

Early Japanese Immigration

Overview:

Japanese immigration to California began in significant numbers in the mid-1880s, when the Japanese government first allowed emigration. The Chinese Exclusion Act of 1882 had created a shortage of cheap Asian labor, and employers encouraged Japanese immigration to fill the gap. Many more came after 1898 from Hawaii, when the U.S. annexation of Hawaii allowed them to travel without passports. Although the Japanese population in the Valley was small relative to the Chinese, immigrants from Japan suffered from similar prejudice and racism. Japanese Americans (and others of America's "minorities") have contributed to some of the basic tenets of America's foundational ideals and promises- of life, liberty, and property. Although denied many of those freedoms at various times in their histories, they sought to secure the guarantees of the Constitution and the promise of the American dream. In this lesson students will determine reasons for immigration and the hardships endured by Japanese immigrants.

Lesson Summary:

Students will utilize primary and secondary resources to gain an understanding of the Japanese immigration experience. This lesson focuses on the cultural and heritage narratives of the Japanese immigrants and the later generations of Japanese Americans.

Grade Level:

Secondary

Standards:

- Standard 1B: The student understands the rapid growth of cities and how urban life changed.
- Standard 1C: The student understands how agriculture, mining, and ranching were transformed.
- Standard 2A: The student understands the sources and experiences of the new immigrants.
- Standard 2B: The student understands "scientific racism", race relations, and the struggle for equal rights.
- CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RH.6-12.1

- CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RH.6-12.2
- CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RH.6-12.3
- CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RH.6-12.7
- CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RH.6-12.9

Learning Objectives:

Students will be able to:

- Explain the contribution of early Japanese immigrants to the development of California's agricultural industries.
- Describe the obstacles encountered by Japanese immigrants as they struggled to make a living and find a place in American society.
- Analyze the condition and status of early Japanese immigrants.
- Report on ethnic enclaves that made contributions to the history of the students' community.

Materials:

- History of Japanese in Sanger
- Japanese American Businesses in Fresno Chinatown, 1940
- Japanese American Residential Desegregation, Fresno, 1900-1980- Fresno Past & Present, Fall 1981
- Remembering Central Fish Market by Brad Shirakawa
- The Japanese Americans - Maruko Cyclery by Brad Shirakawa
- Images
- Poster board
- Markers, pens, crayons

Introductory Activity:

Discuss with students the background information below:

Japanese immigrants began their journey to the United States in search of peace and prosperity, leaving an unstable homeland for a life of hard work and the chance to provide a better future for their children. However, before the first generation of immigrants could enjoy the fruits of their labor, they had to overcome hostile neighbors, harsh working conditions, and repeated legislative attacks on their very presence in the country. Students will work together to analyze sources to gain an understanding of diversity and

immigration. This lesson can be used alone or within the unit. In 1869, when the transcontinental railroad laid its last piece of track, Chinese workers, the labor force behind the building of the railroad, were left to seek employment elsewhere. At the same time, in the San Joaquin and Sacramento valleys, Northern California's farming and agriculture industry was fast-expanding to meet the needs of a growing State. It was in these areas that many displaced Chinese workers migrated. Despite the clear need for labor in the orchards, fields, and vineyards of these regions anti-Chinese sentiment, formalized in the Chinese Exclusion Act of 1882, was rampant – forcing many to move to urban areas where Chinatowns offered some form of protection against racial violence. As Chinese workers were forced out, labor needs in these agriculture and farming areas started to be filled by newly arrived immigrants from Japan. Post 1900, immigration from Japan to Hawaii and the West Coast of America was fueled by people seeking economic security and many Japanese, particularly those from rural farming and fishing villages, took advantage of Japan's loosening emigration laws to seek employment overseas. Communities were born all over rural California as people from the same prefecture in Japan often settled near each other, many making the transition over time from agricultural laborers to tenant farmers and even business owners.

Learning Activity:

- Divide students into five groups.
- Assign each group a different resource. Ask students to discuss what they think the key takeaways are from their assigned resource.
- Have each group create a poster with the key learnings from their resource that will be presented to the class.
- Allow students time to present their poster and explain their key takeaways.
- Encourage discussion as a class after each presentation.

Key Questions:

1. Why were the Japanese encouraged to live in Fresno?

2. What types of jobs did the Japanese have in Fresno? What types of businesses were owned?
3. How did WWII affect American born Japanese citizens?
4. Who were the Issei?
5. What were some of the reasons the Japanese were discriminated against in the late 1800s to early 1900s?
6. What is internal colonialism?
7. What can we learn about the culture and lives of Japanese Americans from Brad Shirakawa's recollections?

Extension Activity:

Have students write a 1 to 2 page narrative from the perspective of a Japanese immigrant in Fresno using one of the images provided. Who was this person? What kind of job did they have? Where did they live?

Assessment:

Assess the student's engagement as part of the group, their participation in the project, and their role in the presentation.