

## Coolies Lesson Plan

**Book Title:** Coolies

**Author and publication date:** Yin, 2001

**Link to digital reading of book:** <http://youtu.be/pQ-CaW-fJ8U>

**What unit will you use this book with or how/when will you use it with your fourth graders:** Development of Industry

| Social Studies concepts taught in this book:                          | Questions that could be discussed based on the text:  |
|---|---|
| <b>Power, Authority, and Governance (Rights and Responsibilities)</b> | <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. What rights did the Chinese workers have?</li> <li>2. What responsibilities did the Chinese workers have?</li> </ol>  |
| <b>Perspective/Conflict</b>   | <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Were the judgments the bosses and other workers made about the Chinese workers accurate? Were they fair?</li> <li>3. Based on the story, what can you determine about the Chinese workers? What evidence supports your answer?</li> </ol> |
|   |   |
|   |   |

Adapted from: Every Book is a Social Studies Book, Libresco, Balantic, & Kipling, 2011

**Materials for the Lesson:** *List any materials that will be needed for teaching this lesson.*

- Coolies by Yin
- Anticipation Guide
- T-Chart
- Persuasive Essay Graphic Organizer (Free [Graphic Organizer](#) from teacherspayteachers)
- Persuasive Essay Grading Rubric (Free [Common Core Aligned Rubrics](#) from teacherspayteachers.)

**Lesson Objective:**

- **Standard 2, Objective 1** "Describe the historical and current impacts of various cultural groups on Utah."
- **Standard 3, Objective 1, indicator c**, "Determine how and why the rights and responsibilities of various groups have varied over time."

**Background Knowledge:**

- Thousands of Chinese fled to America in the mid-1800s because of a famine in China and civil unrest in the area, which led to great poverty.
- Chinese immigrants came to the "Land of Opportunity" in order to find work to support their families back home.
- The Central Pacific Railroad needed laborers to help complete the Transcontinental Railroad and recruited Chinese workers from mines. Later, they began to contract workers directly from China.

- The Chinese workers were called “Coolies,” a negative term meaning “lowly workers” and were mistreated and disliked by other people in the area.

### **Anticipatory Set/Invitation to Learn:**

- Students will complete the anticipation guide prior to receiving background knowledge from the teacher.
- As a class, go over the anticipation guide, allowing students to share what they already know about the topic.
- Share the background knowledge and ask if anyone has been to Promontory Point.
- Show the famous photograph of the joining of the rails.

### **Listening Focus:**

- Students should listen for examples of cause and effect in the story.
- They should also listen for the rights and responsibilities of Chinese workers.

### **Method for sharing the book:**

- Show students the cover of the book. What do you think they are looking towards?
- Read the story to the class, stopping at various points to ask comprehension questions. Also pause for students to make predictions about the story.
  - After Shek and Wong leave China ask the following questions.
    - Why did Shek and Wong leave China? *(To find work and earn money to send home to their family.)*
  - Pause on the image of Shek and Wong getting off the boat.
    - Look at the men on either side of the gangplank. What do you think they could be saying? What do their expressions tell you about what they might be feeling? *(They could be saying mean or angry things to the people coming off the boat. Or they could just be yelling in English to try to get them to go to a certain location and be frustrated when the immigrants don't understand them.)*
    - What about the man behind Shek and Wong? What might he be feeling? *(His expression seems a little hesitant and scared. Maybe he is overwhelmed by all the new sights and sounds of this new place, and is scared he doesn't know what to do or where to go.)*
  - Pause after the next page (After the sentence, “Coolies, they called the Chinese. Lowly workers.”)
    - What did the bosses think of the Chinese workers? *(They thought they were weak and funny looking.)*
    - What kinds of judgments and assumptions did they make about them? *(They assumed they were less capable of doing hard labor than other people.)*
    - What were they basing these judgments on? *(They were based on what the Chinese workers looked like.)*
    - How do you think that will affect the work the Chinese immigrants do? *(Answers will vary)*
  - Stop after Shek sets the dynamite.
    - Why do you suppose the Coolies were chosen to do the most dangerous jobs? *(The bosses didn't think they mattered or had as much value as other bigger, stronger workers.)*
  - Stop after the strike starts.
    - What do you suppose is going to happen next? Who will win the dispute? *(Answers will vary)*
  - Stop after Shek tells Wong he must get better.
    - Do you think Shek made the right decision to speak up and end the strike? Why or why not? *(Answers will vary)*

## Instructional Procedures:

- Before reading the story, review with students the difference between a “right” and a “responsibility.”
- Using a T chart, have students brainstorm the rights and responsibilities the Chinese workers had as they listen to the story.
  - After reading the book, go over their lists as a class, allowing students time to add other ideas mentioned by classmates or other rights and responsibilities they know of from other sources.
- Complete an Opinion Spectrum
  - Have students line up based on whether or not they think the judgements the bosses made about the Chinese workers were accurate and/or fair, based on the perspective of the Chinese workers.
  - Divide the kids into three groups, those who think it was accurate and fair, those who aren't sure, and those who don't think it was accurate and fair.
  - In groups, have the students come up with their best reasons and evidence from the story to support their opinion.
  - Each group will present their argument with the class.
  - Give students the chance to change their mind, and discuss what it was that made those students change their mind.
  - After completing the opinion spectrum on the Chinese workers' perspective, redo the process based on the bosses perspective.
  - Then, discuss as a class which one was more accurate. Discuss how sometimes a situation can be entirely different, based on your perspective.
- Have students choose one side or the other (Chinese worker or railroad boss) to write a response to the following writing prompt: Was Shek right in getting the immigrants back to work and to end the strike?
  - Make sure they support their answer with reasons and evidence from the text.

**Closure:** *How will you tie all learning together and wrap up the lesson?*

- After students complete their writing, assign them into groups and hold a mock debate.
  - State that a motion has been made to give the Chinese workers more rights.
  - Those who wrote their papers from the perspective of the bosses would be against the motion.
  - Those who wrote their papers from the perspective of the Chinese laborers would be for the motion.
  - As a team, they need to determine which reasons and evidence from their papers would be the most compelling.
  - Each team will be given 8-10 minutes to present their case.

---

**Utah English/Language Arts Core objectives (Reading, Writing, Speaking and Listening, or Language) that could be appropriately taught with this text:**

- **Writing #1: Write opinion pieces on topics or texts, supporting a point of view with reasons and information.**
  - a. Introduce a topic or text clearly, state an opinion, and create an organizational structure in which related ideas are grouped to support the writer’s purpose.
  - b. Provide reasons that are supported by facts and details.
  - c. Link opinion and reasons using words and phrases (e.g., for instance, in order to, in addition).
  - d. Provide a concluding statement or section related to the opinion presented.
  - *Students will be writing a persuasive essay based on the given prompt about whether or not the Shek was right in getting the workers back to work and ending the strike.*

- **Speaking and Listening #1: Engage effectively in a range of collaborative discussions (one-on-one, in groups, and teacher-led) with diverse partners on grade 4 topics and texts, building on others' ideas and expressing their own clearly.**
  - 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.
  - b. Follow agreed-upon rules for discussions and carry out assigned roles.
  - c. Pose and respond to specific questions to clarify or follow up on information, and make comments that contribute to the discussion and link to the remarks of others.
  - d. Review the key ideas expressed and explain their own ideas and understanding in light of the discussion.
- *Students will participate in a variety of collaborative discussions throughout the lesson, such as during the Opinion Spectrum activity and the mock debate.*

**Other disciplines (math, science, the arts, etc.) that could be integrated with this text:**

- Math: Have students calculate the distance between San Francisco and Promontory Point.
  - Have students create a small scale map showing the distance.
- Art: Students can practice Chinese calligraphy
- Health: Students can study the causes, effects, remedies, and prevention methods for frostbite

**Additional Resources**

- <http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/americanexperience/features/general-article/tcrr-cpr/>
- <http://web.stanford.edu/group/chineserailroad/cgi-bin/wordpress/>
- <http://www.soentpiet.com/coolies.htm#note1>
- [http://www.soentpiet.com/documents/soentpiet\\_lessons3-5.pdf](http://www.soentpiet.com/documents/soentpiet_lessons3-5.pdf)
- [http://www.soentpiet.com/documents/soentpiet\\_lessons6\\_8.pdf](http://www.soentpiet.com/documents/soentpiet_lessons6_8.pdf)

Name \_\_\_\_\_

## Coolies Anticipation Guide

Check either true or false for each statement below.

| <b>Statement</b>  | <b>True</b> | <b>False</b> |
|---|-------------|--------------|
| 1. Chinese immigrants were the only non-American workers on the railroad.                             |             |              |
| 2. "Coolies" was a nickname given to them that meant they were hard workers.                          |             |              |
| 3. Everyone who worked on the railroad was paid the same amount.                                      |             |              |
| 4. The Chinese workers helped the Central Pacific Railroad company and built east from San Francisco. |             |              |
| 5. Chinese immigrants considered America the "Land of Opportunity."                                   |             |              |
| 6. "Transcontinental" means the railroad went all the way across the country.                         |             |              |
| 7. Chinese immigrants only came to work on the railroad.  |             |              |

Name \_\_\_\_\_

## Coolies Anticipation Guide

Check either true or false for each statement below.

| <b>Statement</b>  | <b>True</b> | <b>False</b> |
|---|-------------|--------------|
| 1. Chinese immigrants were the only non-American workers on the railroad.                             |             |              |
| 2. "Coolies" was a nickname given to them that meant they were hard workers.                          |             |              |
| 3. Everyone who worked on the railroad was paid the same amount.                                      |             |              |
| 4. The Chinese workers helped the Central Pacific Railroad company and built east from San Francisco. |             |              |
| 5. Chinese immigrants considered America the "Land of Opportunity."                                   |             |              |
| 6. "Transcontinental" means the railroad went all the way across the country.                         |             |              |
| 7. Chinese immigrants only came to work on the railroad.  |             |              |

Name \_\_\_\_\_

## Coolies Rights and Responsibilities

*As you listen to the story, write down any of the rights or responsibilities the Chinese laborers had in the book. Remember, not all of them will be stated directly. Consider inferred rights and responsibilities.*

| Rights | Responsibilities |
|--------|------------------|
|        |                  |