

SAN FRANCISCO'S CHINATOWN

Organizing Questions

- What factors contribute to the creation and sustainment of ethnic enclaves? What value do they have for their communities?
- What perceptions did Chinese residents and visitors have of San Francisco's Chinatown? How did these compare with the impressions of non-Chinese visitors?
- What role did Chinese railroad workers play in the growth of San Francisco's Chinatown?
- What tangible and intangible benefits did Chinatowns provide Chinese railroad workers in the United States?

Introduction

In this lesson, students learn about the historical and cultural background of San Francisco's Chinatown and its significance to the Chinese community in the United States over time. After reading primary sources, they compare the depictions of Chinatown written by non-Chinese with those written by Chinatown residents and visitors of Chinese descent. They examine the connections between the Chinese railroad workers and Chinatown and look at the role of Chinatown in sustaining a shared identity among the Chinese community in the United States. Finally, students reflect on the legacy of the Chinese railroad workers by designing a memorial in their honor.

Objectives

In this lesson, students will

- practice using primary sources as a tool to understand and analyze history;
- understand how status, language, and class influence how history is remembered;
- become familiar with the history of Chinatown in San Francisco and its importance to the Chinese community;
- understand the importance of Chinatowns and especially San Francisco's Chinatown as a place of protection for Chinese workers;
- explain how Chinese railroad workers contributed to the growth and vitality of San Francisco's Chinatown; and
- explain how Chinatown's symbolism has helped perpetuate the legacy of Chinese railroad workers and convey their contribution to the expansion of the United States.

Connections to Curriculum Standards

This lesson has been designed to meet certain national history, social studies, and Common Core State Standards as defined by the National Center for History in the Schools, the National Council for the Social Studies, and the Common Core State Standards Initiative. The standards relevant to this lesson are listed here.

United States History (from National Center for History in the Schools)

- Era 4, Standard 2C, Grades 5–12: Assess the ways immigrants adapted to life in the United States and to the hostility sometimes directed at them by the nativist movement and the Know Nothing party. [Assess the importance of the individual in history]
- Era 6, Standard 2A, Grades 5–12: Trace patterns of immigrant settlement in different regions of the country and how new immigrants helped produce a composite American culture that transcended group boundaries. [Reconstruct patterns of historical succession and duration]
- Era 6, Standard 2A, Grades 5–12: Assess the challenges, opportunities, and contributions of different immigrant groups. [Examine historical perspectives]
- Era 6, Standard 2B, Grades 5–12: Explain the rising racial conflict in different regions, including the anti-Chinese movement in the West and the rise of lynching in the South. [Explain historical continuity and change]
- Era 6, Standard 3A, Grades 9–12: Account for employment in different regions of the country as affected by gender, race, ethnicity, and skill. [Formulate historical questions]
- Era 10, Standard 2B, Grades 9–12: Identify the major issues that affected immigrants and explain the conflicts these issues engendered. [Identify issues and problems in the past]

National Social Studies Standards (from the National Council for the Social Studies)

- Culture; Thematic Strand I: Social studies programs should include experiences that provide for the study of culture and cultural diversity.
- Time, Continuity, and Change; Thematic Strand II: Social studies programs should include experiences that provide for the study of the ways human beings view themselves in and over time.
- People, Places, and Environments; Thematic Strand III: Social studies programs should include experiences that provide for the study of people, places, and environments.
- Individual Development and Identity; Thematic Strand IV: Social studies programs should include experiences that provide for the study of individual development and identity.
- Individuals, Groups, and Institutions; Thematic Strand V: Social studies programs should include experiences that provide for the study of interactions among individuals, groups, and institutions.

Reading Standards for Literacy in History/Social Studies (from the Common Core State Standards Initiative)

- Standard 4, Grades 9–10: Determine the meaning of words and

phrases as they are used in a text, including vocabulary describing political, social, or economic aspects of history / social science.

- Standard 7, Grades 11–12: Integrate and evaluate multiple sources of information presented in diverse formats and media (e.g., visually, quantitatively, as well as in words) in order to address a question or solve a problem.
- Standard 9, Grades 11–12: Integrate information from diverse sources, both primary and secondary, into a coherent understanding of an idea or event, noting discrepancies among sources.

Writing Standards for Literacy in History/Social Studies, Science, and Technical Subjects (from the Common Core State Standards Initiative)

- Standard 4, Grades 6–12: Produce clear and coherent writing in which the development, organization, and style are appropriate to task, purpose, and audience.
- Standard 6, Grades 9–12: Use technology, including the Internet, to produce, publish, and update individual or shared writing products, taking advantage of technology’s capacity to link to other information and display information flexibly and dynamically.
- Standard 9, Grades 6–12: Draw evidence from informational texts to support analysis, reflection, and research.

Materials

Handout 1, *Maps of San Francisco’s Chinatown*, 30 copies

Handout 2, *Descriptions of San Francisco’s Chinatown*, 30 copies

Handout 3, *Video Notes*, 30 copies

Handout 4, *Memorial to Chinese Railroad Workers*, 30 copies

Handout 5, *Review of Memorials to Chinese Railroad Workers*, 30 copies

Answer Key 1, *Descriptions of San Francisco’s Chinatown*

Answer Key 2, *Video Notes*

Video, “San Francisco’s Chinatown and the Chinese Railroad Workers,”
online at <https://youtu.be/asjiPpDm3EE>

Six sheets of butcher paper

Markers for six groups

Tape to affix butcher paper to walls of the classroom

Equipment

Computer with Internet access and a Flash-enabled or HTML5-supported web browser

Computer projector and screen

Computer speakers

15 computers with Internet access for student use

Teacher Preparation	<p>Instructions and materials are based on a class size of 30 students. Adjust accordingly for different class sizes.</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none">1. Make the appropriate number of copies of handouts.2. Become familiar with the content of all handouts and answer keys.3. Set up and test computer, projector, and speakers. Confirm ability to play audio and video and project sound audibly to students.4. View the video, "San Francisco's Chinatown and the Chinese Railroad Workers."
Time	Three 50-minute class periods, plus preparation
Procedures Before Day One	<ol style="list-style-type: none">1. Distribute one copy of Handout 1, <i>Maps of San Francisco's Chinatown</i>, to each student. Allow students several minutes to review the two maps and inform them that they will refer to these maps throughout the lesson.2. Distribute one copy of Handout 2, <i>Descriptions of San Francisco's Chinatown</i>, to each student. Instruct students to read the handout and answer the questions before the next class period. The handout contains several descriptions of San Francisco's Chinatown in the 19th century. Some of these are neutral descriptions, others are written by Chinese immigrants, and others are written by non-Chinese visitors to Chinatown.
Day One	<ol style="list-style-type: none">1. Convene the full class and discuss the questions on Handout 2, referring to Answer Key 1 as needed.2. Distribute one copy of Handout 3, <i>Video Notes</i>, to each student. Allow students several minutes to read through the questions.3. Inform students that they will view a lecture by Professor Gordon Chang on the history of San Francisco's Chinatown and what life was like there in the 19th century.4. View the video, "San Francisco's Chinatown and the Chinese Railroad Workers," online at https://youtu.be/asjiPpDm3EE.5. If necessary, pause the video at various points to allow students to respond to the prompts on Handout 3.6. Once the video has ended, allow students time to record their answers to the questions on Handout 3.7. Instruct students to complete Handout 3 as homework. Inform them that Professor Gordon Chang's video is online, so they can watch it again if needed.
Day Two	<ol style="list-style-type: none">1. Collect Handout 3 for assessment.2. Divide the class into six groups of five students each. Distribute one copy of Handout 4, <i>Memorial to Chinese Railroad Workers</i>, to each

student. Inform the class that they will work in groups to complete the project as described on the handout. Review the directions as a class and answer any questions students may have.

3. Distribute one piece of butcher paper and several markers to each group for use in completing their memorial.
4. Allow groups the remainder of the class period to complete the task described on Handout 4, checking in with students as needed.

Day Three

1. Direct students to reconvene in their groups and post their memorials around the classroom.
2. Distribute one copy of Handout 5, *Review of Memorials to Chinese Railroad Workers*, to each student. Allow students 30 minutes to complete a gallery walk in which they view and take notes on other groups' memorials and respond to the questions on Handout 5.
3. Collect Handout 5 for assessment.
4. Conclude the lesson with a class discussion, using the following questions as a guide:
 - What role did Chinatown play in supporting the work of the Chinese railroad workers?
 - How did Chinatown's importance increase for Chinese immigrants after the railroad was completed?
 - What do you wish Chinese immigrants to Chinatown had written about to provide us better insight today into what life was like there in the 19th century?

Assessment

The following are suggestions for assessing student work in this lesson:

1. Evaluate student responses to Handout 2, *Descriptions of San Francisco's Chinatown*, using Answer Key 1, *Descriptions of San Francisco's Chinatown*, as a guide.
2. Assess completeness of students' notes on Handout 3, *Video Notes*, using Answer Key 2, *Video Notes*, as a guide.
3. Evaluate group work on Handout 4, *Memorial for Chinese Railroad Workers*, using the criteria outlined on the handout as a guide.
4. Assess students' attention to other groups' memorials as demonstrated in their responses to Handout 5, *Review of Memorials to Chinese Railroad Workers*. Refer to each group's memorial to ensure that student responses are accurate.
5. Assess student participation in group and class discussions, evaluating students' ability to
 - clearly state their opinions, questions, and/or answers;
 - provide thoughtful answers;
 - exhibit sensitivity toward different cultures and ideas;
 - respect and acknowledge other students' comments; and
 - ask relevant and insightful questions.

MAPS OF SAN FRANCISCO'S CHINATOWN

1. Map of Chinatown in 1885

In 1885, soon after passage of the Chinese Exclusion Act, San Francisco's governing Board of Supervisors published this detailed map of Chinatown to accompany a report on vice and disease. The investigation characterized Chinatown as a hotbed of prostitution, gambling, opium dens, and squalor. Chinatowns became linked with moral and physical danger in the minds of many Americans, although critics maintained that the nearly all-male nature of immigrants, efforts to exclude Chinese workers from coming into the country, and discrimination created these conditions.

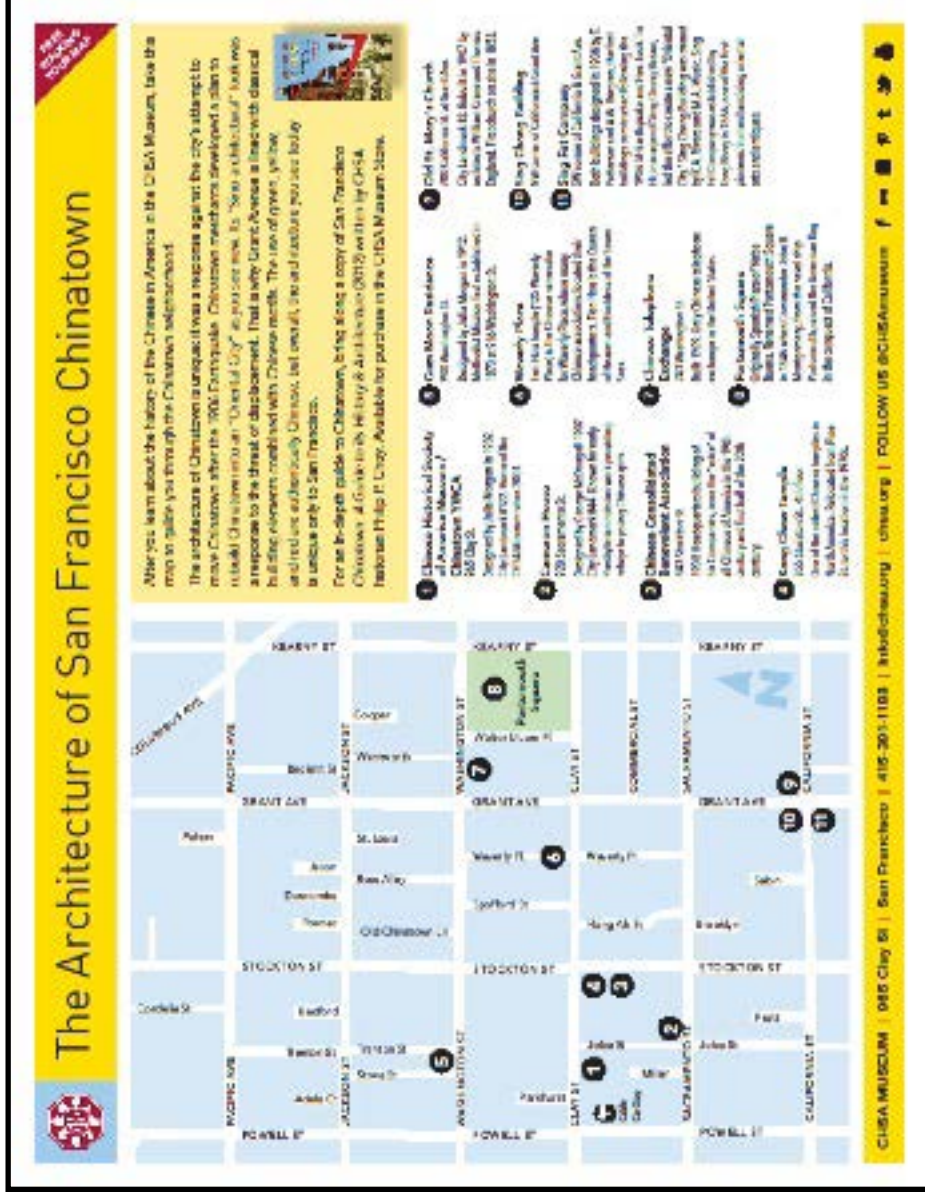


"Map of San Francisco Chinese Quarter," Report of the Special Committee of the Board of Supervisors of San Francisco on the condition of the Chinese quarter and the Chinese in San Francisco, July 1885. Reproduction. New York Historical Society.

handout 1

2. Chinatown Walking Tour Map from 2012.

This map is designed for visitors to Chinatown who are interested in learning about the neighborhood's history. It is based on information from *San Francisco Chinatown: A Guide to Its History and Architecture* (2012) by Philip Choy and is distributed by the Chinese Historical Society of America, an organization dedicated to the interpretation, promotion, and preservation of the social, cultural, and political history and contributions of the Chinese in America. The organization itself is located in Chinatown and organizes walking tours of Chinatown.



Keep these two maps of Chinatown handy for reference throughout the lesson. Take a moment to view both maps and note the following:

- How have the boundaries of Chinatown changed over time?
- What features of Chinatown are highlighted in each map? How might you explain these differences?

DESCRIPTIONS OF SAN FRANCISCO'S CHINATOWN

Instructions: Read the following descriptions of San Francisco's Chinatown in the 19th century, divided into four categories:

1. Introduction to Chinatown
2. Photographs of Chinatown pre-1906
3. Chinatown as described by non-Chinese
4. Chinatown as described by Chinese

After you finish reading this entire handout, respond to the questions below on a separate sheet of paper or digitally, following your teacher's instruction.

Questions:

1. Why did so many Chinese immigrants to the United States congregate in San Francisco's Chinatown?
2. What were the most noteworthy aspects of Chinatown for non-Chinese observers?
3. What aspects of Chinatown did Chinese immigrants emphasize?
4. Why did the characterizations of Chinatown from non-Chinese dominate general impressions of the neighborhood in the United States?
5. What impression do the photographs convey of Chinatown?
6. Which written descriptions of Chinatown best match the photographs?

***Important note:** Several of the primary-source descriptions below use the terms "Chinaman" and "Chinamen," which are now considered offensive. These terms have been denoted with an asterisk below to indicate that you should not use these terms in writing or speech.

1. Introduction to Chinatown

Almost as soon as Chinese came to America, they banded together in a distinctive community. In 1851, a San Francisco newspaper reported, "About 200 Chinamen* have ... formed an encampment on a vacant lot at the head of Clay Street. They have put up about 30 tents, which look clean and around which are scattered the various articles of Chinawares and tools which they brought over. They look cheerful and happy." This was the beginning of what was first dubbed "Little China," and later, "Chinatown." Because there was not enough timber to supply the demands of the gold-rush boomtown, entire buildings were actually shipped from China and reassembled in San Francisco. ...

By the 1870s, Chinatown had definite boundaries—Kearney, Stockton, Sacramento, and Pacific Streets. It could not expand farther because it was hemmed in by the business district of the city, and conditions became ever more crowded. The Chinatown businesses were small, as one writer noted: “A space in a wall of no greater dimensions than a large dry goods box furnishes ample room for a cigar stand; and a cobbler will mend your shoes in an area window, or an unused door step. Nothing goes to waste.”

blight—something that impedes growth or development

San Francisco’s white citizens regarded Chinatown as a blight, and the city health officer declared, “Some disease of a malignant form may break out among [the Chinese] and communicate itself to our Caucasian population. Their mode of living is the most abject in which it is possible for human beings to exist.”

To outsiders, Chinatown became a feared and mysterious place, “a system of alleys and passages ...into which the sunlight never enters; where it is dark and dismal even at noonday. A stranger attempting to explore them, would be speedily and hopelessly lost ... Often they have no exit—terminating in a foul court, a dead wall, a gambling or opium den.”

opium den—an establishment where opium (an addictive narcotic drug made from the dried, condensed juice of a poppy) was sold and smoked

Source: Philip P. Choy. (2012). *San Francisco Chinatown: A Guide to Its History & Architecture*. City Lights, p. 67.

Chinatown shops sold medicines, food, and other articles imported from China. Chinese stores were social centers that often doubled as banks. People could obtain loans there or arrange to have the money they earned sent home to their families. Public bulletin boards featured announcements of public interest. The first Chinese American newspaper, the *Golden Hills News*, began in San Francisco in 1854. Many others followed.

Small Confucian and Buddhist temples could be found tucked away on side streets, providing another link with the Chinese homeland. These religious centers were sometimes called “joss houses,” because of the Chinese practice of burning joss sticks, or incense, as a sign of devotion.

During the first century of Chinese immigration [that is, the 19th century], the proportion of males to females was very high. In 1900, about 95 percent of Chinese Americans were male. The members of this “bachelor society” often shared dormitory-like rooms that offered little more than a place to sleep. The bachelors’ favorite recreation was gambling. The Chinatowns had many gambling halls, marked by signs (in Chinese) reading “Riches and Plenty” or “Winning Hall.” Lotteries and such games as fan-tan and mah-jongg were popular.

fan-tan—gambling game played in China for centuries

Source: Philip P. Choy. (2012). *San Francisco Chinatown: A Guide to Its History & Architecture*. City Lights, p. 69.

mah-jongg—tile-based game developed in China during the Qing dynasty

Many factors contributed to Chinese San Francisco's ability to develop and maintain its relatively high population level. Over the years, especially after 1870, when anti-Chinese violence prevailed throughout the American West, racial discrimination forced many Chinese to give up their residences and jobs elsewhere and move to San Francisco. Hostility within the city drove some Chinese to live within Chinatown. In addition to violence, there existed other forms of discrimination that continued after the organized anti-Chinese movement died out. Outside Chinatown, Coolidge noted, "no other lodging would take in Chinese." In 1900 a cook named Li Rong, who had come back to San Francisco after failing to find lodging in Stockton, was again forced out of his new residence by a white San Franciscan. The experience was so depressing that he contemplated suicide. Naturally, Chinatown became a safe haven for many Chinese. "Here," the Rev. Otis Gibson wrote metaphorically, "they breathe easier." He continued: "The hoodlum's voice has died away in the distance. Here Chinese faces delight the vision, and Chinese voices greet the ear." For immigrants, however, Chinatown was more than a physical shield against hostility. Many were attracted to the economic opportunities offered by Chinese San Francisco, opportunities that became increasingly important when fewer jobs were available in mining and railroad construction beginning in the 1860s.

Source: Yong Chen. (2000). *Chinese San Francisco, 1850–1943*. Stanford University Press, p. 67.

On Social Organizations:

From the beginning, the Chinese Americans formed organizations for mutual protection and assistance. Some were modeled after similar ones in China. Family, or clan, associations included anyone who shared the same family name. In the United States, it was natural for members of the same clan to rely on each other for support and friendship. The clan associations became a permanent part of Chinese American life.

Chinese Americans also formed district associations. These were composed of people from the same geographical area—those who spoke a familiar dialect and shared memories of their home villages.

Seeing the need for unity, the leaders of six district associations agreed in 1860 to form a larger group to represent the interests of all Chinese in the United States. Officially named the Chinese Consolidated Benevolent Associations (CCBA), the group was popularly known as the Six Companies.

Source: Philip P. Choy. (2012). *San Francisco Chinatown: A Guide to Its History & Architecture*. City Lights, p. 69.

Various social organizations mushroomed in Chinatown, providing the social fabric that connected Chinese immigrants to one another. Referring to the large number of such organizations, Mary Coolidge wrote that "every Chinaman* is enmeshed in a thousand other relations with his fellows." Liang Qichao found it unthinkable that there were more than 80

clan—a group of people united by actual or perceived kinship or descent

dialect—a regional variety of language distinguished by features of vocabulary, grammar, and pronunciation from other regional varieties and constituting together with them a single language

various associations in San Francisco.

The plethora of organizations clearly reflects the predominantly bachelor population's dire need of community life. It also established the continued significance of complicated Old World social relations defined by traditional geographical, clan, and linguistic bonds and boundaries that constituted the most important foundation of these organizations. The influence of such organizations often extended beyond San Francisco.

huiguan—support organizations for Chinese immigrants based on their native district in China

Of central importance were the *huiguan*. For decades they existed as the most significant Chinese American social institution, and they included an overwhelming majority of Chinese America. The first huiguan is believed to have been the Kong Chow Huiguan, formed probably as early as 1849. In 1853 there were four huiguan. In 1855 the number grew to five. The huiguan buildings loomed large in Chinatown. *The Oriental* gives us a detailed description of the building that housed the Yanghe Huiguan: "As the reader has walked ... his attention has been attracted by a large frame structure, evidently of Chinese architecture. ... A pair of lions, carved in wood, guard the wide doorway. The two perpendicular inscriptions on either side are poetical lines. They read, *Tseung Kwong Ham Man Li, Sui Hi Po Tung Yan*. May the prosperous light fill a thousand leagues; May the auspicious air pervade mankind."

The prominent Chinese motif of the building was not intended to draw the attention of non-Chinese spectators—Chinatown was not a tourist attraction yet. It embodied the cultural traditions that all the huiguan were founded upon. In fact, the huiguan themselves were a long-standing Chinese tradition—people who ventured out of their hometowns had often formed huiguan.

Source: Yong Chen. (2000). *Chinese San Francisco, 1850-1943*. Stanford University Press, pp. 71-72.

... Chinatown by the turn of the century had developed within itself a complicated organizational network to answer the vital needs of its population and to some extent to substitute for their lack of authentic family life. Molded partly by traditional social patterns carried over from Kwangtung and partly by the specific demands of the American situation, the richness of the organizational life thus evolved has been Chinatown's distinction among ethnic communities in America. On the one hand, because of constant competition between rival groups seeking to dominate the community by their control of various bodies, Chinatown's organizations have been the focus of almost incessant cleavage and conflict within the community. In the face of the most powerful threats from outside, however, they have proved capable of unifying and mobilizing Chinatown in the critical struggle for survival as a whole. By reinforcing its cohesiveness within and buffering it from hostile forces outside, they have been an important source of the exceptional resilience and continuity of the community over its history.

A three-tiered institutional structure, in which the basic unit was the clan association, encompassed the Chinatown remembered by oldtimers.

It was on this level that the influence of Kwangtung custom was most conspicuous, for a striking characteristic of South China society was the predominance of kinship relations. Whole villages were made up of families whose male members claimed direct descent from a common ancestor thirty or more generations back, venerated in ancestral halls to perpetuate a sense of family continuity and unity. In Kwangtung villages no aspect of an individual's life took place outside of kinship relations, and men who left the villages to come to California set up institutions which resembled the clan associations in their native Kwangtung. Unlike clans in their villages, which were based on direct lineage, clans in America, because of the small size of the Chinatown population, were broadened to include all those who shared the same last name and, therefore, a mythical, common ancestor. The Wong, Lee, and Chin families were the largest and most powerful clans in Chinatown. Basic everyday needs were dealt with within the framework of the clan unit in which a sense of shared collective responsibility and mutual loyalty were central values. Thus, the most common form of housing in early Chinatown was the room shared by men with the same family name. The men slept and cooked here, all expenses were added and shared at the end of the year. ...

... In larger halls, which were set up as headquarters for the whole clan association, general councils were held, ritual obligations to the clan ancestor were carried out, and communication with village lineages was maintained through a secretary who wrote and read letters for the illiterate men. (And sometimes had to remind them to send remittances home!)

remittance—payment sent to a recipient in another country, usually by someone supporting family or friends in their country of origin

Source: Victor G. Nee and Brett de Barry Nee. (1972, 1973). *Longtime Californ'.* Pantheon Books, pp. 63–65.

On The Theater:

A much more genuinely Chinese tradition that had been around a great deal longer was the theater. The theater was not only a place for recreation; it also helped sustain the community's collective historical memory and cultural identity. Many of the daily and nightly performances in the drama houses represented "the reproduction of very ancient historical events." During his visit to San Francisco early in the 1880s the Englishman George Augustus Sala noticed that in the Chinese theaters, "the play generally represents some historical train of events extending through the entire dominion of dynasty or an interesting national epoch." The integration of historical as well as moral teachings into drama seems to have been the product of a conscious effort. A placard inside the Royal Chinese Theatre during the 1880s revealed the pedagogical purpose of the theatrical performances, that is, to combine "pleasure, or amusement ... with instruction." For the immigrants, theatergoing meant experiencing a host of cultural traditions. Besides historical events, gods from Chinese folk religion were often featured in the drama, and sometimes statues of them stood in the theater hall to "witness and preside over the performance."

In many cases, the actors and, sometimes, actresses came from Guangdong to perform. They brought the immigrants closer to their native society not only by re-creating Chinese history and traditions on the stage but also through their off-stage contact with residents in Chinatown.

...

What the immigrant theatergoers enjoyed in the early years was actually Cantonese opera. Formed during the late Ming and early Qing Dynasties on the basis of several different branches of the Chinese opera, it had become a popular form of entertainment in the Canton region by the Daoguang period. Traveling troupes performed in small towns and rural areas, making Chinese opera an important part of the popular culture.

For many years theatergoing remained a significant recreational activity for the Chinese in San Francisco. And it was quite affordable. As late as the early twentieth century, according to Mrs. E.M. Green, the price of a ticket to the theater was only 20 cents (50 cents for non-Chinese) and the poor could go for free

Chinese San Franciscans came to the theaters not simply for the familiar historical plots staged there. They also came to relax and to socialize, as is indicated by the informality that characterized theatergoing. One visitor reported in the late 1860s: "The audience smoked incessantly and chatted together." Before the performance began people were "calling across the theater, exchanging jokes or the compliments of the season." ...

The theater, which was open during the daytime and until late at night, was a convenient place for Chinese immigrants to recuperate from their daily toil. In the cozy environment of the theater hall that often recalled a familiar past, they could also forget hostile realities.

Source: Yong Chen. (2000). *Chinese San Francisco, 1850–1943*. Stanford University Press, pp. 90-94.

On Festivals:

In the day to day life of the early Chinese-Americans there were many festivals and ritual observations which have disappeared today. The best remembered by anyone who is still alive now is probably the funeral procession. A substantial part of Chinatown's economy was even involved in this. There were two stores on Jackson Street, for instance, which dealt with funeral items. One, the Tai Yuen, is still there. It sold candles, incense, paper money to throw at demons during the funeral procession, and gold and silver paper bullion in the form of ingots. They also sold colored paper garments to be burned at the cemetery and as offerings to the deceased. Selling these things supported one whole store. Then diagonally across the street, at 741 Jackson, was a store which produced figures which were used in the procession to accompany the deceased as servants. These were made of paper and rattan work, about a yard high, in the form of a jade girl and a golden boy.

Funerals in Chinatown would be most elaborate if a man was wealthy or well-known. First there would be a sort of preliminary wake. On the

Ming Dynasty (1368–1644)—a ruling dynasty of China that lasted from 1368 to 1644 and was succeeded by the Qing Dynasty

Qing Dynasty (1644–1911)—the last ruling dynasty of China, ruling from 1644 to 1912

Daoguang period (1820–1850)—portion of Qing Dynasty during which the Daoguang Emperor ruled China

bullion—gold, silver, or other precious metals in the form of bars or ingots

ingot—a mass of metal cast into a convenient shape for storage or transportation to be later processed

rattan—climbing palms used for handicrafts

day of the funeral a platform or shed would be built, with a framework of white banners, and usually one tall vertical banner would give the name of the man who had died and some of his deeds and his relations. Food and wine would be offered to the deceased for the journey. There were deep-fried noodles, dyed red, yellow, and green, which couldn't be eaten, actually. Fruit, wine, and imitation foods of other kinds would be offered, too. While the coffin was at rest there, there would be the wailing of all the children and relatives of the deceased.

Source: Victor G. Nee and Brett de Barry Nee. (1972, 1973). *Longtime Californ'*. Pantheon Books, pp. 108–109.

2. Photographs of Chinatown pre-1906

The great San Francisco earthquake and fire of 1906 destroyed almost all the photographs of Chinatown taken in the 19th century. However, 200 photographs taken by Arnold Genthe (1869–1942), a renowned photographer living in San Francisco, were preserved. The images on the following pages are from the Arnold Genthe Collection in the Library of Congress. As you view the images, think about what impression they give you of Chinatown and which of the descriptions in this handout best match the photographs.

Source: Arnold Genthe Collection, Library of Congress









3. Chinatown as described by non-Chinese

Virginia Enterprise, June 29th, 1865

Celestial—person of Chinese descent. Since China was called the Celestial Empire, Chinese were sometimes referred to as Celestials.

teem—to refer to or call

COLFAX AND PARTY IN CHINATOWN.—Being desirous of seeing all the sights afforded by our city, and being particularly curious in regard to the Celestial inhabitants of the town, Colfax and the gentlemen accompanying him, took a turn through Chinatown, as the Chinese quarter here is popularly teemed. Officer Downey, under whose especial charge the Celestials are, and Jack Perry, Captain of Police, accompanied the party, also several other gentlemen supposed to have some knowledge of the region to be explored.

counting machine—in this context, an abacus

imp—a mischievous child

progeny—descendants, children

“John”—likely a generic slang term for a male child

cachinatory—consisting of, or accompanied by, immoderate laughter

“Hongkong”—likely a generic slang term for a Chinese child

hurdy-gurdy—any of various mechanical musical instruments (such as the barrel organ)

As none of the gentlemen from the East had ever before seen any but a few tolerably civilized Chinamen*, such as are to be seen peddling cigars, etc., in New York, they were all much interested in looking through the various stores, shops, and gambling dens to be seen here. The dress, language, and all they saw were new and curious to them. At one of the stores visited, a Chinaman* explained to Colfax their mode of computation by means of one of their counting machines. Colfax gave the Celestial a sum to do, and was much pleased at the ready answer he received.

The party being anxious to see a Chinese baby, search was made for one. Babies are not very plenty in Chinatown. The first one found was a boy about five years of age. Officer Downey, however, in order to gratify Governor Bross, who wished to see a still smaller specimen, started off and soon returned, bearing in his arms a cunning little imp of the masculine persuasion, less than a year old. The mother came with the child, and seemed to wonder much at the curiosity displayed in regard to her progeny by the “barbarians” from the East. The hair, eyes, complexion of the little “John” were closely examined and freely commented on, much to the amusement of some of the women present, who made audible cachinatory remarks behind their fans and aprons. The little “Hongkong” was examined much as were some of the dried turtles at the stores previously visited.

Tom Poo having learned the real character and standing of the visitors, politely invited all hands into the saloon to indulge in lemonade and lager. Tom Poo allows nobody to get ahead of him in the way of hospitality. The party were a little astonished at the familiar style in which they were addressed by some of the female inhabitants of the “quarters,” but concluded it was the “style in China.” The Governor, being of an inquiring turn of mind, several times excited the laughter of all hands at the style of information he received.

All thought themselves well paid for the trouble of making the visit in the many new and strange sights they had seen. On their way back the party took a look into a hurdy-gurdy house—an institution of this kind being something new to them. On learning who the party were, the proprietor produced some excellent California wine, and ordered a dance for their special edification. The more we see of our distinguished visitors, the better we are pleased with them, and the good natured interest they have invariably taken in such poor sights—tame lions—as we have to exhibit to them, shows them to be gentlemen who are determined to learn all that is to be learned about our country.

4. Chinatown as described by Chinese

A) Huie Kin

In the sixties [1860s] San Francisco’s Chinatown was made up of stores catering to the Chinese only. There was only one store, situated at the

curio—something (such as a decorative object) considered novel, rare, or bizarre

queue—a hairstyle worn by men in Imperial China whose primary attribute is a braid or ponytail at the back of the head

Monte Carlo—the area of Monaco where the extravagant Monte Carlo Casino is located

revolution of 1911 (The Chinese Revolution of 1911)—in October of 1911, a group of revolutionaries in southern China led a successful revolt against the Qing Dynasty (1644–1911), establishing in its place the Republic of China and ending the imperial system

corner of Sacramento and Dupont streets, which kept Chinese and Japanese curios for the American trade. Our people were all in their native costume, with queues down their backs, and kept their stores just as they would in China, with the entire street front open and groceries and vegetables overflowing on the sidewalks. Forty thousand Chinese were then resident in the bay region, and so these stores did a flourishing business ... Chinatown then [1886] lay on both sides of Mott Street and was filled with gambling houses, which, in open daylight, carried on their nefarious trade, stripping poor workingmen of their earnings. It was a little Monte Carlo, but without its glamour ...

Source: Yung, J., Chang, G.H., and Lai, H.M., Eds. (2006). *Chinese American Voices: From the Gold Rush to the Present*. Berkeley: University of California Press, p. 59.

B) Ching Wah Lee

One factor which bound the Chinese together in the early days was a certain loneliness. They felt that the people here were not too interested in them, except as curiosities, and then when the gold mines petered out and there was competition for jobs, there was actual antagonism toward the Chinese, especially among the laboring class. There were frequent anti-Chinese agitations and one leader known as "Sandlot Kearny" was famous for his speeches on street corners and sandlots saying that the Chinese must go. So in a negative way, this fear was a cementing factor, too. Because of the agitation, a lot of Chinese leaders, the cream of the crop, eventually did go back to China. The ones who remained felt almost deserted, and that was another factor which brought them together.

After this time Chinese began organizing their own societies for mutual protection. There were many hoodlums who would attack Chinese for no reason whatsoever, and that caused them to look back to China. Before the revolution of 1911, or at least before the turn of the century, the Chinese here still had great faith in the "mandarin system." They thought if only they could petition the mandarin or viceroy to petition the emperor for them, problems could be settled.

Source: Victor G. Nee and Brett de Barry Nee. (1972, 1973). *Longtime Californ'.* Pantheon Books, p. 107.

C) Gim Chang

We [the authors] discovered in Chinatown's oldtimers a deep resentment of the curious and exotic picture of their lives which prevailed in white society at the turn of the century. ... When we eagerly questioned Gim Chang, a retired rice merchant, about old books and newspaper accounts of Chinatown we had found in the library. Did he remember sword dancers who performed in the streets? We asked him. "No." The actor Ah Chic? "No." There were repeated negatives as we went through the geography we had studied from the old books. Finally we got to the notorious network of underground tunnels, filled with opium dens and gambling joints. Gim exploded:

You read about underground tunnels in old Chinatown? I know nothing about them. I'm quite sure they didn't exist at all. When I was a boy, you know, I used to follow the older boys everywhere and I knew all the dirty, secret places. When white people come to Chinatown looking for curiosities I used to tag along behind the Chinese they took as guides, but I never saw an underground tunnel. Just mahjong rooms in the basements. ... And there were a lot of people who visited Chinese ladies, to look at their small feet. I myself rarely left Chinatown, only when I had to buy American things downtown. The area around Union Square was a dangerous place for us, you see, especially at nighttime before the quake. Chinese were often attacked by thugs there and all of us had to have a police whistle with us all the time. I was attacked there once on a Sunday night, I think it was about eight P.M. A big thug about six feet tall knocked me down. I remember, I didn't know what to do to defend myself, because usually the policeman didn't notice when we blew the whistle. But once we were inside Chinatown, the thugs didn't bother us.

Isolation and resentment developed a strong orientation to China, a pride in being Chinese, which is marked in all the old men of this generation.

Source: Victor G. Nee and Brett de Barry Nee. (1972, 1973). *Longtime Californ'.* Pantheon Books, pp. 71-72.

D) Wei Bat Liu

The sense of being physically sealed within the boundaries of Chinatown was impressed on the few immigrants coming into the settlement by frequent stonings which occurred as they came up Washington or Clay Street from the piers. It was perpetuated by attacks of white toughs in the adjacent North Beach area and downtown around Union Square, who amused themselves by beating Chinese who came into these areas. "In these days, the boundaries were from Kearny to Powell, and from California to Broadway. If you ever passed them and went out there, the white kids would throw stones at you," Wei Bat Liu told us. "One time I remember going out and one boy started running after me, then a whole gang of others rushed out, too. We were afraid of them, and there were more of them than us, so we would come right back. Angry? Well, maybe in those days when we were young, we were not so angry. Just tired of it." Naturally, it was impossible for Chinese to find living accommodations outside the seven block area whose boundaries they were afraid to cross. Mr. Liu remembers looking for a house on Powell Street, just one block above Chinatown. "I had trouble finding a good place in Chinatown. It was so crowded, everyone was sleeping in double-decker beds and all that. So I went up just one block to Powell Street and asked in three places there. They all told me no, no one had ever heard of Chinese living on Powell Street before. So we went back down to Chinatown, where all my cousins lived in one room. No bathroom, no kitchen, just like the apartments down there now."

Source: Victor G. Nee and Brett de Barry Nee. (1972, 1973). *Longtime Californ'.* Pantheon Books, pp. 60-61.

3. How did Chinese laborers, both those already in the United States and those in China, come to work on the railroad?

4. What impact did San Francisco Chinatown have on general U.S. perceptions of the Chinese community?

5. Why did San Francisco's Chinatown and other Chinatowns in the U.S. West emerge, and why did so many later disappear?

6. To what extent did Chinese immigrants choose to live in Chinatown because of its familiar attractions versus being forced to live there by external hostilities and segregation?

MEMORIAL TO CHINESE RAILROAD WORKERS

A special commission has asked you to design a memorial for the Chinese railroad workers to be placed in San Francisco's Chinatown for an upcoming anniversary of the completion of the Transcontinental Railroad. Create a summary of this memorial to present to the commission. Your summary must fit on a piece of butcher paper for viewing by the rest of the class.

You should include a graphical sketch of the memorial along with answers to the following questions:

- What is the format of the memorial (statues, mural, etc.)? Why did you choose this format?
- Where would you place the memorial in Chinatown? Why? Mark the location clearly on the current map of Chinatown in Handout 1.
- What message do you hope that visitors take away from the memorial?
- Would you include quotes on the memorial? If so, whose quotes would you include and why?
- What sources did you use as the basis for creating your memorial?

You may conduct Internet research as needed to complete this project. Refer to the Chinese Railroad Workers in North America Project website at <http://web.stanford.edu/group/chineserailroad/cgi-bin/wordpress/> for additional images, quotes, ideas, etc.

REVIEW OF MEMORIALS TO CHINESE RAILROAD WORKERS

You have 30 minutes to review all the memorials your class created. As you review the memorials, take notes below on what aspects leave an impression on you. Once you are done, respond to the summary questions. Your teacher will collect your responses for assessment.

Notes:

Memorial #	What is the format of the memorial?	What quotes are included on the memorial?	What seems to be the message of the memorial?	What is your general impression of this memorial?
1				
2				
3				

Memorial #	What is the format of the memorial?	What quotes are included on the memorial?	What seems to be the message of the memorial?	What is your general impression of this memorial?
4				
5				
6				

handout 5

Summary questions

1. What is one aspect of another group's memorial that you would consider incorporating into your group's memorial?

2. Besides your memorial, which group's memorial did you find most powerful? Why?

3. What is the most important lesson you learned about Chinatown in the course of this lesson?

DESCRIPTIONS OF SAN FRANCISCO'S CHINATOWN

1. Why did so many Chinese immigrants to the United States congregate in San Francisco's Chinatown?

Responses should mention all or most of the following:

- *Desire for familiar food, language, and traditions*
- *It represented a refuge from anti-Chinese violence in the rest of the United States*
- *A sense of belonging provided by the many associations*
- *Better employment prospects, especially after the 1860s when the railroad had been completed and anti-Chinese hostilities increased*
- *Familiar entertainment, including the theater and gambling*

2. What were the most noteworthy aspects of Chinatown for non-Chinese observers?
Non-Chinese observers tended to emphasize the vice in Chinatown, especially opium dens, gambling, and prostitution. They also described it as dirty, crowded, dangerous, and mysterious.

3. What aspects of Chinatown did Chinese immigrants emphasize?
The accounts of Chinatown from Chinese immigrants focused on Chinatown as a place of safety and refuge from the hostile environment beyond, where they were often physically attacked.

4. Why did the characterizations of Chinatown from non-Chinese dominate general impressions of the neighborhood in the United States?
With few people able to visit Chinatown directly, they relied on newspaper accounts and first-hand accounts in English, which were written by non-Chinese. Many of these writers may have wanted to play up the novel aspects of Chinatown. Further, very few Chinese immigrants in the 19th century wrote accounts of Chinatown. As Chinese American Voices notes,

Chinese immigrants left few records and documents about their experiences in America during this early period. Although some were literate, many were not. Furthermore, the constant struggle for survival and the attitude that they were only in the country temporarily meant they had little time, energy, or inclination to record their experiences. Very few letters, diaries, or other written records survived in either China or the United States. The destruction of wars, revolutions, and great social upheavals took its toll as well. What have survived are a few letters, editorials, speeches, petitions, reports, and ephemeral material produced by the Chinese that were published or retained by the Chinese government and religious or social organizations in America. There are also some memoirs from these early years, and poems or folk songs handed down through the generations.

Source: Yung, J., Chang, G.H., and Lai, H.M., Eds. (2006). *Chinese American Voices: From the Gold Rush to the Present*. Berkeley: University of California Press, pp. 5–6.

5. What impression do the photographs convey of Chinatown?
These photographs were taken by Arnold Genthe, a German-born photographer who was intrigued by Chinatown and wanted to capture its unique nature. To emphasize its 'otherness,' Genthe sometimes removed evidence of Western culture from the photographs by cropping or erasing sections. While Genthe tried to capture images that showed how different Chinatown was from other U.S. neighborhoods, the photos in this handout do not show anything particularly negative beyond conditions that were considered poor for the time.
6. Which written descriptions of Chinatown best match the photographs?
Student responses will vary.

VIDEO NOTES

1. What was San Francisco's Chinatown like in the 19th century?
 - *Chinatown was located just blocks away from the docks and piers where boats came from overseas. It was near Portsmouth Square, the center of San Francisco at the time and where the American flag was first flown in the city.*
 - *Chinatown was a collection of boarding centers, community houses, community associations, and temples.*
 - *In some sense, it was a recreation of the region of southern China from which immigrants came.*
 - *Chinatown was more than a settlement, it was a transit point. Members of the Chinese community would welcome new immigrants at the docks and then bring them to Chinatown.*
 - *The population was constantly changing as workers came and went, and the best estimates are that the population fluctuated between 20,000 and 60,000 people.*
2. Why did railroad workers and other Chinese working in the United States go to San Francisco's Chinatown?
 - *Many came to enjoy familiar food, language, and surroundings after months or years of working outside San Francisco.*
 - *Workers also visited doctors, temples, and familial associations.*
 - *Some workers came to escape anti-Chinese violence and mobs.*
 - *Many came to enjoy the Chinese operas in Chinatown. Troupes from China would stay there and perform for months.*
 - *Many engaged in vice, frequenting opium dens and brothels in Chinatown.*
3. How did Chinese laborers, both those already in the United States and those in China, come to work on the railroad?
 - *When the railroad companies started working in the western United States, they found that Chinese workers were ideally suited to the railroads. Many Chinese had come to the part of California where the railroad would pass through to work as miners during the Gold Rush. Their experience moving earth, using explosives, and blasting rock were all transferable to railroad-building.*
 - *Soon, the railroad companies found they were short of Chinese workers in the United States, so they worked with recruiters in China to bring more workers from southern China.*
 - *The contracting companies paid Chinese workers' passage in advance, but workers had to sign a contract guaranteeing they would work with the railroad for enough time to pay off their debt.*
 - *Upon arrival in San Francisco, labor contractors and agents would meet the Chinese immigrants and either bring them to Chinatown or immediately send them to their assigned work site.*
4. What impact did San Francisco Chinatown have on general U.S. perceptions of the Chinese community?
 - *Chinatown implanted several negative images of Chinese in the minds of North Americans: it was seen as a place of heathens and much was made of the visible use of opium and prostitution. This focus on the negative aspects of Chinatown created a sense that Chinese were depraved and undesirable.*
 - *While this impression was not false, it was a one-dimensional view of the Chinese community and did not appreciate the fact that the Chinese population in the United States was overwhelmingly comprised of young males, especially in the early decades of immigration.*

5. Why did San Francisco's Chinatown and other Chinatowns in the U.S. West emerge, and why did so many later disappear?
 - *As Chinese railroad workers spread throughout the western United States, they founded and gathered in Chinatowns as safe havens that offered some protection in numbers against hostile populations. Chinatowns emerged throughout Idaho, Montana, Nevada, Colorado, Oregon, Washington, and California.*
 - *However, mobs tried to drive Chinese out of many communities in the 1870s and especially the 1880s. They attacked Chinatowns and burnt most to the ground. Chinese were largely driven out of rural areas, and many had to take protection in the remaining Chinatowns, of which San Francisco's remained the largest.*
6. To what extent did Chinese immigrants choose to live in Chinatown because of its familiar attractions versus being forced to live there by external hostilities and segregation?
 - *The best answer is "both." As documented in the descriptions of Chinatown by Chinese, they were frequently attacked in San Francisco when they left the boundaries of Chinatown. As Dr. Chang notes in his video, anti-Chinese violence became frequent across the U.S. West in the 1870s and 1880s. In San Francisco, Chinese were often not allowed to rent residences outside of Chinatown. All of these factors made it difficult or even dangerous for Chinese immigrants to live outside of Chinatown.*
 - *At the same time, many Chinese immigrants clearly wanted to live in Chinatown because it was the only place where they could easily find familiar food and entertainment and where they could easily communicate with others and get things done. It was also easy to join associations of other Chinese that helped with loans and other economic aid, communicate with loved ones back in China, and keep religious and cultural practices alive.*

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