
Sample Lesson 23: Historical and Contemporary Experiences of Pacific Islanders in the United States

Theme: History and Movement, Identity

Disciplinary Area: Asian American and Pacific Islander Studies

Ethnic Studies Values and Principles Alignment: 1, 2, 3, 4

Standards Alignment:

HSS Content Standard: 11.4.2

CA CCSS for ELA/Literacy: RH.9–10.1, 2, 3, 6, 7; W.9–10.1; SL.9–10.1, SL.11–12.4

LESSON PURPOSE AND OVERVIEW:

This lesson is designed to introduce the study of people of Pacific Islander descent in the United States, while drawing connections to the Pacific Islands and the Pacific Island diaspora more broadly. Pacific Islanders in the United States are often left out of conversations about communities of color in America. The purpose of this lesson is to understand the ways in which American expansion in the Pacific since the 1800s has grown and created a variety of issues among growing Pacific Islander communities in Oceania and in the US today. This lesson will use geography, data disaggregation, and narratives to explore the US experiences of Pacific Islanders from Guam, American Samoa, Palau, the Marshall Islands, Fiji, Samoa, and Tonga. This lesson is designed to be an introduction to the study of Pacific Islander migrations to the continental United States, including the history, culture, and politics of Hawai'i and US Pacific territories.

Key Terms and Concepts: Pacific Islanders, race, annexation, migration, militarization, citizenship, Oceania, Melanesia, Micronesia, Polynesia, data disaggregation, census

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

- Identify varying experiences of Pacific Islanders in relation to the United States
- Analyze differences and similarities between Pacific Islander experiences and history
- Explore the relationships between colonialism, citizenship, and identity

Essential Questions:

1. Who are Pacific Islanders in the United States? What is their history with immigration and settlement?

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2. What systems, structures, and events have contributed to the racialization of Pacific Islanders in the US? Why is it important to disaggregate census, educational, and demographic data to understand the Pacific Islander population?
 3. What are the contemporary experiences of Pacific Islanders in the United States? How do they respond to discrimination and displacement?

Lesson Steps/Activities:

Day 1: Pacific Islander Immigration to the US

Who are Pacific Islanders in the United States? What is their history with immigration and settlement?

1. Students write down seven words that describe their identity, which will be shared later in the lesson.
2. The teacher displays an example of a world map.
3. The teacher leads a discussion by asking students the following questions and writing down their responses:
 - a. What are maps and what do they tell us?
 - b. Who and what gets left out of understanding people through maps?
 - c. What do maps tell us about who created them?

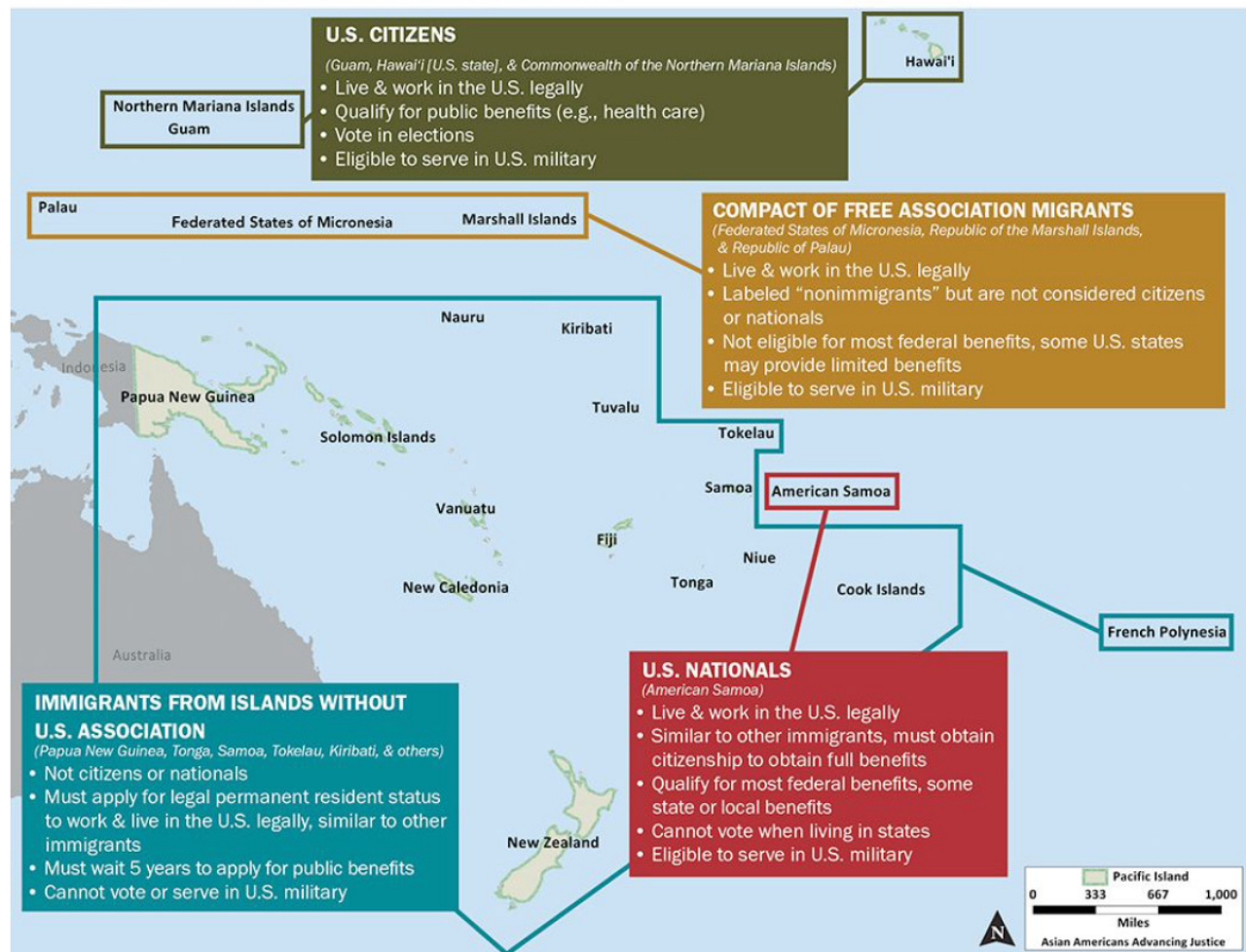
Teacher notes: Concepts include borders, boundaries, difference, and power.
4. Students answer the following question on a piece of paper and then share out to class: How might maps connect to the seven words you chose?
5. The teacher shares examples of maps of the Pacific Islands and presents the following:
 - a. The Pacific includes 1200 distinct cultural groups among the 7–10 million people living in and around the world’s largest and oldest ocean, in some of the world’s most vulnerable and precious ecosystems. These groups maintain their respective cultural, political, and familial knowledge systems under categories known as Melanesia, Micronesia, and Polynesia (<https://www.cde.ca.gov/ci/cr/cf/ch4.asp#link232>). However, when encountering the US, they are defined by their relationships to maps, borders, and the American empire in the Pacific.

Teacher notes:

- Melanesia: Papua New Guinea, the Solomon Islands, Vanuatu, New Caledonia, and Fiji

- Micronesia: Guam, the Mariana Islands, the Federated States of Micronesia (Yap, Chuuk, Pohnpei, Kosrae), Kiribati, Nauru, the Marshall Islands, and Palau
 - Polynesia: The Hawaiian Islands, Samoa, American Samoa, Tonga, Tuvalu, Tokelau, Wallis and Futuna, the Cook Islands, French Polynesia, Niue, Easter Island, Pitcairn, Norfolk Island, and New Zealand
- The teacher displays and explains the “U.S. Immigration Status by Pacific Island of Birth” infographic, which shows the varying US immigration statuses of Pacific Islanders that continue to shift over time.
 - Students share observations of the graphic, while answering the following question: What do you immediately recognize about the different statuses?

U.S. Immigration Status by Pacific Island of Birth



Source: Empowering Pacific Islander Communities. 2014. “Native Hawaiian & Pacific Islanders: A Community of Contrasts in the United States.” Policy Report. Los Angeles, CA.

[Long description of South Pacific map](#)

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8. The teacher passes out the day 1 worksheet, Pacific Islanders in the US (located at the end of the lesson), and explains the write-up for each video prior to viewing, while students follow along.
 - a. US Citizens: Hawai'i
 - i. Hawai'i was colonized by Euro-American capitalists and missionaries in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. In 1893 Americans invaded Hawai'i, overthrew Indigenous peoples, and secured an all-white oligarchy of planters in place of the reigning ali'i (nobility) ruled by Queen Lili'uokalani, which led to annexation in 1898. This included dispossession of the Hawaiian government, lands, and citizenship, which colonized Indigenous Hawaiians.
 - ii. Students watch a clip of the PBS Hawai'i documentary *Act of War* (21:45–36:25) (<https://www.cde.ca.gov/ci/cr/cf/ch4.asp#link233>) and write down seven to ten explicit details or facts from the video. Teachers can also provide the full documentary online for students to watch outside of class.
 - b. Compact of Free Association: Marshall Islands
 - i. In 1946, the United States started testing nuclear bombs in the Marshall Islands under the code name Operation Crossroads. To clear the way for the tests, the US Navy negotiated with leaders of Bikini Atoll to move 167 residents east to Rongerik Atoll—a move that Bikinians understood as temporary and believed would be “for the good of mankind.” When Rongerik’s food supply proved insufficient to support the population, the US relocated the Bikinians to Kwajalein Atoll and finally to Kile Island. On Kile, Bikinians faced numerous challenges, including insufficient food supplies, lack of fishing grounds, drought, typhoons, dependence on canned food supplied by the US Department of Agriculture, and accompanying health problems (e.g., high blood pressure and diabetes).
 - ii. Students watch Kathy Jetnil-Kijiner’s “Anointed” (<https://www.cde.ca.gov/ci/cr/cf/ch4.asp#link234>) and write down five to seven explicit details or facts from the video.
 - c. US Nationals: American Samoa
 - i. In the 1890s, Germany, the United Kingdom, and the United States were locked in a dispute over who should have control over the Samoan Islands. In 1899, these countries came to an agreement in which Germany had influence in the western islands and the US would

maintain influence in the eastern islands. The US Navy wanted to utilize Pago Pago Harbor as a coaling site for their ships, which became key during World War II until the closing of the base in 1951.

- ii. Students watch the first 10 minutes of *Omai Fa'atasi* (1978) by Takashi Fujii and write down seven to ten explicit details or facts from the video.
9. Using examples from the lecture and videos, students work in groups to complete the worksheet and provide an analysis of American influence in the Pacific.
10. As a class, each group shares its reflections and answers to the following questions: What does this lesson tell us about “American expansion” in the Pacific? How might this impact migration to the US?

Extension Assignment:

Teachers can assign an essay that utilizes the information on the worksheet to write about the impact of American expansion on the Pacific Islanders.

Day 2: Analyzing Racialization of Pacific Islanders Through Data

What systems, structures, and events have contributed to the racialization of Pacific Islanders in the US? Why is it important to disaggregate census, educational, and demographic data on the Pacific Islander population?

1. The teacher begins with a group discussion.
 - a. The teacher asks: What is a Pacific Islander? Who is a Pacific Islander? Is it one group or many groups?
 - b. The teacher presents the following: In this lesson, we are going to learn that the broad label Pacific Islander is composed of many groups, and we are going to analyze what has contributed to this label and what the outcomes are of relying only on this label.

The teacher notes:

- The poverty rate of Pacific Islanders is 20 percent, versus 12 percent of the general population.
- Pacific Islanders are half as likely to have a bachelor's degree compared to the general population (27 percent for the total population and 49 percent of Asian Americans).
- Bachelor degree attainment rate is 69.1 percent for Asian Indians, but only 9.4 percent for Samoans.

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- This data shows there is a large difference between the Pacific Islander community and the Asian American community and overall population.
 - This data also shows there is a need for more services and programs for the Pacific Islander community (for example, to get into and graduate from college).
 - It is important to disaggregate the data to identify the needs of the Pacific Islander community.
 - By lumping Pacific Islanders under Asian Americans, Pacific Islander issues become invisible.
2. Students read and analyze the following sources:
 - a. What Census Calls Us: A Historical Timeline (<https://www.cde.ca.gov/ci/cr/cf/ch4.asp#link235>; PDF at <https://www.cde.ca.gov/ci/cr/cf/ch4.asp#link236>)
 - b. Excerpt of Community of Contrasts: Executive Summary and Demographics (pp. 5–10) (<https://www.cde.ca.gov/ci/cr/cf/ch4.asp#link237>)
 - c. The State of Higher Education in California (<https://www.cde.ca.gov/ci/cr/cf/ch4.asp#link238>)
 - d. Lisa Kahaleole Hall, “Which of These Things Is Not Like the Other” (pp. 729–733, 736–738) (<https://www.cde.ca.gov/ci/cr/cf/ch4.asp#link239>)
 3. The teacher will pass out the worksheet The Disaggregation of Pacific Islander Data, which has a number of content questions. Students can work in pairs or in groups to help each other answer the questions.
 4. Before students answer the last question on the worksheet and write their paragraph, they will have a class discussion on what they have learned. The teacher will ask the questions: How have racial categories impacted Pacific Islanders? Provide one example. Why is it important to disaggregate census, educational, and demographic data on the Pacific Islander population?

Extension Assignment:

The handout and paragraph can develop into a larger assignment that uses data disaggregation to do a report on Pacific Islanders. This report can be an infographic or in essay form. This can also lead into a Youth Participatory Action Research project that provides students an opportunity to do more research on Pacific Islander communities. This could consist of interviews and oral histories. This could potentially add to the growing research on Pacific Islanders.

Day 3: Contemporary Pacific Islander Experiences

What are the contemporary experiences of Pacific Islanders in the United States? How do they use storytelling to share about these experiences and reframe dominant narratives about Pacific Islanders?

1. Students will draw two images, side by side, showing 1) how they think the world/society views them and 2) who they really are. Students will share and explain their drawings.
2. The teacher hands out an excerpt of “Our Sea of Islands” by Epeli Hau’ofa (<https://www.cde.ca.gov/ci/cr/cf/ch4.asp#link240>, pp. 6–11). After students finish reading it they participate in a think, pair, share to answer the following questions:
 - a. How does Hau’ofa discuss the perspectives of the Pacific as islands in a far sea versus Oceania as our sea of islands?
 - b. The teacher facilitates a class discussion to tie in mapping, race, genealogy, and the importance of storytelling.
3. Students will review the following narratives to read and listen to examples of Pacific peoples’ stories on contemporary issues of land displacement, climate change, and movements for independence.
 - a. Standing Above the Clouds (<https://www.cde.ca.gov/ci/cr/cf/ch4.asp#link241>)—short documentary
 - b. Frontline Truths by the Pacific Climate Warriors (<https://www.cde.ca.gov/ci/cr/cf/ch4.asp#link242>)—first person narratives of Climate Justice Warriors
 - c. The Question of Guam (<https://www.cde.ca.gov/ci/cr/cf/ch4.asp#link243>)—United Nations testimony (2:48:13–2:52:02)

Discussion: What stood out to you about these stories? Why is it important to learn about Pacific experiences by listening to and reading the stories of Pacific peoples?

4. Students will create “I Am” poems to share.

For each of the items, write three to five things that answer each item about you. Use the list to create a poem which repeats the line, “I am from ...” followed by your lists. Be creative.

- a. Items that were important to you growing up or had significance in your upbringing
- b. Events that changed your life

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- c. Names of relatives and/or community members, especially ones that link you to your past
 - d. Names of food and dishes that are always at family or community gatherings
 - e. Places important to you
 - f. Sayings and beliefs important to you

Assessment, Application, Action, and Reflection:

Assessment: The summative assessment has three parts in this lesson: part 1: an essay on the impact of American expansion on the immigration of Pacific Islanders, part 2: data analysis infographic, and part 3: “I Am” poem. These three parts come together to build the analytical skills of the students and provide direct opportunities for them to connect to the lesson.

Application: Students will apply the ethnic studies principles to their essay, data analysis, and poems.

Action: Students can do a number of things with what they learned. First, they can use the material to analyze immigration policy that is important today. The teacher can include an extension activity to compare Pacific Islander immigration with immigration of other Asian American groups. These immigration patterns and trends can be connected back to American expansion and imperialism. Another option is to have students choose another racialized group and compare their experiences to those of Pacific Islanders. The teacher could also have students apply the content and skills of this lesson to develop a more robust Youth Participatory Action Research project to learn more about Pacific Islanders by conducting interviews with or collecting oral histories from community members. This could contribute to the growing research and literature on Pacific Islanders.

Reflection: Students will use the “I Am From” poems to reflect on how the lesson on Pacific Islanders connects to their own lives.

Materials and Resources:

Name:

Period:

Date:

Pacific Islanders in the US

Learning Target(s):

- Identify varying experiences of Pacific Islanders in relation to the United States.
- Analyze differences and similarities between Pacific Islander experiences and history.
- Explore the relationships between colonialism, citizenship, and identity.

Essential Question:

1. Who are Pacific Islanders in the United States?
2. What is their history with immigration and settlement?

Directions: Read the three descriptions below about US involvement in various islands. For each island nation, you will watch a short video. While watching the video, you will write down explicit details and facts. Afterward, you will work with your group to write a collective response.

1. Hawai'i – US Citizenship

Hawai'i was colonized by Euro-American capitalists and missionaries in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. In 1893 Americans invaded, overthrew Indigenous peoples, and secured an all-white oligarchy of planters in place of the reigning ali'i, ruled by Queen Lili'uokalani, which led to annexation in 1898. This included dispossession of the Hawaiian government, lands, and citizenship, which colonized Indigenous Hawaiians.

Video: Act of War – produced by PBS Hawai'i (write 7–10 explicit details)

2. Marshall Islands – Compact of Free Association

In 1946, the United States started testing nuclear bombs in the Marshall Islands under the code name Operation Crossroads. To clear the way for the tests, the US Navy negotiated with leaders of Bikini Atoll to move 167 residents east to Rongerik Atoll—a move that Bikinians understood as temporary and believed would be “for the good of mankind.” When Rongerik’s food supply proved insufficient to support the population, the US relocated the Bikinians to Kwajalein Atoll and finally to Kile Island. On Kile, Bikinians faced numerous challenges, including insufficient food supplies, lack of fishing grounds, drought, typhoons, dependence on canned food supplied by the US Department of Agriculture, and accompanying health problems (e.g., high blood pressure and diabetes).

Video: Anointed by Kathy Jetnil-Kijiner (write 5–7 explicit details)

3. American Samoa – US Nationals

In the 1890s, Germany, the United Kingdom, and the United States were locked in a dispute over who should have control over the Samoan Islands. In 1899, these countries came to an agreement in which the Germans had influence in the western islands and the US would maintain influence in the eastern islands. The US Navy wanted to utilize Pago Pago Harbor as a coaling site for their ships, which also became key during World War II.

Video: Omai Fa’atasi by Takashi Fujii with Pacific Islander Communications (write 7–10 explicit details)

Analysis

In your group, share your notes from each of the videos. Using your notes from the lecture and videos, discuss and write on a separate lined sheet of paper a collective response explaining US influence in the Pacific.

**Remember to use a proper heading and include all member names.

Day 2 Worksheets:

Name:

Period:

Date:

The Disaggregation of Pacific Islander Data

Learning Target(s):

- Identify varying experiences of Pacific Islanders in relation to the United States.
- Analyze differences and similarities between Pacific Islander experiences and history.
- Explore the relationships between colonialism, citizenship, and identity.

Essential Question:

1. What systems, structures, and events have contributed to the racialization of Pacific Islanders in the US?
2. Why is it important to disaggregate census, educational, and demographic data on the Pacific Islander population?

Directions: Using the four different readings discussed and analyzed in class, answer the following questions about disaggregating Pacific Islander data. Answer in complete sentences.

1. How has the US Census changed over time?
2. How do these sources define Pacific Islanders?
3. List all the Pacific Islander ethnicities.
4. List three important data points for Pacific Islanders.

5. What does this data tell us about race and Pacific Islanders?

Part B:

Write a paragraph using evidence from the sources you have read and analyzed. Answer the following questions: 1) How have racial categories impacted Pacific Islanders? Provide at least one example. 2) Why is it important to disaggregate census, educational, and demographic data on the Pacific Islander population?

Long Description Text for Graphic:

US Immigration Status by Pacific Island of Birth

US Citizens

(Guam, Hawai'i [US state], and Commonwealth of the Northern Mariana Islands)

- Live and work in the US legally
- Qualify for public benefits (e.g., health care)
- Vote in elections
- Eligible to serve in US military

Compact of Free Association Migrants

(Federated States of Micronesia, Republic of the Marshall Islands, and Republic of Palau)

- Live and work in the US legally
- Labeled “nonimmigrants” but are not considered citizens or nationals
- Not eligible for most federal benefits, some US states may provide limited benefits
- Eligible to serve in US military

US Nationals

(American Samoa)

- Live and work in the US legally
- Similar to other immigrants, must obtain citizenship to obtain full benefits
- Qualify for most federal benefits, some state or local benefits
- Cannot vote when living in states
- Eligible to serve in US military

Immigrants from Islands without US Association

(Papua New Guinea, Tonga, Samoa, Tokelau, Kiribati, and others)

- Not citizens or nationals
- Must apply for legal permanent resident status to work and live in the US legally, similar to other immigrants
- Must wait five years to apply for public benefits
- Cannot vote or serve in US military

[Return to South Pacific map.](#)