

Insider and Outsider Perspectives: Cantonese Opera in Canada, 1920-1960

Grade Level: 7-9 and Secondary I-III (Quebec)

Lesson Length: 75 minutes (in class) + optional pre-lesson homework assignment

Curriculum Links:

- History (Canadian, 20th century, immigration history)
- Art (Cultural performance)
- Language Arts (First-hand perspectives)

Lesson Topics:

- Insider and outsider perspectives
- Cantonese opera performance in Canada

Lesson Goals: By the end of the lesson, students will be able to...

- Understand the difference between insider and outsider accounts of events;
- Compare first-hand accounts of historical events;
- Apply insider/outsider concepts to contemporary cultural or group practices

Equipment:

- Handout, "Cantonese Opera in Canada – Insider Perspective"
- Handout, "Cantonese Opera in Canada – Outsider Perspective"
- Worksheet, "Insider and Outsider Perspectives: Cantonese Opera in Canada, 1920-1960"
- Audio and/or visual clips from the Activity "Backstage at the Cantonese Opera" on the website *Chinese Canadian Women, 1923-1967*
www.mhso.ca/chinesecanadianwomen
- Computer or audio/visual equipment to play selected clips

Advanced Preparation:

1. Explore the website *Chinese Canadian Women, 1923-1967* (www.mhso.ca/chinesecanadianwomen) and in particular the Activity "Backstage at the Cantonese Opera"
2. Photocopy the Handouts and Worksheet (1 of each document per student)
3. Select audio and/or visual clips for use in class from the "Backstage at the Cantonese Opera" Activity.
4. (Optional pre-lesson homework assignment) Instruct students to complete the Activity "Backstage at the Cantonese Opera" prior to class, and write a short description of Cantonese opera performances.

Lesson Plan:

1. Introduction to Activity (10 minutes)

- As a class, brainstorm different cultural practices that ethnocultural groups have brought to Canada, and possible reasons for maintaining them in a new homeland.
 - Examples of cultural practices: foods (pasta, sushi), holidays (American Thanksgiving, Chinese New Year), arts (Indian dancing, African drumming)

2. Introduction to Cantonese Opera (10 minutes)

- Explain that Cantonese opera troupes would tour Canadian Chinatowns (1920s-1940s). Show performance clip.
- Explain that Chinese cultural groups and churches in Canada would screen Cantonese opera movies (1950s-1960s). Show movie clip.
- Ask students for their reactions to this cultural practice, focusing on ideas of familiarity and difference. If students completed the optional pre-lesson homework assignment, ask volunteers to read or summarize their impressions.

3. Handouts and Worksheet – Part 1 (25 minutes)

- Distribute Handouts and Worksheet
- Instruct students to read the Handouts and complete Part 1 of the worksheet individually or in pairs.

4. Worksheet – Part 2 (20 minutes)

- Insider: Instruct students to write an “insider” account of the cultural practice of their choice.
 - Students can pick any activity or practice that they know well. This may relate to their ethnocultural group (watching Cantonese opera or Bollywood movies, competing in Highland dancing), religious or faith group (fasting for Ramadan, Bar Mitzvah ceremony, Confirmation ceremony), or a special interest community (engaging in Live Action Role Playing, collecting stamps, etc.)
- Outsider: Instruct students to either (a) imagine that they are “outsiders” to the activity they have just written about (i.e., alien visiting from another planet), and write an outsider account; or (b) find a classmate who has written about a practice to which the student is an outsider, and write an account of this activity.

5. Conclusions (10 minutes)

- As a class, review the answers to the worksheet. Use the Cantonese Opera examples and their own choices to familiarize students with the differences between insider and outsider perspectives.