

ACTIVITY

Supporting Question 3: Navigating the Borders of National Belonging

Overview

About This Activity

Students explore Supporting Question 3 through a series of activities that help them understand ideas about belonging and exclusion. They conclude with a Formative Task that asks them to write a paragraph connecting the history of Angel Island to issues around borders today.

Supporting Question	How does the history of immigration through Angel Island help us understand how we create and challenge borders today?
Formative Task	Students will write a paragraph reflection, supported with evidence from two featured sources, discussing how the history of immigration through Angel Island helps us understand how we create and challenge borders today.
Featured Sources	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Reading: "Not American Yet" ● Reading: "Berkeley Renames Downtown Street 'Kala Bagai Way' After South Asian Immigrant Activist" Find these materials in this Google Folder .

Procedure

Day 1

Activity 1: Exploring the Concepts of Belonging and Exclusion

Begin the class by asking students to dig more deeply into the concepts of belonging and exclusion. Ask students to close their eyes and imagine a place where they have felt a deep sense of belonging. They should imagine what they see, hear, smell, or taste in that place. Then ask students to sketch or jot down words that they associate with that mental image in their journals. Next, ask students to sketch or jot down words they associate with exclusion or a lack of belonging.

After students have reflected individually, lead a group brainstorm where students share words that they associate with both belonging and exclusion, and write them on the board.

Then ask students to reflect on the following questions as a class:

- What actions do people take when they want you to feel like you belong?
- What actions do people take when they want you to feel excluded?

Activity 2: Reflect on the Meaning of National Belonging

Share the following quote from designer and sculptor Maya Lin:

Sometimes a total stranger—a cabdriver, for example—will ask me where I am from. It is an ordinary question. Or is it? . . . I mutter, “Here it goes again” or I will respond, “Ohio,” and the stranger will say, “No, no, where are you *really* from?” It used to upset me to always be seen as *other*—not really from here . . . not really American . . . but then from where? So I used to practically get into brawls with the person, insisting I was really from Ohio. At that point, more than a few have lectured me on how I shouldn’t be ashamed of my heritage. So now, practiced at avoiding conflict, I say, “Ohio . . . but my mother is from Shanghai and my father is from Beijing.” The questioner generally seems satisfied. But the question, however innocently it is asked, reveals an attitude in which I am left acutely aware of how, to some, I am not allowed to be from here; to some, I am *not really an American*.¹

Ask students to reflect on the following questions in their journals:

- What signals did Maya Lin receive about belonging? How did those signals impact her?
- What does it mean to feel like you belong in a nation? What conditions are necessary for someone to feel like they belong in a nation?

Activity 3: Reflect on Inclusion and Exclusion in the US Today

Explain to students that in class today, they will be thinking more about the contemporary relevance of the history of the Angel Island Immigration Station, especially as it relates to ideas about national belonging. Break the class into groups of two and have them read aloud **“Not American Yet”**.

Since the reading is fairly long and may be challenging for some students, consider previewing some vocabulary in advance or using the [Read Aloud](#) or the [Annotating and Paraphrasing Sources](#) teaching strategy to promote students’ understanding of the ideas and arguments presented.

Debrief the article by discussing the following questions as a class:

- What assumptions does Alexander J. Lee think people often make about Asian Americans? How can these assumptions lead to exclusion?
- The author notes that Asian Americans have been regarded as “forever foreigners” throughout US history. What impact do you think it can have on an individual if they are seen as a foreigner in their own country?

¹ Maya Lin, *Boundaries* (Simon & Schuster, 2006).

- What impact can it have on communities, or on the country as a whole, if certain groups of people are excluded?

Activity 4: Students Expand on their Initial Journal Reflection on the Meaning of Belonging

Ask students to return to their initial journal reflection from the opening activity and add to it by responding to the following prompt:

- How do the ideas you explored in class today connect to, extend, or challenge your initial thinking about belonging?

Invite volunteers to share their thoughts with the class.

Day 2

Activity 1: Brainstorm the Meaning of Belonging in Schools

Today, students will be exploring how remembering history and participating in acts of public commemoration can serve as tools to make our communities and our nation more welcoming and broaden the definition of who belongs. To build schema for this exploration, ask students to work in groups to brainstorm what it means to feel a sense of belonging in their school community.

Break the class into groups of two to three students. Have them brainstorm what school policies would need to be in place for all students to feel welcome. You might want to use the following prompts to help guide students' thinking:

- What books would appear in the school library or in the curriculum?
- What class decorations would be on the walls?
- What languages would the school offer? Why?
- What would be the name of the school?

Ask students to debrief their answers as a class. Then have the class build on their ideas about what it means to feel a sense of belonging by discussing the following question:

- What actions can communities take to signal that an individual or group belongs in that community?

Write students' thoughts on the board.

Activity 2: Examine An Effort to Rename a City Street After Kala Bagai

Explain to students that in today's class, they will be learning about a community effort to rename a city street in Berkeley after Kala Bagai. Students were introduced to Kala Bagai in the first activity for this inquiry, when they watched a clip from the *Time* magazine video [The Immigrants of Angel Island](#) (0:00–8:04).

You may want to take time to review some facts with students about Bagai's family story and connection to Angel Island. Kala Bagai, a South Asian immigrant, came to the United States through the Angel Island Immigration Station with her family in 1915. Her husband, Vaishno,

became a naturalized citizen in 1921 but had his citizenship revoked in 1923 when the Supreme Court ruled in *United States v. Thind* that Indians were ineligible for citizenship because they were not “white.” Vaishno ended his own life after being stripped of his property, including his general store, under California’s alien land laws, which barred Asian immigrants from owning land and property.

Then have students build on their knowledge by reading aloud the **KQED article “Berkeley Renames Downtown Street ‘Kala Bagai Way’ After South Asian Immigrant Activist”**. Ask students to underline information that helps them answer the following question as you read:

- Why did community activists want to change the name of Shattuck Avenue to Kala Bagai Way? What ideas or values did they hope to express in the change?

Lead a class discussion centered around the question above. Then transition into a larger conversation about the impact of renaming streets and other historical markers by discussing the following question:

- How can history be used as a tool to challenge borders that exist in society today?

Ask students to use evidence from the article and the video they watched in class to support their arguments, but encourage them to also draw from examples in their own lives or other moments in history or current events.

Formative Task

Write a Reflection in Response to the Supporting Question

Ask students to write a paragraph reflection in response to the supporting question, “How does the history of immigration through Angel Island help us understand how we create and challenge borders today?” Encourage students to use evidence from their readings and class discussions to support their arguments.