



Unit 3 – Exploring Chinese Canadian History

The unit helps students to gain insight into the experiences of the Chinese who came to Canada in the 1880s to work as labourers on the Canadian Pacific Railway, and their descendants.

Between 1881 and 1885, thousands of Chinese men helped Canada achieve its national dream – the completion of the Canadian Pacific Railway. Instead of gratitude, the Government sought to restrict further immigration by Chinese with the imposition of a head tax, followed by the even more restrictive Chinese Exclusion Act. Discrimination against Chinese lasted more than six decades. These laws affected every aspect of life for Chinese in Canada, and were felt across the country.

Students will examine the following questions:

- Who were the Chinese railroad workers?
- What was life like for the Chinese railroad workers during the railway building period and afterwards?
- What challenges did the Chinese railroad workers experience? What about their descendants' challenges?
- How did the Chinese railroad workers and their descendants help shape British Columbia and Canada?

After completing this unit students will be able to:

- Identify the main characteristics of Chinese settlement in Canada up to the mid 1950s
- Understand the role of Chinese Canadian labour and entrepreneurship in the development of British Columbia and Canada
- Appreciate Canada's evolution from a country in the 1880s, when Canada penalized and excluded people based on race, to the present where the state protects diversity through the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms

Recommended grade levels:

- The lesson is adaptable to the following grade levels: 6, 7, 8, 9, 10

Curriculum links:

- Social Studies, History, Language Arts, British Columbia History
- Can be customized as required, for regional variances in curriculum

The unit consists of:

- Three in-class workshops
- At-home research

Time required:

- Recommended 120 minutes; 40 minutes per workshop
- The unit is flexible depending on the amount of class time available and class size



Evaluation based on:

- Research
- Student response form
- Final assignment
- Classroom participation

Materials provided:

The Ties That Bind website provides the following:

- Website content including primary source material – oral histories, photographs, newspaper articles, and government documents
- Website resources – including bibliography, links to other websites and a glossary
- Research form for Workshop 1 (download)
- Response form for Workshop 2 (download)

Equipment required:

- In-class or computer lab computers and home computers

Procedure:

- Advance planning required before beginning the unit
- Book or set up available computers
- In the absence of computers, print, copy and collate the website pages
- Print all other documents related to this lesson and make copies

Workshop 1 – Introduction

1. Introduce *The Ties That Bind* website to students, explaining what it's about.
2. Class discussion on students' prior knowledge of Chinese Canadian immigration and the building of the Canadian Pacific Railway.
3. Students briefly review the website online. Alternatively, if computers are not available, hand out booklets of website pages.
4. Class discussion on what they learned from the brief review.
5. The following questions may be useful:
 - Was there a surprising piece of information in the website? Why was it surprising?
 - Did the website change how you think about Chinese Canadians?
6. Students choose one of the following topics to research:
 - Who were the Chinese railroad workers?



- What was life like for the Chinese railroad workers during the railway building period and afterwards?
 - What challenges did the Chinese railroad workers experience? What about their descendants' challenges?
 - How did the Chinese railroad workers and their descendants help shape British Columbia and Canada?
7. Expectations:
- students will do research at home on their topic, using *The Ties That Bind* website, and the resources in the website
 - students will use the Research form to record their findings
 - students will share what they have learned with the class in Workshop 2

Workshop 2 – Research Sharing

1. Hand out Student Response form.
2. Students share their research with the class and get feedback.
3. Students fill in the Student Response form, writing down three new facts they learned from the research presentations, and two questions the research evoked for follow-up.
4. As a whole group, talk about the final assignment format.
 - Assume the role of a young Chinese worker of about 14 years of age arriving in Canada to work on the railroad. Write a letter to a relative back in China about the experience.
 - Assume the role of a reporter who is sympathetic to the rights of Chinese Canadians and write an article against charging Chinese immigrants a Head Tax entry fee.
 - Write a positive news article about Chinese Canadians and illustrate an editorial cartoon to accompany the article.
 - In pairs, role play two Canadian politicians, each supporting opposing sides of the head tax debate. In 250 words write down your reasons for your position.
 - Assume the role of a Chinese Canadian bachelor seeking a wife through the arranged marriage system. Write a letter to a prospective bride in China, explaining your accomplishments in Canada and why she would be happy living with you in your new country.
5. Collect the Student Response forms.

Workshop 3 – Final Assignment Presentation

1. Students present their final assignment to classmates.
2. Class discussion.
3. The following questions may be useful:
 - Was there a surprising piece of information the assignments generated? Why



was it surprising?

- What follow-up questions did the assignments evoke?
- What might have made the assignments more productive?
- Did the assignments have anything in common? If yes, what were those elements?