High School Lesson Plan: Establishing Honolulu's Chinatown

Lesson Summary:
In this lesson, students will learn the history of Chinese immigration to Hawaii, focusing on the experiences of Chinese settlers and their various roles in shaping Hawaii's society. They will also explore multiple perspectives regarding their arrival, not just as indentured laborers for the sugar plantations, but also as traders and businessmen. The lesson will cover the growth of Chinatown in Honolulu, the tight knit community of the Chinese, but also the tensions with other people groups, particularly during the late 19th century. Students will also investigate the impact of public health crises, such as the bubonic plague outbreak, and the controversy behind the Great Chinatown Fire of 1900. By the end of this lesson, students will understand key points of history that shaped the formation of Honolulu's Chinatown.

State Standards:
SS.9-12.17: Analyze the influence of human migrations on patterns of settlement and culture.
SS-US.9-12.17: Explain the patterns of and responses to immigration on the development of American culture and law.
SS-Soc.9-12.14: Identify characteristics of groups, and the influences that groups and individuals have on each other.
SS.9-12.13: Explain the formation of groups and the creation and development of societal norms and values.

Learning Objectives:
Students will be able to…
Analyze the early immigration patterns of Chinese in Hawaii
Understand the impact of Chinese migration to Honolulu's Chinatown
Analyze social tensions between different groups in Hawaii
Evaluate the impact of public health crises and discrimination

Lesson Outline:

- **Bell Ringer:**
  "What do you know about the history of Chinese immigration to the United States? How might this be different in Hawaii?"
  Discuss briefly, and introduce the focus on Hawaii's Chinatown and the migration of Chinese individuals to the Hawaiian Islands.
- **Worksheet/Activity (computer required)**
  - Early Chinese Presence
  - Growth of Honolulu's Chinatown
  - The Great Chinatown Fire of 1900
  - Establishing Chinatown: Timeline
- **Wrap-Up:**
  My Chinatown, With Aloha | Full Film | Asian American Stories of Resilience and Beyond
  Film about current Chinatown in Honolulu. Ask students to make connections to the lesson

Early Chinese Presence in Hawaii

Read the text below and answer the following questions.

When discussing Chinese migration to Hawaii, there is a common misconception that the Chinese first established a community in Hawaii after arriving as indentured laborers for sugar plantations during the 19th century. However, according to Douglas Chong, president of the Hawaii Chinese History Center, this is a false Western narrative. In an interview, Chong explains that Chinese individuals arrived in Hawaii around 1785 as businessmen and traders, separate from the Western ships. Further research also challenges the idea that the Chinese settled in Hawaii after European arrival, as plants from Asia were already growing in Hawaii prior to the arrival of Europeans. The most widely accepted academic narrative suggests that Chinese individuals first arrived in 1789 on commercial trading ships of Captain James Cook. These Chinese were described as "cooks, carpenters, and artisans," while others were businessmen. They later settled in Hawaii due to the lucrative sandalwood trade between China and Hawaii, which lasted from 1792 to 1843. In China, the islands were known as “Tan Heung Shan” which means “the sandalwood mountains” in Cantonese. In the same period, a Chinese man named Wong Tze-Chun established the first sugar mill in 1802, and by the mid-1800s, the Chinese continued to drive the growth of the sugar industry. Although many people believe that the Haole (non-Hawaiian, usually Europeans) commercialized sugar, the Chinese were the pioneers of the industry and were responsible for teaching European settlers how to maintain a successful sugar business. As American-owned sugar and pineapple plantations began to open, indentured laborer contracts were introduced in the 1850. Between 1852 and 1899, around 56,720 Chinese individuals came to Hawaii specifically to work on the plantations. As this history reveals, there are multiple perspectives on how the Chinese people first established a community in Hawaii.

Questions:

1. What is the common misconception about the Chinese community in Hawaii, and how does Douglas Chong challenge this narrative?
2. What was the role of Chinese immigrants in the sugar industry, and how did they influence European settlers?
3. How did the sugar plantations impact the migration of Chinese individuals?
4. Why might there be various interpretations of how the Chinese first settled in Hawaii?

OBJ + Standards:

- SS.9-12.17: Analyze the influence of human migrations on patterns of settlement and culture.
- Analyze the early immigration patterns of Chinese in Hawaii

This worksheet helps students meet standards by analyzing the early Chinese migration to Hawaii and its impact on settlement in Hawaii. By discussing how the Chinese were a part of Hawaii's society, the students can see how the Chinese settlement influenced Hawaii. The questions guide students to explore how Chinese immigrants influenced Hawaii's economy through sandalwood and sugar. By acknowledging different viewpoints on their settlement, students are able to understand the various factors of Chinese migration, and how these perspectives challenge common misconceptions about how they first arrived to the islands.

Early Chinese Presence in Hawaii ANSWER KEY

Read the text below and answer the following questions.

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Questions:

1. What is the common misconception about the Chinese community in Hawaii, and how does Douglas Chong challenge this narrative?
    a. Common misconception is that Chinese did not first come as indentured laborers
    b. Mention how Chong argues that Chinese individuals came around 1785, as actual businessmen and more
2. What was the role of Chinese immigrants in the sugar industry, and how did they influence European settlers?

    a. Chinese immigrants began the sugar business, but were also brought in as indentured laborers for the American companies
    b. The Chinese taught European settlers how to process sugar
3. How did the sugar plantations impact the migration of Chinese individuals?
    a. American-owned sugar plantations caused a surge of immigration from China to the Hawaiian Islands under a contract.
    b. Students should include something from this part of the text: "1852 and 1899, around 56,720 Chinese individuals came to Hawaii specifically to work on the plantations."
4. Why might there be various interpretations of how the Chinese first settled in Hawaii? **Open-ended question**
    a. Western narratives are/were widely taught in schools
    b. False belief that the West discovered everything first.
    c. Different ethnic groups have different recounts
    d. Documents could be misaligned

Growth of Honolulu's Chinatown

Read the text below.

After the labor contracts for the sugar plantations ended for the Chinese individuals, some workers entered the rice industry in rural Hawaii, as they were already familiar with growing the crop. However, many others moved to downtown Honolulu to seek new opportunities. Downtown Honolulu was undoubtedly an attractive area for many Chinese individuals because of its proximity to the harbor, which made trading ideal. Additionally, there were already some Chinese businesses established by earlier Chinese settlers, long before the sugar plantations. Chinatown, located along Honolulu Harbor to the southwest of the Nu'uanu Stream, became an ideal location for this growing community. By the late 19th century, the Chinese community in Hawaii flourished. The community was tight-knit, with individuals often interacting and exchanging contacts. Those who had already established successful businesses were eager to support newcomers. However, during this time, tensions arose between the Chinese and other major groups, particularly Native Hawaiians and the Haole. The Haole promoted the false idea that Chinese immigrants were taking jobs from the Native people, which led to growing animosity. Although the Haole had initially supported some Chinese businesses through loans, their feelings also shifted as they became intimidated by the socio-economic success of the Chinese.

Independent Thinking

- Identify the groups of people mentioned in the text.
- Understand why downtown Honolulu was an ideal place to be after the contracts ended.
- Visualize the atmosphere of the Chinatown community during this time.

Find 3-4 classmates and answer the following discussion questions in a group.

1. What were the reasons for the tensions between the Chinatown community and other groups on the Hawaiian Islands?
2. How did the indentured laborers establish businesses downtown after their contracts ended?
3. Do you think that there is still strain between the various groups discussed in the text above? Is anyone on the "right" or "wrong" side of history in this context?

OBJ + Standards:

- SS-Soc.9-12.14: Identify characteristics of groups, and the influences that groups and individuals have on each other.
- SS.9-12.13: Explain the formation of groups and the creation and development of societal norms and values.
- Understand the impact of Chinese migration to Honolulu's Chinatown
- Analyze social tensions between different groups in Hawaii

The worksheet aligns with the state standards as it identifies the Chinese community, Haole, and Native Hawaiians during that time period. Additionally, the activity encourages discussion on how these groups interacted with each other and how they impacted one another in both positive and negative ways. Furthermore, the activity explains the growth of the Chinatown community and how their presence shifted societal norms in downtown Honolulu.

Growth of Honolulu's Chinatown ANSWER KEY

Read the text below.

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Independent Thinking

- Identify the groups of people mentioned in the text.
    - Haole, Native Hawaiians, Chinese, Chinatown community
- Understand why downtown Honolulu was an ideal place to be after the contracts ended.
    - Close to the harbor, fairly urban, already Chinese businesses established
- Visualize the atmosphere of the Chinatown community during this time.
    - Tight-knit community inside the Chinatown community, people helping one another

Find 3-4 classmates and answer the following discussion questions in a group.

1. What were the reasons for the tensions between the Chinatown community and other groups on the Hawaiian Islands?
    a. False idea that Chinese people were taking jobs from Native Hawaiians
    b. As Chinese community became more prosperous, it posed a threat to the successful Haole

2. How did the indentured laborers establish businesses downtown after their contracts ended?
    a. There were already some Chinese businesses established. The workers received help from these owners, and also set up their own businesses in the area.
3. Do you think that there is still strain between the various groups discussed in the text above? Is anyone on the “right” or “wrong” side of history in this context? Open-ended question
    a. Students should address whether they think tensions exist, and if they believe a group is on the wrong or right side of history.

The Great Chinatown Fire of 1900

Read the given texts below and fill out the table.

Chinatown in Honolulu was strongly associated with being a public health nuisance, partly because the Haole media promoted the idea that immigrants, particularly the Chinese, were disease-ridden. Another factor was the actual unsanitary conditions within Chinatown itself. After the fire of 1886, the area was rebuilt without a proper sewage system or a safe water supply, causing sanitary issues. Clifford Wood, the president of the Hawai'i Board of Health (BOH), declared that Chinatown was the natural habitat of the plague. Bubonic plague, which had been identified in Asia during the 1860s, made its way to Hawaii in 1899. There was a deep mistrust between the BOH and the Chinese community, stemming from negative experiences during a previous cholera outbreak. The Chinese, in turn, were reluctant to cooperate, hiding individuals who were ill with the plague. On December 12, 1899, five victims of the bubonic plague were identified in Chinatown, prompting the BOH to place a strict quarantine on the entire district. Although the first wave of quarantine was eventually lifted, a second wave was imposed after four new cases were discovered.

During this time, the BOH continued to blame the people of Chinatown for the spread of disease, accusing them of being unclean. In response, the government authorized "controlled fires" intended to burn down blocks in northern Chinatown to eliminate the sources of the plague. However, the winds shifted, and the fire spread uncontrollably, destroying 60 acres of Chinatown. Only five buildings remained, leaving over 4,000 individuals without homes. While the incident was framed by the general public as a simple accident, many in Chinatown view it differently. Given the prior discrimination and exclusion based on their ethnicity, as well as the perception of the Chinese as a threat to both haole and Native Hawaiians, the Chinese community believes that the fire presented an opportunity for the state government to remove the ethnic enclave. Douglas Chong, speaking on behalf of the community, asserts that they strongly believe the fire was not an accident but an intentional attack on the thriving Chinese community.

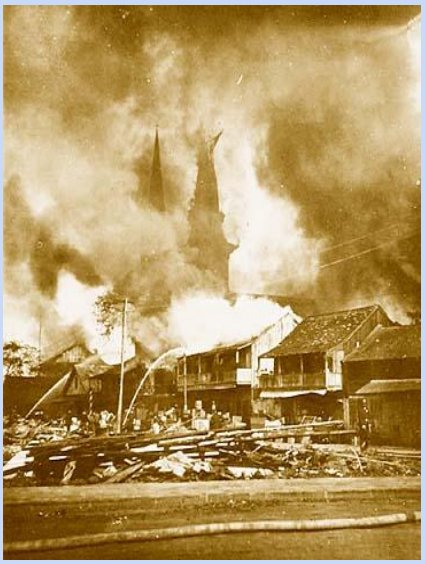


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Article in *The Geography of Immunology*:

How Honolulu's Chinatown "Went Up in Smoke"

Excerpt from *Chinatown, Honolulu: Place, Race, and Empire*

All evidence suggests that the fire was not intentionally set to destroy Chinatown. But many—if not most—Chinese believed it was a deliberate attack on their community, an attempt to rid Honolulu of Chinese or at least reopen Honolulu more quickly at the expense of the Chinese community. What cannot be disputed is that Chinese community members were not included in decisions made regarding the epidemic and its control; that they felt powerless to shape their own futures is understandable. Chinese living in Hawai'i had long felt beleaguered and under attack. They had been stripped of their rights as citizens of the Territory. They had faced constant discrimination and restrictions because of their ethnicity. They were seen as a threat to the haole and Hawaiian populations. During this and earlier epidemics, they had been treated much more severely than haole, with little respect or concern shown for their livelihoods or safety. As Julia Katz argues, "The persistent rumors around the Chinatown fire indexed a profound sense of persecution in the wake of annexation. Rumors like these offer a synthesis of vernacular wisdom and sense, and given the physical, legal, political, and economic attacks on Chinese—by men in American military uniform, restrictive immigration policies, and discriminatory legislative proposals—it was logical for Chinese communities to extrapolate from the explicit desire for their exclusion a deliberate effort to remove them when an opportunity presented itself."

How do they view the incident?

Board of Health / Haole	Chinatown Community

Discuss:

1. The spreading fire in Chinatown was considered an "accident," but many people in the Chinese community believed it was an intentional attack. Based on what you know, what are some reasons that the Chinese community might feel this way?
2. Imagine you are a member of the Hawaii Board of Health at the time. How would you have justified the controlled fires to the public?

3. How did the exclusion from decision-making processes affect the community's sense of power and autonomy?

OBJ + Standards:

- SS-US.9-12.17: Explain the patterns of and responses to immigration on the development of American culture and law.
- SS-Soc.9-12.14: Identify characteristics of groups, and the influences that groups and individuals have on each other.
- Evaluate the impact of public health crises and discrimination

The worksheet aligns with the standards by allowing students to analyze how the Board of Health responded to the immigration community in Chinatown. Additionally, this worksheet identifies how the Board of Health, as well as the Haole, influenced the Chinatown community leading up to the 1900 fire. The questions encourage students to consider the Chinese community's perspective on the fire as a potential attack, while also evaluating the role of public health officials during this time. This activity allows students to analyze the unfolding of the fire.

The Great Chinatown Fire of 1900 ANSWER KEY

Read the given texts below and fill out the table.

Chinatown in Honolulu was strongly associated with being a public health nuisance, partly because the Haole media promoted the idea that immigrants, particularly the Chinese, were disease-ridden. Another factor was the actual unsanitary conditions within Chinatown itself. After the fire of 1886, the area was rebuilt without a proper sewage system or a safe water supply, causing sanitary issues. Clifford Wood, the president of the Hawai'i Board of Health (BOH), declared that Chinatown was the natural habitat of the plague. Bubonic plague, which had been identified in Asia during the 1860s, made its way to Hawaii in 1899. There was a deep mistrust between the BOH and the Chinese community, stemming from negative experiences during a previous cholera outbreak. The Chinese, in turn, were reluctant to cooperate, hiding individuals who were ill with the plague. On December 12, 1899, five victims of the bubonic plague were identified in Chinatown, prompting the BOH to place a strict quarantine on the entire district. Although the first wave of quarantine was eventually lifted, a second wave was imposed after four new cases were discovered.

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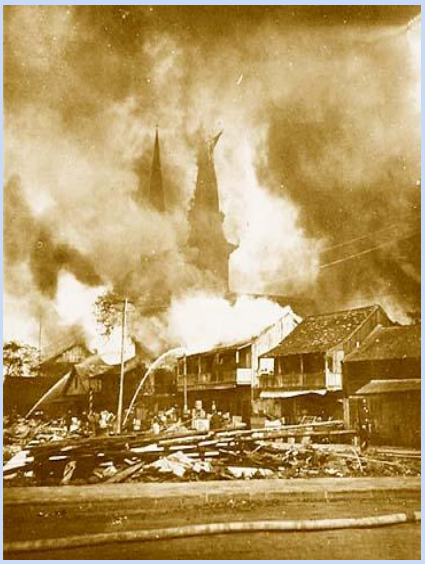


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How do they view the incident?

Board of Health / Haole	Chinatown Community
- Mention that they believed the winds were unintentional - Thought Chinatown was unclean/unsanitary (disease-ridden) - Fire was a method to solve the bubonic plague outbreak + eradicate the disease - Viewed Chinatown as the "natural habitat" of disease	- Mention that they believed the fire was a deliberate attack on the community - Mistrust between the health officials and Chinatown residents - No power or say in whether or not the fire was a good idea - Fire was connected to discrimination and racism - Fire was a way to hinder growth of Chinatown

Discuss with classmates:

1. The spreading fire in Chinatown was considered an "accident," but many people in the Chinese community believed it was an intentional attack. Based on what you know, what are some reasons that the Chinese community might feel this way?

    a. Prior miscommunication/mistrust between the BOH and the Chinatown residents
    b. Chinatown residents faced discrimination and racism
    c. Viewed as a threat to the other groups of people in Hawaii because of their prosperity
2. Imagine you are a member of the Hawaii Board of Health at the time. How would you have justified the fires to the public? Open-ended question
    a. I would have focused on the actual disease and reinforced that the spread was accidental.
3. How might the exclusion from decision-making processes affect the community's sense of power and autonomy? Open-ended question
    a. The lack of inclusion might be the reason why residents still believe the spread of fire was intentional as it took away their homes and destoryed their businesses.

Establishing Chinatown: Timeline

Fill in the missing blanks.

1785-1789	
1792-1843	
	First Sugar Mill: Wong Tze-Chun, a Chinese entrepreneur, establishes the first sugar mill in Hawaii, marking the beginning of Chinese involvement in Hawaii's sugar industry.
1850'S	
	Fire in Chinatown: A fire destroys 8 blocks, and the area is rebuilt without proper sewage or water systems. This contributes to the unsanitary conditions in the district later.
1899	
1900	
1930-1950's	
	First Historic District: Chinatown is designated as Hawaii's first historic district. This leads to efforts to preserve and revive the area.

Standards + OBJ:

- SS.9-12.17: Analyze the influence of human migrations on patterns of settlement and culture.
- SS.9-12.13: Explain the formation of groups and the creation and development of societal norms and values.
- Understand the impact of Chinese migration to Honolulu's Chinatown

The timeline worksheet provides a broader overview of how the Chinese people situated themselves in Hawaiian society. Students are able to visually pinpoint key events, starting from the migration of the Chinese people to the revitalization of Chinatown itself. By organizing the events in a chronological order, students can analyze how the migration of people eventually shaped a whole community.

Establishing Chinatown: Timeline

Fill in the missing blanks.

1785-1789	Chinese Arrive in Hawaii: The most widely accepted academic narrative suggests that the Chinese individuals arrived in 1789 with Captain Cook. Community leaders believe they came before during 1785, separate from the Western ships.
1792-1843	Sandalwood Trade: Chinese traders and businessmen establish a presence in Hawaii due to the sandalwood trade between China and Hawaii. This makes Chinese individuals familiar with Hawaii.
1802	First Sugar Mill: Wong Tze-Chun, a Chinese entrepreneur, establishes the first sugar mill in Hawaii, marking the beginning of Chinese involvement in Hawaii's sugar industry.
1850'S	Indentured Laborer Contracts: As sugar plantations increase, contracts were introduced to the workers from China. 1852 marks the first documented year that the workers arrived in Hawaii.
1886	Fire in Chinatown: A fire destroys 8 blocks, and the area is rebuilt without proper sewage or water systems. This contributes to the unsanitary conditions in the district later.
1899	Bubonic Plague Outbreak: The disease arrives to Hawaii and spreads in Chinatown. Five victims are identified on 12/12/1899. The BOH imposes two strict quarantines after cases are discovered.
1900	The Great Fire of Chinatown: The BOH carries out "controlled fires" to eliminate the plague from Chinatown. The fire spreads, destroying 60 acres of Chinatown. Many community members believe this was an intentional attack.
1930-1950's	Revitalizing Chinatown: There is an interest in revitalizing Chinatown, but progress is delayed due to the World Wars. In the 50's the Honolulu Redevelopment Agency begins to redevelop Chinatown as an attraction due to the increase in tourists. However, large malls later divert attention away,
1973	First Historic District: Chinatown is designated as Hawaii's first historic district. This leads to efforts to preserve and revive the area.

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