

CHINESE RAILROAD WORKERS IN NORTH AMERICA PROJECT

Organizing Questions

- What is the Chinese Railroad Workers in North America Project? How is the project helping to raise awareness about early Chinese laborers?
- How did Chinese railroad workers contribute to the first Transcontinental Railroad and help shape the landscape of the American West?
- How do scholars interpret the past without first-hand written records?
- What insights does Maxine Hong Kingston's book *China Men* provide on the lives of and experiences of Chinese railroad workers?

Introduction

This lesson familiarizes students with the Chinese Railroad Workers in North America Project (CRWNAP), the significance of using primary sources, and what the lives and experiences of Chinese railroad workers might have been like. The lesson begins with a discussion of how we interpret the past and learn about our ancestors. Students then discuss their current knowledge of early Chinese immigrants and are introduced to the CRWNAP with a short news clip. Students also listen to part of a National Public Radio recording, "*Stanford Project Unearths Histories of Chinese Railroad Workers*," with Stanford History Professor and CRWNAP Project Co-director, Gordon Chang; Chinese Historical Society of America Executive Director, Sue Lee; and Russell Low, a descendant of a Chinese railroad worker. Students also learn about the importance of using primary sources in interpreting the past.

On Day Two, students work with a partner to observe and analyze resources provided on the CRWNAP website. Then they read selections from an interview with Chinese-American author Maxine Hong Kingston and consider what questions they would ask if they were interviewing her.

On Day Three, students examine excerpts from Kingston's book *China Men*, about three generations of Chinese immigrants, to identify what they reveal about the contributions and experiences of Chinese railroad workers. To conclude the lesson, students assume the role of a Chinese railroad worker and create a personal reflection in the form of a mock journal entry, poem, letter, song, etc.

Objectives

In this lesson, students will

- become familiar with the Chinese Railroad Workers in North America Project;
- gain an understanding of the contributions of Chinese workers on the Transcontinental Railroad and westward expansion;
- consider the challenge of interpreting the past without first-hand written records;

- practice carefully observing and analyzing primary and secondary sources;
- examine literary excerpts to identify what they reveal about Chinese railroad workers in the 1860s; and
- appreciate multiple perspectives.

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: Analyze the push-pull factors which led to increased immigration, for the first time from China but especially from Ireland and Germany. [Analyze cause-and-effect relationships]
- Era 4, Standard 2C, Grades 7–12: Explain how immigration intensified ethnic and cultural conflict and complicated the forging of a national identity. [Interrogate historical data]
- Era 6, Standard 2A, Grades 7–12: Distinguish between the “old” and “new” immigration in terms of its volume and the immigrants’ ethnicity, religion, language, place of origin, and motives for emigrating from their homelands. [Analyze multiple causation]
- 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 2B, Grades 9–12: Analyze the role of new laws and the federal judiciary in instituting racial inequality and in disfranchising various racial groups. [Evaluate the implementation of a decision]
- Era 6, Standard 2C, Grades 7–12: Describe how regional artists and writers portrayed American life in this period. [Read historical narratives imaginatively]

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.
- Power, Authority and Governance; Thematic Strand VI: Social studies programs should include experiences that provide for the study of how people create and change structures of power, authority, and governance.
- Production, Distribution, and Consumption, Thematic Strand VII: Social studies programs should include experiences that provide for the study of how people organize for the production, distribution, and consumption of goods and services.
- Science, Technology, and Society; Thematic Strand VIII: Social studies programs should include experiences that provide for the study of relationships among science, technology, and society.
- Global Connections and Interdependence; Thematic Strand IX: Social studies programs should include experiences that provide for the study of global connections and independence.

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

- Standard 1, Grades 9–10: Cite specific textual evidence to support analysis of primary and secondary sources, attending to such features as the date and origin of the information.
- Standard 2, Grades 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.
- Standard 3, Grades 9–10: Analyze in detail a series of events described in a text; determine whether earlier events caused later ones or simply preceded them.

- 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, *NPR Recording: “Stanford Project Unearths Histories of Chinese Railroad Workers,”* 30 copies
Handout 2, *Primary Sources*, 30 copies
Handout 3, *Analyzing Resources*, 15 copies
Handout 4A–E, *China Men Excerpts*, six copies
Answer Key 1, *NPR Recording: “Stanford Project Unearths Histories of Chinese Railroad Workers”*
Answer Key 2, *Primary Sources*
Answer Key 3, *Analyzing Resources*
Answer Key 4, *China Men Excerpts*
Teacher Information, *Transcript of Interview with Maxine Hong Kingston*

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
Optional: *China Men* by Maxine Hong Kingston

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|---------------------|---|
| 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. Become familiar with the Chinese Railroad Workers of North America Project and the contents of its website at http://web.stanford.edu/group/chineserailroad/cgi-bin/wordpress/. 4. View the three-minute ABC news clip about Chinese Railroad Workers in North America Project at http://abc7news.com/society/american-railroad-project-peers-into-chinese-past/903452/. 5. Listen to the first 23 minutes of the NPR Recording: “<i>Stanford Project Unearths Histories of Chinese Railroad Workers</i>” provided at https://ww2.kqed.org/forum/2015/07/27/stanford-project-unearths-personal-histories-of-chinese-railroad-workers-2/. 6. View the video recording of the interview with Maxine Hong Kingston. If helpful, read Teacher Information, <i>Transcript of Interview with Maxine Hong Kingston</i>, while viewing the recording. 7. Set up and test computer, projector, and speakers. Confirm ability to play audio and video and project sound audibly to students. |
| Note to Teacher | <p>This lesson provides the opportunity for students to carefully observe and analyze primary sources to make a hypothesis, pose additional questions, and draw possible conclusions. When using primary sources in the classroom, be sure to emphasize the importance of putting the sources in the proper historical and cultural context, understanding the sources through that lens, and demonstrating cultural and historical sensitivity. Remind students that primary and secondary sources provide a glimpse into the past and cannot present all perspectives.</p> |
| Time | Three 50-minute class periods |
| Procedures Day One | <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Prepare the class for this lesson by facilitating a brief discussion about how we interpret the past. Pose the following questions to engage students in the discussion. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What information does your family have about your ancestors? • How did your family obtain the information? • Does your family have oral histories that have been passed down from generations, telling the stories and experiences of your ancestors? • How reliable do you think oral histories are? • Could some of the information shared in oral histories be family legend, misunderstood, forgotten, or inaccurately retold? • Does your family have first-hand sources or records from your ancestors? |

- If so, what kinds of records (official documents, photographs, journals, memorabilia, etc.)?
- How do these records help your family understand its history and share it with later generations?

If students have limited knowledge about their ancestors, they can talk to parents or other relatives to gain more information as homework, if helpful.

2. In the case of early Chinese immigrants, historians and descendants have had to rely on oral histories and documents and accounts by others. Ask students why not having first-hand accounts is a disadvantage.
3. Assess students' current knowledge about early Chinese immigrants in America by asking them to share what they know. Students may have limited knowledge on this topic. If helpful, prompt their responses with some or all of the following questions:
 - When did they first begin to immigrate?
 - Why did they immigrate? Where did they settle?
 - What types of work did they engage in?
 - Did they bring their families?
 - What challenges did they face in America?
 - How did Americans treat them?
 - What contributions did they make to the economy and society?
 - Where did you learn about early Chinese immigrants?
4. Explain that historians have limited information about early Chinese immigrants because they have not yet found first-hand accounts written by them, and therefore, have had to interpret their past without these valuable records. The Chinese Railroad Workers in North America Project—facilitated at Stanford University and incorporating the work of more than 100 scholars in the United States and Asia—is seeking to gather more information about early Chinese immigrants, particularly those who worked on the Transcontinental Railroad in the 1860s.
5. Inform students that they will view a three-minute ABC news clip introducing the Chinese Railroad Workers of North America Project. Play the video at: <http://abc7news.com/society/american-railroad-project-peers-into-chinese-past/903452/>.
6. After viewing the video, ask students to list the resources that historians are using to interpret the experiences of the Chinese railroad workers. (*Answer: Family stories, old photographs, drawings, and documents from railroad builders.*) Then ask the following questions:
 - What do these resources lack?
 - Why do historians and scholars continue to look for first-hand accounts?
7. Distribute one copy of Handout 1, *NPR Recording: “Stanford Project Unearths Histories of Chinese Railroad Workers”* to each student. Inform

students that they will listen to part of a NPR recording with Stanford History Professor and Project Co-director, Gordon Chang; Executive Director of the Chinese Historical Society of America, Sue Lee; and Russell Low, a descendant of a Chinese railroad worker, to learn more about the project and its research.

8. Play the first 23 minutes of the NPR recording. Instruct students to listen and write their answers to the questions on Handout 1. Pause and /or replay sections of the recording as needed.
9. Review answers as a class. Use Answer Key 1, *NPR Recording: "Stanford Project Unearths Histories of Chinese Railroad Workers,"* to correct or add to student responses.
10. Collect Handout 1 for informal assessment.
11. Distribute one copy of Handout 2, *Primary Sources*, to each student for homework. Instruct students to read the handout, respond to the prompts, and bring the completed handout to the next class period.

Day Two *Note: Access to computers with Internet required.*

1. Use Answer Key 2, *Primary Sources*, to review student responses on Handout 2, *Primary Sources*.
2. Collect Handout 2 for assessment.
3. Divide the class into pairs. Distribute one copy of Handout 3, *Analyzing Resources*, to each pair. Inform students that they will work with their partner to become familiar with the Chinese Railroad Workers of North America Project website, view several sources on the site, and record their observations on the handout. Review the instructions with the class.
4. Allow 20–25 minutes for pairs to complete the activity, checking in with students to help them navigate the website and answer questions as needed.
5. Reconvene the whole class and ask a few students to briefly share their thoughts about the resources and what they found most interesting. Collect Handout 3 for assessment.
6. Inform students that they will listen to selections of an interview of Maxine Hong Kingston led by Shelley Fisher Fishkin, English Professor at Stanford University, co-director of Chinese Railroad Workers in North America Project, and author. In the interview, Kingston talks about her literary process and how she improvised using family oral history combined with folklore and historical fact.
7. Share the following information about Maxine Hong Kingston: Maxine Hong Kingston is a first-generation Chinese-American author who writes about the experiences of the Chinese immigrant community. She was born in Stockton, California in 1940 and graduated from the University of California, Berkeley in 1962. Kingston's parents were Chinese immigrants. She published her first book, *Woman Warrior: Memoirs of a Girlhood Among Ghosts*, in 1976. It won that year's National Book Critics' Circle Award for nonfiction

and earned her recognition as a leading author. Her second book, *China Men*, which tells the immigrant stories of three generations of her male relatives—her great grandfather in Sandalwood Mountains, her grandfather building the railroad in the Sierra Nevada Mountains, and her father who immigrated from China through Cuba—won the American Book Award in 1980. Both of these books combine family history, myth, and Kingston’s own memories.

About the title of her book *China Men*, Kingston explains:

“In the early days of Chinese-American history, men called themselves ‘Chinamen’ just as other newcomers called themselves ‘Englishmen’ or ‘Frenchmen’: the term distinguished them from the ‘Chinese’ who remained citizens of China, and also showed that they were not recognized as Americans. Later, of course, it became an insult. Young Chinese Americans today are reclaiming the word because of its political and historical precision, and are demanding that it be said with dignity and not for name-calling.” (<http://www.nybooks.com/articles/1980/08/14/chinese-ghost-story/>)

7. Play the video clip of the interview with Maxine Hong Kingston. As homework, instruct students to draft five questions they would ask Maxine Hong Kingston if they had the opportunity to interview her.

Day Three

1. Ask a few volunteers to share one of their five interview questions for Maxine Hong Kingston. Collect student questions for assessment.
2. Explain that students will examine excerpts from Kingston’s book, *China Men*, to gain further understanding about what the railroad workers might have experienced.
3. Divide the class into five groups of six students each. Distribute one copy of Handout 4A–E, *China Men Excerpts*, to each student in the corresponding group. Review the instructions with the class and explain that the character in the excerpts, Ah Goong, is a Chinese railroad worker whose character represents Maxine Hong Kingston’s grandfather.
4. Instruct students to respond to the questions on their handout as homework and to bring the completed handout to the next class session.
5. Ask students to convene in their groups of six. Allow groups about 10 minutes to discuss their responses to the prompts on the handout and select two spokespeople: one to read the excerpt to the class, and one to summarize the groups’ interpretations and reflections.
6. Allow approximately five minutes for each group to present its excerpt and reflections to the class.
7. Pose the following question to the class as a concluding discussion of the passages from the book: *Although, as Kingston states, her book is a mingling of historical fact, myth, and imagination, what facts are represented in the excerpts?*
8. Collect Handout 4A–E from each original small group for assessment.

9. Instruct students to write a personal response to the following prompt as homework:
Using the knowledge you have gained and the primary and secondary sources you have viewed as inspiration, assume the role of a Chinese railroad worker in the 1860s and write a mock journal entry, a letter to loved ones back home, a poem, or song lyrics about your experiences. Be sure to demonstrate cultural sensitivity.
10. Collect student responses during the next class period as a final assessment for the lesson.

- Assessment** The following are suggestions for assessing student work in this lesson:
1. Informally assess student responses to Handout 1, *NPR Recording: "Stanford Project Unearths Histories of Chinese Railroad Workers,"* based on Answer Key 1, *NPR Recording: "Stanford Project Unearths Histories of Chinese Railroad Workers."*
 2. Evaluate student responses to Handout 2, *Primary Sources,* based on Answer Key 2, *Primary Sources.*
 3. Evaluate student responses to Handout 3, *Analyzing Resources,* based on Answer Key 3, *Analyzing Resources.*
 4. Informally assess student interview questions for Maxine Hong Kingston, based on cultural sensitivity, quality, and thought demonstrated.
 5. Evaluate student responses to Handout 4A–E, *China Men Excerpts,* based on Answer Key 4, *China Men Excerpts.*
 6. Assess students' personal responses, based on cultural sensitivity, depth, quality, and thought demonstrated.
 7. 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.

NPR RECORDING: “STANFORD PROJECT UNEARTHS HISTORIES OF
CHINESE RAILROAD WORKERS”

Answer the following questions on a separate sheet of paper while listening to the NPR recording.

1. What is the goal of the Chinese Railroad Workers of North America Project?
2. Professor Chang mentioned the appropriateness of the project being facilitated at Stanford University. How is the founding of Stanford University associated with Chinese railroad workers?
3. When did the first Chinese immigrants arrive in America?
4. Were all the Chinese railroad workers already living in America when they started working for the railroad company? Explain.
5. According to Professor Chang, were Chinese laborers simply illiterate and unable to send letters home to China?
6. In 1969, Chinese were not honored at the commemoration of the 100th anniversary of the completion of the Transcontinental Railroad. According to Sue Lee, why was the program abruptly changed, resulting in the exclusion of the President of the Historical Society?
7. Why does Sue Lee believe that “people felt it was okay” to snub the memory of the Chinese workers in 1969?
8. What significant feat is mentioned that the Chinese workers accomplished in the Sierra Nevada Mountains?
9. Why were Chinese laborers hired to construct the railroad?
10. Why did it take months to travel from New York to San Francisco before the Transcontinental Railroad was built?
11. After the completion of the Transcontinental Railroad in 1869, what kinds of work did the Chinese do?

PRIMARY SOURCES

Just as detectives rely on evidence to solve crimes, historians study and interpret documents and objects to decipher history. Primary sources—original records left behind by eyewitnesses and participants in past events—are the clues historians rely on to piece together the past. Primary sources provide the evidence that underpins historical narratives. These include items such as letters, manuscripts, treaties, newspapers, diaries, interviews, photographs, videos, objects, artifacts, and data that offer information about the past.

Because a primary source has its own voice, it allows the reader to become the historian, to interpret and decipher its historical value. To determine its value, historians must carefully analyze a source for bias and time and place. All sources contain bias in that they can only tell what the author thought happened or wanted us to think happened, and not what actually happened. A historian must also consider when and where a primary source was created. The closer the time and place a primary source and its author were to an event in the past, the more useful the source will be to a historian who is studying that event.

When an author compiles information derived from primary sources and then writes about it, his or her narrative becomes what is called a secondary source. A secondary source is an analysis or interpretation of primary sources or other secondary sources. While there is great value in studying history through secondary sources such as textbooks, they offer a limited and sometimes flawed view of history. One must remember that the author is using his or her own words and interpretation to tell the story, thereby introducing the element of bias.

Bias can take the form of the author writing his or her narrative in a way that leads the reader to a certain conclusion. Bias can also arise from the content that is or is not included in a source—how much space is allotted to the topic; what information about the topic is included; and what perspectives are highlighted. It is important to understand that what is not present can be as telling as what is present. Who decides what is important enough to be included in your textbook or a nonfiction work? He or she may have a vested interest in promoting a certain view of history. This is one reason why relying solely on secondary sources about history has its limitations.

An abundance of primary sources exists for influential figures and powerful institutions, and a significant amount of scholarship has been done on them. But focusing solely on these types of primary sources also limits the scope and view of history. For every voice influential enough to appear in a history book, there are untold numbers of voices of everyday people, the poor and powerless, and the underrepresented in society. These individuals often leave few or inaccessible records behind, and they are often marginalized or forgotten altogether.

When using primary sources, one must carefully observe to try to make a hypothesis, pose additional questions about what is there, what is not, and why, and draw possible conclusions. Be careful to put it into the proper context, understanding the resource through that lens, and demonstrate cultural and historical sensitivity.

When using any source, ask yourself: Who created it, and why? When and where was it created? What questions about the past can it help answer? What questions about the past can it not help answer? What is the author's purpose or bias?

* Adapted from *Chinese-American Voices From the Gold Rush to the Present Teacher's Guide*. Jonas Edman and Selena Lai. Stanford Program on International and Cross-Cultural Education (SPICE), Stanford University, 2012.

handout 2

Respond to the prompts below.

1. What is a primary source?

2. Identify which of the following are primary sources and which are secondary sources, if one is studying Chinese railroad workers. Write "P" for primary sources and "S" for secondary sources.
 - a. A current newspaper article about working conditions on the railroad in 1868
 - b. A newspaper article from 1868 about working conditions on the railroad
 - c. Bamboo-pattern rice bowls found near a railroad tunnel camp site
 - d. A documentary about the story of a Chinese-American family whose ancestors were railroad workers
 - e. Photographs from 1867 of laborers constructing the railroad
 - f. An interview of a descendant of a Chinese railroad worker
 - g. A fragment of a traditional Chinese teacup
 - h. Your history textbook
 - i. A mural painted in 1935 depicting the scene when the rail lines from the west and east met in Promontory, Utah
 - j. The original golden spike used to symbolize the completion of the Transcontinental Railroad
 - k. Payroll records from 1866 from the Pacific Railroad Company
 - l. A railroad advertisement in a 1865 newspaper

3. Why do historians prefer to work with primary sources when studying and interpreting the past?

4. What determines whether a source is primary or secondary?

5. Explain why bias, time, and place are important in determining the usefulness of a primary source.

ANALYZING RESOURCES

Read the “FAQ” page on the Chinese Railroad Workers of North America Project (CRWNAP) website. In the space below, list five facts that you found most significant.

Using the CRWNAP website, locate the “Research” tab and the resources listed in #1–4 below. Complete the information for each to the best of your ability. Then choose two additional resources on the website and complete the information for #5–6. You may need to make hypotheses and educated guesses for some of your answers. The first one has been completed for you as an example.

1. Type and title of source:

Photograph, “Chinese Camp, Brown’s Station”

Who created it and when?

Possibly a photographer working for the railroad company or a newspaper; between 1865 and 1869

Is it a primary or secondary source?

Primary source

What questions can it help answer?

What the camp looked like; what the tents were made of; if the men socialized with each other; what kinds of tools and equipment they had; what the scenery and surroundings looked like; how close they lived to the tracks, what the tracks looked like, etc.

What is the author’s purpose or bias?

For historical record or to demonstrate progress to the company directors

2. Type and title of source:

Photograph, “Funeral procession returning to New Chinatown in Dutch Flat”*

Who created it and when?

Is it a primary or secondary source?

What questions can it help answer?

What is the author's purpose or bias?

Do you think this is what a funeral procession would have been like in their home village in China? Explain.

*A note about Dutch Flat:

The rich mining town of Dutch Flat was founded in 1851 by two German-immigrant brothers who were miners during the California Gold Rush. At one point, Dutch Flat had the largest population (5,000) in Placer County. The Chinese established a thriving Chinatown in Dutch Flat in the late 1850s, and there was a large Chinese immigrant community in the 1860s during the railroad construction. For a time, Dutch Flat boasted the most significant Chinatown outside of San Francisco, where visitors would go to celebrate the Chinese New Year. In September 1877, the original Chinatown was destroyed by fire and a new Chinatown was built closer to the railroad tracks. A Chinese cemetery exists in Dutch Flat, mostly containing only headstones because bodies were later transported back to China.

3. Type and title of source:

Photograph, "Chinese celebration at Dutch Flat Railroad Station area"

Who created it and when?

Is it a primary or secondary source?

What questions can it help answer?

What is the author's purpose or bias?

What do you think they are celebrating? Explain.

4. Type and title of source:

Payroll manuscript, "Sisons China PRoll" CPRR Payroll No. 116, February 1866

Who created it and when?

Is it a primary or secondary source?

What questions can it help answer?

What is the author's purpose or bias?

5. Type and title of source:

Who created it and when?

Is it a primary or secondary source?

What questions can it help answer?

What is the author's purpose or bias?

One additional observation about the source:

6. Type and title of source:

Who created it and when?

Is it a primary or secondary source?

What questions can it help answer?

What is the author's purpose or bias?

One additional observation about the source:

CHINA MEN *EXCERPT A*

Read the following passage from *China Men* and consider what it reveals about Chinese culture, the Chinese laborer experience, the immigrant experience, and/or American culture. Answer the questions at the end and bring your responses to the next class period to share in your group.

Excerpt A: Beginning on page 128 of *CHINA MEN* by Maxine Hong Kingston, copyright © 1977, 1978, 1979, 1980 by Maxine Hong Kingston. Used by permission of Alfred A. Knopf, an imprint of the Knopf Doubleday Publishing Group, a division of Penguin Random House LLC. All rights reserved.

The Central Pacific hired him on sight; Chinamen had a natural talent for explosions. Also, there were not enough working men to do all the labor of building a new country. Some of the banging came from the war to decide whether or not black people would continue to work for nothing. ...

He made a dollar a day salary. The lucky men gambled, but he was not good at remembering game rules. The work so far was endurable. "I could take it," he said.

The days were sunny and blue, the wind exhilarating, the heights godlike. At night the stars were diamonds, crystals, silver, snow, ice. He had never seen diamonds. He had never seen snow and ice. As spring turned into summer, and he lay under that sky, he saw the order in the stars. He recognized constellations from China. There—not a cloud but the Silver River, and there, on either side of it—Altair and Vega, the Spinning Girl and the Cowboy, far, far apart. He felt his heart breaking of loneliness at so much blue-black space between star and star. The railroad he was building would not lead him to his family. He jumped out of his bedroll. "Look! Look!" Other China Men jumped awake. An accident? An avalanche? Injun demons? "The stars," he said. "The stars are here." ...

Pretending that a little girl was listening, he told himself the story about the Spinning Girl and the Cowboy. A long time ago they had visited Earth, where they met, fell in love, and married. Instead of growing used to each other, they remained enchanted their entire lifetimes and beyond. They were too happy. They wanted to be doves or two branches of the same tree. When they returned to live in the sky, they were so engrossed in each other that they neglected their work. The Queen of the Sky scratched a river between them with one stroke of her silver hairpin—the river a galaxy in width. The lovers suffered, but she did devote her time to spinning now, and he herded his cow. The King of the Sky took pity on them and ordered that once each year, they be allowed to meet. On the seventh day of the seventh month (which is not the same as July 7th), magpies form a bridge for them to cross to each other. The lovers are together for one night of the year. On their parting, the Spinner cries the heavy summer rains. Ah Goong's discovery of the two stars gave him something to look forward to besides meals and tea breaks. Every night he located Altair and Vega and gauged how much closer they had come since the night before. During the day he watched the magpies, big black and white birds with round bodies like balls with wings; they were a welcome sight, a promise of meetings. He had found two familiars in the wilderness: magpies and stars.

The Spinning Girl and the Cowboy met and parted six times before the railroad was finished.

Note: Kingston's myth of the constellations is based on a 2,000-year-old fairy tale associated with Qi Xi, Chinese Valentine's Day, that symbolizes true love and is celebrated on the seventh day of the seventh month of the Chinese lunar calendar.

Questions

1. What reasons does this passage suggest for why Chinese men were hired to work on the railroad?
2. What was their daily salary?
3. Considering the situation in America after the Civil War, what was the significance of building the Transcontinental Railroad?
4. What does the myth of the Spinning Girl and the Cowboy represent for Ah Goong?

CHINA MEN *EXCERPT B*

Read the following passage from *China Men* and consider what it reveals about Chinese culture, the Chinese laborer experience, the immigrant experience, and/or American culture. Answer the questions at the end and bring your responses to the next class period to share in your group.

Excerpt B: Beginning on page 130 of *CHINA MEN* by Maxine Hong Kingston, copyright © 1977, 1978, 1979, 1980 by Maxine Hong Kingston. Used by permission of Alfred A. Knopf, an imprint of the Knopf Doubleday Publishing Group, a division of Penguin Random House LLC. All rights reserved.

When cliffs, sheer drops under impossible overhangs, ended the road, the workers filled the ravines or built bridges over them. They climbed above the site for tunnel or bridge and lowered one another down in wicker baskets made stronger by the lucky words they had painted on four sides. Ah Goong got to be a basketman because he was thin and light. Some basketmen were fifteen-year-old boys. He rode the basket barefoot, so his boots, the kind to stomp snakes with, would not break through the bottom. The basket swung and twirled, and he saw the world sweep underneath him; it was fun in a way, a cold new feeling of doing what had never been done before. Suspended in the quiet sky, he thought all kinds of crazy thoughts, that if a man didn't want to live any more, he could just cut the ropes or, easier, tilt the basket, dip, and never have to worry again. He could spread his arms, and the air would momentarily hold him before he fell past the buzzards, hawks, and eagles, and landed impaled on the tips of a sequoia. This high and he didn't see any gods, no Cowboy, no Spinner. He knelt in the basket though he was not bumping his head against the sky. Through the wickerwork, slivers of depths darted like needles, nothing between him and air but thin rattan. Gusts of wind spun the light basket. "Aiya," said Ah Goong. Winds came up under the basket, bouncing it. Neighboring baskets swung together and parted. He and the man next to him looked at each other's faces. They laughed. They might as well have gone to Malaysia to collect bird nests. Those who had done high work there said it had been worse. ...

This time two men were blown up. One knocked out or killed by the explosion fell silently, the other screaming, his arms and legs struggling. A desire shot out of Ah Goong for an arm long enough to reach down and catch them. Much time passed as they fell like plummets. The shreds of baskets and a cowboy hat skimmed and tacked. The winds that pushed birds off course and against mountains did not carry men. Ah Goong also wished that the conscious man would fall faster and get it over with. His hand gripped the ropes and it was difficult to let go and get on with the work. "It can't happen twice in a row," the basketmen said the next trip down. "Our chances are very good. The trip after an accident is probably the safest one." They raced to their favorite basket, checked and double-checked the four ropes, yanked the strands, tested the pulleys, oiled them, reminded the pulleymen about the signals and entered the sky again.

Another time, Ah Goong had been lowered to the bottom of a ravine, which had to be cleared for the base of a trestle, when a man fell and he saw his face. He had not died of shock before hitting bottom. His hands were grabbing at air. His stomach and groin must have felt the fall all the way down. At night, Ah Goong woke up falling, though he slept on the ground, and heard other men call out in their sleep. No warm women tweaked their ears and hugged them. "It was only a falling dream," he reassured himself. Across a valley, a chain of men working on the next mountain, men like ants, changing the face of the world fell, but it was very far away. (continued on next page)

Godlike, he watched men whose faces he could not see and whose screams he did not hear roll and bounce and slide like a handful of sprinkled gravel.

After a fall, the buzzards circled the spot and reminded the workers for days that a man was dead down there. The men threw piles of rocks and branches to cover bodies from sight.

Questions

1. What does this passage indicate about the geography and terrain where the men worked?
2. Briefly describe the tasks the men did in the mountains.
3. Why do you think Kingston describes the scenes of men dying?
4. How does this passage help dispel the common stereotype of the weak Chinese man?
5. Many historians believe the men did not actually go down the cliffs in baskets as described in this passage, but what historical truth does this passage reveal?

CHINA MEN EXCERPT C

Read the following passage from *China Men* and consider what it reveals about Chinese culture, the Chinese laborer experience, the immigrant experience, and/or American culture. Answer the questions at the end and bring your responses to the next class period to share in your group.

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The men who died slowly enough to say last words said, "Don't leave me frozen under the snow. Send my body home. Burn it, and put the ashes in a tin can. Take the bone jar when you come down the mountain." "When you ride the fire car back to China, tell my descendants to come for me." "Shut up," scolded the hearty men. "We don't want to hear about bone jars and dying. You're lucky to have a body to bury, not blown to smithereens." "Stupid man to hurt yourself," they bawled out the sick and wounded. How their wives would scold if they brought back deadmen's bones. "Aiya, to be buried here, nowhere." "But this is somewhere," Ah Goong promised. "This is the Gold Mountain. We're marking the land now. The track sections are numbered, and your family will know where we leave you." But he was a crazy man and they didn't listen to him.

Spring did come, and when the snow melted, it revealed the past year, what had happened, what they had done, where they had worked, the lost tools, the thawing bodies, some standing with tools in hand, the bright rails. "Remember Uncle Long Winded Leong?" "Remember Strong Back Wong?" "Remember Lee Brother?" "And Fong Uncle?" They lost count of the number dead. There is no record of how many died building the railroad. Or maybe it was demons doing the counting and Chinamen not worth counting. Whether it was good luck or bad luck, the dead were buried or cairned next to the last section of track they had worked on. "May his ghost not have to toil," they said over graves. (In China a woodcutter ghost chops eternally; people have heard chopping in the snow and in the heat.) "Maybe his ghost will ride the train home."*

*The scientific demons said the Transcontinental Railroad would connect the West to Cathay. "What if he rides back and forth from Sacramento to New York forever?" "That wouldn't be so bad. I hear the cars will be like houses on wheels." The funerals were short. "No time. No time," said both China Men and demons. The railroad was as straight as they could build it, but no ghosts sat on the tracks; no strange presences haunted the tunnels. The blasts scared ghosts away.** ...*

The demons invented games for working faster, gold coins for miles of track laid, for the heaviest rock, a grand prize for the first team to break through a tunnel. Day shifts raced against night shifts, China Men against Welshmen, China Men against Irishmen, China Men against Injuns and black demons. The fastest races were China Men against China Men, who bet on their own teams. China Men always won because of good teamwork, smart thinking, and the need for the money. Also, they had the most workers to choose teams from. Whenever his team won anything, Ah Goong added to his gold stash. The Central Pacific or Union Pacific won the land on either side of the tracks it built.

* The winter of 1866 was one of the harshest on record in the Sierra Nevada. Storms, snow, and low temperatures led to the deaths of many Chinese working in the mountains that winter.

** According to ancient Chinese tradition, ghosts are believed to only travel in straight lines but could be scared away by loud noises.

Questions

1. In the first sentence of the last paragraph, who are the “demons”? Why do you think they call them demons?
2. According to this passage, how did the Chinese compare to the other workers?
3. Chinese burial is an important cultural tradition, and this passage depicts situations in which the men could not take time for the traditional Chinese burial customs. Ancient Chinese beliefs dating back to the Shang Dynasty (c. 1600–1046 BCE) assert that if burial customs are not followed properly, the soul of the deceased will remain among the living as ghosts. According to these customs, the deceased should be mourned for an appropriate amount of time.

Given this information, why do you think the men said, “You’re lucky to have a body to bury, not blown to smithereens”?

4. How do you feel about the fact that no records were kept of Chinese deaths during the railroad work? Explain.
5. The passage indicates that contests were used to encourage teams to work harder and faster. During the most famous contest known by historians, workers built 10 miles of track in one day.

Why do you think they would work so hard when they were paid so little and the work was so physically and psychologically demanding?

CHINA MEN *EXCERPT D*

Read the following passage from *China Men* and consider what it reveals about Chinese culture, the Chinese laborer experience, the immigrant experience, and/or American culture. Answer the questions at the end and bring your responses to the next class period to share in your group.

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One summer day, demon officials and China Man translators went from group to group and announced, "We're raising the pay—thirty-five dollars a month. Because of your excellent work, the Central Pacific Railroad is giving you a four-dollar raise per month." The workers who didn't know better cheered. "What's the catch?" said the smarter men. "You'll have the opportunity to put in more time," said the railroad demons. Two more hours per shift. Ten-hour shifts inside the tunnels. "It's not ten hours straight," said the demons. "You have time off for tea and meals. Now that you have dynamite, the work isn't so hard." They had been working for three and a half years already, and the track through the Donner Summit was still not done.

The workers discussed the ten-hour shift, swearing their China Men obscenities. "Two extra hours a day—sixty hours a month for four dollars." "Pig catcher demons." "Snakes." "Turtles." "Dead demons." "A human body can't work like that." "The demons don't believe this is a human body. This is a chinaman's body." To bargain, they sent a delegation of English speakers, who were summarily noted as troublemakers, turned away, docked.

The China Men, then, decided to go on strike and demand forty-five dollars a month and the eight-hour shift. They risked going to jail and the Central Pacific keeping the pay it was banking for them. Ah Goong memorized the English, "Forty-five dollars a month—eight-hour shift." He practiced the strike slogan: "Eight hours a day good for white man, all the same good for China Man." ...

The strike began on Tuesday morning, June 25, 1867. The men who were working at that hour walked out of the tunnels and away from the tracks. The ones who were sleeping slept on and rose as late as they pleased. They bathed in streams and shaved their mustaches and wild beards. Some went fishing and hunting. The violinists tuned and played their instruments. The drummers beat theirs at the punchlines of jokes. The gamblers shuffled and played their cards and tiles. The smokers passed their pipes, and the drinkers bet for drinks by making figures with their hands. The cooks made party food. The opera singers' falsettos almost perforated the mountains. The men sang new songs about the railroad. They made up verses and shouted Ho at the good ones, and laughed at the rhymes. Oh, they were madly singing in the mountains. The storytellers told about the rise of new kings. The opium smokers, when they roused themselves, told their florid images. Ah Goong sifted for gold. All the while the English-speaking China Men, who were being advised by the shrewdest bargainers, were at the demons' headquarters repeating the demand: "Eight hours a day good for white man, all the same good for China Man." They had probably negotiated the demons down to nine-hour shifts by now.

The sounds of hammering continued along the tracks and occasionally there were blasts from the tunnels. The scabby white demons had refused to join the strike. "Eight hours a day good for white man, all the same good for China Man," the China Men explained to them. "Cheap John Chinaman," said the demons, many of whom had red hair. The China Men scowled out of the corners of their eyes. ... (continued on next page)

On the second day, artist demons climbed the mountains to draw the China Men for the newspapers. The men posed bare-chested, their fists clenched, showing off their arms and backs. The artists sketched them as perfect young gods reclining against rocks, wise expressions on their handsome noble-nosed faces, long torsos with lean stomachs, a strong arm extended over a bent knee, long fingers holding a pipe, a rope of hair over a wide shoulder. Other artists drew faeries with antennae for eyebrows and brownies with elvish pigtails; they danced in white socks and black slippers among mushroom rings by moonlight.

Ah Goong acquired another idea that added to his reputation for craziness: The pale thin Chinese scholars and the rich men fat like Buddhas were less beautiful, less manly than these brown muscular railroad men, of whom he was one. One of ten thousand heroes. ...

Note: After company management cut off the workers' food supply, the strike ended and the Chinese men went back to work. However, the Central Pacific owners later raised Chinese workers' pay, perhaps in part as a result of the strike. They expressed respect for the organization and discipline of the workers, who had conducted the strike with a remarkable degree of coordination and unity. The strike had taken the company completely by surprise and had deeply shaken it, for without the Chinese workers, the company understood that it would be unable to make any progress in construction. The Central Pacific owners realized that they could not take the Chinese for granted.

Questions

1. What do you think of the different depictions of Chinese by the American newspapers (i.e., gods, fairies, elves)? Why do you think they would be effective in promoting stereotypes?
2. James Strobridge, the superintendent of construction for the Central Pacific Railroad, was opposed to hiring Chinese in 1865 because he did not think they were big or strong enough to handle the physically demanding work. During this era, a common stereotype of a Chinese man was physical and emotional weakness. In this book, Kingston helps dispel the stereotype of the inferior Chinese man.

How does this passage help dispel the stereotype? What do the workers accomplish with the strike that Kingston describes as Chinese workers basically organizing the first labor union?

3. What does this passage reveal to you about the Chinese laborer experience?

CHINA MEN *EXCERPT E*

Read the following passage from *China Men* and consider what it reveals about Chinese culture, the Chinese laborer experience, the immigrant experience, and/or American culture. Answer the questions at the end and bring your responses to the next class period to share in your group.

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There were two days that Ah Goong did cheer and throw his hat in the air, jumping up and down and screaming Yippee like a cowboy. One, the day his team broke through the tunnel at last. Toward the end, they did not dynamite but again used pics and sledgehammers. Through the granite, they heard answering poundings, and answers to their shouts. It was not a mountain before them anymore but only a wall with people breaking through from the other side. They worked faster. Forward. Into day. They stuck their arms through the holes and shook hands with men on the other side.

Ah Goong saw dirty faces as wondrous as if he were seeing Nu Wo, the creator goddess who repairs cracks in the sky with stone slabs; sometimes she peeks through and human beings see her face. The wall broke. Each team gave the other a gift of half a tunnel, dug. They stepped back and forth where the wall had been. Ah Goong ran and ran, his boots thudding to the very end of the tunnel, looked at the other side of the mountain and ran back, clear through the entire tunnel. All the way through.

He spent the rest of his time on the railroad laying and bending and hammering the ties and rails. The second day the China Men cheered was when the engine from the West and the one from the East rolled toward one another and touched. The Transcontinental Railroad was finished. They Yippee'd like madmen. The white demon officials gave speeches. "The Greatest Feat of the Nineteenth Century," they said. "The Greatest Feat in the history of Mankind," they said. "Only Americans could have done it," they said, which is true. Even if Ah Goong had not spent half his gold on Citizenship Papers, he was an American for having built the railroad. A white demon in top hat-tapped on the gold spike, and pulled it back out. Then one China Man held the real spike, the steel one, and another hammered it in.

While the demons posed for photographs, the China Men dispersed. It was dangerous to stay. The Driving Out had begun. Ah Goong does not appear in railroad photographs. ...

Seventy went to New Orleans to grade a route for a railroad, then to Pennsylvania to work in a knife factory. The Colorado State Legislature passed a resolution, welcoming the railroad China Men to come build the new state. They built railroads in every part of the country—the Alabama and Chattanooga Railroad, the Houston and Texas Railroad, the Southern Pacific, the railroads in Louisiana and Boston, the Pacific Northwest, and Alaska. After the Civil War, China Men banded the nation North and South, East and West, with crisscrossing steel. They were the binding and building ancestors of this place.

Questions

1. In the first paragraph, Kingston compares Ah Goong to a cowboy. What do you think is the significance of this simile? Do you think Ah Goong is like a cowboy? Explain.
2. Describe how the men may have felt on the day the Transcontinental Railroad was finished. Why might they have had mixed emotions?
3. Explain why you think Ah Goong felt like an American for having built the railroad?
4. The fourth paragraph states: "While the demons posed for photographs, the China Men dispersed. It was dangerous to stay. The Driving Out had begun." The 'Driving Out' refers to the increased anti-Chinese sentiment which had begun with the California Gold Rush in 1849, continued to escalate, and eventually resulted in the Chinese Exclusion Act of 1882. This legislation passed by the U.S. Congress prohibited Chinese immigration to the United States and was not repealed until 1943.

Unfortunately, racism and discrimination continue to exist in contemporary society. What forms of racism and discrimination do you see in the world today? In your country? In your community? In your school? How can learning about history and the experiences of all kinds of people lead to a more accepting and less racist world?

NPR RECORDING: “STANFORD PROJECT UNEARTHES HISTORIES OF
CHINESE RAILROAD WORKERS”

1. What is the goal of the Chinese Railroad Workers of North America Project?
The goal of the project is to increase awareness about Chinese railroad workers and give them a voice.
2. Professor Chang mentioned the appropriateness of the project being facilitated at Stanford University. How is the founding of Stanford University associated with Chinese railroad workers?
Much of the wealth that Leland Stanford used to establish the university came from the Transcontinental Railroad, and Chinese workers were instrumental in its construction and completion.
3. When did the first Chinese immigrants arrive in America?
The first Chinese immigrants moved to California during the Gold Rush of 1849.
4. Were all the Chinese railroad workers already living in America when they started working for the railroad company? Explain.
No, the first wave of workers was already living in America, but others were recruited from China later.
5. According to Professor Chang, were Chinese laborers simply illiterate and unable to send letters home to China?
No, many of the workers were literate and some did send materials back home.
6. In 1969, Chinese were not honored at the commemoration of the 100th anniversary of the completion of the Transcontinental Railroad. According to Sue Lee, why was the program abruptly changed, resulting in the exclusion of the President of the Chinese Historical Society of America?
According to Sue Lee, the program was changed to accommodate John Wayne, politicians, and other celebrities who attended the ceremony.
7. Why does Sue Lee believe that “people felt it was okay” to snub the memory of the Chinese workers in 1969?
Sue Lee believes some people felt it was okay in 1969 because there were still small numbers of Chinese in the United States then; as a result, there was less awareness and less interest in recognizing them than there is today.
8. What significant feat is mentioned that the Chinese workers accomplished in the Sierra Nevada Mountains?
The Chinese workers built 15 tunnels through solid granite in the mountains using hand tools and explosives. It was treacherous and dangerous work.
9. Why were Chinese laborers hired to construct the railroad?
Chinese labor was more available; it was quicker in many cases to sail across the Pacific Ocean from China than to travel from the east coast of the United States. It was also less expensive, as Chinese laborers were paid significantly less than non-Chinese workers.
10. Why did it take months to travel from New York to San Francisco before the Transcontinental Railroad was built?
Before the Transcontinental Railroad, travelers had to sail through Panama or all the way around the tip of South America to the west coast.
11. After the completion of the Transcontinental Railroad in 1869, what kinds of work did the Chinese do?
Some Chinese became professional railroad workers on other railroad projects in the Western

Hemisphere; others became merchants, doctors, cooks, etc.

12. What further questions do you have after viewing the ABC video and listening to the NPR recording?

Student responses will vary.

PRIMARY SOURCES

1. What is a primary source?
A primary source is an original record left behind by an eyewitness or participant in a past event.
2. Identify which of the following are primary sources and which are secondary sources if one is studying Chinese railroad workers. Write "P" for primary sources and "S" for secondary sources.
 - a. A current newspaper article about working conditions on the railroad in 1868 (S)
 - b. A newspaper article from 1868 about working conditions on the railroad (P)
 - c. Bamboo-pattern rice bowls found near a railroad tunnel camp site (P)
 - d. A documentary about the story of a Chinese-American family whose ancestors were railroad workers (S)
 - e. Photographs from 1867 of laborers constructing the railroad (P)
 - f. An interview of a descendant of a Chinese railroad worker (S)
 - g. A fragment of a traditional Chinese teacup (P)
 - h. Your history textbook (S)
 - i. A mural painted in 1935 depicting the scene when the rail lines from the west and east met in Promontory, Utah (S)
 - j. The original golden spike used to symbolize the completion of the Transcontinental Railroad (P)
 - k. Payroll records from 1866 from the Pacific Railroad Company (P)
 - l. A railroad company advertisement in a 1865 newspaper (P)
3. Why do historians prefer to work with primary sources when studying and interpreting the past?
Primary sources provide clues and evidence from the actual eyewitnesses or participants in past events, whereas secondary sources provide someone else's analysis and interpretation.
4. What determines whether a source is primary or secondary?
A primary source is created by an eyewitness and/or a participant in the event. A secondary source is created by someone who did not experience the event first hand.
5. Explain why bias, time, and place are important in determining the usefulness of a primary source.
All primary sources can exhibit bias, even those created near the time and place of an event. For example, a newspaper article written the day of an event may be heavily biased. However, primary sources that were created far from the event in time or place will likely exhibit different biases.

ANALYZING RESOURCES

Five facts from “FAQ” page of the Chinese Railroad Workers of North America Project website:
Student responses will vary.

Resources from the CRWNAP website:

1. *Answers are provided to students on Handout 3.*

2. Type and title of source:
Photograph, “Funeral procession returning to New Chinatown in Dutch Flat”
 Who created it and when?
Possibly a photographer working for the railroad company or newspaper; possibly circa 1865–66
 Is it a primary or secondary source?
Primary source
 What questions can it help answer?
What a funeral procession looked like; what the men wore; what they carried; how they walked in the procession; who was there; etc.
 What is the author’s purpose or bias?
For historical record, to share with railroad directors, or out of interest
 Do you think this is what a funeral procession would have been like in their home village in China? Explain.
Student responses will vary.

3. Type and title of source:
Photograph, “Chinese celebration at Dutch Flat Railroad Station area”
 Who created it and when?
Possibly a photographer working for the railroad company or newspaper; possibly circa 1865–66
 Is it a primary or secondary source?
Primary source
 What questions can it help answer?
What they might be celebrating, the kinds of items they carried in a celebration, etc.
 What is the author’s purpose or bias?
For historical record, to share with railroad directors, or out of interest
 What do you think they are celebrating? Explain.
Since they are carrying lanterns and some kind of flags and some appear to be wearing traditional Chinese clothing, they may be celebrating Chinese New Year.

4. Type and title of source:
Payroll manuscript “Sisons China PRoll” CPRR Payroll No. 116, February 1866
 Who created it and when?
An employee of the railroad company who kept records of their payroll; 1866
 Is it a primary or secondary source?
Primary source

answer key 3

What questions can it help answer?

What company the men worked for; when they worked for the company; who was paid; how much they were paid; when they were paid; how many days of the month they worked; who represented them, etc.

What is the author's purpose or bias?

To record payment of the workers for a one-month period

For #5 and #6, student responses will vary based on which resources they selected.

CHINA MEN EXCERPTS

Excerpt A Questions

1. What reasons does this passage suggest for why Chinese men were hired to work on the railroad?
Chinese were considered to be talented with the use of explosives; there were not enough men to do the labor.
2. What was their daily salary?
They earned a dollar a day.
3. Considering the situation in America after the Civil War, what was the significance of building the Transcontinental Railroad?
The construction of the railroad was significant because it would unite the east and west at a time when the country was divided by great distances as well as different ideologies, especially regarding slavery; the railroad represented progress and symbolized hope that the country was moving forward, expanding; it was also important for boosting the post-war economy.
4. What does the myth of the Spinning Girl and the Cowboy represent for Ah Goong?
The myth represents Ah Goong's homesickness and loneliness; being separated and far away from his wife and family; the reunion of the Spinning Girl and the Cowboy is something for him to look forward to. It helps signify the passage of time, and distracts him from his own longing to be with his wife. Seeing magpies and stars provides him some comfort because they are familiar things in a land that is unfamiliar. The railroad that he is building also represents a means for people who are far apart to come together, although ironically, it will not bring him together with his family.

Excerpt B Questions

1. What does this passage indicate about the geography and terrain where the men worked?
The men worked on steep cliffs, near ravines, and in the high altitude of the Sierra Nevada mountains.
2. Briefly describe the tasks the men did in the mountains.
They climbed cliffs, blasted rock, pounded granite, hammered steel, cleared trees and boulders, built bridges, filled ravines, etc.
3. Why do you think Kingston describes the scenes of men dying?
Student answers will vary. The scenes demonstrate the danger and fear that the Chinese workers faced; the men saw their comrades' lives abruptly taken and knew they could be next. The scenes depict the situations and hardships that thousands of other men also endured.
4. How does this passage help dispel the common stereotype of the weak Chinese man?
This type of dangerous work required courage and physical and mental strength.
5. Many historians believe the men did not actually go down the cliffs in baskets as described in this passage, but what historical truth does this passage reveal?
The passage reveals how dangerous the Chinese workers' jobs were and helps the reader imagine how frightening it might have been to work in such conditions. Given the hardships they endured, it is possible many of them did have thoughts of suicide.

Excerpt C Questions

1. In the first sentence of the last paragraph, who are the “demons”? Why do you think they call them demons?
The “demons” are the white men, their bosses on the railroad. The men use it as a derogatory term.
2. According to this passage, how did the Chinese compare to the other workers?
The Chinese workers were faster because of their ability to work as a team, the thought they put into their work, and their motivation to earn more money.
3. Chinese burial is an important cultural tradition, and this passage depicts situations in which the men could not take time for the traditional Chinese burial customs. Ancient Chinese beliefs dating back to the Shang Dynasty (c. 1600–1046 BCE) assert that if burial customs are not followed properly, the soul of the deceased will remain among the living as ghosts. According to these customs, the deceased should be mourned for an appropriate amount of time.
Given this information, why do you think the men said, “You’re lucky to have a body to bury, not blown to smithereens”?
According to ancient custom, they believe it is more fortunate to have a body that can be buried after death so that the soul will not remain on earth as a ghost.
4. How do you feel about the fact that no records were kept of Chinese deaths during the railroad work? Explain.
Student answers will vary.
5. The passage indicates that contests were used to encourage teams to work harder and faster. During the most famous contest known by historians, workers built 10 miles of track in one day.
Why do you think they would work so hard when they were paid so little and the work was so physically and psychologically demanding?
Student answers will vary.

Excerpt D Questions

1. What do you think of the different depictions of Chinese by the American newspapers (i.e., gods, fairies, elves)? Why do you think they would be effective in promoting stereotypes?
Student answers will vary.
2. According to the passage, why did the Chinese not get the pay increase they demanded with the strike?
The passage suggests the Chinese workers did not get the pay increase they demanded because Irish workers continued working rather than joining them on the strike.
3. James Strobridge, the superintendent of construction for the Central Pacific Railroad, was opposed to hiring Chinese in 1865 because he did not think they were big or strong enough to handle the physically demanding work. During this era, a common stereotype of a Chinese man was physical and emotional weakness. In this book, Kingston helps dispel the stereotype of the inferior Chinese man.
How does this passage help dispel the stereotype? What do the workers accomplish with the strike that Kingston describes as Chinese workers basically organizing the first labor union?
The strike demonstrated their bravery and determination. They had the courage to risk the money they had already earned to stand up for themselves and fight for equal pay and equal treatment. Their ability to strike showed their courage, motivation, and ability to peacefully organize.

4. What does this passage reveal to you about the Chinese laborer experience?
Student answers will vary.

Excerpt E Questions

1. In the first paragraph, Kingston compares Ah Goong to a cowboy. What do you think is the significance of this simile? Do you think Ah Goong is like a cowboy? Explain.
Student answers will vary.
2. Describe how the men may have felt on the day the Transcontinental Railroad was finished. Why might they have had mixed emotions?
Student answers will vary. The Chinese probably felt pride and ownership in the accomplishment and excitement about their hard work being completed. They may have had mixed emotions because they had completed something so important; however, most could not stay, were not recognized, and would need to find new jobs.
3. Explain why you think Ah Goong felt like an American for having built the railroad?
He felt American because he was proud of his contribution and understood the railroad's significance to the country and its expansion.
4. The fourth paragraph states: "While the demons posed for photographs, the China Men dispersed. It was dangerous to stay. The Driving Out had begun." The 'Driving Out' refers to the increased anti-Chinese sentiment which had begun with the California Gold Rush in 1849, continued to escalate, and eventually resulted in the Chinese Exclusion Act of 1882. This legislation passed by the U.S. Congress prohibited Chinese immigration to the United States and was not repealed until 1943. Unfortunately, racism and discrimination continue to exist in contemporary society. What forms of racism and discrimination do you see in the world today? In your country? In your community? In your school? How can learning about history and the experiences of all kinds of people lead to a more accepting and less racist world?
Student answers will vary.

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TRANSCRIPT OF INTERVIEW WITH MAXINE HONG KINGSTON

Interviewee: Maxine Hong Kingston, Granddaughter, Author

Interviewed by: Shelley Fisher Fishkin and Barre Fong

Interview Date: November 4, 2013

Location: Oakland, California

Length of Interview: 37 minutes, 15 seconds

[00:04.11] Maxine Hong Kingston (MHK): This is the ring that was made from all the gold that Ah Goong found when he was building the railroads. I guess it was in gold dust form, I don't know what form it was in—but the family story was that he got this gold, and he took it to somebody who made it into this ring—and I just love it that it's two hands shaking each other.

[00:40.22] MHK: When he returned to China after working here, he actually had no money. He had nothing. And they had to rent out land in China in order to give him passage back. But he did have this gold and he had it made into a ring.

[01:07.26] MHK: And when my father got married to my mother, this was the ring that they used, so this was my mother's ring. And it has survived! We went through the fire here, and this didn't get burned in the fire!

[01:50.16] Shelley Fisher Fishkin (SFF): Wonderful! I'm so glad that you thought of that. It's really wonderful to see it! I have to say that your *China Men* was really my first introduction to this chapter of history, so in a sense you were really the godfather of this whole project.

MHK: That's so great!

[00:01:51] SFF: So I want to thank you for that inspiration and for being so gracious about sharing your time and your beautiful words with us.

MHK: You're very welcome.

[00:02:01 – 00:02:31] SFF: As you know we have nothing written from any of these workers—nothing from any of the fifteen- to twenty-thousand workers who were here working on the railroad from China, but we have your vision of what might have been going on in one worker's mind, one worker's imagination. And that's all the more important given that we have nothing from them. So tell us a little about the process you went through to imagine what your father's father's experience working on the railroad might have been.

[02:31.17] MHK: Well, I have some sources of information, and I think the most important one was the whole tradition of talk story. My mother is the one that's really a good storyteller—and she comes from generations of storytellers also. It was her that told the grandfather railroad stories, because she knew my grandfather for a long time. He came back from America, and then his son, my father, left. My grandfather and my mother were very close and he told her everything that he had gone through, so she has the direct transmission of the stories, but also she's a storyteller.

[03:33.13] MHK: She's a fictional storyteller, and I know she made up a lot. Maybe he made up a lot, too—and that was the story about the baskets. So who knows whether that really happened,

or in their telling. And they loved making up things, they loved exaggerating, so, as I wrote it, I used their imagination and I also used the stories as they were orally transmitted.

[00:04:20 – 07:47:00] MHK: Another way that I composed this was that I wanted to get as close as I could to what they were physically going through. So surely there is bodily memory—I have memory in my body—and if I could use a sledgehammer then I would know how it felt directly and I would be able to describe it for myself. And so I used all those tools that I described. There was a friend who was driving a fencepost. And I got that hammer and I drove the fencepost so that I could feel where the shocks are in my own body. And I have been there where great trees are felled, and so I know the sounds and the way this living beast of a tree falls. And several trips—going by train—taking the train from Sacramento and going through the Sierras and just really paying attention to what it would have been like if it wasn't Amtrak. But then, we lived across the street from the railroad in Stockton. And this was before Amtrak. And there were all these steam engines, the wheels. Living there for—what, 18 years?—I really knew how those trains worked and the people that would be working them and the way they jumped on and off. And also being on those railroad tracks as kids—you are on those tracks and you can listen and you put things for the train to run over. I wanted to get that direct transmission as much as I can. And then, I also know the kinds of stories they told one another, because my mother passed those stories on, and I know who they came from. I did not get to meet Ah Goong myself. I missed him by a short time.

[07:48.18] MHK: He was alive during my lifetime, but he was in China. He had two brothers there. Actually, maybe there were even three. And they were in Stockton with us, and growing up, and so I knew what their personalities were. And so I could use that to give me the energy to write about him.

[08:23.26] SFF: Did any of them have a direct connection to the railroad?

[08:27.01] MHK: No.

[08:27.08] SFF: Was he the only brother who worked on the railroad?

[08:30.05] MHK: No, he was older than them, and they were farmers. And they had horses, so they were really, really back in that old time.

[08:45.09] SFF: Did you also find that there were some books that were helpful? Did you do any other kind of research to reconstruct this history?

[10:06.12] MHK: Yes. The books—I had to rely on just traditional research to find out how a railroad is made, and of course all that information about the strike, what happened every day of the strike, exactly which days they were striking, what the demands were, how the negotiations went. The information that was historical, or documented, I would look these up when I had a talk story from my mother and then I would try to see whether I could find any kind of written record or if anybody else had said such a thing or wrote it down and so I would always try to confirm things, but most of the time I could not, and I think the most interesting historical research I did was about Alaska.

[10:55.27] MHK: I found diaries and all the diaries were different. And so, you know, the written history is not any more “for sure” than the spoken history.

[11:14.22] SFF: That is absolutely true. Keeps historians in business. Do you recall your mother saying anything about how your grandfather was recruited for the railroad? How did he even know it was possible to come work on the railroad?

[11:30.26] MHK: I did not get that from my mother, but I did read in history that there were recruiting posters that went out all over South China. There were posters in the cities and even out to the villages, where people knew that they were recruiting. That Crocker was going to pay people for helping with the railroads. I imagine that the same recruiting posters went to Ireland and to Wales.

[12:08.02] SFF: And were there others from your father's village who also responded to those posters?

[12:13.17] MHK: Not that I know of. Just my grandfather, and all the time he did have this reputation for being crazy. And there was also the story that he was bayoneted in his head by the Japanese and that was why he was crazy, but that would be after the railroad time. That would be when he was very old.

[12:41.26] SFF: You have a wonderful line in the book, you said, "Grandfather left a railroad for his message. We had to go somewhere difficult, ride a train, go somewhere important—in case of danger the train was to be ready for us." What was the message?

[12:58.08] MHK: I don't know—but that came from always living next to the railroad. And I thought that was the railroad that he built. And there it was. And that meant we needed to go somewhere. Maybe some kind of quest. Maybe the message is the whole history of his life, or our lives, or the history that we're going to make.

[13:34.15] SFF: I like that. How do you think men like Ah Goong changed America?

[13:45.05] MHK: You know, I feel that what he did was very small. It was just a little bit of the work on the railroads, and there were many people from all over the world working on it, and the bankers who financed it. It's just a little drop in whatever was going on.

[14:23.08] SFF: Your work blends history and myth, often American history and Chinese myth, so how did you decide which Chinese myths would have been comforting, empowering, inspiring to Ah Goong as he worked on the railroad?

[14:41.09] MHK: As I was writing this, I was trying out different myths. And this one, with the spinning maid and the cowboy, it really seemed to fit because it's a story about being apart and being lonely, being far away from the loved ones, which was the condition of work, but also it's a story about a pathway in which we could all meet one another. So this is the story about the Milky Way, the river of heaven, and they're going to use this river of heaven so that they can meet up at the sky, but on earth it's going to be the railroad, which is also a big way of transportation, a way of communicating with people. I thought that one fit, and it was comforting, and it was comforting to them that they do eventually meet, even though it's once a year.

[15:57] SFF: It was perfect. It's really beautiful. Tell me about your decision to follow this chapter, "Grandfather of the Sierra Nevada," with a description of the laws relating to the Chinese from 1868 to 1978. I thought it really was an important dimension of the book, and I'm wondering whether you could tell us a bit about why you did it the way you did and what it means to you.

[16:21] MHK: The laws are right in the middle of the book and the laws are written in a completely different language than the rest of the book. Let's say the rest of the book is in poetic language. The laws are written in legalese. And they are a barrier, a border, a fence that says that you cannot travel, you cannot go riding on that railroad. The laws are saying, you cannot travel whenever you please. And so I put the laws in the middle of the book to show an obstacle to being free, and I think it works literarily in that the language changes. But not all the laws were

bad. Because I started with the Burlingame Treaty. And I just loved that treaty because it says, “you are free to travel.” We don’t get that in the Constitution—the freedom to travel was on that treaty, and it also talked about “for purposes of curiosity.” You can travel just because you’re curious? And you can change your residence? And we had that treaty—and I think, boy, that’s a broken treaty. And you know, sometimes I’ve even thought to myself, with all this border stuff that we’re going through now, we can take that—just cut it out of the book and put it in your wallet—and when you cross borders just show it—“See, we have this Burlingame Treaty...”

[18:43.07] SFF: I think it’s a great idea. Understanding the past changes the present, and the ever-evolving present changes the significance of the past. So how does understanding this chapter of the past change the way we live in the present, or how might it change the way we live?

[18:56.02] MHK: Even though Ah Goong had just a tiny bit of American history that he was affecting, the turning of what he did, into a story and an art—that changes the way we think of what a human being is, or what an American is. And it even makes us aware of why should history or life be like that? Where you get driven out of your country? Or where you cannot travel freely?

[19:56.07] MHK: To be able to tell the story of a common laborer and even remembering that there was a strike on the railroads, to me that strike in a way is even more important than the labor of building a railroad. Can you imagine these people who are not Americans and they came from nowhere, and they’re nobody, they’re just about slaves. And to then make this great contribution, to labor rights and to human rights, and to dare to say, “We are going to organize labor, and we’re going to organize a strike.” So, wow! In the 1860s to be able to ... we can think of it as the founding of one of the first unions!

[21:13] SFF: I know the book has been translated in China several times. Could you tell us a bit about how Chinese readers respond to this part of the book?

[21:48] MHK: I think Chinese readers are now appreciating the work that’s been done by Chinese Americans. When these books first arrived in China, there was a sense that these are not really Chinese. The first Chinese readers and critics found mistakes: “Oh, this is not like China. This isn’t Chinese.” But thirty years have gone by and now there is a sense there’s a Chinese-American literature. But now they’re even calling it Chinese literature, they’re calling it World Chinese Literature. They’re proud that World Chinese Literature is so universal, that World Chinese Literature can even be written in English. And they include it in their canon.

[23:13.12] SFF: Did you have surprises when you went back to the village that Ah Goong came from a few years ago? You saw in some ways how right you’d been and how you’d described it, and in other cases there must have been some things that surprised you.

[23:31.07] MHK: The first time I went to that village, which is about thirty years ago, it took two days to get from Canton to the village. And we were in a car, and then there were two or three ferries and more driving and then staying overnight in an inn and going on. Two and a half years ago when I went it just took like four hours. And we were there. It was so super highways, and then we get there, and they have a television, and everybody’s got a cell phone. And in a way I was so disappointed. The first time I went they were showing me these pipes: water! And before, there was electricity, and they were so proud of their electricity. There was one bare light bulb next to the altar. But this time, television! And I was disappointed because, where was the colorful ancient village? But they still had a water buffalo. It was a baby the first time I saw it and now it is a big water buffalo. Our village was still using water buffalo. My cousin was

still farming that way. So, lots of differences but a lot of things the same. Oh, here's a big, big difference: They built a new temple and they were getting money from everybody in America to ... people like me sending money back. And then when you send your money back, your name is on red paper and it is in the temple, and lots of women's names—that's a big difference. Before it was all men's names and the descent line—now there's women.

[26:15.28] SFF: That is wonderful. Just one last question: are there any photographs left? You refer to photographs in the book. Are all those photographs gone, or do you still have any of those photographs of Ah Goong and his family?

[26:54] MHK: I was thinking about photographs when I was reading that. I did depend a lot on photographs—not my family photographs, but it was so great that the camera was invented before the railroads 'cause there are a lot of good pictures of them among the trees, chopping down trees, making trellises ...

[28:20.22 – 29:12] MHK: From our own pictures, there was the picture of Ah Goong, we always lived with that picture and he and his wife—well, in this Chinese religion we have, which some people call ancestor worship, the ancestors on top were Ah Goong and his wife, and so we have that picture, and he is in an overcoat which is—that was one of the treasures he brought back. He got a really warm, good overcoat ...

[Cut off at 29:23]

[36:42.02] Interviewer: close up of ring

[36:45.25] Interviewer: close up of photo 1 (Ah Goong & wife)

[36:56.18] Interviewer: close up of photo 2 (family)

[37:08.25] Interviewer: close up of photo 3 (family)