



Ethnic Studies Lesson 5A: Asian American Identity

TOPIC:

ASIAN AMERICAN HISTORY

GRADE LEVELS:

11-12

TIME:

1½ HOURS

California Ethnic Studies Model Curriculum Themes, Values, and Principles Alignment

Themes:

1. Identity
2. History and Movement

Values and Principles:

1. Cultivate empathy, community actualization, cultural perpetuity, self-worth, self-determination, and the holistic well-being of all participants, especially Native People/s and Black, Indigenous, and People of Color (BIPOC).
2. Celebrate and honor Native People/s of the land and communities of Black, Indigenous, and People of Color by providing a space to share their stories of success, community collaboration, and solidarity, along with their intellectual and cultural wealth.

California English and Social Science Standards Alignment

English Language Arts Standards (11th and 12th Grade):

Reading—Informational Text (RI.11-12)

Determine the central ideas or information of a primary or secondary source; provide an accurate summary that makes clear the relationships among the key details and ideas. (RI.11-12.2)

Social Sciences Standards (11th and 12th Grade):

History-Social Science Content Standards—(Grades 9-12)

Lesson Purpose

Students will determine what they know about Asian American origins, cultures, and civil rights issues and determine what they still want to learn.

Essential Questions

What do we know about Asian American culture, and what do we want to learn?

How has life changed for Asian Americans in the United States over the last 150 years?

Materials

[PEW Research Center, Documentary: Being Asian in America](#)

[USA Facts: AAPI Demographics: Data on Asian American ethnicities, geography, income, and education](#)

[Unit 5 KWL Chart](#)

Vocabulary

East Asian

South Asian

Pacific Islander

Southeast Asian

Central Asian

Lesson Steps

Step 1:

- As a class, present the [unit 5 KWL Chart](#) to the class. Ask students what they already know about Asian American history in the US. Make sure to note what questions they have and would like to pursue as well. Have students watch [PEW Research Center, Documentary: Being Asian in America](#) (video 32 minutes, 39 seconds). As students watch, have them take notes on what nationalities are represented. Students should also take note of what terminology is helpful when referring to someone of Asian American heritage. Finally, students should note common themes where civil rights were limited.
- When students have finished, as a class, have students share their notes. Ask students what questions they continue to have about who Asian Americans are. Have students work in pairs and read: [U.S.A. Facts: AAPI Demographics: Data on Asian American ethnicities, geography, income, and education](#). As students are reading, they should create a set of 20 flash cards on 3 x 5 cards, with a question about AAPI demographics, facts, or geography and the answer on the reverse side.
- When students have completed their flash cards, have them meet with another pair and review the questions and answers. If time allows, have students create categories for a *Jeopardy*-style board game. Post the answers on the board, and students must state the question.

Step 2:

- As a class, ask students this lesson's questions, "What do we know about Asian American culture, and what do we want to learn?" Also ask this unit's question, "How has life changed for Asian Americans over the last 150 years?" Make note of what was learned on this unit's KWL chart—along with additional questions.

Essential Question Assessment, Application, Action, and Reflection

As time permits, and as homework, have students watch [ABC News: Asian Americans endure long fight against history of exclusion in the U.S.](#) (video 3 minutes, 20 seconds). As students watch, they should take note of how Asian Americans have worked with other cultures to improve civil rights. Students should note several examples in a short paragraph.

Additional Readings and Resources

Bernstein, David E. *Classified: The Untold Story of Racial Classification in America*. Bombardier, 2022.

Qin, Amy. “They’re Asian. They’re American. But, They Wonder, Are They Asian American?” *New York Times*, June 1, 2024. <https://www.nytimes.com/2024/06/01/us/asian-american-identity-bhutanese.html>

Sowell, Thomas. *Ethnic America: A History*. Basic Books, 1981, 133-179.

Sowell, Thomas. *Migrations and Cultures: A World View*. Basic Books, 1996, chaps. 3, 5, 7.

NOTE TO EDUCATORS REGARDING ADDITIONAL READINGS AND RESOURCES: America is a pluralistic country, ethnically. It is also a pluralistic country politically—left, right, and center. Ethnic studies educators have ready access to resources from the left-of-center in the [2021 California Model Curriculum](#) and in the [Liberated Model Curriculum](#). This Comparative Cultures Ethnic Studies curriculum favors teachers exposing students to views from across the political spectrum. Educators often lack guidance to materials from outside the left-of-center. Therefore, in the sections on Additional Readings and Resources, the Comparative Cultures Ethnic Studies curriculum alerts educators to credible resources that provide an alternative to the other Model Curricula. In doing so, this curriculum encourages educators to acquaint students with evidence-based views from left, right, and center.

Ethnic Studies 5A: KWL Chart

KNOW

WONDER

LEARNED

<p><i>What do we think we already know about this topic?</i></p>	<p><i>What do we wonder about this topic? Write your questions below.</i></p>	<p><i>After the research is completed, what did we learn? Make sure to cite your source.</i></p>