

BLUFF CITY CHINESE

Learning Guide: Community Memory Activity

Topics: AAPI History, Identity, Oral History

Objectives:

Students will:

- Understand the role of Chinese Americans in Memphis history
- Analyze how documentary storytelling preserves marginalized histories
- Reflect on family and community narratives

Agenda:

Pre-Screening (15 minutes)

- **Warm-Up Prompt:**
Whose histories are told in your textbooks? Whose are missing?
- **Short Introduction on Historical Context:**
The Chinese Exclusion Act, Southern segregation, and Memphis demographics.
 - Ideally, students may have already learned about the history of anti-immigration policies, so this part is meant to set the stage with the level of political oppression explored in the film. Here is a resource for teaching immigration policies include: [Teaching Chinese Immigration \(The Immigrant Learning Center\)](#)- pages 5-7 highlight the 1882 Exclusion Act
 - [Memphis demographics by race](#) - Showcases the minority status that Chinese people had in Memphis via 1950 Census data
- **Define Terms:**
diaspora, oral history, community archive
 - **Diaspora:** populations, such as members of an ethnic or religious group, that originated from the same place but dispersed to different locations [*Britannica*]

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- **Oral History:** An oral history interview consists of an interviewer questioning an interviewee and recording their exchange in audio or video format. Recordings of the interview are transcribed, summarized, or indexed and then placed in a library or archives [oralhistory.org]
- **Community Archive:** documentation of a group of people that share common interests, and social, cultural and historical heritage, usually created by members of the group being documented and maintained outside of traditional archives [SAA Dictionary]

Screening (10-20 minutes)

- Watch selected clips or the full film. Timestamps for topics:
 - Cultural Assimilation (5:00 - 9:45)***
 - 1882 Exclusion Act/anti-Chinese immigration policies (10:10-14:00)**
 - Chinese-owned small businesses (14:00-18:22)
 - Model Minority Myth/Civil Rights Movement (21:00 - 28:05)
 - Anti-Asian hate (31:00 - 39:00)
- Before screening, choose 3 questions to consider:
 - How does the filmmaker use personal memory to tell a larger story?
 - What symbols, music, or visuals stood out?
 - What do you think is lost when stories like these aren't preserved? Why are community archives so important?

***Sections most relevant for this lesson*

Post-Screening Discussion (15-20 minutes)

In small groups or a full-class:

- What resonated with you the most?
- What do you think is lost when stories like these aren't preserved? Why are community archives so important?
- Why is it important to respect and preserve oral histories?
- Exit ticket: "One thing I learned / One question I still have"

Ideas for further creative reflection or follow-up lessons

- **Story Mapping:** Students draw or document a visual representation of their own family journey or neighborhood story

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- **Mini Oral History:** Interview a classmate using 2-3 prompts about family traditions or childhood memories

Homework:

- Interview a family member about their experience living in Memphis/their city
- Create a short media piece (video, podcast, or photo essay) inspired by the documentary