

SMALLPOX, FEAR & RACISM

during 1800s San Francisco



FOR GRADES 6-12
RUN TIME: 2 HR FOR 1-2
ACTIVITIES (4 HR FOR ALL)

CURRICULUM DEVELOPERS

Ruchi Shah
Kathy Lu
Julia Wang

REVIEW BOARD

Dr. Nayan Shah
Sheena Iwamoto
Hilary Gushwa

SLIDE DESIGNER

Angela Kong

Summary & Key
Understandings - 2

Common Core Standards - 5

Activities - 6

Resource List - 15

on xenophobia & public health

In times of great emergency, blame and anger manifest in violent ways toward perceived outsiders. The COVID-19 pandemic is no exception. IHI is proud to present this series of lesson plans investigating the link between xenophobia and public health crises through in-depth historical case studies. This free instructor guide presents important but sobering history, highlights how past events mirror the present, and challenges both students and teachers to consider the COVID-19 pandemic in all its dimensions and take action against racism, fear, and hate.

Made possible with funding from CT Humanities.

this lesson plan contains:

- Customizable slide deck tailored for remote teaching
- 3 hands-on student activities involving primary source analysis
- Customizable student worksheets
- List of further resources to guide teacher research & preparation

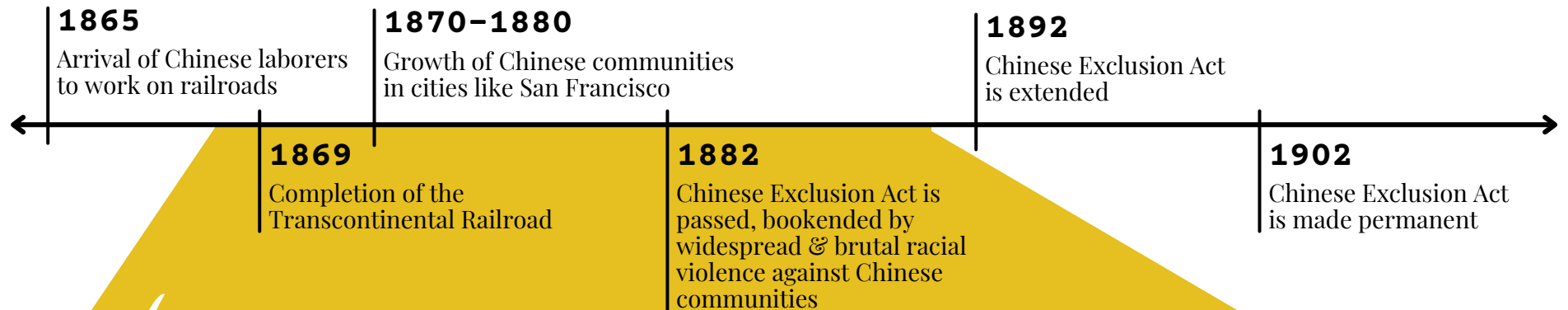
INSTRUCTOR'S QUICK SUMMARY

- 4 devastating smallpox epidemics occurred in San Francisco in the 1800s: in 1868, 1876, 1880, and 1887.
- San Francisco responded to these epidemics with racially targeted tactics that scapegoated the Chinese immigrant population in the city, including policies that forced Chinatown under close surveillance, prevented Chinatown residents from accessing healthcare resources, and attempted to further isolate and even exclude the Chinese.
- Thousands died during these epidemics, and the racist public health policies had little to no impact on stemming the spread of the disease. To the contrary, the introduction of the smallpox vaccine was the key factor in reducing the mortality rate in later outbreaks.
- Racial scapegoating still occurs today, notably in the 2020-21 novel coronavirus pandemic where East Asians and Asian Americans have been accused of spreading the virus and attacked in the streets. Encourage your students to make these connections and think critically about how to effectively combat public health crises and push back against discrimination.

DOWNLOAD THE SLIDES
FOR FULL HISTORY
LESSON & ACTIVITY
INSTRUCTIONS AT

tinyurl.com/smallpoxlesson

OVERVIEW OF 1800S CHINESE MIGRATION



TIMELINE OF SF SMALLPOX EPIDEMICS & RESPONSE



KEY UNDERSTANDINGS FOR STUDENTS

- Racism and anti-immigrant sentiment tend to spike during times of great emergency, such as public health crises. Racial scapegoating occurs when one racial group is **unfairly singled out and blamed** for a particular problem, leading to mistreatment and injustice.
 - Public health policy created based on racist beliefs or agenda have devastating consequences on the population and distract from more effective ways of preventing or stopping disease outbreaks.
 - Racism and xenophobia are not only confined to the past, but continue to impact us today. During public health crises today, including the COVID-19 pandemic, we see similar patterns of racial scapegoating. We all have a responsibility to fight back against racial scapegoating and advocate for better ways of protecting the public health.
- 

Activity 1: Mapping Stereotypes (*page 6*)

Students will analyze graphical primary sources (maps) to investigate how racialized perceptions of the Chinatown population impacted public health policy during San Francisco's smallpox epidemics.

Activity 2: Racial Scapegoating in Texts (*page 9*)

Students will analyze three textual primary sources from different points of view to understand how racial scapegoating was pushed, justified, or condemned.

Activity 3: Using Art for Good & Evil (*page 12*)

Students will interpret political cartoons from the time period and compare with activist artwork from COVID-19 pandemic. Can be adapted for younger students.

COMMON CORE STANDARDS

This lesson plan fulfils many Common Core standards in the areas of English & Language Arts. See below for a non-exhaustive list. For more information, please visit www.corestandards.org.

Grades 6-8

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RH.6-8.1
CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RH.6-8.2
CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RH.6-8.3
CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RH.6-8.7
CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RH.6-8.8
CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RI.6.1
CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RI.6.2
CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RI.6.3
CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RI.6.4

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RI.6.6
CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RI.6.7
CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RI.6.8
CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RI.6.9
CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RI.7.1
CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RI.7.2
CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RI.7.3
CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RI.7.4
CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RI.7.6

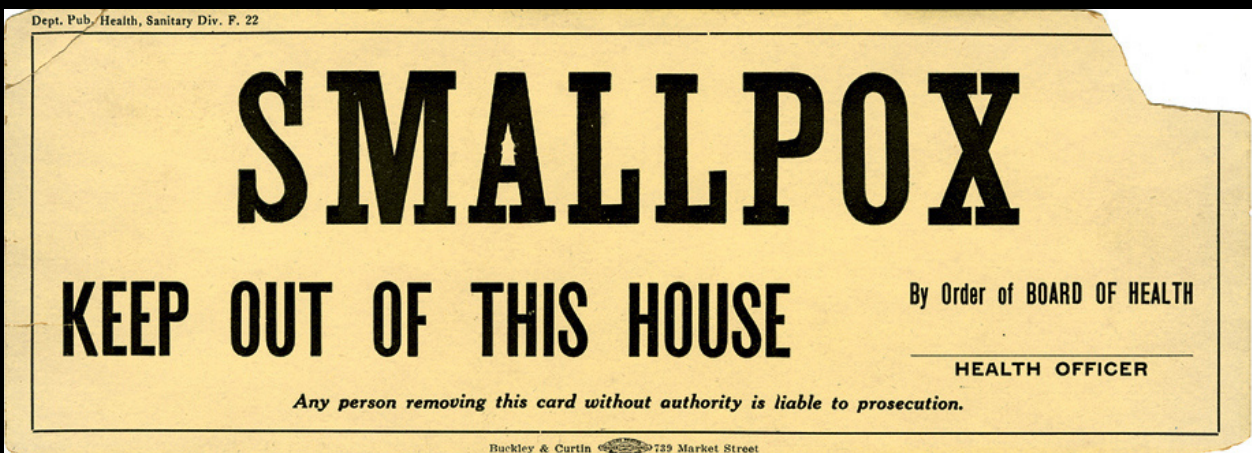
CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RI.7.8
CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RI.7.9
CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RI.8.1
CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RI.8.2
CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RI.8.3
CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RI.8.4
CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RI.8.6
CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RI.8.8
CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RI.8.9

Grades 9-12

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RH.9-10.1
CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RH.9-10.2
CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RH.9-10.4
CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RH.9-10.5
CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RH.9-10.6
CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RH.9-10.8
CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RH.9-10.9
CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RH.11-12.1
CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RH.11-12.2

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RH.11-12.3
CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RH.11-12.4
CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RH.11-12.6
CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RH.11-12.7
CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RH.11-12.8
CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RH.11-12.9
CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RI.9-10.1
CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RI.9-10.2
CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RI.9-10.3

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RI.9-10.4
CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RI.9-10.6
CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RI.9-10.8
CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RI.11-12.1
CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RI.11-12.2
CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RI.11-12.3
CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RI.11-12.4
CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RI.11-12.6



ACTIVITY 1: MAPPING STEREOTYPES

learning objectives

Students will be able to:

- Understand and analyze visual/graphical primary sources (ex. maps)
- Identify different elements of maps and interpret them, including biases involved in the creation of maps
- Deconstruct the racist biases and stereotyping of officials who mapped San Francisco's Chinatown in 1885

pre-class activity

Recommend assigning to students before class as homework

1. Introduce the topic of maps and mapping. Paper maps might seem less relevant to today's world, but things that we use every day, like a car's GPS, Google Maps, and even social media apps like Snapchat's Snap Maps, are still maps that we rely on in our daily routines. Maps can serve different purposes, such as finding out where you are, what businesses are located around you, or where your friends are in relation to you. This activity will ask students to create a map of their own neighborhood.
2. Ask students to draw a map of their own neighborhoods that highlights the places they go in their typical day/week. What's important to them about their neighborhood? They should include places that they frequently visit, such as their home, the parks in the neighborhood, the locations of part-time jobs or other activities, favorite restaurants in the area, etc. They should not try to draw every building or street, or copy directly from Google Maps, but use their own memories. Encourage students to use art supplies such as markers, colored pencils, and more.
 - *For younger students, consider splitting into 2 steps: 1) Create a list of their favorite local places. 2) Build a map around this list.*

Don't forget to download the all the slides & handouts at tinyurl.com/smallpoxlesson

in-class activity



1. (5-7 min) Split students into pairs and compare their maps to each other. Encourage students to think about how the perspective of the map-maker (or cartographer) affects their view of the neighborhood and how they designed the map. Students should discuss the following guiding questions:
 1. What is different between their maps? What is similar?
 2. What do these maps tell you about the person who made the map? For example, what can you learn about the map-maker's hobbies, priorities, or daily routine?
2. (5-7 min) Facilitate a brief classroom discussion on what students noticed about the differences in their maps and what that means for the purposes of their maps. Guide students to consider how maps contain the biases of the creator, so they may not be objective. By critically analyzing the goal or purpose of a map, we can better understand how maps may be biased or fail to reveal the whole picture.
 - *If students are not already familiar with the concept of stereotype, introduce the term and define it.*
3. (5 min) Introduce the 1885 Chinatown map activity by giving students a section of the “Official Map of “Chinatown” in San Francisco” (1885). Students can access a high resolution image of this map at immigranthistory.org/smallpoxmap. This map was created when a special survey was commissioned by the San Francisco government after multiple smallpox epidemics had broken out in the city. Chinese immigrants were targeted and blamed for spreading the epidemic, with little evidence. As part of this survey, officials entered every room and floor of Chinatown, noting elements like the number of inhabitants and sanitary condition of the rooms, which they described in an accompanying report on Chinatown for the public.
 - *If necessary, walk students through the map legend. For example, “C.” denotes “Chinese” areas, and “P.” stands for prostitution.*
4. (10 min) Distribute the worksheet (tinyurl.com/smallpoxlesson), and instruct students to examine the map on their own. They should observe and write down their answers to the questions on the handout.

5. (15 min) Once students are finished with the worksheet, lead a class discussion using the following questions:

1. What did you notice about the map?
2. What is labelled on the map? What do these labels/categories suggest about how the Board of Supervisors saw and portrayed Chinatown and its Chinese residents?
3. What stereotypes do you see being represented in this map?
4. How might this map have affected the general public's views of Chinatown and its residents? Remember that this was labeled an "Official" map of Chinatown, and that it was created by a government agency.

VOCABULARY LIST

Joss House: Chinese temple or shrine

Opium: an addictive drug which can be smoked

Gambling: playing games of chance like card games (ex. poker) for money

Pawn broker: someone who takes a valuable object and loans money to the owner in exchange for it. Once money is repaid, object is returned.

Stereotype: a widely held idea about a group of people that takes away the individual characteristics of a person.

post-class assignment

Ask students to write a reflection (or journal entry, if your class uses journals) responding to the following prompt:

1. In today's COVID-19 pandemic, many politicians and people in the media have used generalizations to talk about the coronavirus. For example, many public figures have called COVID-19 the "Chinese virus" or the "Kung Flu" and blamed Chinese people for spreading it. What connections do you see between what is going on right now, and what might have been happening in 1885 when the SF government was making the "Official Chinatown Map"? Do you see any repeated stereotypes or biases? How might these stereotypes harm the communities they target?

ACTIVITY 2: RACIAL SCAPEGOATING IN TEXT

learning objectives

Students will be able to:

- Understand and analyze textual primary sources from a variety of sources/authors
- Identify author's position and how the position is supported, including the rhetorical strategies used
- Understand how Chinese residents and Chinatown were viewed and scapegoated by officials and other residents of San Francisco during epidemics in the 1800s

In this activity, students will be reading and analyzing three excerpts on the Chinese and Chinatown in San Francisco during the smallpox epidemics of the 1870s and 1880s. Two use racist stereotypes to argue that the Chinese in Chinatown should be discriminated against as part of public health policy, while one defends the Chinese passengers and argues that they have been unfairly treated.

VOCABULARY LIST

Unscrupulous: Dishonest, not having morals

Treacherous: Disloyal, betraying or tricking someone

Sanitary: Clean, germ-free

Concealed: Hidden

Distilling: To make very concentrated or strong

Contaminate: Make dirty

Atmosphere: Air

Alien: Different from, not belonging

Promiscuousness: Being amoral, having many sexual relationships

Ventilation: Breathing, the circulation of air

Unaccountable: Can't be explained

Stench: Bad smell

Plague: Sickness

Quarantine: Separating from other people to prevent spreading disease

activity instructions

*Don't forget to download the
all the slides & handouts at
tinyurl.com/smallpoxlesson*

1. (5 min) Distribute the Textual Analysis worksheet to students and explain the historical context behind the primary sources. These three excerpts discuss Chinese and Chinatown in San Francisco during the smallpox epidemics of the 1870s and 1880s.
2. (15 min) Instruct students to read these excerpts and think about their purposes in relation to the Chinese in San Francisco by answering the following questions on the worksheet (reproduced below for teacher reference). You may use the rhetorical triangle to guide student analysis.
 1. What is the author's background?
 2. Who is their intended audience?
 3. What adjectives are being used to describe Chinese people? What do they mean?
 4. What are the different actions being suggested in these excerpts? If the passage does not suggest a particular action or policy, what do you think the author would want to do based on their statements?
3. (10 min) Split students into pairs and instruct them to share their answers to these rhetorical analysis questions, then analyze the texts using the below guiding questions:
 1. What is the author's motivation and intended impact?
 2. What tools or strategies did they use to make their argument? For example, did they use descriptive language? Comparisons? Generalizations or stereotypes?
 3. How convincing do you find these strategies? Why?
4. (3-5 min) Bring the students back together as a class and introduce the concept of "scapegoating." Scapegoating occurs when a person or a group of people is targeted and blamed for a bad event/thing without merit. For example, the Chinese were scapegoated in the 1800s smallpox epidemics even though there was little evidence that they were the cause of the disease outbreaks. Scapegoating a particular racial group occurs frequently and often reflects racist beliefs and prejudices, which can lead to harmful consequences such as unfair treatment and violence.

5. (8-10 min) Lead the students in a discussion of racial scapegoating using the below questions:

1. What did you see in the documents that might show why the Chinese were scapegoated? How might politicians from that time have benefited from this move? How might people outside of the Chinese community have received this?
2. Where else have you seen people use racial scapegoating?
3. In the COVID-19 pandemic, Chinese and other Asians have been scapegoated for spreading the coronavirus. What similarities do you see between what is happening now, versus during the 1800s? Do you see any similar language being repeated?
4. What are the impacts of scapegoating?



ACTIVITY 3: USING ART FOR GOOD & EVIL

learning objectives

Students will be able to:

- Understand & interpret visual primary sources, including artwork
- Analyze imagery and symbolism in political cartoons
- Identify common themes between multiple representations of Chinese residents of San Francisco
- Analyze implications of racist depictions of Chinese in America

introduction

This activity will analyze three political cartoons published in San Francisco newspapers between 1881 and 1911, during which there were multiple smallpox epidemics which were blamed on the Chinese Americans in Chinatown. These epidemics occurred from 1868-1869, 1876-1877, 1880, and 1887. Chinatown's crowded environment, along with racist stereotypes about its Chinese residents, was blamed for spreading this disease.

Don't forget to download the all the slides & handouts at tinyurl.com/smallpoxlesson

Background on Political Cartoons:

1. "The Gate of the End of the World" (1911) depicts the San Francisco Pesthouse. This pesthouse was where patients with contagious diseases were quarantined, as well as the only public health facility in San Francisco where Chinese Americans could go for medical treatment. Even regular hospitalization during this time did not guarantee recovery from disease.
2. "Three Graces" (1882) represents the widespread belief (which even public health officials spread) that Chinese residents of Chinatown spread disease through the air with their "foul and disgusting vapors."
3. "A Statue for Our Harbor" (1881) shows an imagining of the Statue of Liberty, which was under construction at the time, on the San Francisco harbor.

activity instructions

1. (10 min) Put the students in groups of 4 and give one political cartoon to each group (links to [Gate of the End of the World](#), [Three Graces](#), and [Statue for Our Harbor](#)) to discuss. Tell them to look up the definitions of unknown words in their cartoon, or provide with a copy of the vocabulary list on Page 14. Ask them to fill out Worksheet #1 (download: tinyurl.com/smallpoxlesson) as a group.
2. (12-15 min) Instruct students to designate two members as “explorers” and give each explorer an [Explorer Worksheet \(Worksheet 2\)](#). Ask each explorer to visit a group studying a different cartoon. The two members remaining will act as “storytellers” and share the group’s findings about their assigned cartoon with visiting explorers. Afterward, the two explorers will return to their group and report back on what they learned. They can use the following questions to guide their discussion:
 1. Are the focuses of these cartoons different? What stereotypes about Chinese residents are being portrayed in each?
 2. Based on the cartoons’ content, how do you think Chinatown residents may have been treated by others in San Francisco?
3. (10 min) Ask students to visit this website (immigranthistory.org/covidart) to view examples of contemporary artwork depicting Asian Americans during the COVID-19 pandemic. Instruct students to pick one of their favorite images, and fill out [Worksheet #3](#) together as a group.
4. (5-8 min) Bring the class back together and lead a discussion on their findings. Finish with the following questions:
 1. What similarities or differences do you see between this artwork and the political cartoons? These pieces of art were all created during public health crises, so why do you think their messages turned out so differently?
 2. What role can artists play in changing public perceptions?



post-class assignment *(optional)*

Ask students to create their own political cartoon or graphic to send an important message of their choosing about the COVID-19 pandemic. Encourage students to consider what elements they found particularly powerful and compelling about the artworks analyzed in class, and incorporate those elements into their own art. Artworks can be displayed in class or shared on social media afterward.

VOCABULARY LIST

Malaria: A disease that causes fever, chills, and sweating, that can be deadly

Smallpox: A very contagious disease that causes flu-like symptoms and a rash. In the past, it was extremely deadly and left people with bad scarring from the rash.

Leprosy: A disease that causes skin lesions, lumps, and disfigurement

Pesthouse: A building to separate those infected with a contagious disease

Immorality: Not having morals or values

Filth: Dirtiness

Labor: Work force

RESOURCES & READINGS

1. Shah, Nayan. *Contagious Divides: Epidemics and Race in San Francisco's Chinatown*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 2001.
2. Immigrant History Initiative. *500 Years of Migration*, published 2018, <https://www.immigranthistory.org/chineseamerican.html>
3. New York Historical Society, *Chinese American: Exclusion/Inclusion Curriculum Guide*, published 2014, <https://chsa.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/09/Chinese-American-Classroom-Materials-1.pdf>
4. Chinese Historical Society of America, *San Francisco Chinatown 1906-2006: Selected Milestones*, published 2006, http://www.chsa.org/wp-content/uploads/2010/05/Chinatown_Rising_Timeline.pdf

Image Credits

Page 1: Keystone View Company

Page 5: National Library of Medicine

Page 11: Arnold Genthe (*left*), Library of Congress (*right*)



All Rights Reserved.

You may use these materials only for your personal, or your organization's internal, use. You may redistribute, alter or modify these materials for any non-commercial educational purpose, provided that, in all cases, you appropriately credit IHI as the source of the information and provide a link to the website (www.immigranthistory.org).