

ACTIVITY

Supporting Question 2: The Impacts of Detention on Immigrants and Their Descendants

Overview

About This Activity

Students explore Supporting Question 2 through a series of activities that help them understand the impact of detention at the Angel Island Immigration Station on immigrants and their descendants. They conclude with a Formative Task that asks them to submit an exit card explaining this impact using evidence from featured sources.

Supporting Question	How did border enforcement at the Angel Island Immigration Station impact immigrants and their descendants?
Formative Task	Students complete an Exit Card explaining three ways that border enforcement at the Angel Island Immigration Station impacted immigrants and their descendants, using evidence from at least two featured sources.
Featured Sources	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Video: Paper Sons and Daughters (0:00–5:41) • Reading: Paper Sons and Daughters and the Complexity of Choices during the Exclusion Era • Reading: Angel Island Poetry Find these materials in this Google Folder .

Procedure

Activity 1: Exploring the Impacts of Detention at Angel Island

In the following activities, students will be exploring the impacts of detention at Angel Island and the personal stories of immigrants. To help them develop a sense of historical empathy and build the schema necessary to delve into these stories, ask them to reflect privately in their journals on borders that they have encountered in their own lives. Be sure to tell students that they will be able to share their responses if they choose, but it is not a requirement. You might want to return to the definition of *border* that students developed in the “Staging the Question” section:

- What borders exist in your neighborhood, your school's neighborhood, or your community?
- What purposes do these borders serve?
- What messages do these borders send to those on either side?
- How have these borders impacted you? How have you negotiated or challenged these borders?

Give volunteers the opportunity to share, but allow students to keep their responses private if they choose.

(Note that some students may need to take extra care of themselves during this discussion if the subject feels personal to their lives or experiences. Teachers know their students best, so we encourage you to adapt the activity for your particular context.)

Activity 2: Students Watch “Paper Sons and Daughters”

Transition by explaining to students that over the course of the next two days, they will be exploring the impacts of detention at the Angel Island Immigration Station and the personal stories of immigrants detained there. The video [Paper Sons and Daughters \(0:00–5:41\)](#) highlights historian Judy Yung’s family story and explores why some Chinese immigrants, the majority of whom came through the Angel Island Immigration Station, attempted to enter the country with fraudulent documents. (Note that this video contains images of political cartoons with racist, anti-Chinese imagery. We recommend that you view the clip in advance and make choices about how students will engage with it in order to decide if it is appropriate for your students or if they could benefit from additional processing.)

Play the video for your students, and to help them process, pause at the time stamps below and use the following questions for quick pair-shares:

- (0:40) Why weren’t Judy and her siblings allowed to use their real names?
- (2:25) What did it mean to be a “paper” son or daughter? How is the “paper son” system connected to the history of Chinese exclusion?
- (5:41) What effect did the decision to enter the country as a paper son or daughter have on Chinese immigrants and their descendants?

After students have finished watching the video, transition into a class discussion of the broader themes raised by the video, centered on the following questions:

- Why did Judy Yung have two names? What do her two names illustrate about the sacrifices her family made to belong in the United States?
- What are some reasons why people might have to keep part of their story and/or their identity secret today?
- What impact do those kinds of secrets have?

Activity 3: Exploring the Complexity of Choices during the Exclusion Era

To help provide more context for Judy Yung's personal story, pass out the reading **Paper Sons and Daughters and the Complexity of Choices during the Exclusion Era**. Read the source aloud and ask students to annotate it using an annotation strategy of your choice. Then break the class into small groups of three to four students and have them discuss the following questions:

1. How did paper sons and daughters, and the people who helped them, explain their decision to resist the exclusion laws?
2. How were the Chinese immigrants who entered the country as paper sons and daughters affected by their decision? How did their decision affect their descendants?
3. How does the concept of "moral luck" relate to the choices of paper sons and daughters?

Close the lesson by asking students to complete a [Connect, Extend, Challenge](#) prompt on a separate piece of paper in response to their exploration of the personal stories of paper sons and daughters.

- **Connect:** How do the ideas and information in this reading connect to what you already know about borders and/or the experiences of immigrants at the Angel Island Immigration Station?
- **Extend:** How does this reading extend or broaden your thinking about borders and/or the experiences of immigrants at the Angel Island Immigration Station?
- **Challenge:** Does this reading challenge or complicate your understanding? What new questions does it raise for you?

Collect students' responses and read through them before the beginning of the next class.

Day 2

Activity 1: Connect to Students' Responses from the Previous Class

Begin by sharing some key takeaways from students' responses to the **Connect, Extend, Challenge** prompt from the previous class. You might share patterns that you notice in students' responses or anonymously share several responses that resonated with you.

Activity 2: Set the Context for Exploring Poetry from the Angel Island Immigration Station

Then explain to students that they will be deepening their exploration of the personal impacts of detention at Angel Island by considering poetry carved into the walls of the immigration station. Share with students that the poems were written on the barrack walls by Chinese immigrant detainees at Angel Island. The poems were for the most part not signed, most likely because the authors wanted to avoid punishment from authorities at Angel Island.

To give students more context about the poetry, you might project the following paragraph and read it aloud. Explain that the quote is from a Chinese immigrant named Mr. Ng, who was only 15 years old when he was detained at Angel Island.

The people at Angel Island wrote poems all over the walls, where the hand could reach, even in the bathroom. Some were carved, but most were written in ink. There were many

carved in the hall leading to the basketball court, because the wood there was softer. It was not easy finding space on the wall to compose a poem, so sometimes when I thought of something lying in bed, I would bend over and write a poem under my bed which was made of canvas. Sometimes when someone didn't like what another person wrote, he would deface the poem, saying, "What a smart aleck, trying to write poetry like the others." Sometimes, people fought over poems. A lot of people there didn't know how to write poetry. They weren't highly educated, but they knew some of the rules of poetry. You can't say that the poems were great, but they expressed real feelings.¹

Activity 3: Analyze Poetry from the Angel Island Immigration Station

For the next activity, students will work in groups of three to five. Pass out **Angel Island Poetry reading** and choose the read-aloud strategy that students will use to read the poems in their small groups.

Once students have read the poems together, give them the opportunity to emotionally process the poetry in a private journal reflection. First, ask each student to highlight one or two lines from the poems. Students should select the line or lines that resonate with them for one of the following reasons:

- Because of something about who I am (What in particular?)
- Because it reflects human nature or how people are in the world (What human characteristics or ways of being?)
- Because of how the poet expressed the idea (What did the poet do that makes you feel this way?)

Ask students to write a journal reflection discussing how their selected lines respond to one of the prompts above. Close by asking students to share their selected poetry lines using the [Wraparound](#) strategy. Then ask volunteers to share some of their journal responses. Finally, discuss the following questions as a class:

- What do these poems illustrate about the experiences of Chinese immigrants detained at Angel Island?
- What do the poems illustrate about this chapter of immigration history in the United States?

Formative Task

Students Submit an Exit Card

Ask students to submit an [exit card](#) explaining three ways that border enforcement at the Angel Island Immigration Station impacted immigrants and their descendants. Students should use evidence from at least two featured sources to support their thinking.

¹ Him Mark Lai, Genny Lim, and Judy Yung, eds., *Island: Poetry and History of Chinese Immigrants on Angel Island, 1910–1940* (University of Washington Press, 1980), 136.