

Immigration Oral Histories (Using Chinese Immigrants to Greenville, MS as an example)

Grades 7-12; American History, Civics, American Studies, World History

Time Needed

One 80-minute class period

Objectives

SWBAT:

- Identify reasons for immigrants to immigrate to America
- Identify challenges immigrant and immigrant children face in America
- Compare the experiences of Mississippi Delta Chinese immigrants to Philadelphia immigrants
- Use oral histories to examine the experiences of immigrants in Philadelphia

Materials

Article, "Growing Up Chinese in Greenville, MS" by Frieda Seu Quon; chart paper, markers

Background

In the early 20th century Chinese began immigrating to the Mississippi Delta in search for opportunity and the chance at a better life. Once they arrived they were faced with challenges, including difficulty in fitting in with either the black or white populations of Greenville. The purpose of this lesson is to examine the challenges faced by Chinese immigrants in this new land, as well as to compare those challenges to the issues facing immigrants today in Philadelphia (or your hometown). This lesson may open students' eyes and create greater tolerance towards issues in their own communities, particularly those facing immigrants.

Procedure

1. Anticipatory Set

Have students respond to the following questions: Why do people from other countries immigrate to America? What are some challenges they might face once they arrive here? Discuss responses as a class.

2. Explain that you'll be learning about experiences of immigrants and their children in America. Tell students they'll be reading about Chinese immigrants in the Mississippi Delta. Have students make predictions about the types of challenges these immigrants may have faced based on their racial and cultural differences from the rest of the Delta population.

3. As a class, read "Growing Up Chinese in Greenville" (or have students read article in groups).

4. Divide students into groups of 3 or 4. Have groups write their responses to the following discussion questions on chart paper:

- a. What challenges did Quon's parents face once they arrived in Mississippi? Why do you think they chose to stay in Mississippi despite these challenges?
- b. How did Quon's family maintain their Chinese customs while assimilating into Delta culture?
- c. Should immigrants put more effort towards maintaining their native culture or should they focus their energy on assimilating into American culture as much as possible? Why? Which is more valuable for America?
- d. How did Quon deal with racism towards Chinese in the Delta? How do you think this compares with how immigrants in Philadelphia deal with discrimination?
- e. What questions would you ask Ms. Quon about her experiences?

5. Once students have recorded their responses, have groups share their discussion questions.

6. Culmination/Conclusion: How are the experiences of the Quon family similar to the experiences of all Americans? How were their goals/hopes/dreams similar to those of all Americans?

Evaluation

Students will use their understanding of the immigrant experience to develop an oral history of an immigrant (or immigrant's child). Students will interview an immigrant of their choosing to gain a deeper understanding of the experiences and challenges of those that have come to Philadelphia to seek opportunity.

**Note: In some classes, it may help students if the teacher first discusses what types of questions to ask and how to conduct an interview.*

In addition to the interview, students should write a one-page reflection on the insight they gained from their oral history on the immigrant experience. They may also reflect on how their attitudes towards immigrants have shifted during this experience. Students will submit this reflection along with a written transcript or audio tape of their oral history.