



Yee Clun and Regina's White Women's Labour Law: Unit and Lesson Plans¹

Note to Teachers

Thank you for your interest in the Lost Stories website. The lesson plans provided here are aimed at middle school and early secondary school students (grades 7-10). However, both younger and older students may find these materials to be useful if they are provided sufficient scaffolding and/or extension material. These lessons are meant to accomplish several interrelated goals. First, and foremost, these lessons build on the website's overarching theme of recovering lost stories from the past to encourage students to think historically. As they explore these lessons students will reflect on why this story might have been lost and how it was found. In so doing, they will experience key elements of *doing* history, which include finding and selecting evidence to build a portrait of 'what happened,' and creating a contextual narrative – a story -- that illustrates why it mattered. At the same time that the lessons are nurturing historical thinking, they also provide students with a great deal of insight into the specific issue or topic being explored, namely discrimination against Chinese immigrants in Canada. This specific issue is also tied to wider historical contexts, including immigration, discrimination, and Canadian identity. While the lessons provided comprise a coherent unit of study,

and build upon one another in a logical fashion, it is possible to use them in a stand-alone fashion. As such, teachers are **strongly** encouraged to adapt them to the needs of their classes.

It is also important to note that the vast majority of the primary documents used in these lessons were written by white Canadians. Efforts were made to uncover more documents written by Chinese-Canadians that addressed the areas upon which these lessons focus. While such documents may exist, we were not able to find many of them in regard to these particular issues. We welcome suggestions for pertinent documents that might be added to our collection. The lack of such records is, unfortunately, reflective of what happens to groups that have been marginalized, whose records are not well preserved. It is suggested that teachers draw their students' attention to the lack of Chinese voices in the primary document collection.

Note on Terminology

It is important to note that many of the documents included in this package make use of archaic language, and include terms, statements, and images that were offensive then and are offensive now. Terms like

¹ The research for the Yee Clun lesson plans was compiled by Taytyn Dwernychuk-Welcher, with the support of Kristin Enns-Kavanagh and the Saskatchewan History and Folklore Society.

“Orientals,” “Chinamen,” and “Asiatics,” abound. These have been left in the documents for the sake of historical accuracy and to allow the full nature of anti-Chinese racism to be apparent, however, teachers should explain to their students that the use of these terms is no longer acceptable.

Unit Overview

These educational materials provide teachers and students with some strategies and supplementary materials to explore in more depth – to get under the surface of - the story of Yee Clun, a Chinese-Canadian man who questioned the justice of a law that prohibited Chinese businessmen from employing white women. The three lessons that make up this unit can be used as ‘stand-alone’ lessons, but taken together they provide a kind of ‘how to’ guide for recovering lost stories from a variety of communities, including local school communities.

Lesson One

In this two-part lesson, students develop criteria for distinguishing history from the past, and apply these to the resurrection of the Yee Clun Lost Story. Before students can begin to engage with the “Lost Stories” project in a meaningful way they need to possess some understanding of “history” as a discipline. Specifically, they need to recognize that histories are narratives constructed from the selection and interpretation of meaningful evidence left over from the past, and about an issue, event or topic that people are interested in.

Part 1 begins with a set of simple exercises to encourage students to think more deeply about what “history” is.

Part 2 moves students from the general discussion of history and its highly selective nature, to apply their understanding to the specific case of Yee Clun and how his story was lost and then found. In so doing, students will develop their ability to work with primary documents, while also developing a deeper understanding of anti-Chinese discrimination and its impact on Chinese communities in Canada in the late 19th and early 20th centuries.

Lesson 1, Part 1 (70 minutes) History vs. the Past

In this lesson, students work in small groups or pairs to examine and interpret artifacts. Having begun to think about the interpretive nature of history, students are asked more directly to articulate specific differences between history and the past. In the ensuing Socratic dialogue between teacher and students, four key differences will be clarified, and re-defined as four criteria not only for thinking historically, but for *making history* – and therefore of recovering lost stories from the past.

Activity 1: Teacher in a Box

This activity draws particular attention to the fact that historians usually interpret evidence that was created for other purposes.

For this activity, the teacher collects a wide range of personally significant items from their home. Each item should have the potential to tell your students something about you. However, some of the items should be potentially misleading. For example, one teacher who has used this activity brings in a number of vegetarian cookbooks. This usually leads students to conclude, incorrectly, that the teacher is vegetarian. It is also a good idea to have more than one item for some areas of your life, thereby indicating that this is an area of greater importance, for instance bringing in

several artifacts related to children or some particular activity.

Begin the activity by breaking students into small groups. Explain to them that they are taking on the role of historians in the 22nd century. Because schools have all been entirely abolished by this time- replaced by individual, home-based, customized, computer-generated educational modules- historians have become very interested in the lives of teachers in the early 21st century. All of the evidence that has survived about you, the teacher, is contained in the box you have brought in for them. Working in their groups students are to examine the items. Based on their observations of the evidence they will generate conclusions about you and record them using the following headings: “evidence” and “inference”. After examining all of the evidence they should write a short reflective paragraph summarizing their “conclusions.”

When debriefing this activity be sure to ask the students if there are any other types of evidence, missing from the box, they wish they had access to in order to verify conclusions or to learn more about you.

Activity 2: History versus the Past

A simple, yet highly effective, way to introduce students to the idea of “history” as a discipline is to discuss the difference between “the past” and “history”. Create a “T Chart” like the one below:

The Past	History
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Place students into groups of two or three and ask each group to identify two differences between these two terms. Debrief this as a whole class, writing

students' answers on the board. During this discussion, the teacher should push students to recognize that “the past” is literally everything that happened before this exact moment in time, and history is the selection from it, based on certain criteria as identified below. Students can then be asked: “how is history different from the past?” During this discussion, the teacher should provide students with the following criteria for “making history:”

1. People need **evidence** -- traces and accounts -- left over from the past before they can begin to research and understand any aspect of history. These traces or accounts are called Primary Sources. Like evolutionary biologists and geologists, historical thinking depends on the existence of primary sources that have remained from the past into the present. In other words, if a tree falls in the forest and leaves no trace, it is part of the past, but will not be part of history. Think about your own life: out of everything that you experienced yesterday, how much of it left traces and accounts?
2. Traces and accounts not only have to be created, this evidence **needs to be preserved** through time before it can become part of history. Think again about your own life: of that evidence about your life yesterday that was created - a shopping list, a text message, a record of a visa purchase, a conversation that you remember – how much will be preserved through time? How much will be available in the future? Evidence (or fragments) from the past can be found stored everywhere - in everything from government statistics and personal letters in provincial archives, to scientists' pollen samples, and stories told from one generation to the next and preserved in family memories.

3. The creation and preservation of a record of the past is still not enough to make it become part of history. People need to **interpret the evidence**, the primary document. No primary source “tells the truth” about history; even eyewitness accounts, photographs and videos were created by a person at a particular time and place, and these factors influenced what was recorded, and how. Evidence, therefore must be interpreted
 - in the context of how, when, where, why and by whom it was created,
 - in the relevant historical contexts of the time and place it was created
 - in the context of issues and concerns in the present
4. Historians interpret evidence that they see as **significant**– meaningful, important, of consequence. What is significant changes from place to place, from person to person, and over time. This is one of the reasons why history is never really finished, and one of the reasons why stories from the past are always getting lost and found.

In conclusion, suggest that students remember these criteria, because we will be using them to explore how a lost story from the past becomes history.

Lesson 1, Part 2: (210 minutes) Why are stories lost? How do stories get found?

Begin this lesson by watching the Yee Clun video on the Lost Stories website. While watching the video, students consider the question: Does the Yee Clun story meet our criteria for history (in comparison with the past)?

Debrief the video by asking students to discuss, first in small groups then as a class, the following questions:

- What evidence is presented in the film that was created during Yee Clun’s fight against the White Women’s Labour Law? Provide as many examples as you can.
- Does the film show where and/or how that evidence was preserved? Provide at least 2 examples (and remember that human memories count as evidence!) Does it provide other evidence that was not created at the time? What kind?
- What individual person or people are responsible for interpreting the evidence for this Lost Hi/Story?
- People seldom explicitly state why they think the history they are telling is significant, but they usually leave clues. What does the artist think is most important about this story? Can you guess what other participants in the film think is most important about the story of Yee Clun? Or the filmmaker?
- What are three reasons why the Yee Clun story might have been lost?
- What are three reasons why we are now able to “find” this story?

At the end of this discussion, explain to students that they are to complete a two-part critical challenge. First, students are to work in small groups to examine all of the primary documents provided in the *White Women’s Labour Law Historical Document Collection* in the **Teaching Lost Stories** section of the Lost Stories website. They will find that these documents support three theories, or cases, as to why Yee Clun’s story was lost.

1. **The story was lost because of racism from white Canadian society.** Due to prejudice and racism, many white Canadians viewed Chinese immigrants with suspicion and disgust, seeing them as uncivilized, degenerate, dirty, and backward. As a result, they simply had no real interest in recording the stories

of the Chinese population.

2. **The story was lost because segregation and language barriers between the Chinese and white Canadian society made the former less visible.** Chinese immigrants were refused entry to much of Canadian life due to the racist attitudes of the time. As a result, much of the social and cultural life of Chinese Canadians remained in exclusively Chinese organizations and communities. This made the Chinese community largely invisible to white Canadian society.
3. **The story was lost because the of the decline of the early Chinese community.** Prior to the *Chinese Immigration Act* of 1923, which banned immigration completely, the majority of Chinese immigrants were Cantonese-speakers. As the data show, almost no women were able to immigrate to Canada during this early period of Chinese immigration. As a result, the Chinese population was unable to sustain itself, and members returned to China or died off over time. This set them apart from Chinese immigrants after 1967, most of whom spoke variations of Mandarin. Unrelated by dialect or close geographic origin, these later immigrants had little to no connection with the earlier waves, and the story was unknown to them.

The teacher will assign each of the groups **one** of these theories and ask that each group identify the four or five pieces of evidence that best support their assigned theory. Students can use the **primary document analysis organizer** to help them through this process. The group's work can be summarized in a poster that they will present to the class. Each poster should briefly restate the theory the group was trying to support (maximum 2 sentences)

and should clearly identify and explain the four or five pieces of evidence they found most compelling. For each piece of evidence the group should provide the title of the relevant primary document(s), as well as quotes or summaries and pictures or drawings

Once all groups have presented their posters the class should discuss which interpretation is best supported by evidence using the criteria provided on the **primary document analysis organizer**. Teachers should ask all students to rank the order of the theories or cases from most to least convincing and collect this information as an exit ticket. The results can be shared at the start of the next lesson. Teachers are also encouraged to draw attention to the absence of Chinese voices in the document collection. An easy way to do this is to ask the students what other types of evidence they would like to have had available.

Note on the Primary Documents

Teachers can allow each group to examine all the documents. Alternatively, teachers can point students towards the documents that most directly address their assigned theory. In this case, we would recommend that students investigating the idea that **the story was lost because of racism from white Canadian society** look at documents 1-6. Students looking into the idea that **the story was lost because of segregation and language barriers between the Chinese and white Canadian society** can look at 7-13. Finally, those students focusing on the theory that **the story was lost because of the decline of the early Chinese community** should look at 13-16. Teachers may need to provide their students with assistance, by giving them additional historical context, as they try to interpret the documents.