



The Early Chinese Canadians, 1858-1947

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Educational Resources

Activity 2.2

Photo Analysis

1. Ask your students the question: What was life like for early Chinese Canadians? Explain that they will be doing some historical research to create a museum-like exhibit that answers this question. The research will be based on traces of the past, such as photographs.
2. Model for students an analysis of an evocative photograph from the website. Choose an example from the list below. The photo can be copied from the website and inserted in the centre square of **Handout 2.1** or a copy of the photograph can be distributed along with **Handout 2.2**.

Photograph 1: See Shu Gong, taken around 1900, location unknown, photographer unknown
<http://www.collectionscanada.gc.ca/chinese-canadians/index-e.html>

Photograph 2: Chinese men on a quay, 24 May, 1899, Vancouver, photographer: V.H. Dupont
<http://www.collectionscanada.gc.ca/chinese-canadians/021022-1100-e.html>

Photograph 3: Chinese children and young girls, taken between 1880 and 1897, Victoria, photographer unknown
<http://www.collectionscanada.gc.ca/chinese-canadians/021022-1500-e.html>

Photograph 4: men and boys in a park, 8 June 1919, Toronto, photographer: John Boyd
<http://www.collectionscanada.gc.ca/chinese-canadians/021022-1500-e.html>

3. Ask your students what the photograph tells us with relative certainty about Chinese-Canadians at that time. Ask them to observe the photo and list the details of what the image tells us about the past. For example:
 - a. Photograph 3: there were children and businesses with Chinese and English signs in Victoria.
 - b. Photograph 1: traditional Chinese clothing was worn, the clothes are neat, the photo's subject holds an umbrella, there is softened shading suggesting that the photo was taken in a studio.
 - c. Photograph 4: gym clothing, Boy Scout uniforms and western clothing is being worn; there is a Union Jack flag in the photo.

Note: Photograph 2 was most typical of early Chinese Canadians. As a frontier city in 1900, most Vancouver residents of all ethnic groups were male. Photograph 3 was unusual as there were few Chinese-Canadian children at this time.

4. Next, ask what this photograph suggests to us. What might we reasonably guess or infer from this evidence? For example:
 - a. Photograph 3: We could infer that there were many Chinese families in Victoria at the time, that there were many Chinese run businesses. Students might also guess as to the type of business suggested by the sign in the right-hand corner. It appears to say "Dealer" and "Opium".
 - b. Photograph 2: the men wear traditional clothes but European hats, there is forest, electric wires, street light, a Union Jack flag.
 - c. Photograph 4: may have been intended to show the integration of Chinese Canadians into mainstream Western society. It was taken just four years before all Chinese immigration was stopped.
5. Consider what the photo does not tell us, for example, how many Chinese children there were, what their parents did, if they went to school, etc.

6. Finally, think about what other questions your students need to ask to know what life was like for Chinese-Canadians at this time.
7. Distribute blank copies of **Handout 2.1 or Handout 2.2** and ask students to use the website to select photographs that help answer the question: What was life like at this time for Chinese-Canadians? If there is no Web access in your classroom, you can print copies of photographs ahead of time for students to consult.
8. Remind students to ask themselves the question: What was life like for early Chinese Canadians? Also remind them that their work will be used for a museum-like project.