# ***Identity Thematic Unit***

**The Asian American Education Project**

# For educators who wish to teach with a thematic approach when using The Asian American Education Project curricular resources**,** the following are suggestions on how to utilize the different lesson plans with the time teachers can allot to the theme.

***Theme – Identity:***

Who is an American? In this thematic unit, students will explore aspects of their own identity, perceptions of Asian Americans, and the challenges Asian Americans have faced and continue to face when forging their own identities.

***Organizing Questions:***

* What is an American?
* How has your heritage shaped who you are?
* How have Asian Americans been stereotyped?
* How have Asian Americans forged their own identities?

***Teacher Procedures:***

1. Inform students that they will be learning about issues pertaining to identity through the lens of the Asian American experience.
2. Outline expectations for discussions on this topic. Emphasize that they must be respectful when acknowledging classmates’ comments, as well as exhibit sensitivity toward cultures and ideas different from their own.
3. Follow the guidelines outlined below, depending on how much time you have available to teach this unit.
4. Please note that instructions for group work are based on a class size of 30. Adjust accordingly for different class sizes.

**DAY ONE:**

***Summary:***

Students explore what it means to be an American, what characteristics comprise their own identities, and how the census can empower and also be misused.

***Activity 1:***

1. Inform students that they will explore issues pertaining to identity through the lens of the Asian American experience.
2. On a separate sheet of paper, direct them to write what they believe it means to be an American. Explain that since this is a quickwrite, they should write as much as possible in the five minutes allotted to this activity.
3. Once students have completed the quickwrite, show them the one-minute video, “I Am an American” at <https://vimeo.com/59664228> or <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=vPIXLUrIjXg> (excerpted from an activity from Lesson 2.4 – *Nationality, Ethnicity, Race, Constitutional Rights - Civil Liberties Act of 1988*
4. On the same paper that they completed their quickwrite, now ask students to record their answers to the following questions.

* How do the people in the video resemble/not resemble what I wrote as being American in my quickwrite?
* Did citizenship, birthplace, language, or race factor into my descriptions of what an American is? If so, how?

Ask some student volunteers to share their answers.

***Activity 2:***

1. Inform students that they will now look more closely into their own heritage and identities. (The following activity is excerpted from Lesson 4.7 – *Know History, Know Yourself*).

Tell them, “Since 2013, the Restoring Our Original True Selves (ROOTS) program utilizes the motto, ‘If you know history, you know yourself.’” Tell them that they will explore their own family histories as a way to learn more about themselves.

1. Ask each student to create a family tree, focusing on the experiences of their family rather than an individual family member (as is the focus of traditional family trees). Students should include the following:

* Roots: Events and things that have affected your family and your family’s heritage (e.g., slavery, Spanish missions, colonialism, Transcontinental Railroad, World War II, the wars in Vietnam and Southeast Asia, freedom fighters, women’s rights, LGBTQ rights, familial culture, traditions, hard workers, dreamers, entrepreneurship, etc.)
* Base/Trunk: The impact of those events or things (your roots) on your family and their response to what they faced (e.g., immigrating from afar to earn money for back home, being the first in their family to attend college, starting a successful business, serving in the military, making impacts in the fields of education, science, health, and technology, etc.)
* Leaves/Fruit: The future that you imagine for your family or community that addresses the past issues they and you have faced (e.g., racial equality and equity, free higher education, affordable housing, universal healthcare, true living wages, and citizenship for undocumented people, etc.)

Optional Gallery Walk: Because students are sharing personal details and experiences, the sharing (e.g., gallery walk activity) of family trees is an opt-in process. Only include the work of students who explicitly agree/want to share their work.

1. After the voluntary sharing or participation in the Gallery Walk, direct students to write a quick 10-minute reflection based on the following questions:

* What parts of your own heritage and family history did you think most deeply about during this activity?
* What feelings and words do you associate with your heritage?
* What are you most proud of, and how do you carry/show that pride in your life?
* During the gallery walk did you notice any similarities between your family tree and your classmates’ trees? If so what were they?

Ask some student volunteers to share their answers.

***Activity 3:***

1. Inform students that every ten years, the U.S. government conducts a census in which it counts every person living in the United States and the five U.S. territories. Describe how the census also gathers and compiles information such as the kind provided in their family trees.
2. Distribute one copy of the handout, *72-Year Rule of the Census* (from Lesson 2.4 – *Nationality, Ethnicity, Race, Constitutional Rights - Civil Liberties Act of 1988*) to each student. Allow students time to read the handout and answer its discussion questions on a separate sheet of paper. The questions are also included below for your reference.

* What do you remember about the last census?
* What is the purpose of the census?
* What are some things I can learn about the people in my community through census data?
* Why does the census matter to my community?
* Today, many people still fear providing information to the government. Explain why one would no longer worry about census confidentiality.

1. Conclude the day’s class with a discussion centered around the questions listed above.
2. Inform students that in the past, census data was used to target Japanese Americans during World War II. As homework, inform them that they will explore how many Japanese Americans’ identities as “Americans,” as well as their loyalty to the United States was called into question.

***Homework Prior to Day Two:***

1. Direct students to watch the video in Lesson 2.3 – *Who Defines Loyalty?*

* Also instruct students to read this lesson’s essay, from the lesson***,*** and to answer the following questions on a separate sheet of paper:
* What does loyalty mean to you in your personal life? Consider loyalty in the national context. How has the government or media sometimes depicted what a loyal or disloyal citizen looks like and why?
* What consequences resulted from the U.S. government’s emphasis on loyalty, particularly the impacts on individuals and communities? How was this human toll justified?
* In your opinion, how much should we value loyalty? Does it result in positive change? Does it have harmful consequences? Why or why not?

### In your opinion, was challenging Executive Order 9066 an act of a loyal American? Why or why not?

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| **One Day to Teach Lesson:** |
| If you have only one day to teach about issues pertaining to identity, collect students’ homework assignments for assessment and conclude your lesson on identity here. If you have additional days to teach on this theme, proceed with the following directions. |

**DAY TWO:**

***Summary:***

Students explore the connection between loyalty and identity, and the issue of stereotypes of Asian Americans.

***Activity 1:***

1. Review the previous day’s lesson on identity by asking students to think of characteristics that they identify with being American. Record their answers on a large sheet of butcher paper or a whiteboard in front of the classroom.
2. Direct students to the questions that they answered for their homework. Facilitate a discussion based on them, as well as the following:

* What values and ideals do you think Americans stand for or should stand for?
* To what extent is loyalty a trait of Americans?
* To what extent do you believe citizens should be loyal to their government?
* What sort of conflicts in identity do you believe Japanese Americans felt during World War II?
* How “American” do you believe the “no-no boys” along with those who challenged Executive Order 9066 like Fred Korematsu, Gordon Hirabayashi, and Minoru Yasui were?
* Why do you think all people of Japanese ancestry from the West coast were the only ones forced en masse into incarceration camps during World War II, and only a very limited incarceration of those of German and Italian ancestry?

***Activity 2:***

1. Tell students that Asian Americans have often been seen as “perpetual foreigners” in the United States, and have been the target of numerous stereotypes. Inform students that “a **stereotype is** a common belief, often negative, about or attached to a particular group of people.” (The following activities for this day are excerpted from lessons 3.1 –*Model Minority Myth* and 3.6 –*Asian Americans On the Big Screen: Responding to Stereotypes.*)
2. Begin a discussion on the topic of stereotypes by encouraging students to think about the following questions:

* Have you ever experienced stereotyping?
* What difficulties have emerged when others view you differently than you view yourself?
* What difficulties have emerged when you view others differently than they view themselves?
* How do you think stereotypes might impact the way you see yourself?

1. Direct students to write their answers on a separate sheet of paper. Allow 5–7 minutes for this task.
2. When students have finished, divide the class into partner pairs and instruct students to share their answers with their partners. When they have finished doing so, ask for student volunteers to share some of their answers with the entire class.

***Activity 3:***

1. Play the videos for Lesson 3.1 and Lesson 3.6.
2. After viewing the clip(s), engage in a brief class discussion with the following questions:

* During World War II, how were Japanese Americans treated? Why would being seen as “Good Americans” be so important to Asian Americans after the war?
* What are the characteristics of a “Good American”? What are the connections between this stereotype and ideas about the American Dream and meritocracy?
* How might the idea of the “Good American” create problems for Asian Americans?
* Based on the video clip, what were some of the images of Asian Americans that the speakers saw on TV and in movies while they were growing up?
* How did the speakers feel about seeing these images as they were growing up?
* What stereotypes do these portrayals create or perpetuate?

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| **Two Days to Teach Lesson:** |
| If you have only two days to teach about issues pertaining to identity, conclude your lesson here. If you have additional days to teach on this theme, proceed with the following directions. |

***Activity 4:***

1. Based on this discussion, direct students to choose a research project from the list below to complete as homework (Note that there are three options under the “Affirmative Action and the Model Minority Stereotype”).

* **Stereotyping in media and film**

In 2015, #OscarsSoWhite addressed Hollywood’s racial inequity problems. However, how were Asian Americans stereotyped? Find other examples of yellowface and whitewashing in film and media. Two examples: Emma Stone, a white actress, portraying a part-Hawaiian-Chinese character in 2015’s *Aloha*, Tilda Swinton, a white actress, playing a Tibetan monk in 2016’s *Doctor Strange*. After conducting your research, answer the following questions on a separate sheet of paper.

* What problems did you find that Asian Americans face when yellowface and whitewashing occurs?
* Why is the use of yellowface, brownface, and blackface a problem?
* Why is whitewashing a problem?
* Do you think it is acceptable for Hollywood to keep on perpetuating stereotypes?
* **The model minority myth**

Read the essay from Lesson 3.1. Research the following points, compile them into a document, and be prepared to share your findings with your classmates during the next class.

* Introduction of the model minority stereotype in the 1960s and how it was used to divide minority groups.
* Statistics of different Asian groups that are living in the United States.
* Statistics on how Asian American groups are doing in terms of education.
* Statistics on how Asian American groups are doing in terms of income level.
* Use data from the U.S. Census for their research, <https://data.census.gov/cedsci/>.
* **Stereotyping of your own community**

In the video clip, Helen Zia says: “That’s not me and I can’t be that.” Write a short paper in which you incorporate the following points:

* Have you ever felt that way?
* Have you ever seen your community being portrayed in an unfair and untrue way? A community can be an ethnic community, racial community, gender community, LGBTQ community, disabled community, religious community, undocumented community, low-income community, homeless community, etc.
* Discuss how your community is being stereotyped in:
  + Hollywood
  + private companies
  + public sector, such as departments of education, police departments
  + elected public servants, politicians
* **Affirmative Action and the Model Minority Stereotype**

In 2018, a group of more than a dozen Asian American students brought a lawsuit against Harvard University, arguing that the university’s admissions practices discriminated against Asian American applicants. According to the plaintiffs, Harvard admissions officers often assigned Asian American applicants with strong academic credentials lower ratings for admissions criteria related to personality traits. The plaintiffs, called Students for Fair Admissions (SFFA), alleged that the admissions office needed to use these lower personality ratings in order to keep the number of Asian American students at Harvard from becoming too high.

In 2019, Judge Allison D. Burroughs ruled against the SFFA, stating she believed that Harvard’s admissions policies were fair and that affirmative action, a set of admissions policies designed to improve opportunities for students of color, did not hurt Asian American students’ chances of getting into the college. The case raised strong feelings among different members of Asian American communities: while some agreed with the plaintiffs, others felt that affirmative action was a fair process for groups of color, particularly African American and Latinx students.

**Option 1:** Write an essay in which you incorporate the following points:

* + Based on what you know about Asian Americans and the model minority myth, how might affirmative action support Asian American students applying to college?
  + How might the model minority stereotype potentially be an obstacle to college admissions for Asian Americans?
  + Describe how the model minority myth can be used to drive a wedge between Asian Americans and other communities of color in this case.
  + Describe the benefits that Asian Americans actually gained through the Civil Rights Movement.

**Option 2:** Write a letter in which you address the following points:

* In what ways have people tried to stereotype you? How are you more than these stereotypes? Write an op ed, in which you share how you are more than the stereotype they have placed on you.

**Option 3:** Create a visual representation:

* The model minority stereotype has historically been used to drive a wedge between different groups of color. How would you try and bring different groups together? Create a visual representation showing how and/or why different groups of people need to come together.

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| **Two Days to Teach Lesson:** |
| If you have only two days to teach about issues pertaining to identity, collect students’ homework assignments for assessment and conclude your lesson on identity here. If you have additional days to teach on this theme, proceed with the following directions. |

**DAY THREE:**

***Summary:***

Students share their research projects on stereotypes and the model minority myth. Then, they learn about noteworthy Asian Americans who forged their identities in areas such as politics and entertainment.

***Activity 1:***

1. Group students together according to which extension activity they chose. If there are students without a group, direct them to a group with fewer members, or allow them to choose a group whose topic they wish to learn more about.
2. Allow students time to share and discuss their research.
3. Direct students to choose a paper (or papers) that they would like to share with the class.
4. Select student volunteers to share their research. Debrief their presentations with a short class discussion, using the following questions:

* What is so bad or wrong about stereotyping? Why does it need to stop?
* What do you think a person can do to help reduce it?
* How have some people dealt with it?
* How would you deal with it?

***Activity 2:***

1. Inform students that there are a number of noteworthy Asian Americans who have fought against stereotypes and who have forged their own identities. Tell the students that they will spend the remainder of the class and homework researching one of the following Asian Americans. Decide whether to assign each student an individual from the list, or to let them choose. Provide students access to the suggested resources and video clips listed below each name.

**Anna May Wong**

* Video for Lesson 3.6 – *Asian American On the Big Screen: Responding to Stereotypes*
* Essayfrom Lesson 3.6

**Patsy Takemoto Mink**

* Video for Lesson 6.3 – *Women Advancing Equality*
* Essayfrom Lesson 6.3

**Dalip Singh Saund**

* Video for Lesson 3.4 – *Asian American Voices in Politics*
* Essayfrom Lesson 3.4

**Hiram Fong**

* Video for Lesson 3.4 – *Asian American Voices in Politics*
* Essay from Lesson 3.4

**Daniel Inouye**

* Video for Lesson 3.4 – *Asian American Voices in Politics*
* Essayfrom Lesson 3.4

**Koji Ariyoshi**

* Video for Lesson 3.4 – *Asian American Voices in Politics*
* Essayfrom Lesson 3.4

**George Takei**

* [*George Takei: Leading Man*](https://advancingjustice-la.org/sites/default/files/UCRS%2015_George_Takei_story%202.pdf)*,* from Lesson 5.7.1 – *LGBTQ Civil Rights*

1. Inform students that they should write a short research paper in which they provide the following information:

* Short description of the person (who they are, when they lived and worked, what field they worked in, etc.)
* Obstacles the person encountered (stereotypes, discrimination, lack of role models, etc.)
* How did they handle their obstacles?
* What identities the person occupies (race, gender, etc.)
* What is their legacy and long-term impact? How did their work change the United States?
* Do you relate to this individual in any way? Why or why not?

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| **Three Days to Teach Lesson:** |
| If you have only three days to teach about issues pertaining to identity, collect students’ homework assignments for assessment and conclude your lesson on identity here. If you have additional days to teach on this theme, proceed with the following directions. |

**DAY FOUR:**

***Summary:***

Students share their research projects on noteworthy Asian Americans who forged their identities in areas such as politics and entertainment.

***Activity 1:***

1. Group students together according to which individual they researched. If there are students without a group, direct them to a group with fewer members, or allow them to choose a group whose topic they wish to learn more about.
2. Allow students time to share and discuss their findings.
3. Direct students to choose a paper (or papers) that they would like to share with the class.
4. Select student volunteers to share their research. Debrief their presentations with a short class discussion, using the following questions:

* What were some of the obstacles this person encountered, and how did they handle them?
* In what way did this individual defy stereotypes?
* What is their legacy and long-term impact? How did their work change the United States?
* Did you relate to this individual in any way? Why or why not?
* Do you feel like you have faced similar obstacles?
* How can we as individuals work to break down these types of obstacles for everyone?

**ADDITIONAL DAYS:**

If you have more than four days to teach about issues pertaining to identity through the lens of the Asian American experience, consider spending one class per time period, and incorporating activities from the following lessons in particular:

***A Question of Loyalty, 1920s – 1940s***

* 2.3, *Who Defines Loyalty?*
* 2.3.2, *Korematsu v. United States*
* 2.4, *Nationality, Ethnicity, Race, Constitutional Rights - Civil Liberties Act of 1988*

***Good Americans, 1950s – 1960s***

* 3.1, *Model Minority Myth*
* 6.3, *Women Advancing Equality (Elementary)*
* 3.4, *Asian American Voices in Politics*
* 3.6, *Asian Americans On the Big Screen: Responding to Stereotypes*

***Generation Rising, 1960s – 1970s***

* 4.7, *Know History, Know Yourself*

***Breaking Through, 1980s – Present***

* 5.7.1, *LGBTQ Civil Rights*
* 5.7.24, *AAPI Women: Untold Stories Through Poetry*

If class time allows, consider including additional activities such as the following:

* Campaign to have your school or state to declare a Fred Korematsu Day. Have students write to the [Fred T. Korematsu Institute](http://www.korematsuinstitute.org/homepage/) to speak to the class, in person, or virtually. Engage the Institute to help your campaign.
* Construct a debate around the following topics:
* The model minority myth: Is it good or bad for Asian Americans?
* Do Asian Americans need Affirmative Action in the workplace? Is there discrimination against Asian Americans in the workplace?
* Create a physical or digital flyer, poster or infographic to teach about the purpose of the census or about why the census is important. The project must convey an important message and use visuals and colors to attract an audience.

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The thematic unit was created by Waka Takahashi Brown, Curriculum Specialist, Stanford Program on International and Cross-Cultural Education (SPICE), and the lesson plans were developed by Asian Americans Advancing Justice.