



Common Core Projects | Pre-Reading Activities

Coolies

Written by Yin and illustrated by Chris Soentpiet.

About the Book

Shek marvels at the new world as he and his brother, Little Wong, arrive in California. Along with hundreds of other workers, the brothers are going to build a great railroad across the West. They plan to save enough money so that their mother and little brothers can join them in America. But as days grow into months, they endure many hardships-exhausting work, discrimination, and treacherous avalanches. Inspired by actual events, this story reveals the harsh truth about life for the Chinese railroad workers in 1865, while celebrating their perseverance and bravery.

Pre-Reading Activity

Have students mark their opinion of the following statements below in pairs or individually. Then, start with small group discussions of each statement or use as a springboard for a whole class discussion.

	<i>No way!</i>	<i>I don't think so</i>	<i>Probably I would</i>	<i>Yes, for certain!</i>
<i>I would leave my whole family to live in another country.</i>				
<i>I could work 12 hours a day, outside, in all kinds of weather.</i>				
<i>I could take complete care of my little siblings.</i>				
<i>I would do anything to keep my family from going hungry.</i>				



Common Core Projects | Reading Comprehension

Discussion Questions

Use the questions below to discuss the details of the story or have students answer them in complete sentences.

1. What festival do they celebrate to honor their ancestors in the story?
2. What special foods are made to celebrate the festival? What are your favorite holiday foods?
3. Who is PawPaw honoring during the festival? Why?
4. Describe life for people in China during the middle of the 1800's.
5. Why did Shek and Wong leave their family? What did they promise to do?
6. Summarize the voyage from China to America. What do you think would be the most difficult part?
7. Explain how the railroad would be constructed in two directions. Why was it important to the growing country?
8. Why did the Central Pacific bosses not believe in their new Chinese workers? What did they criticize them about and call them?
9. How did the boys earn their money? What did they do with it? Why?
10. Describe life at the end of the workday for the Chinese workers. Infer (or figure out using clues from the story) what you think they looked forward to most each evening.



Common Core Projects | Reading Comprehension

Reading Comprehension Questions (Continued)

11. Why do you think Shek taught his little brother calligraphy? Why would it be an important skill?
12. What job is Wong asked to do? How does Shek react to it? Why?
13. Explain how the Chinese workers were treated unfairly compared to others doing the same type of labor? What did they decide to do about it?
14. What was Shek's viewpoint about the men refusing to work? How do you know? Did you agree with him or not?
15. Summarize what happened when Wong saved his older brother's life. Why do you think they were being forced to keep working in such harsh conditions?
16. Describe the ceremony when the railroads finally met. Why were Shek and Wong left out of it with the other Chinese workmen?
17. Where did the boys settle after building the railroad? How did the rest of the family finally make it to America?
18. How is PawPaw related to Wong and Shek? How do they honor their memory at the end of the book? What do you know about your own ancestors?
19. What was the most interesting fact that you learned while reading this story? What more would you like to learn about the transcontinental railroad?
20. Which illustrations helped you to best understand the plot (or events) in the story? Which illustration was your favorite? Why?



Common Core Projects | Research to Build and Present Knowledge

Research Project

In pairs, assign students one of the following topics from the story. Then give them ten minutes (using school appropriate search engines) to find out what they can and take notes on the topic using the graphic organizer below.

Topic ideas:

Ching Ming Festival

Canton, China

1850's sea voyages

San Francisco, 1850

Central Pacific Railroad Company

Union Pacific Railroad Company

Chinese Calligraphy

Transcontinental Railroad

Trestle design for railroads

Chinese queue braids

Historical Chinese garments/clothing from 1800's

Avalanches

Taiping Rebellion



Research Topic:

Team Members:

Sources Used:

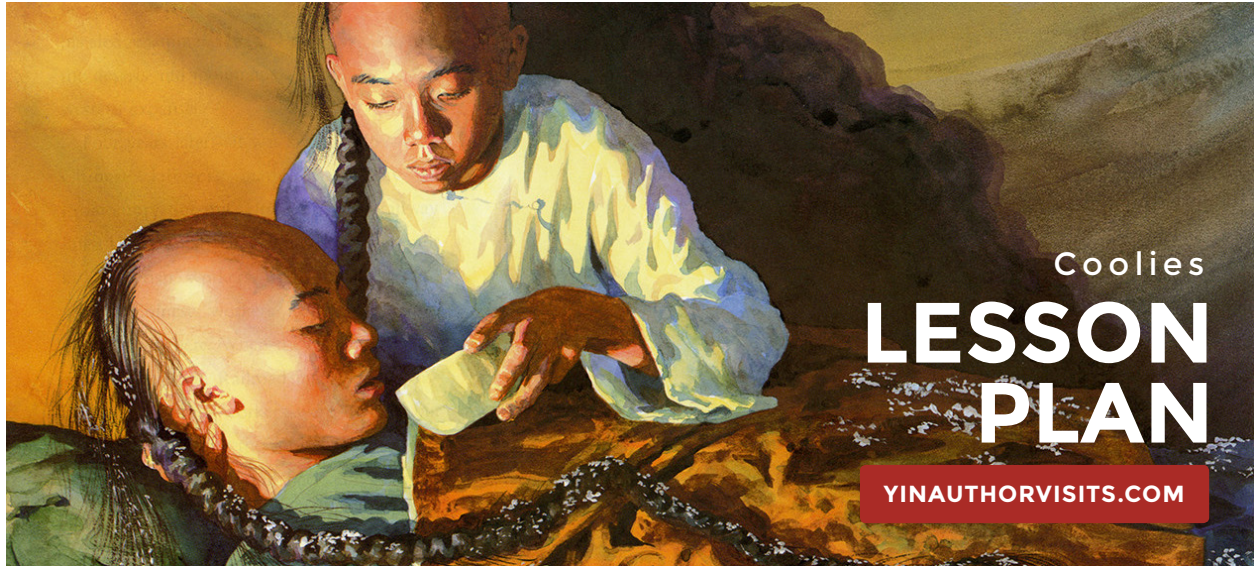
(website, book, magazine)

What is it?

(DEFINE the term)

5 Important Facts:

(LIST what you found out)



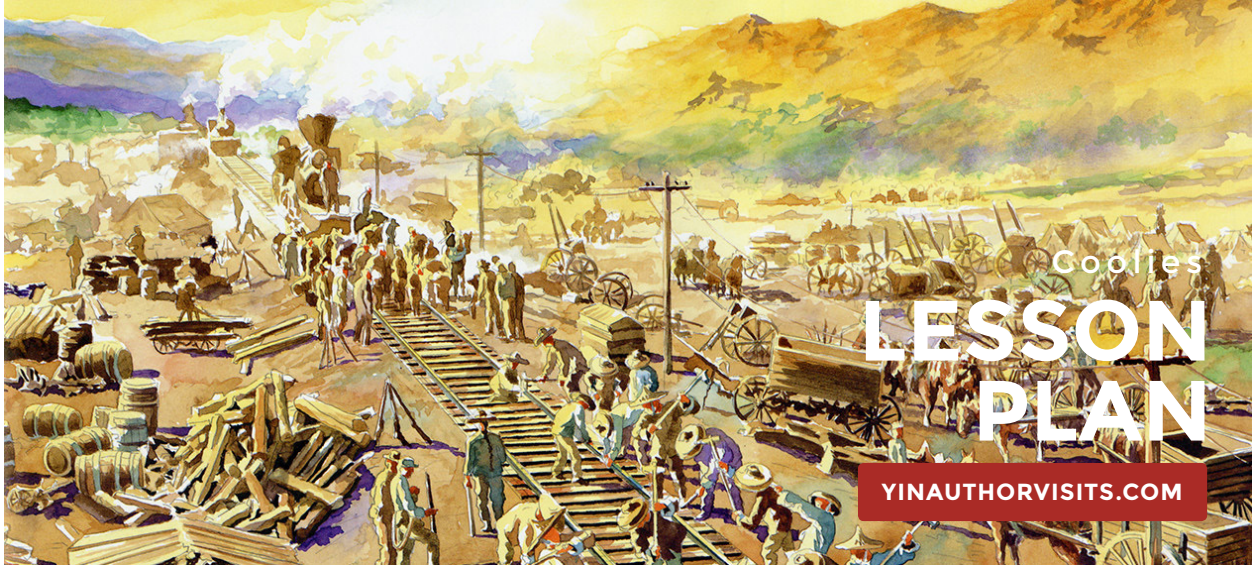
Coolies
LESSON PLAN

YINAUTHORVISITS.COM

Reading: Finding Evidence

It's important that good readers can find evidence in a story to prove what they know. Practice this important skill by finding scenes (and then sentences) that show these statements to be true.

Statement About the Story	Proof from the Text
<i>Example: Shek is a good big brother.</i>	<i>Example: "During the steel-cold nights, Shek made sure his little brother had enough hot tea and blankets to stay warm."</i>
<i>The journey to America was long and hard.</i>	
<i>The Chinese workers were not treated fairly.</i>	
<i>The work on the railroad was difficult.</i>	
<i>The work on the railroad could be dangerous.</i>	
<i>The Chinese workers worked harder than they were expected.</i>	
<i>Shek and Wong care about the family they left behind in China.</i>	



Goodies
LESSON PLAN

YINAUTHORVISITS.COM

Common Core Projects | Communicating with Illustrations

Illustration Study

Good readers know that illustrations are more than just beautiful pictures. They can help a reader understand the characters, setting, and mood of a story. Fill out the chart below to help guide you.


<p>MOOD is the feeling the reader gets from the author's words and the illustrator's pictures.</p>	<p>CHARACTERS are the people (or animals) in a story.</p>	<p>SETTING is the place and time where a story happens.</p>
<p><i>How do the illustrations help the reader to feel what life was like for Shek & Wong? Why do you think Chris Soentpiet used certain colors?</i></p>	<p><i>How do the illustrations help us to know more about the brothers and the people around them?</i></p>	<p><i>What are the clues about time and place are tucked inside each picture? What things do you learn from the illustrations that are not stated in the text?</i></p>



Common Core Projects | Vocabulary

Vocabulary

There are lots of new words within the story of Shek and Wong. Find at least three words that are new to you and fill out the chart below. Remember, you may not be right about what it means at first, but that's OK!

Word in its original sentence	What I think it means by the way it's used	A dictionary definition	A picture to help me remember the meaning (stick figures rule!)
"On this occasion we crouch on our knees and kowtow with the burning incense in our hands."	to pray	Kneel or touch the head to the ground as part of Chinese worship	



This Lesson Guide has been aligned to the Common Core standards for informational text for the 3rd grade. If you teach a different grade, simply visit the [Common Core Website](#) to find a similar standard in the same strand.

Key Ideas and Details

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.3.1

Ask and answer questions to demonstrate understanding of a text, referring explicitly to the text as the basis for the answers.

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.3.3

Describe characters in a story (e.g., their traits, motivations, or feelings) and explain how their actions contribute to the sequence of events

Craft and Structure

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.3.4

Determine the meaning of words and phrases as they are used in a text, distinguishing literal from nonliteral language.

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.3.5

Refer to parts of stories, dramas, and poems when writing or speaking about a text, using terms such as chapter, scene, and stanza; describe how each successive part builds on earlier sections.

Integration of Knowledge and Ideas

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.3.7

Explain how specific aspects of a text's illustrations contribute to what is conveyed by the words in a story (e.g., create mood, emphasize aspects of a character or setting)

Speaking and Listening / Comprehension and Collaboration

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.SL.3.1

Engage effectively in a range of collaborative discussions (one-on-one, in groups, and teacher-led) with diverse partners on grade 3 topics and texts, building on others' ideas and expressing their own clearly.

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.SL.3.1.A

Come to discussions prepared, having read or studied required material; explicitly draw on that preparation and other information known about the topic to explore ideas under discussion.

Vocabulary Acquisition and Use

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.L.3.4.A

Use sentence-level context as a clue to the meaning of a word or phrase.