poems are available through AIISF:
<https://www.aiisf.org/poems-and-inscriptions>

4. Assuming students have already studied Ellis Island and the experience of Europeans coming to America, have them compare and contrast the immigrant experiences. Discussion questions: How were Angel Island and Ellis Island similar and different as immigration stations? How were the experiences of immigrants who went through Angel Island similar to and different from immigrants who went through Ellis Island? Why do you think there were differences?

RESOURCES

Angel Island Immigration Station Foundation
<https://www.aiisf.org/history>

Angel Island Curriculum Guides
<https://www.aiisf.org/curriculum>

Film- *Carved in Silence* by Felicia Lowe. Available through the Angel Island Immigration Station Foundation (a 22 min. cut of *Carved in Silence* is available online: <https://vimeo.com/294645783>)

Angel Island Immigration Station Foundation
<https://www.aiisf.org/poems-and-inscriptions>

California Department of Parks and Recreation
https://www.parks.ca.gov/?page_id=1309



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RESOURCES

History.com: Angel Island Immigration Station. Provides a short history and contextual background, including information about the Chinese Exclusion Act (1882), with links to other resources.
<https://www.history.com/topics/immigration/angel-island-immigration-station>

Comparison of Ellis Island and Angel Island Immigration Lesson Plan
<https://immigrationhistory.org/lesson-plan/immigration-stations/>

Books:

Lai, Him Mark; Lim, Ginny; Yung, Judy. Island. Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2014.

Lee, Erika; Yung, Judy. Angel Island: Immigrant Gateway to America. Oxford University Press, 2010.



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