

Final Project

Find a primary source from your parents' or grandparents' life that is significant for their experiences as Chinese immigrants (or children of immigrants).

Examine the primary source and interview your parents, grandparents, or anyone else who can tell you more about the primary source.

Write an essay that talks about your findings. The essay should be double-spaced, 3-4 pages for 8th graders, and 4-6 pages for high school students.

- What did you learn?
- How did it relate to our course this term?
- Did finding this primary source change the way you think about the Chinese American experience? If so, why and how?

This essay needs to be written in complete sentences, observing grammar and spelling rules. However, it can be narrative or expository; just make sure you are answering the questions that the prompt provides.

Essay Due Date: _____

Presentation: Everyone will bring in their primary source (or a photo of it if it is too fragile or precious to bring in) and talk about their findings for 3-5 minutes on _____ (our last class)

Optional Module: Oral History



Suggestion: This may be covered in 7-10 minutes during a class after the distribution of the final assignment.

1. *What is oral history?*

- It is the preservation of oral accounts, especially interviews, of people's experiences, both past and present, for the historical record.
- They usually take the form of recorded interviews in which the subject tells the story of his or her life experience, either in its entirety or during a specific moment or period.

2. *Why do we do oral history?*

- Oral history provides a rich source of information about a specific period of time.
- It often contains information that we would not be able to obtain elsewhere.
- It presents different perspectives on a particular event or time period.
- It is a great way to preserve your own family history as well as the histories of a community that might not be as well-known or studied.

3. *What should we keep in mind when doing oral history?*

- Because oral history involves having conversations with individuals, we want to keep in mind some things that we don't worry about when it comes to written sources:
 - **Be patient:** Your interview subject has a story to tell, but it might not come in coherent or organized form (in fact, this is true for written records as well!).
 - **Be empathetic:** Your interview subject may be telling you about a difficult or traumatic part of their past, and this may bring back emotional responses. Always be understanding and respectful of your interview subject.
 - **Be responsive:** Doing oral history requires active listening and asking follow-up questions when appropriate.

Takeaway: A lot of the history of Chinese Americans and Asian Americans is gathered from the oral histories of those who lived through significant moments that we discuss in this course. Oral history is one important way to preserve the experiences of those who are marginalized or underrepresented because there may be fewer representations of their experiences in books, movies, papers, etc. Oral history is also important for presenting multiple perspectives on the same event or time period.

Final Assignment Tips

1) *How to approach your parents about this assignment:*

“For my class in Chinese school, we have to write a paper about an object that is meaningful to our family’s experience as immigrants in America. Do you have anything from the early years when you first came to this country or that you brought from China?”

Examples: An old hat, a photograph, a dish or special chopsticks, gift from family in China, a letter, etc.

2) *Sample intro paragraph: old medicine bag*

This is a medicine bag that my grandmother gave my parents when they left for the United States. It is a small black and white cloth bag with a zipper on top. It was a makeup bag that my grandmother used to store her medicine, and she gifted it to my mother when they decided to come to the United States. One of my grandmother’s biggest fears was my mother falling ill without anyone to care for her, especially in a strange country, so the bag was one way of trying to protect my mother even from thousands of miles away. It is now worn around the edges. When my parents first arrived in New York, they kept the medicine bag in their bedroom. Whenever my mother had a cold, she took one of the many kinds of medicines that her mother had packed for her.

3) *Sample questions about the object:*

- What is this object?
- When did you get it? From where? From whom?
- What did you use it for?
- When you look at it now, what does it remind you of? Does it remind you of particular events or people?
- Has the way you use this object changed? How?
- In what way does this remind you of first coming to America?

4) *Sample questions about your parents/family’s experience:*

- When did you first come to America?
- What was life like when you first got here? (If your parents are reluctant to speak, you can give them more concrete prompts, such as: “Use 3 adjectives to describe what it was like. Why did you pick those adjectives?”)

- What did you do when you first arrived in America? How were you treated by your coworkers? Your neighbors?
- What did you miss about China when you first came here? What do you miss about China now?
- How has your life changed when you first arrived? Did you have to overcome any obstacles? What were they? How did you overcome them?
- What do you want your children to know about your experience as an immigrant?