

The Komagata Maru Incident: Understanding Apologies¹

Critical Task

- a) Assess the adequacy of the Canadian government and the provincial government of British Columbia's apologies for their actions during the Komagata Maru incident.
- b) Prepare a written response to either the federal or provincial government's apology.

Overview

In this challenge, students consider the appropriate response of governments to legally sanctioned injustices. To acquaint themselves with the process, they will examine the Canadian government's apology for its treatment of Chinese Canadians for the head tax. Next, students will read the Canadian federal and British Columbia provincial government's 2008 apology for the Komagata Maru, and will be asked to judge the adequacy of each government apology. Finally, students will draft a written response to either the federal or provincial government suggesting how the government might improve the adequacy of their response. To accomplish this task, students will be given different views from South Asian Canadians who have commented on whether the federal and provincial apologies for the Komagata Maru incident were adequate.

Professor Ali Kazimi speaks about what an apology means: "Understanding Apology" at 43:45
<http://komagatamarujourney.ca/node/4638>

Teaching Suggestions

A sample injustice

BLM #4A

Begin by distributing a copy of *Falsely Accused* (BLM #4A) to each student. As a class, read the fictional scenario (located at the top of page) where a student is punished for bringing pills to school, which are incorrectly identified as illegal drugs. Ask students to record, in the bottom part of the sheet, all the consequences of the accusation and to judge the adequacy of the principal's response. Invite students to share their responses, directing the discussion towards the factors they used in assessing the adequacy of a formal response to an injustice.

Uncover criteria for an adequate response

In groups of three, invite students to develop criteria for an adequate response to an historic wrong. Invite students to share their criteria and record them on the board by placing them into four untitled lists that correspond to the following criteria. If necessary, add your own criteria to ensure that each grouping has at least two suggestions.

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)

- **Sincere and full admission:** Acknowledgment of the mistakes and, where warranted, exposes any intentional wrongdoing.
- **Appropriate support:** Appropriate assistance and/or compensation for the negative experiences and consequences for the victims and their families and ancestors.
- **Prevention:** Response helps to build public awareness and avoid future injustices.
- **Fair consideration:** Response fairly respects the legitimate interests of all affected parties—doesn't create new victims or ignore old ones.

Ask students to speculate on what titles would best correspond with the sections. Once the choices have been made, reveal the correct titles to each section. Invite students to revisit their judgment of the principal's reaction using these criteria to determine whether the principal's response to the injustice is adequate. Encourage students to propose a more suitable response for the principal that would be better satisfy all the identified criteria.

Model the criteria for adequate apology

BLM #4B, #4C

Explain to students that in history, governments often sanction injustices for which they later wish to make amends. As an example, students should be asked to examine the Canadian federal government's 2006 apology to Chinese Canadians for the Head-Tax. If necessary, review the background knowledge of students on the topic of the Chinese Head Tax or direct students to a textbook and to online resources to supplement their understanding. Distribute the *Apology to Chinese Canadians* (BLM #4C) and ask students to underline or highlight evidence for each criterion for an acceptable apology. Place a copy of the *Judging Apology* (BLM #4B) on an overhead and invite students to offer their responses and supporting evidence. As a class, complete the overhead transparency as a class directing students towards any supporting evidence and insight they might have missed.

Judge the apology

BLM #4B, #4D, and #4E

Inform students that they are to judge the adequacy of the Canadian government's 2008 apology for its actions during the Komagata Maru incident. Divide students into groups of two and distribute *Transcript of Prime Minister Stephen Harper's Apology* (BLM #4D) and *Transcript of the Province of British Columbia's Official Apology* (BLM #4E). Ask students to judge the adequacy of the apologies using, *Judging Apology* (BLM #4B) and to find evidence for each criterion. After giving students an opportunity to share and review each others' reasons, instruct them to come to a final conclusion about whether the response to the historic injustice was adequate or not.

Written response to the apologies for the Komagata Maru

BLM #4G, #4H

Ask students to consider what either the provincial or federal governments might do to improve the adequacy of their apology for the *Komagata Maru*. Distribute *Sikhs don't accept apology for Komagata Maru* (BLM #4G) as an example of some of the grievances raised towards the apology. Invite students to watch the following three videos that provide different opinions on the issue of apology to supplement their knowledge. Ask students to identify which of the criterion the apology is perceived to have most failed.

1. Professor Ali Kazimi: "Understanding Apology" at 43:45
<http://komagatamarujourney.ca/node/4638>

2. Activist, Harsha Walia: “Apology” at 4:29 <http://komagatamarujourney.ca/node/4792>
3. Ajmer Rode: “Apology” at 53:55 <http://komagatamarujourney.ca/node/4097>
4. Belle Puri: “Apology” at 14:54 <http://komagatamarujourney.ca/node/4112>
5. Guntaas Kaur: “Suggestions for Action: <http://komagatamarujourney.ca/node/4789>

Inform students that they are to write a letter to the government explaining why the apology was either adequate or inadequate. The letter should include suggestions for actions they would recommend the government to take, to meet the criteria for an adequate response. Once students have completed their response, invite them to share their letters with one of their classmates, using this as an opportunity to modify their letter before submission.

Assessment

Assess students’ ability to judge the adequacy of the government apology for the Komagata Maru incident using the rubric assessing the *Response to the Apology* (BLM #4H). The criteria for this assessment are (a) identifies relevant consequences and responses (b) identifies reasons the response might be seen as adequate and inadequate (c) actions suggested to meet the criteria of adequacy are plausible.

Additional Resources

Video on “Ethical Judgment”: http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=_wbw08jPRus

Example: Falsely Accused

Marcus had a terrible headache before school one day, but he didn't want to miss an important science class so he took two acetaminophen pills. His mother placed a handful of pills in a plastic bag so that he could take them at school in case his headache continued. When Marcus arrived at school he opened his locker, and began to place the bag of pills in his locker. Just at this moment, a teacher walked by. The teacher immediately reported to the school principal, Mrs. Green, that he had seen Marcus at his locker with a bag of pills.

Mrs. Green went to Marcus' classroom, demanded that he gather all of his things and escorted him roughly to her office. Once in the office Mrs. Green informed Marcus that school authorities had forced open his locker and found a bag of illegal drugs inside. Marcus explained that they pills were for his headache. The principal was unconvinced, suggesting instead that Marcus had brought the pills to school for the purpose of selling them to other students. She suspended Marcus from school and informed his parents and the police. When the police arrived, they handcuffed and escorted Marcus through the crowded hallways to the police car. He was detained overnight in jail and missed a week of classes because of the suspension.

News of his arrest spread throughout the community. The local newspaper contained an article on illegal drugs in schools and mentioned Marcus by name. When the test results finally arrived, they revealed that the drugs were not illegal, but common headache medication. Upon learning of this development, Mrs. Green sent a letter to Marcus' home apologizing for the misunderstanding, but suggesting that he be more careful in future about bringing suspicious looking drugs to school without a note from his parents.

List 5 or 6 injustices that were done	What were the immediate consequences	What are some possible long term consequences

Was the principal's reaction: [] Entirely adequate [] Somewhat adequate [] Not adequate at all

What are your reasons?	How should she have reacted?

Judging an Apology	
Summarize the Injustice(s)	List its Consequences
Identify the Official response(s) to the injustice	

Criteria for an adequate apology	Reasons why it would be seen as adequate	Reasons why it would be seen as inadequate
Sincere and full admission <i>Acknowledgment of the mistakes and, where warranted, exposes any intentional wrongdoing.</i>		
Adequate support <i>Appropriate assistance and/or compensation for the negative experiences and consequences for the victims and their families and ancestors.</i>		
Prevention <i>Response helps to build public awareness and avoid future injustices.</i>		
Fair consideration <i>Response fairly respects the legitimate interests of all affected parties—doesn't create new victims or ignore old ones.</i>		
Overall Assessment	<input type="checkbox"/> Much more than was required <input type="checkbox"/> A little more than was required <input type="checkbox"/> Exactly what than was required <input type="checkbox"/> A little less than was required <input type="checkbox"/> Much less than was required	Three main reasons.

Address by the Prime Minister of Canada on the Chinese Head Tax

22 June 2006 Ottawa, Ontario

Mr. Speaker, I rise today to formally turn the page on an unfortunate period in Canada's past. One during which a group of people - who only sought to build a better life - was repeatedly and deliberately singled out for unjust treatment. I speak, of course, of the head tax that was imposed on Chinese immigrants to this country, as well as the other restrictive measures that followed. The Canada we know today would not exist were it not for the efforts of the Chinese labourers who began to arrive in the mid-nineteenth century. Almost exclusively young men, these immigrants made the difficult decision to leave their families behind in order to pursue opportunities in a country halfway around the world they called "gold mountain." Beginning in 1881, over 15,000 of these Chinese pioneers became involved in the most important nation-building enterprise in Canadian history - the construction of the Canadian Pacific Railway. From the shores of the St. Lawrence, across the seemingly endless expanses of shield and prairie, climbing the majestic Rockies, and cutting through the rugged terrain of British Columbia. This transcontinental link was the ribbon of steel that bound our fledgling country together. It was an engineering feat one for which the backbreaking toil of Chinese labourers was largely responsible. That was instrumental to the settlement of the West and the subsequent development of the Canadian economy. The conditions under which these men worked were at best harsh, and at times impossible: tragically, some one thousand Chinese labourers died building the CPR. But in spite of it all, these Chinese immigrants persevered, and in doing so, helped to ensure the future of Canada. But from the moment that the railway was completed, Canada turned its back on these men.

Beginning with the Chinese Immigration Act of 1885, a head tax of \$50 was imposed on Chinese newcomers in an attempt to deter immigration. Not content with the tax's effect, the government subsequently raised the amount to \$100 in 1900, and then to \$500 - the equivalent of two years' wages - in 1903. This tax remained in place until 1923, when the government amended the Chinese Immigration Act and effectively banned most Chinese immigrants until 1947. Similar legislation existed in the Dominion of Newfoundland, which also imposed a head tax between 1906 and 1949, when Newfoundland joined Confederation. The Government of Canada recognizes the stigma and exclusion experienced by the Chinese as a result. We acknowledge the high cost of the head tax meant many family members were left behind in China, never to be reunited, or that families lived apart and, in some cases, in poverty, for many years. We also recognize that our failure to truly acknowledge these historical injustices has led many in the community from seeing themselves as fully Canadian. Therefore, Mr. Speaker, on behalf of all Canadians and the Government of Canada, we offer a full apology to Chinese Canadians for the head tax and express our deepest sorrow for the subsequent exclusion of Chinese immigrants. *Gar nar dai doe heem*. This apology is not about liability today: it is about reconciliation with those who endured such hardship, and the broader Chinese-Canadian community, one that continues to make such an invaluable contribution to our great country. And while Canadian courts have ruled that the head tax, and immigration prohibition, was legally authorized, we fully accept the moral responsibility to acknowledge these shameful policies of our past.

For over six decades, these race-based financial measures, aimed solely at the Chinese, were implemented with deliberation by the Canadian state. This was a grave injustice and one we are morally obligated to acknowledge. To give substantial meaning to today's apology, the Government of Canada will offer symbolic payments to living head tax payers and living spouses of deceased payers. In addition, we will establish funds to help finance community projects aimed at acknowledging the impact of past wartime measures and immigration restrictions on ethno-cultural communities. No country is perfect. Like all countries, Canada has made mistakes in its past, and we realize that. Canadians, however, are a good and just people, acting when we've committed wrong. And even though the head tax - a product of a profoundly different time - lies far in our past, we feel compelled to right this historic wrong for the simple reason that it is the decent thing to do, a characteristic to be found at the core of the Canadian soul. Mr. Speaker, in closing, let me assure the House that this government will continually strive to ensure that similar unjust practices are never allowed to happen again. We have the collective responsibility to build a country based firmly on the notion of equality of opportunity, regardless of one's race or ethnic origin. Our deep sorrow over the racist actions of our past will nourish our unwavering commitment to build a better future for all Canadians. Thank you.

Transcript of Prime Minister Stephen Harper's Federal Apology for the 1914 Komagata Maru Incident

Location: Surrey, British Columbia, Bear Creek Park

Event: *Gadri Babian da Mela*

Opening: A bhangra performance by the Surrey India Arts Club.

Stephen Harper (Prime Minister): Good Afternoon, *Bonne après-midi, Sat Sri Akaal, Nameste, As-Salāmu Alaykum*. Thank you Jason for that introduction. Greetings to my colleagues, Nina Grewal, Jim Abbot, and Russ Heaper, and fellow Canadians. I'd like to begin today by thanking the president of the Mohan Singh Memorial Foundation, Sahib Thind, for inviting me once again to this spectacular showcase of Punjabi culture. The vibrant dance and musical traditions, exquisite art and timeless literature being celebrated here today are the fruits of a millennial old civilization whose influence spans the globe. Canada now shares this rich cultural legacy; it has become an integral part of our own cultural diversity. [French Translation] Today over one million Canadians are of South Asian descent. These hard working men and women passionately devoted to their families and communities are helping make our country even stronger for the generations yet to come, our country that affords opportunity to all, regardless of their background, our country that offers sanctuary to victims of violence and persecution, our country of freedom and democracy, of prosperity and peace, second to none in the world. As Canadians we have before us, and before our children and grandchildren, a future of literally unlimited possibility. A lot of that promise stems from the confidence, the ideas, and the energies brought here by successive waves of newcomers drawn to our shores by the promise of a new and better life. Canada is renowned the world over for its welcoming embrace of immigrants. But like all countries, our record isn't perfect. We haven't always lived up to our own ideals. One such failure, as has been mentioned, was the detention and turning away of the *Komagata Maru* in 1914, an event that caused much hardship for its passengers, 376 subjects of the British crown from Punjab, and which for many of them ended in terrible tragedy. Two years ago, I stood before you and made a commitment and since then, we have acted on that.

This May the Government of Canada secured passage of the unanimous motion in the House of Commons recognizing the *Komagata Maru* tragedy and apologizing to those who were directly affected. Today, on behalf of the Government of Canada. [Harper pauses to drink water]. Today, on behalf of the Government of Canada, I am officially conveying as Prime Minister that apology. Now friends, many Canadians have worked long and hard to secure recognition for this historic event. I'd like to thank from this community, the Professor Mohan Singh Foundation, the Khalsa Diwan Society, the *Komagata Maru* Descendants Association, and Community Leader, Tarlok Sablok, for their persistent and passionate dedication to this issue over the years. I also wish to acknowledge, I also wish to acknowledge my own colleagues, Nina and Gurmant Grewal, Parliamentary Secretary Jim Abbot, and Minister Jason Kenney for the work they have done to help all Canadians come to terms with this sad chapter in our history. We cannot change the events of the past; we cannot undo the misdeeds committed against those long deceased. But we can bring Canadians together in the present to unite our country, and to set us on a course to accomplish greater things in the future. In closing, I'd like to once again thank the organizers of this event for inviting me to once again be part of this tremendous festival. One of the most rewarding things about being Prime Minister is being able to travel across our great country and to meet the hardworking men and women of all faiths and cultures who are making Canada such a success. We should all be proud of our country and of each other and work together to build an even stronger Canada for all of us. Please enjoy the rest of the festivities. Thank you. *Merci Beaucoup*. God bless our land.

Province of British Columbia

**Official Report of
Debates of the Legislative Assembly
2008 Legislative Session: 4th Session, 38th Parliament, Friday, May 23, 2008
B.C Government, Motion No 62 - Motion of Apology
Komagata Maru: Motion Unanimously Approved**

"Be it resolved that this Legislature apologizes for the events of May 23, 1914, when 376 passengers of the Komagata Maru, stationed off the Vancouver harbour, were denied entry by Canada. The House deeply regrets that the passengers who sought refuge in our country and our province were turned away without benefit of the fair and impartial treatment befitting a society where people of all cultures are welcomed and accepted."

Under the leadership of Premier Gordon Campbell, the province of British Columbia is the first province in Canada to issue an apology for the Komagata Maru events of May 23, 1914 on the 75th anniversary of that May date, the city of Vancouver under his Worship Mayor Gordon Campbell, was the first city in Canada to place a plaque in remembrance of those that were wronged. In 2006, the government issued a statement of regret and this year we were to pass this important motion.

Signed by Gordon Campbell, Premier, Province of British Columbia

Signed by Dave S Hayer, M.L.A (*Surrey-Tynehead*), Parliamentary Secretary for Multiculturalism and Immigration

Sikhs don't accept apology for Komagata Maru

Jeremy Hainsworth SURREY, B.C.— The Canadian Press Published Sunday, Aug. 03, 2008 9:00PM EDT

Prime Minister Stephen Harper apologized Sunday for the 1914 Komagata Maru incident in which hundreds of Indians seeking a better life in Canada were turned away. Mr. Harper was speaking to a crowd of about 8,000 people in Surrey, B.C which has a large east Indian community. But as soon as he left the stage, members of the Sikh community rushed to the podium immediately denouncing the apology. They said they wanted it delivered on the floor of the House of Commons. "The apology was unacceptable," said Jaswinder Singh Toor, president of The Descendants of Komagata Maru Society. "We were expecting the prime minister of Canada to do the right thing. The right thing was ... like the Chinese head tax," said Mr. Toor, referring to Mr. Harper's full apology to the Chinese-Canadian community in 2006 for the head tax imposed on Chinese immigrants who came to Canada between 1885 and 1923.

The Komagata Maru sailed into Vancouver harbour May 23, 1914, with 376 people on board. The dominion government would not allow the passengers to disembark and the vessel sat in the harbour for two months. Eventually, the boat steamed back to Calcutta where it was met by police, and 20 people were killed as they disembarked while others were jailed. In May, the B.C. government issued an apology for the incident. Many of those aboard the Komagata Maru were Sikhs. Following Mr. Harper's speech, Sikh community leaders asked the crowd for a show of hands on whether or not to accept the apology. Then they announced that the gathering had rejected it. "The apology has been given and it won't be repeated," said Secretary of State Jason Kenney, who was accompanying Mr. Harper during the visit. The apology marks the third such reconciliation Harper has made with embarrassing parts of Canada's past.

On June 11, Mr. Harper apologized to aboriginals who suffered abuse decades ago at Canadian residential schools, calling it "an important evolution in Canada's relationship with our first peoples." And, in 2006, Mr. Harper issued a full apology to the Chinese-Canadian community for the head tax imposed on Chinese immigrants who came to Canada between 1885 and 1923. He offered compensation to surviving Chinese-Canadians who paid the tax, as well as to widows and their children. And, it is not without symbolism that Sunday's apology should be delivered in Surrey's Bear Creek Park. Two teenage boys were found guilty of manslaughter in November 2006 for attacks – one fatal – on two elderly Indo-Canadian men in the park a year earlier. The boys, who cannot be identified because they were 13 and 15 at the time of the attack, had been charged with second-degree murder in the beating death of 76-year-old Shingara Singh Thandi of Surrey. Mr. Thandi was beaten with baseball bats and robbed in a washroom in July 2005. He died in hospital three weeks later. The youths were also found guilty of aggravated assault and robbery of Mewa Singh Bains, 83.

The Komagata Maru incident highlighted inconsistencies in Canadian immigration policy at the time. A 1910 Order in Council was passed requiring immigrants to come to Canada by continuous journey from their homeland. So, Gurdit Singh chartered the Japanese ship Komagata Maru and sold tickets for a continuous journey from the Punjab to Canada. However, a 1908 Order in council required all "Asiatic" immigrants to be in possession of \$200. The Indians argued the provision did not apply to them, as they were British subjects as India was still a colony. That July, the ship was ordered to sail but the Indians took over the ship and refused to leave. On July 19, 125 Vancouver police officers and 35 special immigration agents attempted to board the vessel and were beaten back. Thirty were injured. However, on July 23, under the guns of the naval cruiser S.S. Rainbow, the Komagata Maru was escorted out to sea and returned to India.

<http://www.theglobeandmail.com/news/national/sikhs-dont-accept-apology-for-komagata-maru/article702064/print/>

Assessing the Response to the Apology

Use the following rubric to assess the effectiveness of student responses to the apology

	Outstanding		Competent	Underdeveloped
Identifies relevant consequences and responses	Clearly identifies the consequence of the injustice, distinguishing between short and long term effects.	Accurately identifies the consequence of the injustice without clear distinction between short and long term effects.	Accurately identifies some consequences of the injustice.	Identifies few consequences of the injustice.
Comments/explanation for rating				
Identifies reasons the response might be seen as adequate and inadequate	Clearly explains reasons why the response might be considered both adequate and inadequate using examples for all relevant criteria.	Gives some reasons why the response might be considered both adequate and inadequate with some reference to criteria.	Provides reasons why response might be considered both adequate and inadequate.	Provides few reasons why response might be considered both adequate and inadequate.
Comments/explanation for rating				
Actions suggested to meet the criteria of adequacy are plausible	Clearly aligns suggested actions to each of the criterion, explaining how the action addresses the concern.	Suggests actions for each of the criterion that addresses the concern.	Suggests some actions to better align with the criteria in general.	Offers few suggestions for actions and/or unclear explanations as to how it addressed the criteria.
Comments/explanation for rating				