
ASIAN AMERICAN AND PACIFIC ISLANDER STUDIES

Sample Lesson 14: Asian Americans and Pacific Islanders and the Model Minority Myth

Theme: History and Movement

Disciplinary Area: Asian American and Pacific Islander Studies

Ethnic Studies Values and Principles Alignment: 1, 2, 5

Standards Alignment:

CA HSS Analysis Skills (9–12): Historical Research Evidence and Point of View 1–3

CA CCSS for ELA/Literacy: RH.9–10.1, 2, 8, 9; WHST.9–10.1A and B; SL.9–10.1A–D, 9–10.3

CA ELD Standards: ELD.PI.9–10.1, 5, 9, 10a

LESSON PURPOSE AND OVERVIEW:

This three-day lesson introduces students to the complexity of the term “Asian American,” ultimately coming to understand the various ethnic groups and politics associated with the identity marker. Additionally, students will be exposed to the concept of the model minority myth. This course will provide for students the implications that result when lumping all Asian groups together and labeling them the model minority. For example, marginalized groups (e.g., Pacific Islanders, Southeast Asians) suffer from being cut out of programs and resources. It presents a false narrative that Asian Americans and Pacific Islanders (AAPIs) have overcome racism and prejudice. It glosses over the violence, harm, and legalized racism that AAPIs have endured, for example, the 1871 Chinese massacre in Los Angeles, the annexation of Hawaii, shooting of Southeast Asian schoolchildren in Stockton. Furthermore, students will understand how this label for AAPIs becomes a hindrance to expanding democratic structures and support, and, worse, how it creates a division among the AAPI community and places a wedge between them and other oppressed groups, including, but not limited to, African American, Latinx, and American Indian communities.

Key Terms and Concepts: assimilation, stereotype, identity, model minority myth, racism, anti-Blackness, data disaggregation

Lesson Objectives (Students will be able to ...):

- Analyze the misconceptions of the model minority to describe Asian Americans and Pacific Islanders
- Differentiate the various identities, nationalities, and ethnicities that make up the Asian American and Pacific Islander community
- Learn to analyze statistical data and legislation that directly impacts communities of color
- Actively dispel stereotypes and the model minority myth

Essential Questions:

1. What does Asian American mean? And who is Asian American and Pacific Islander?
2. How has the model minority myth been used to oppress and/or stymie certain Asian American and Pacific Islander communities?
3. What are the dangers of the model minority myth?
4. What are ways you can dispel the model minority myth?

Lesson Steps/Activities:*Day 1*

1. Place four large pieces of flip chart paper in each corner of the room along with three to five markers. Engage the class by asking students: What does Asian American mean? What does Pacific Islander mean?
2. Before delving too deeply into discussion, divide the class up into four groups. Assign each group to a corner and instruct students to take 10 minutes as a group to respond to the aforementioned questions. Also ask the groups to list the various ethnic groups that comprise "Asian American and Pacific Islander."
3. After about 10 minutes, signal for the groups to stop what they are doing. Allow each group to share what they discussed with the class. After each group has shared, provide a definition for Asian American and Pacific Islander and begin listing some of the various ethnic groups (see below for a sample list).

Sample Ethnic Groups:

(This list is in the order of population according to the 2010 Census and is in no way exhaustive.)

Chinese
Filipino
Indian
Vietnamese
Korean
Japanese
Pakistani
Cambodian
Hmong
Thai
Laotian
Bangladeshi
Burmese
Indonesian
Malaysian
Fijian
Samoan
Hawaiian
Micronesian
Polynesian

Definition of Asian American: The term “Asian American” was born out of the Asian American Movement (1968–1975) as a means of identifying people of Asian descent living in the United States. During the late 1960s, the term was largely seen as radical and unifying, a rejection of “oriental” and other pejoratives that were associated with people of Asian descent. The collective coining of the term was an act of self-naming and self-determination, and it aligned with the broader goals of the Asian American and Pacific Islander movement—equality, justice, and anti-racism.

-
4. After sharing the definition and ethnic groups listed above, reiterate that “Asian American and Pacific Islander” is a loaded term that encompasses dozens of different Asian ethnic groups that have settled in the US, with large populations settling in California.
 5. Ask students whether they know what the model minority myth is. If students are able to answer, move to the article. If not, describe the model minority myth and explain to the students that they will be examining how the effects of racial stereotypes that are perceived to be positive can in fact be harmful. For example, the teacher can describe the effects of stereotype threat.
 6. Ask students to read the article “‘Model Minority’ Myth Again Used as a Racial Wedge Between Asians and Blacks” in NPR Code Switch (see the link in the Materials and Resources section). Note that this article references William Petersen’s 1966 New York Times article that inherently pitted Japanese Americans (and arguably Asian Americans more broadly) against African Americans, with Petersen identifying the latter group as the “problem minority.” Following internment, Japanese Americans were able to achieve some level of social and economic mobility, rendering them the “model minority,” for their ability to thrive in the face of adversity unlike their African American counterparts. After reading the NPR piece, explain to students that the Petersen article is first time the term “model minority” was used (or coined) and marks the beginning of the stereotyping of Asian Americans as inherently “smart” and “successful.” Ask students to reflect on the main points of the NPR article and discuss how and why the model minority myth is used as a wedge group.
 7. Tell students that they will gain an understanding of the diversity of AAPI communities by exploring statistics on education and poverty. Split the class into groups of three and instruct half of the groups to review educational data and the other half economic data.

Education: Guide groups to investigate high school and college graduation rates. (<https://www.cde.ca.gov/ci/cr/cf/ch4.asp#link128>)

Economic: Guide groups to investigate income and poverty among AAPI groups and compare with the rest of the US. (<https://www.cde.ca.gov/ci/cr/cf/ch4.asp#link129>)

Each student group will report their findings to the class. Each group will write the findings for their assigned part on the board or a sheet of poster paper. For example, one group can describe how Asian American and Pacific Islander groups vary in terms of reading and math test scores, and another group can summarize the educational attainment of various Pacific Islander groups.

For homework, have students answer the following questions. Students can use the resources at the end of the lesson to help them answer the questions. Tell students that each question requires at least two examples or arguments:

- How are Asian American and Pacific Islander ethnic groups similar and different in terms of education and economic experiences?
 - How might the model minority myth be an obstacle for advancement for Asian Americans?
 - How can the model minority myth be used to drive a wedge between Asian Americans and other communities of color in policies and services?
 - Knowing that AAPIs are not a monolithic “model minority” and that each ethnic group fares differently economically and educationally, how might policies change to be more inclusive of those groups in need, in terms of jobs, services, government funding, employment, small business, education, etc.?
8. During the second half of class, hand out copies of the law signed by Governor Brown on September 25, 2016, California Assembly Bill 1726 (Data Collection). Have students take turns reading the bill aloud popcorn style. After the in-class reading, provide necessary context on what a bill is and summarize how bills become laws. Additionally, define any words or terms students may need support to understand. In groups, have students discuss the purpose of the bill, the impact that it will have on AAPI communities, and how the legislation helps dispel the model minority myth.
 9. As homework, ask students to complete a “mini bill analysis” of Assembly Bill 1726 using the Bill Analysis Worksheet (located at the end of the lesson).

Day 2

The key method to dispel the model minority myth is telling the true stories of yourself, your family, and your community. By writing down, speaking aloud, and sharing your stories, you actively counteract the stereotypes and master narrative developed to pigeonhole Asian American and Pacific Islanders as a monolithic group with one identity, one experience, and one role. No AAPI individual fits the model minority stereotype in all its facets. Take time in your class for students to first think, write, and then share on three questions:

1. What is your ethnic background?
2. What stereotype of your ethnic group do you not identify with? Why? Explain in detail with facts about your experiences, your background, your values, your goals, your dreams, your family, and your community.
3. How will you actively dispel these stereotypes?

Assessment, Application, Action, and Reflection:

Students will read and analyze an article, demographic data, and a legislative document, providing their own informed critiques, opinions, and feedback on the sources. Students will also tell their stories as a way to dispel the harmful stereotypes that the media and society impose on their ethnic group.

Materials and Resources:

“Why Data Matters When It Comes to Asian Americans and Pacific Islanders and Education” article and videos <https://www.cde.ca.gov/ci/cr/cf/ch4.asp#link130>

“How Does a Bill Become a Law?” infographic/handout
<https://www.cde.ca.gov/ci/cr/cf/ch4.asp#link131>

“Asian Americans Are Still Caught in the Trap of the ‘Model Minority’ Stereotype. And It Creates Inequality for All” article <https://www.cde.ca.gov/ci/cr/cf/ch4.asp#link132>

California Assembly Bill 1726 (2016) <https://www.cde.ca.gov/ci/cr/cf/ch4.asp#link133>

Kat Chow. “‘Model Minority’ Myth Again Used as a Racial Wedge Between Asians and Blacks.” NPR Code Switch, April 19, 2017. <https://www.cde.ca.gov/ci/cr/cf/ch4.asp#link134>

Ellen D. Wu. 2015. *The Color of Success: Asian Americans and the Origins of the Model Minority*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press.

NPR. 2014. “Asian-Americans Are Successful, but No Thanks to Tiger Parenting” article <https://www.cde.ca.gov/ci/cr/cf/ch4.asp#link135>

PBS America By the Numbers “Model Minority Myth” video
<https://www.cde.ca.gov/ci/cr/cf/ch4.asp#link136>

Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie’s 2009 TED talk “The Danger of a Single Story”
<https://www.cde.ca.gov/ci/cr/cf/ch4.asp#link137>

Chris Fuchs. “Behind the ‘Model Minority’ Myth: Why the ‘Studious Asian’ Stereotype Hurts.” NBC News, August 22, 2017. <https://www.cde.ca.gov/ci/cr/cf/ch4.asp#link138>

AAPIDemographic data and policy research on Asian Americans and Pacific Islanders <https://www.cde.ca.gov/ci/cr/cf/ch4.asp#link139>

Asian Americans Advancing Justice Los Angeles – Model Minority Myth Lesson Resources
<https://www.cde.ca.gov/ci/cr/cf/ch4.asp#link140>

National Commission of Asian American and Pacific Islander Research in Education
“iCount: A Data Quality Movement for Asian Americans and Pacific Islanders and Higher Education” <https://www.cde.ca.gov/ci/cr/cf/ch4.asp#link141>

Background Information/Context:

How can being an upstanding American citizen be a double-edged sword? During the post-World War II era, after nearly a hundred years of anti-Asian sentiment and legislation, many Asian Americans hoped to be seen as more American and accepted by American society. They didn't want to be viewed as a threat to national security like Japanese Americans were when they were imprisoned during WWII. Instead, they wanted to be seen as "good Americans" and desired to assimilate and Americanize, which developed into the idea of the model minority myth, recasting Asian Americans as prime examples of representing the quintessential American values of opportunity, meritocracy, and the American Dream. Toy Len Goon, the first ever Asian American named American Mother of the Year in 1952, was an early example of what it meant to be a "model minority."

During the 1960s, as the Civil Rights Movement continued the fight for equality of all Americans and the federal government invested in social welfare programs such as the War on Poverty and the Great Society, the concept of the "model minority" became a stereotype used to pit Asian Americans against other communities of color, particularly Black Americans. News publications ran articles extolling the ways Asian Americans capitalized on the American Dream with their work ethic and emphasis on education. By doing this, it delegitimized centuries of systemic oppression and racist policies that shaped the experiences of Black Americans.

This stereotype also hid how Asian Americans were discriminated against based on racist policies, such as being excluded from living in certain neighborhoods and from being fully accepted members of American society. It created a limited perspective on the Asian American community, where they were seen as one monolithic group. In reality, this community consisted of diverse ethnicities from a variety of countries and cultures, comprising over ten different languages. Thus, socioeconomic success was not universal, and praising Asian Americans as a "model minority" called into question the fact that there were many within the community who did not get the services and government assistance they needed.

The model minority myth has persisted long after the stereotype originated. Media publications such as the 1987 Time Magazine cover story "Those Asian-American Whiz Kids" and articles analyzing the work ethic of Asian Americans in response to Amy Chua's 2011 book *Battle Hymn of the Tiger Mother* illustrate that the model minority myth is still being perpetuated.

Bill Analysis Worksheet

Bill Information (Name, Legislative Year, and Author):

What does this bill aim to do? What does it address?

What, if any, are the social and/or economic benefits of this bill?

Does this bill directly or indirectly impact your community and/or family? If so, how?

Do you agree with what this bill seeks to do? Please explain.

Beyond legislation, what can be done to address the issue this bill calls attention to?