

## **Turning Points in the History of South Asian Canadians<sup>1</sup>**

### **Critical Task**

- a. Examine important events and key turning points in the history and development of the South Asian community in Canada between the years 1914 and 2010.
- b. Judge the importance of these events using a values timeline.

### **Overview**

This two-part challenge invites students to explore significant events in the history and development of the South Asian community in Canada between the years of 1914 and 2010. It invites students to learn about important events affecting the South Asian community in Canada by identifying links in their lives with turning points in South Asian Canadian history. To accomplish this task, students will be introduced to a values timeline to judge the importance of each event. After an examination of several events in the history of South Asians in Canada, students judge the importance of each event using a values timeline. Finally, students are asked to identify which of these events constitute a turning point in the community's development, and at times integration, into Canadian society. One important example, is the choice by the Canadian government to implement the "Continuous Journey" regulation that not only impacted the lives of the people on the Komagata Maru, but also the development of the South Asian community in Canada.

### **Teaching Suggestions**

#### **Examining causal links**

Ask students to identify 10 important events they think will need to happen in order for them to get a good career. For example, they may suggest that obtaining a high school diploma is an important step to getting into a university program necessary for a chosen career. After completing their imagined timelines, invite volunteers to share their histories with the rest of the class. Ask students to rank the events in order of importance. Suggest that different career goals may place different values on particular events.

Invite students to review the ten events on their lists and ask them to consider how they decided on which events to include and which ones to ignore. Explain to students that in the process of writing out these 10 important events, they made judgments about what was important to include, and what was not. Indicate to students that the consequences of events are not the only criteria used to determine significance, as there are often unknown or unacknowledged causes to historic events.

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<sup>1</sup> 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)

Suggest that significance also depends upon the recognized importance of an event. Sometimes participants are immediately aware that a monumental event has occurred. For example, the recognition of women as persons under the law by the British court was a hard fought decision whose importance was immediately celebrated, or the right to vote for South Asians in Canada in 1947 was similarly acknowledged. Significance may only be realized years or decades after the event. For example, it is unlikely that the soldiers who fought at Vimy Ridge during World War One were immediately aware of the symbolism that would be bestowed on their victory. Introduce two additional criteria for determining the significance of events by writing the following list on the board.

Prominence at the time: was the event’s importance noticed at the time?

Iconic of the time: has the event been memorialized or come to symbolize change?

### **Judge the important events using a values timeline**

**BLM #3A**

Invite students to consider that events in history have causal importance. Inform students that they are to examine seminal moments in the history of the Canadian South Asian community in the years after the Komagata Maru incident using the *Exploring Prominent Events* guide (BLM #3A). Direct their attention to the sample list of events at the top of the sheet. You may wish to reproduce this list on the board.

For a list of important events, please visit the Komagata Maru interactive timeline (<http://komagatamarujourney.ca/timeline>). If you have access to the website in your classroom, this may be a helpful and interactive tool to use with your students as you explore turning points for South Asian Canadians.

1. The Komagata Maru arrives in Vancouver in May 1914 and was turned away two months later because of the “Continuous Journey” regulation.
2. Immigration restrictions, that stopped Indian immigrants from bringing in their wives and children to Canada, were lifted in 1919.
3. Those onboard the Komagata Maru asked for equal rights as British Subjects.
4. Canadians of Indian origin fight for Canada in World War II.
5. Canadians of Indian origin gain the right to vote in 1947.
6. Canada adopts an official multiculturalism policy in 1971 under Prime Minister Pierre Trudeau, which recognizes a diversity of customs, languages and religions.
7. Changes in immigration policy towards a points-based system occurred in 1967.
8. A memorial plaque to the Komagata Maru is unveiled in a Portal Park, Vancouver in 1989 (75th Anniversary).
9. Commemorative stamp released to recognize 100 years of Sikhs in Canada in 1999.
10. The federal government’s apology for the Komagata Maru incident delivered by Prime Minister Stephen Harper at Bear Creek Park in Surrey (2008).
11. The provincial government’s apology for the Komagata Maru incident delivered in the British Columbia Legislature (May 23, 2008).

Introduce students to the concept of a values timeline. Ask students to place each event from their previous list in the correct chronological order along the timeline and within the appropriate column to indicate whether the consequence of the event forwarded or reversed the South Asian community’s integration into Canadian society. Each column has been assigned a value of +2 +1,

-1, -2 to be used as a scale that ranges from very positive to very negative. Encourage students to use textbooks and online resources to supplement information to support their judgment. In this process, they may find additional events that they wish to include in the timeline. *Please note: If the class will be doing lesson 4 in this series, omit the last two events from the list.*

### **“Identify Turning Points”**

**BLM #3B**

Inform students that they are to consider which of the events from the list constitutes a turning point in the history of South Asian Canadians. Ask students to consider the difference between a significant event and a turning point. Suggest to them that significance is a component of a turning point. Provide students the following criteria for turning point:

- a. The event had a very positive or negative effect
- b. It resulted in an enduring change that was not reversed
- c. It caused a subsequent chain of events that altered circumstances and/or attitudes

As a class, have students watch sections from the following two videos that discuss personal reflections over the granting the right to vote to Canadians of South Asian descent and changes in immigration laws. These can be viewed online at:

1. Belle Puri: “The right to vote” at 00:15:34 (<http://komagatamarujourney.ca/node/4112>)
2. Sadhu Binning: “South Asians in Vancouver in 1967” at 00:11:39 (<http://komagatamarujourney.ca/node/4627>)

Distribute *judging the importance of events* (BLM #3B) to students. Based on the description in the video, ask students to record their impression on how and why this event was important to the South Asian in Canada.

### **Distinguish between Turning points: Catalysts and Watersheds**

**BLM #3C**

Explain to students that not all turning points are perceived to have equal importance. Some turning points act as catalysts that begin a process of change while others are watershed events whose magnitude irreversibly changes attitudes and perspectives. For example, the discovery that the splitting of the atom was a necessary catalyst for nuclear power, whereas the detonation of the first atomic bomb was a watershed moment that caused an irreversible change in opinion and behaviour towards nuclear power.

Distribute *Differentiating Turning Points* (BLM #3C) and invite students to select two turning points. Ask students to explain whether these were watershed moments or catalysts for future change. Encourage students to share their decision with classmates, using this as an opportunity to supplement or alter any of their information.

## **Evaluation**

**BLM #3D**

Use the rubric assessing the *rating of key turning points* (BLM #3D) to provide feedback to students on how effectively they understood the events in the history of South Asian Canadians in the years following the Komagata Maru. The criteria for this evaluation is (a) Accurately identified the consequence(s) of the events (b) Plausibly rated the turning point (c) used reasoned judgment to considers criteria when formulating my opinion.

## **References**

Komagata Maru website: <http://komagatamarujourney.ca/>

## Blackline Master #3A: Exploring Prominent Events

1. Immigration restrictions on bringing wives and children for Indian immigrants lifted (1919).
2. Canadians of Indian origin fight for Canada in World War 2.
3. Gaining the right to vote in 1947.
4. Indians not permitted to purchase homes in certain parts of Vancouver (1950- 60s)
5. Changes to the Immigration policy to a Points system 1967.
6. Commemorative stamp released to recognize 100 years of Sikhs in Canada in 1997.
7. A memorial plaque to the Komagata Maru is unveiled in a Vancouver park in 1989.
8. Creation of Indian radio programs, weekly newspapers, and television shows (1970s) .
9. Federal government’s apology for the Komagata Maru incident delivered by Prime Minister Stephen Harper at Bear Creek Park in Surrey (2008).
10. Provincial government’s apology for the Komagata Maru incident delivered in the British Columbia legislature (May 23, 2008).

Very Positive +2	Somewhat Positive +1	Date	Somewhat negative -1	Very negative -2
		1920		
		1930		
		1940		
		1950		
		1960		
		1970		
		1980		
		1990		
		2000		

**Judging the Importance of Events**

What was the importance towards greater participation?	
Video #1  Right to Vote  Belle Puri: “The right to vote” at 00:15:34	
Video #2  Change in Immigration  Sadhu Binning Vancouver in 1967 at 00:11:39	

***Differentiating Turning Points***

How does Turning points #1 meet the criteria ?	Was this a catalyst or watershed moment
	Explanations for decision
How does Turning points #1 meet the criteria ?	Was this a catalyst or watershed moment
	Explanations for decision

**Assessing the rating of the turning points**

	<b>Outstanding</b>	<b>Well Developed</b>	<b>Competent</b>	<b>Underdeveloped</b>
<b>Accurately identifies the consequence(s) of the events.</b>	Correctly identified all relevant consequences of the event to the South Asian community with clear evidence of research.	Identified some consequences of the event to the South Asian community with some evidence of research.	Identified some consequences of the event in general with some evidence of research.	Speculated on some consequences of the event in general with little evidence of research.
Comments/ Explanations for Rating:				
<b>Plausibly rates of the turning point</b>	Explanation for the rating is highly plausible given what historians know about the event.	Explanation for the rating is somewhat plausible given what historians know about the event.	The explanation given is questionable given what historians know about the event.	The explanation given is unclear
Comments/ Explanations for Rating:				
<b>Reasoned judgment considers criteria when formulating my opinion</b>	The information is accurate, clearly relevant, and comprehensive of the important facts for each criterion.	The information is largely accurate, generally relevant, and includes many of the most important facts for each criterion.	The information is often inaccurate or irrelevant but corresponds to some of the criterion.	The information is often inaccurate or irrelevant and omits the most important facts.
Comments/ Explanations for Rating				