



A is for Anna May Wong | ABC's of AAPIs

This lesson plan is about Anna May Wong and introducing her legacy through art and poetry.

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In partnership with the Asian American Advocacy Fund (AAAF), WQED Education took AAAF's ABC's of AAPIs coloring book project and created lesson plans for educators to use in the classroom to provide a creative activity and resource for AAPI Studies.

Time Allotment: 1 class period

Learning Objectives

- Learn about Anna May Wong as an important Asian American historical figure
- The impacts of stereotypes in the entertainment industry
- Why representation matters

Prep for Teachers

- Have video clips ready to view
- Print enough copies of the coloring sheet and poem

Supplies

- "A is for Anna May Wong" coloring sheet
- Pencil
- Paper
- Coloring supplies

Media in this Lesson

- Video: [Asian Americans on the Big Screen: Responding to Stereotypes | Asian Americans](#)
- Video: [Anna May Wong | Unladylike2020](#)

Vocabulary

- anti-miscegenation laws — laws that prohibited interracial marriage as well as intimate and romantic relationships between people of different racial backgrounds. In some states these racist laws were established in the colonial era and they lasted until the late 1960s.
- Chinese Exclusion Act — From 1882 to 1943 the United States Government severely curtailed immigration from China to the United States. This Federal policy resulted from concern over the large numbers of Chinese immigrants, competition with American workers and a growing nativism. It was the first time that federal immigration laws targeted a particular group of people. As a result, an act (22 Stat.58) was enacted on May 6, 1882 to suspend immigration of Chinese laborers; permitted those Chinese in the United States as of November 17, 1880, to

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stay, travel abroad, and return; prohibited the naturalization of Chinese; and created a "Section 6" exempt status for teachers, students, merchants, and travelers. --Adapted from National Archives

- cinematographer — also called director of photography, is a person who is in charge of the camerawork and lighting in a film.
- cirrhosis — a disease of the liver often caused by alcoholism
- dragon lady — A derogatory term used to describe a woman who is strong, overbearing, glamorous and mysterious. It is often used as a stereotype for women of Asian descent who is cast as a villain
- flapper — a woman in the 1920s who disregarded conventional standards of behavior and appearance for a more “modern” lifestyle (a woman who danced, smoked, and wore her hair and skirts short).
- inclusivity | practice of equal access. It also refers to including people who might otherwise be marginalized or excluded based on race, class, gender, sexuality, or physical ability.
- Madam Butterfly — A Japanese woman who was the lead character in an Italian opera married a U.S. navy officer who abandoned her for another woman in the United States. A stereotype for a woman of Asian descent who is cast as a tragic figure.
- nativist — a person who believes in, and works toward, protecting the rights and privileges of people born in a particular country and seeks to inhibit the rights immigrants. Often nativist views may be espoused by a political party or groups as well as individuals in response to growth in immigration, or the perception that native-born people are being outnumbered by immigrants.
- nuance — a subtle difference in meaning
- segregated — the enforced separation of different racial groups in a country, community, or establishment
- yellow-face — when a White actor uses makeup in an attempt to “look like” and play an Asian character. Hollywood has a long history of casting White actors in Asian roles.
- white-washing — the film industry practice of casting White actors in non-White roles

Introductory Activity

Asian Americans have historically been stereotyped in the United States as “foreigners,” “exotic,” or “dangerous.” This has been promoted and maintained by the film industry. In Hollywood, Anna May Wong, a Chinese American actor from the 1920s, faced many setbacks. Wong was passed over for roles intended for an Asian actor and given instead to white actors.



Learning Activities

1. Distribute copies of the coloring sheet and put students into small groups to read and analyze the poem: "A is for Anna May Wong."
2. Groups will define key terms outlined in the vocabulary and summarize the poem. Each group should write a reflection question for classmates to consider and respond to the poem.
3. Watch together the videos:
 - Video: [Asian Americans on the Big Screen: Responding to Stereotypes | Asian Americans](#)
 - Video: [Anna May Wong | Unladylike2020](#)
4. Discuss the following questions:
 - What's your impression of Asian/Asian American figures in Hollywood films?
 - How did the speakers in the clip feel about seeing these images as they were growing up?
 - How do you think it feels to be typecasted to one kind of character as a person and professional? In other words, only being known for one thing.
 - How might seeing positive or negative images of a group affect you, especially if you are part of the group being portrayed?
 - How do these positive or negative images of a group affect or influence those who have little to no interaction with those portrayed groups?
5. Ask students to answer these reflection questions on a piece of paper or in a notebook: How have you been stereotyped in your life? How did it make you feel? How did racism and stereotypes affect Wong's career?
6. Class reflection: Why does representation matter in the media? What does it communicate to audience members? Why is it important to show different stories from different walks of life? What was the first piece of media to make you feel seen?

Lesson Extension:

Have students research about a modern Asian American entertainer. Compare and contrast the challenges that their chosen person faces/faced with those of Anna May Wong. Are things different in the entertainment industry or the same, how so? Students should write down their findings, sources, quotes, and their own reflections in a notebook or write a brief paper.