

The Komagata Maru Incident: Setting the Context¹

Critical Task

- a. Uncover varying views towards both (i) immigration and (ii) intercultural connections
- b. Identify the varying attitudes towards the South Asian community in Canada at the turn of the 20th century from the years 1906 to 1922.
- c. Specifically use diverse opinions from members of (a) the South Asian community in Canada (b) other communities present in Canada in the early 1900s and (c) Government Officials.
- d. Draw specific conclusions about the topics and opinions discussed in the documents using the *Reading within a Document* (BLM #1C) worksheet.

Overview

The aim of this lesson is for students to compare and contrast the complex and varying views towards the immigration and participation of South Asians in Canada at the turn of the century. The time period examined includes several years prior to the arrival of the Komagata Maru in 1914 and several years after the incident. In this challenge, students generate questions about the Komagata Maru incident by examining primary documents published during this time period.

The aim is to identify opinions towards the immigration, integration, and intercultural connections of South Asians in Canada. The documents provide examples of the views of a number of different groups of the time held on Asian immigration. First, students are asked to summarize the attitude of the author of their document in two or three words and second, students are asked to challenge their author's viewpoint. Students are asked to compare and contrast these complex views in order to contextualize the range of the arguments, both for and against, accepting immigrants in Canada.

Remind students that even within communities, there are varying views and opinions. Students should be challenged to pick out the differences within each text and not to assume that each person shares the same view.

Teaching Suggestions

Generating questions about the Komagata Maru

BLM #1A

If students have not previously studied the controversy that frequently surrounds immigration policy to Canada and the challenges faced by new Canadians, introduce the issue by asking them to consider some of the possible concerns that may be voiced by new arrivals to Canada (i.e. education, language, career, and cultural change). Record the ideas students share on the board, suggesting that debates over immigration are ongoing in Canadian history. Approach this

¹ This lesson plan was created by members of Simon Fraser University's Komagata Maru Project Management team and members of the Critical Thinking Consortium (TC2)

challenge with sensitivity and from the perspective of new migrants. Be prepared to counter views that may want to exclude people from being accepted in Canada.

Next, display the image titled, *Crowded deck of the Komagata Maru* either on a transparency on the overhead projector or directly from the website (<http://komagatamarujourney.ca/node/395>). Invite students to work with a partner for one minute to generate as many questions as they can about the picture. Allow students time to supplement or modify their questions. Ask partners to work with another group to compare lists, crossing off duplicate questions (limit the time for generating questions to allow more time for discussion). Finally, ask students to select the three most powerful questions they developed and randomly select groups to share their questions with the class.

As they are working on their questions, inform them that the Komagata Maru was a steamship from India. It arrived in Vancouver's harbour on May 23, 1914 that was denied access to Canada. Provide students with the following information on the Komagata Maru incident (<http://komagatamarujourney.ca/incident>).

Teaching Assignment

Examine a primary source on the Komagata Maru

BLM #1A, #1B

Explain to students that among the challenges faced by historians is to explain why events happened and what motivated individuals and groups to make the decisions they did. Often this is achieved by examining primary documents that reveal the attitudes that govern the behaviour and decisions of people. Remind the class that historians often use a variety of sources and incomplete texts to uncover and make inferences about events, issues and attitudes taking place during a time period. Inform students that uncovering the opinion of an author often requires a careful reading of primary sources.

Encourage students to identify the context within which their text was written by asking what type of document they are examining and its purpose. For example, are students looking at an official telegram sent between two government representatives, or are they looking at a newspaper article written by a journalist? As an example of the attitudes that surrounded the Komagata Maru incident, read the challenging text titled, *Declares Hindus are the Filthiest* (<http://komagatamarujourney.ca/node/3065>). The article can be placed on a transparency copy of the sheet on an overhead or by providing handouts. Ask students to record their initial response to this text before distributing the worksheet titled, *Reading within a Document* (BLM #1C), as a structured means of recording evidence of the author's opinion and bias.

Use this opportunity to explain to students the difference between observation and inference by indicating that the former relates to the nouns, adverbs and adjectives that appear in a text while the later requires them to make plausible speculations of the author's intent. Invite students to share their answers, circling any observations made on the overhead sheet and annotating the inferences on the margins. Use this as an opportunity to ensure students are able to distinguish the two.

- Imperialism or Nationalism? Canada's involvement in maintaining British imperial policy, including the Boer War and Laurier's Naval Bill;
- Issues concerning conscription during World War I;
- Banning of various First Nations Potlatch ceremonies;
- Women's suffrage and the suffrage movement;
- Winnipeg General Strike;
- Effects of the Stock Market crash and Great Depression;
- Many other events around World War II and post WW II issues;
- Challenges to Chinese Canadian Head-Tax;
- Japanese Canadian Internment;
- The right to vote for South Asians in 1947.

References

<http://komagatamarujourney.ca>

Blackline Master #1A

The Komagata Maru Incident (<http://komagatamarujourney.ca/incident>)

Here are a few direct links to the *Komagata Maru: Continuing the Journey* website to help you prepare for your class. A selection of books in the reference list, directly related to the Komagata Maru are also available online from the website (<http://komagatamarujourney.ca/books>).

1. *Continuous Journey: A Social History of South Asians in Canada* by Norman Buchignani; Doreen Indra; and Ram Srivastava (<http://komagatamarujourney.ca/node/3462>)
2. *The Voyage of the Komagata Maru: The Sikh Challenge to Canada's Colour Bar* by Hugh Johnston (<http://komagatamarujourney.ca/node/3288>)
3. *The Komagata Maru Incident* (Chapter 5) by Peter Ward (<http://komagatamarujourney.ca/node/3348>)

Images of the Komagata Maru (<http://komagatamarujourney.ca/photos>)

Here are five images of the Komagata Maru in Vancouver. There are additional images available online if you would like to expand this lesson

1. The Komagata Maru in the harbour: <http://komagatamarujourney.ca/node/399>
2. Malcolm Reid, H. H. Stevens during Komagata Maru incident: <http://komagatamarujourney.ca/node/401>
3. An image of Gurdit Singh on board the Komagata Maru: <http://komagatamarujourney.ca/node/397>
4. Passengers on board the ship: <http://komagatamarujourney.ca/node/398>
5. Crowded deck of the Komagata Maru: <http://komagatamarujourney.ca/node/395>

Thumbnail Samples:



Blackline Master #1B: Attitudes of Different Groups

Here are links to important newspaper clippings, government documents and other texts to help compare and contrast the various attitudes of three to four groups. Questions to consider are, what is the validity of the law that is being enforced in the Komagata Maru case? Why does this incident become so important?

Set #1: Attitudes

- 1) Newspaper Clipping: Clergyman's View on the "Hindu" Problem:
<http://komagatamarujourney.ca/node/3065>
- 2) Newspaper Clipping: Hindu Question is Considered by Vancouver MP H.H. Stevens:
<http://komagatamarujourney.ca/node/3067>
- 3) A comparison and contrast between Canadian government views (Member of Parliament H.H. Stevens and South Asian Pioneer Sunder Singh) "Should British Columbia Admit the Hindu":
<http://komagatamarujourney.ca/node/539>
- 4) The Indian Independence Movement based in North America (The Mutiny Paper):
<http://komagatamarujourney.ca/node/504>
- 5) The Canadian government's position as outlined by the Minister of the Interior:
<http://komagatamarujourney.ca/node/70>
- 6) Letter from Citizen H.H. Davies from The Western Club: <http://komagatamarujourney.ca/node/81>
- 7) Letter from South Vancouver Conservative Association: <http://komagatamarujourney.ca/node/133>
- 8) Women's Council Meeting (Compare: Mrs. Gordon, Mrs. Grant, Mrs. Jenkins):
<http://komagatamarujourney.ca/node/355>
- 9) Treatment of Hindus: <http://komagatamarujourney.ca/node/205>
- 10) Clipping from Sansar, the only Hindustani paper in Canada: <http://komagatamarujourney.ca/node/3075>

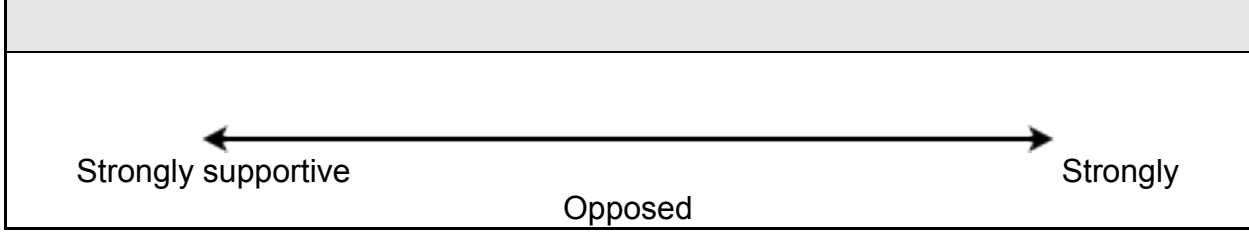
Set # 2: The Right of Entry

- 1) The Aryan Newspaper: Deputation to Ottawa on conditions for South Asians in British Columbia: <http://komagatamarujourney.ca/node/1156>
- 2) Excerpt of a court ruling on the legality of the Komagata Maru (see underlined section):
<http://komagatamarujourney.ca/node/634>
- 3) The Verdict from the "test case" for the Komagata Maru: <http://komagatamarujourney.ca/node/586>
- 4) The challenge of the Komagata Maru: <http://komagatamarujourney.ca/node/378>
- 5) The Canadian Sikhs Delegation: <http://komagatamarujourney.ca/node/960>
- 6) Baba Gurdit Singh: Voyage of the Komagata Maru or India's Slavery Abroad (the forward):
<http://komagatamarujourney.ca/node/2289>

Blackline Master #1C: Reading within a Document

	Observations (Evidence from the document)	Inferences (What does this suggest about the author's attitude).	One word that summarises this attitude with explanation
<p>Actors: Identify the loaded words, adjectives and adverbs used to describe the actor's mentions in the document.</p>			
<p>Issue: Identify the loaded words and adjectives used to describe the issue that the document discusses.</p> <p>Everything you can about the themes, issue(s) discussed in the document.</p>			
<p>Purpose: Report any suggested action stated or implied by the text (e.g. Change the law, arrest an individual).</p>			

Positioning on spectrum



Assessing the Reading within a Document

	Outstanding	Well Developed	Competant	Underdeveloped
Accurate relevant observations	Identifies many relevant and accurate details from the document, including several less obvious details.	Identifies many relevant and accurate details from the document, and occasionally recognizes less obvious details.	Identifies a number of relevant and accurate, but obvious, details from the document.	Identifies only a few of the most obvious details from the document, but not all are relevant or accurate.
Comments/ Explantions for Rating:				
Plausible, imaginative inferences	Provides many varied and imaginative inferences that are highly plausible.	Provides many plausible and sometimes imaginative inferences.	Provides a number of inferences that are generally plausible, but are rather obvious.	Provides a few plausible but obvious inferences.
Comments/ Explantions for Rating:				
Word choice effectively summarises position.	Provides detailed explanation related to observations of the text of the word choice.	Provides a brief explanation of the reasons for word choice with little evidence from text for word choice.	Provides a brief explanation without evidence from the text for word choice.	Provides an unclear explanation for word choice.