



Grades 10 to 12 | Social Studies (Social Justice)

Activity Plan: Canada's Immigration Policies and the *Komagata Maru*



**SOUTH ASIAN CANADIAN
LEGACY PROJECT**



**SOUTH ASIAN
STUDIES INSTITUTE**
University of the Fraser Valley



Activity Plan: Canada’s Immigration Policies and the *Komagata Maru*

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Overview

Big question

Have immigration policies always supported Canada's ideal of an inclusive, multicultural society?

Activity description

This lesson uses the *Komagata Maru* incident as a vehicle for exploring Canadian immigration policies in the early 20th century and their lasting impacts.

Grades and curricular area(s)

- Grade 10 to Grade 12
- Social Studies (Social Justice)

Big ideas

- **Social Studies 10:** Historical and contemporary injustices challenge the narrative and identity of Canada as an inclusive, multicultural society.
- **Explorations in Social Studies 11:** Social justice initiatives can transform individuals and systems.
- **20th Century World History 12:** Nationalist movements can unite people in common causes or lead to intense conflict between different groups.
- **Social Justice 12:** Social justice initiatives can transform individuals and systems.

Curricular competencies

- **Social Studies 10:** Compare and contrast continuities and changes for different groups at the same time period (continuity and change).
- **Explorations in Social Studies 11:** Compare and contrast continuities and changes, trends and patterns, or similarities and differences for different people, places, events, phenomena, ideas, or developments (continuity and change).
- **20th Century World History 12:** Compare and contrast continuities and changes for different groups at the same time period (continuity and change).
- **Social Justice 12:** Compare and contrast continuities and changes for different groups at the same time period (continuity and change).

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Materials/Resources

Resources for teachers

- [Komagata Maru Backgrounder](#)
- [100 Year Journey](#) (website and book)
- [How the Komagata Maru Changed Canada](#) (online article)
- [Komagata Maru: Continuing the Journey](#) (website)
- *Righting Canada's Wrongs: The Komagata Maru and Canada's Anti-Indian Immigration Policies in the Twentieth Century*, Pamela Hickman
- [The Art of Decoding Political Cartoons: A Teacher's Guide](#), Charles and Cynthia Hou
- [Remembering Komagata Maru](#) (video, City of Vancouver, 10:44)

Resources for activities

- [Political Cartoons](#)
- [A Timeline of Official Apologies from the Federal Government](#) (article, National Post)
- [Behind the Komagata Maru's Fight to Open Canada's Border](#) (Michael Bird, Globe and Mail, May 24, 2014)
- [Canadian Immigration Acts and Legislation](#), Canadian Museum of Immigration at Pier 1
- [Canada Apologizes for Racist Incident 100 Years After Rejecting Komagata Maru Ship of 370 Immigrants](#) (video, Democracy Now, 21:21)
- [Continuous Journey](#) (film by Ali Kazimi, 87:30; available as DVD in many school district libraries or [available for rent](#) on Vimeo)
- [Immigration Policy in Canada](#) (Gerald E. Dirks, Canadian Encyclopedia)
- [Justin Trudeau Apologizes in the House for the 1914 Komagata Maru Incident](#) (video, 9:23)
- [Komagata Maru](#) (Hugh Johnston, Canadian Encyclopedia)
- [Munshi Singh \(Re\), 1914 CANLII 679 \(BC CA\)](#) (1914 court document)
- [PM to Apologize for Komagata Maru](#) (video, CBC News, 5:12)
- [The Sikh Migrants Who Challenged Canadian Immigration Law](#) (video, Historical Canada, 7:01)

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Templates

- [Know-Wonder-Learn \(KWL\) Chart](#)
- [Immigration Acts and Legislation Table](#)
- [House of Commons Apologies Table](#)
- [Political Cartoons](#)

Kick Off and Connect

Step 1

Introduce the activity with the big question and the idea of beginning to look at Canada's immigration policies through the *Komagata Maru* incident.

Have students start a [Know Wonder Learn \(KWL\) chart](#) to guide their discovery by filling in what they may already know about the *Komagata Maru*. If they have no knowledge of the incident, that's fine.

Step 2

Display the [two political cartoons](#) either by projecting or printing. Have students choose one cartoon and gather at the cartoon of their choice with other students to discuss what they think the cartoon is about. You may use the following guiding questions to help discussions:

- Who are the people involved?
- What kind of power dynamic is happening? Who has the power and who does not?
- What kind of power do they have and how do they use it?
- What can we tell from the image?

Then have each group report out to the class on what they think their cartoon means.

Step 3

Have students continue filling in their KWL chart as they view the video [The Sikh Migrants Who Challenged Canadian Immigration Law \(7:01\)](#).

Step 4

Think-Pair-Share discussion:

- What needs to be investigated further for you to understand the immigration policies behind the *Komagata Maru* incident and the subsequent apology?

Provide the opportunity add these questions to the "Wonder" column of their KWL chart.

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Explore and Engage

Part 1: Canada's Immigration Policies

Step 1

Have students work individually or in small groups to fill in the [Immigration Acts and Legislation table](#) using the following two resources:

- [Canadian Immigration Acts and Legislation](#)
- [Immigration Policy in Canada](#)

Step 2

Have students either discuss the following as a class or group or write down their answers as a group or individually:

- How many of these policies were discriminatory based on race or country of origin? Which people were discriminated against?
- Did it surprise you that Canada had discriminatory policies? Why or why not?
- Which policies applied to the passengers on the *Komagata Maru*?
- What year was the Canadian Bill of Rights introduced? How did it affect immigration policy?

Part 2: Aboard the *Komagata Maru*

Step 1

Have students use their [KWL chart](#) as they read the following articles to gain insight into the experiences of those who were aboard:

- [Komagata Maru](#)
- [Behind the Komagata Maru's Fight to Open Canada's Border](#)

Step 2

Have students imagine themselves as one of the passengers on the ship and describe their experience through diary entries, paneled illustrations (comic book), ballad, PowerPoint presentation or other medium of choice. Items to address include:

- Who am I (name, age, gender, home village, etc.)?
- Why did I want to come to Canada?
- Where did I board the ship?
- How did I feel arriving in Vancouver?

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- What was it like during the two months in Vancouver harbour?
- What was it like being escorted out of Vancouver?
- Where did I leave the ship?
- What happened to me after leaving the ship?

Step 3

Have students present their stories to the class (opportunity for teacher or peer assessment) or within a group (opportunity for peer assessment), using a rubric for presentations that you have co-created with the class.

Part 2a: The Court Case

Note: This activity is recommended for Grade 12 students because of the complexity of the court document. However, you may choose to adapt this portion for other grades.

Step 1

Have students explore the Munshi Singh court ruling document, [Munshi Singh \(Re\), 1914 CanLII 679 \(BC CA\)](#). Munshi Singh was the only test case from the passengers of *Komagata Maru*. The outcome determined the fate of all of the passengers. Focus on the judge's ruling (not the whole document—refer to pages 1,380-1,381). You may choose to review other sections of the document as well.

Step 2

Direct students to appeal the court's decision, either individually or in small groups:

- Imagine you are a lawyer acting for Munshi Singh and the other passengers on the *Komagata Maru*. You are seeking to appeal the judge's decision. To start, divide a page into two columns. In the left column, summarize what the judge has said in point form and plain language from the bottom of page 1,379 ("It is plain that upon study of the question...") to the end of page 1,381. In the right column, note your ideas to argue against what the judge has said. Then prepare a speech to present to the court to represent your clients' rights to stay in Canada.

Part 3: Apologies

Step 1

As a class, watch [Justin Trudeau Apologizes in the House for the 1914 Komagata Maru Incident](#) (9:23).

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Step 2

In small groups, have students research other groups that have had apologies made to them in the House of Commons, and list them in the [House of Commons Apologies table](#).

Step 3

Class or group discussion:

- How many apologies has Canada made?
- Are there any people you identified in the Immigration Acts and Legislation table that have not received an apology?
- Is an official apology important? Why or why not?

Step 4

Assign or have each group choose a policy. Have groups locate the apology video and/or the transcript to analyze their apology, using the following questions:

- Who is involved? Provide details (e.g., Canadian citizens with Japanese ancestry).
- What actions were taken by the Government of Canada?
- What was society like at that time of the incident?
- Does the apology properly address the oppressions that occurred?
- Does the government hold itself accountable?
- What actions are mentioned, or do you see being taken to redress? Are they symbolic or practical, or both?

Step 5

Have each group present their findings to the class in a presentation format of their choice.

Wrap-Up and Assess

Have students prepare a short (approximately 500 to 750 words) written or oral opinion on the following question:

- Would changes in current immigration policy make Canada a more inclusive, multicultural society? Why or why not?

The question could also be used as a debate topic for an extended activity.

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Assessment

- Aboard the Komagata Maru: Assess or have peers assess the Aboard the Komagata Maru presentation using a rubric co-created with students.
- Court Case: Co-create with the students a rubric for presenting an oral argument. You may assess oral or recorded speeches. If time permits, speeches could also be peer assessed, with peers acting as the court and accepting or rejecting the argument based on its merit. In co-creating the rubric, students may first want to research what makes a strong argument. Looking for online resources on good arguments for a debate may be helpful.

Extend and Transform

Activity 1: Telling an Immigration Story

Introduce the activity to students:

You've learned about the challenges, obstacles and hardships that South Asian settler pioneers faced immigrating to a new country 110 years ago. Your task is to create a first-hand account of someone who has come to Canada. This can be someone you know (such as a family member or friend) or someone from a (non-fiction) book or online source. The goal is to tell their story based on their journey, struggles and achievements. Before interviewing someone, if you're telling the story of someone you know, be sure to ask for permission to use their story for this project.

Develop interview questions based on what you wonder about the person's immigration story. Here are some examples:

- Where did they emigrate from?
- Why did they emigrate?
- What was the journey to Canada like?
- What were some of their first impressions and early experiences in this country?
- What kind of work, jobs, or careers did they do?
- What do they still do that carries on the traditions/culture of their ancestors (such as, holidays, food, clothes)

You can pick any presentation method that you like (such as, Prezi, PowerPoint, poster, movie, storybook).

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Your finished project must include the following:

- A presentation that tells the person's story
- Interview questions (typed out)
- The person's answers (typed out or recorded)
- Pictures/graphics to go with your presentation
- A reflection describing what stood out for you while working on this assignment—one thing that you didn't know before, or any other takeaways
- Citations for all resources (online, print, images, etc.)

Field Study

Consider conducting any of the following place-based activities or visits with your students, or have them do them on their own:

- A Nameless Collective walking tour
- *Komagata Maru* Memorial visit (Vancouver)
- Gur Sikh Temple—[National Historic Site and Sikh Heritage Museum](#) visit
- Khalsa Diwan Society visit

Activity 2: Resilience and Resistance

Have students do the following:

Step 1

Define resilience and resistance. How are they different?

Step 2

Brainstorm examples of both resilience and resistance—are there examples of actions that have been or are both?

Step 3

Explore the *Komagata Maru* incident and identify examples of both resilience and resistance.

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Step 4

In small groups, discuss the following questions and create an output (e.g., paper, video, poster, graphic) outlining the key points of their discussions:

- Does research typically frame the *Komagata Maru* incident as an act of resilience or resistance?
- Can looking at an event through the lens of resilience and resistance change the narrative associated with it? Why is important to consider these views?
- How did *Komagata Maru* supporters resist? How were they resilient?
- **Extension:** Do you see connections with Indigenous resistance to the Indian Act and residential schools? (This will access students' prior knowledge and link with current events relating to genocide in Canada.)

Name: _____

Date: _____

Know Wonder Learn Chart

Know	Wonder	Learn

Name: _____

Immigration Acts and Legislation

Year	Immigration policy changes or restrictions	Why did this policy come into place?	Who benefited from this policy?	Who was negatively impacted?	In what way were they impacted?
1869					
1885 to 1903					
1904 to 1905					
1906					
1908					

Name: _____

Immigration Acts and Legislation

Year	Immigration policy changes or restrictions	Why did this policy come into place?	Who benefited from this policy?	Who was negatively impacted?	In what way were they impacted?
1910					
1911					
1914					
1919					
1922					

Name: _____

Immigration Acts and Legislation

Year	Immigration policy changes or restrictions	Why did this policy come into place?	Who benefited from this policy?	Who was negatively impacted?	In what way were they impacted?
1923					
1925					
1931					
1947					
1952					

Name: _____

Immigration Acts and Legislation

Year	Immigration policy changes or restrictions	Why did this policy come into place?	Who benefited from this policy?	Who was negatively impacted?	In what way were they impacted?
1962					
1967					
1971					
1976					
1988					

Name: _____

House of Commons Apologies

Date	Prime Minister	Apologizing for?

Name: _____

House of Commons Apologies

Date	Prime Minister	Apologizing for?

Political Cartoons



"The same act which Excludes Orientals Should Open Wide the Portals of British Columbia to White Immigrations." Cartoon by N.H. Hawkins, Saturday Sunset. (1907)



Oriental Labor:—If you don't let me ashore I'll refuse to take anything to eat.
White Labor:—And if we do let you ashore I won't be able to get anything to eat anyway.