



INDIANA  
REPERTORY  
THEATRE

The  
**Chinese  
Lady**  
by Lloyd Suh

October 11 – November 6, 2022

on the IRT Upperstage

**STUDY GUIDE**

Indiana Repertory Theatre  
140 West Washington Street  
Indianapolis, Indiana 46204

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Executive Artistic Director  
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# THE CHINESE LADY

## BY LLOYD SUH

In 1834, 14-year-old Afong Moy was the first Chinese woman to come to America. She spent her life traveling across the country as a living exhibition for a paying public, who were mesmerized by her exotic ways and unnerved by her bound feet. Inspired by a true story, this critically acclaimed play unearths hidden history as a displaced woman and a young nation struggle with how to define themselves.

Part of IRT's INclusion Series: Celebrating Diverse Storytelling

*Recommended for students in grades 8-12*

## CONTENT ADVISORY

*The Chinese Lady* includes descriptions of foot binding, violence against Asian Americans, and anti-Asian slurs. There is smoking and drinking alcohol on stage.

The performance will last approximately 90 minutes with no intermission.

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Richard J Roberts, Resident Dramaturg

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# THE STORY OF THE PLAY

Lloyd Suh's play *The Chinese Lady* focuses on Afong Moy, the first Chinese woman to come to the United States. Moy was brought here by American businessmen who "displayed" her as a public exhibition, alongside the Chinese import goods they were selling.

The play begins in 1834, when Afong Moy is 14 years old. The setting is her exhibition room, elaborately decorated with Chinese furniture, vases, watercolors, and silks. We, the audience, experience the play as though we are visitors who have come to see the exhibition. Afong introduces herself and her translator, Atung. She describes what she does during exhibition hours, and how her audiences respond. She explains the process of foot binding, and demonstrates how she walks on her tiny feet. Atung brings her food, and she demonstrates the use of chopsticks. She offers her early perceptions of her new American home. She discusses the history of tea and demonstrates the rituals of the Chinese tea ceremony. She expresses her hope that her exhibition might lead to greater understanding and goodwill between China and America.

The play moves forward to 1836. Afong tells us how popular her exhibition has been, and talks about her upcoming tour of the United States. She discusses how she is learning the English language, as her translator, Atung, begins to insert more of his own viewpoint. Again, she demonstrates walking on her bound feet, eating with chopsticks, and drinking tea, with expanded commentaries and new insights.

In 1837, Afong shares with us some of her experiences across America, include seeing the Liberty Bell in Philadelphia, and her conversation with President Andrew Jackson in Washington DC. Afong and Atung re-enact her conversation with Jackson, with Atung playing the President. Atung also translates the conversation, allowing us in the audience to hear the differences between what is actually said and what Afong and Jackson are told. Afong's history of tea continues, delving further into the profound economic and political impact of such a seemingly simple product. She discusses her visit to a zoo in Cincinnati, and begins to question her own role as a creature on display. After Afong's exhibition time concludes, Atung tells us of his dreams.

The play moves forward 12 years to 1849, and Afong tells us of the many changes in her life and the world around her. Her English has greatly improved, and she now prefers to speak without a translator. She is now employed by famous impresario P. T. Barnum, and her exhibition is now one of many in his museum. Her knowledge of both national and international affairs has sharpened. Her enthusiasm for America has been tempered by her observation of the treatment of Native Americans.

As the play continues, Afong's perceptions of her life and America continue to evolve. She looks back at her past, hoping that her life as a sharer of cultures has had some impact. And she looks forward, hoping that we can all find understanding in both our differences and our similarities.

# ONE WOMAN'S UNIQUE VOICE

BY JANET ALLEN, MARGOT LACY ECCLES ARTISTIC DIRECTOR

This production is a testament to collaborative relationships and small-world celebrations. I first learned about this remarkable play when it premiered before the pandemic, from collaborator Junghyun Georgia Lee, whose design work has graced both IRT's stages over many years (*The Book Club Play*, *Twelve Angry Men*, *Pipeline*, to name a few). She raved about this play, sending me an early, pre-publication draft. Junghyun had been working on it for several years with director Ralph B. Peña, the artistic director of Ma-Yi Theater Company in New York City, who originally developed the work with playwright Lloyd Suh. Thanks to Junghyun's matchmaking, this IRT production of Lloyd's luminous play will also be led by Ralph. I learned only as we were negotiating with Ralph, that Lloyd is an Indianapolis native, so this is a homecoming as well as a celebration of an amazing piece of theatre writing, one that is receiving its Indiana premiere.

What makes this play so unique? First, it gives us insight into a little-known historic character, Afong Moy, thought to be the first Chinese woman to enter the United States in 1834. Her experience as a traveling museum "exhibit," a cultural curiosity, displayed for paying observers who gaped at her "exotic" ways, captures adroitly our culture's inclination to "other" those not like us and to exploit those differences for financial gain. Second, the play is wildly and amazingly theatrical, spanning many years of Afong's time in this country, her often piquant responses to what she sees in the West, and



how she filters what she experiences through her own cultural lens with more than occasional humor and constant revelation. Suh's light touch with Moy, as he dramatizes her eager desire to take in fully what she experiences, is dramatically counterpoised against the dark revelations she makes as she encounters a country torn by the slave trade and stained by the violence of westward expansion. She sees clearly things that our history has muted or ignored, and we benefit hugely from her clarity.

It is worth noting that this play was written and first performed before the pandemic. You may remember how, in its earliest manifestations, Covid was referred to as the "Chinese virus," a reference that ignited verbal and physical attacks on people of Asian heritage around the country. Suh's play asks us to consider why we racially profile and to what end, even while inviting us to spend 90 minutes in the company of an unwitting entertainer and savant.

*Afong Moy as depicted in the Pittsburgh Gazette, 1835.*

# TIMELESS & TIMELY

BY RALPH B. PEÑA, DIRECTOR

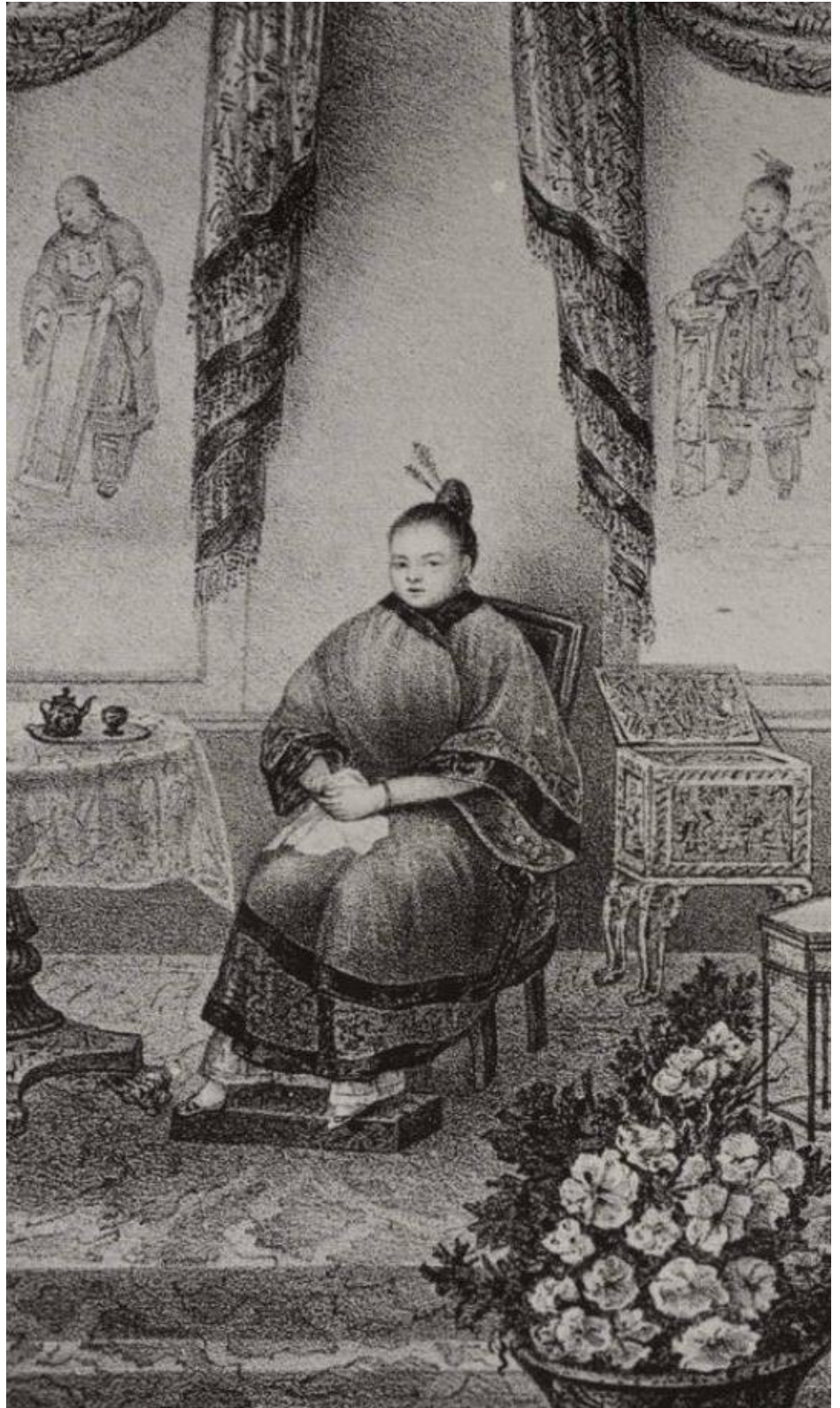
I have been an eager student of Afong Moy and her translator Atung since I first read Lloyd Suh's play in 2018. They have led me to a more nuanced appreciation of American history and the inextricable role Chinese immigrants played in nation building, even as they never escaped the indignities of being "the other."

I am deeply grateful to Janet Allen and Indiana Repertory Theatre for bringing this play to Indianapolis, the playwright's hometown. I am equally grateful to be working with the enormously talented Mi Kang and Trieu Tran. The humanity they bring to Lloyd's characters allow us to hear voices long silenced by history and indifference.

I have always thought Lloyd's play to be timeless. Today, I think of it as timely. Afong Moy considered it her mission to bridge the gap between America and China, and to foster greater empathy between their peoples.

This is a continuation of that mission.

*Afong Moy in her exhibit room.  
Lithograph by Charles Risso &  
William R. Browne, 1835.*



# REPRESENT

BY PLAYWRIGHT LLOYD SUH

I grew up in an Indy suburb, about 15 miles due south of this theatre. There weren't a lot of Asian Americans there. My parents would sometimes note that in certain situations, I might be the first Asian person that some people had ever encountered, and so I'd need to behave myself accordingly. As a child, this was something I felt daunted by, and as a teenager it was something I often ran from. When I first learned of Afong Moy and her extraordinary life, she helped me grapple with those feelings. Now, as an adult, I'm more ready to embrace the responsibility—and in some cases the privilege—of representing something that much bigger myself. In Afong Moy's case, the burden of that responsibility—especially as it was imposed upon her without consent—was tragic and destructive. But it's my hope that in remembering her, and honoring her, it can be redemptive.

It's impossible to feel pride in representing an idea—let alone a community—without the support of people to feel proud of. I'm grateful to Ralph B. Peña, who championed this play from its earliest pages, and taught me a great deal about service along the way. I'm proudest, of course, of my family: Jeanie, Matilda, Elliot, and Lewis, and all the Indy Suhs: Young and Olivia, Ron, Andrea, Vivian, and Beckett. And thanks to Janet Allen and everyone in the IRT community for giving Afong Moy their attention, on this stage, at this moment.



**LLOYD SUH** is the author of *Charles Francis Chan Jr.'s Exotic Oriental Murder Mystery*, *American Hwangap*, *The Wong Kids in the Secret of the Space Chupacabra Go!*, *Jesus in India*, and others. His plays have been produced with Ma-Yi, Magic Theatre, EST, NAATCO, PlayCo, Denver Center, Milwaukee Rep, ArtsEmerson, Children's Theatre Co, and more. International productions include the Cultural

Center of the Philippines and with PCPA in Seoul, Korea. He has received support from the NEA Arena Stage New Play Development program, Mellon Foundation, NYFA, NYSCA, Jerome, TCG, Dramatists Guild, and residencies including NYS&F and Ojai. He is an alum of Youngblood and the Soho Rep Writer/Director Lab. He has received the Helen Merrill Award, the Herb Alpert Award in the Arts, and a Guggenheim fellowship. From 2005-2010 he served as Artistic Director of Second Generation and Co-Director of the Ma-Yi Writers Lab. He has served since 2011 as the Director of Artistic Programs at The Lark, and since 2015 as a member of the Dramatists Guild Council.

# AFONG MOY

Afong Moy was the first known female Chinese immigrant to the United States. She was brought here in 1834 by brothers Nathaniel and Frederick Carne, who sold Chinese decorative goods in New York City. They conceived the idea of bringing a Chinese woman to New York to “exhibit” her in a display filled with their showy but affordable Chinese import goods that viewers could purchase and take home with them. Afong Moy arrived on the ship *Washington* on October 17, 1834, creating quite a sensation; dozens of newspaper articles appeared even before the exhibit opened on November 6.

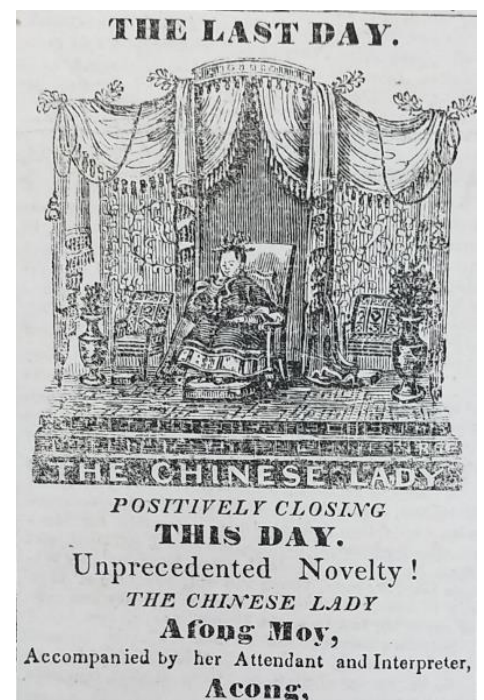
Very little is known of Afong Moy’s life in China; most of what was claimed about her background was made up by the Carne brothers and/or American journalists trying to write an interesting story. It was suggested that Moy came from Chinese nobility; but in her book *The Chinese Lady: Afong Moy in Early America*, Nancy E. Davis suggests that she was probably from a middle class family. Her bound feet suggest that she was urban rather than rural, and not so poor that she needed unbound feet to work. The fact that she was essentially “sold off” for money suggests that she did not come from a wealthy family. Davis concludes that Moy was probably the daughter of a merchant or a middle-man who worked for foreign traders. It is likely that she had little education. Prior to the 20th century, education of women in China was extremely rare. Women were almost exclusively trained in the domestic arts: cooking, sewing, housekeeping. There were only a handful of women who were part of the intellectual community and could read and write.

In the exhibition, Moy would sit upon a throne, the centerpiece of a room full of the Carne brothers’ Chinese furnishings, handicrafts, and decorative objects. She would demonstrate the use of chopsticks, explain Chinese social practices (through an interpreter), and sing traditional Chinese songs. She would display her bound feet by elevating them on a cushion or walking around the room.

As her exhibition in New York gained fame, Moy embarked on a trip across the United States, visiting several major cities. In Washington DC she met President Andrew Jackson. In 1837, she returned to New York.

In 1838, newspapers reported that Moy had been abandoned by her guardians and was living in a poorhouse in Monmouth, New Jersey. In 1847, a group of concerned citizens put together a fund to give her more security, and she returned to public shows. In 1849, her name was advertised as Afong Moy Nanchoy, suggesting that she had married. Her last recorded exhibition was in the New York City Hotel in April 1850. Following this performance, records of Afong Moy completely disappear.

*Advertisement in the Philadelphia newspaper  
The American Sentinel, February 17, 1835.*



# CHINESE IMMIGRANTS IN AMERICA

BY RICHARD J ROBERTS, RESIDENT DRAMATURG

The first Chinese men in North America arrived in Mexico in the 1630s as sailors via the Spanish colonial Philippines. By the mid-1700s, a few Chinese men had settled in California. In the early days of American independence, as trade was opening with China, others arrived in New England ports, sailing around South America from Guangzhou. When Afong Moy arrived in New York City in 1834 as the first Chinese woman in America, she followed the same route.

The California Gold Rush of 1848 attracted a significant number of Chinese to immigrate to the United States. Even greater numbers came in the 1860s to work on the Transcontinental Railroad. Many moved to cities such as San Francisco, where they took low-wage jobs, often in restaurants and laundries.



While entry into the United States was uncomplicated at this time, from the beginning the Chinese were treated differently from other immigrants. Children born here of Chinese parents automatically became U.S. citizens; but unlike European immigrants, Chinese immigrants themselves were denied the possibility of becoming naturalized citizens.

As the U.S. economy declined after the Civil War, labor and government leaders began to blame Chinese “coolies” (laborers) for depressed wage levels. Public opinion began to demonize Chinese immigrants, and a series of ever more restrictive laws were placed on Chinese labor, behavior, and even living conditions. Many Chinese Americans were forced into urban conclaves called Chinatowns, where the scarcity of unrestricted jobs pushed many into illegal activities such as gambling, prostitution, and opium.



By 1880, there were 105,000 Chinese in the United States—one fifth of one percent of the total population. In 1882, the federal government passed the Chinese Exclusion Act, which banned all immigration of “skilled and unskilled laborers” from China for a period of 10 years. The act was renewed in 1892 for another ten years and then in 1902 indefinitely. The Immigration Act of 1924 banned immigration from East Asia entirely.

The Chinese Exclusion Act was finally repealed by the 1943 Magnuson Act, which permitted Chinese nationals already residing in the United States to become naturalized citizens. At the same time, the Magnuson Act allowed a national quota of only 105 Chinese immigrants per year. The passage of the Immigration and Nationality Act of 1965 finally ended these restrictions; but Cold War conflicts between the United States and Communist-led China continued to keep numbers of immigrants low.



*(both pages) Faces from Chinese immigration forms, 1900-1905, courtesy of the No Place Project.*

In 1977, the People’s Republic of China lifted restrictions on emigration from Mainland China. Since then, the U.S. population of Chinese has grown from under 800 thousand to more than five million. Today’s Chinese immigrants tend towards students and professionals who prefer suburban life and avoid the Chinatowns.

In recent years in the United States, patriotism—love for one’s country—has become hopelessly entangled with nationalism—promotion of one’s own country to the detriment of other countries. Xenophobia has been on the rise; but during the pandemic, there has been a particularly sharp rise in anti-Asian violence. One in six Asian Americans experienced race-based violence in 2021—a tenfold increase from previous years. Such statistics are a harsh reminder that, even as restrictions are diminished and opportunities expand, racism is still very much among us.

# FOOT BINDING

The practice of foot binding is thought to have begun in 10th century China. Emperor Li Yu asked his concubine, Yao Niang, to use white silk to bind her feet into the shape of the crescent moon and perform a dance on the points of her feet. Yao Niang's dance was said to be so graceful that others sought to imitate her. The binding of feet was soon replicated by other upper-class women, and the practice spread. Bound feet came to be considered a status symbol and a mark of feminine beauty, despite the fact that foot binding was very painful, limiting the mobility of women and resulting in lifelong disabilities.

The practice eventually spread to lower social classes, where it was considered to raise marriage prospects. It has been estimated that by the 19th century, 40 to 50% of all Chinese women may have had bound feet, with that figure rising to almost 100% among the upper classes.

Throughout its history, the practice of foot binding faced periodic opposition. The 17th century Manchus issued a number of edicts to ban the practice, but few Chinese complied. Some Chinese

writers in the 18th century raised opposition. A few years after this scene (1836), the Taiping Rebellion (1850-1864) outlawed foot binding. The rebellion failed, however, and the practice continued.

In the late 19th century, Christian missionaries began to play a part in changing elite opinion on foot binding through education, pamphleteering, and lobbying of the Qing court. The earliest-known anti-foot binding society was formed in 1874. Reform-minded Chinese intellectuals began to consider the practice to be an aspect of their culture that needed to be eliminated. In 1912, the new Republic of China government banned foot binding, and the practice quickly died out.

## Ancient Chinese footbinding

*The custom of binding feet was said to have been adopted by courtesans after a Tang Dynasty emperor 1,000 years ago fell for a concubine who wrapped her tiny feet in silk when she danced*

- ▶ In ancient Chinese culture, bound foot is known as symbol of identity and status
- ▶ Purpose is to restrict growth of foot (ideal length is between 5-10cm)
- ▶ Painful process begins when a girl is between 3-11 years old

**Known process:**

- 1 Foot is soaked in warm water and massaged; toenails are trimmed
- 2 Four smaller toes are cracked then bent toward ball of foot. Big toe is not bent to provide balance
- 3 Bandage (3m x 5cm) is wrapped around bent toes, pulled tightly to heel
- 4 Every two days, bandage is removed and rebound; goes on for 2-3 years

*Foot binding could result in infections, blood poisoning and even death*

Sources: AFP/SFMuseum/UCLA

Normal foot

Bound foot

Girls with bound feet walk on "Lotus shoes" (Usually 7.6cm long)

040609 AFP

# TEA

Tea was first identified in China more than 4000 years ago. Originally it was a luxury item used mainly by nobles and royalty, who drank it to energize the body and clear the mind. As tea culture developed, it spread to the literati and monks. Tea became the backdrop for deep philosophical and religious discussions. Tea art, the tea ceremony, and teahouses increased in popularity. Traditional tea culture among the elite and scholars became more complex, with numerous rules, while at the same time, tea culture spread to the masses.



The tea ceremony has held great cultural significance in China for more than a thousand years. The basic steps of a tea ceremony include preparing, serving, appreciating, sniffing, savoring, and tasting the tea. The quality of both the tealeaves and the water are important considerations. An esthetically pleasing tea service is desired, and the location where the tea is taken is also important—ideally a courtyard, forest, or pavilion. The weather should be nice, with moderate sunshine or a gentle rain. A person taking tea should be relaxed and not too busy, in a peaceful, tranquil setting, not a tense, noisy one. Tea should be experienced with only a few people at a time. A recent article in *Chinese Medicine* stated: “It is believed that a tea-drinking process is a spiritual enjoyment, an art, a means of cultivating the moral character and nourishing the mind.”

As cultivation of tea moved from wild plants to established farming, tea became a commodity to be traded worldwide. The earliest known reference to tea by an Englishman is found in a 1615 letter from an agent for the East India Company. Tea was first sold in London in 1657. At that time, tea was six to ten times more expensive than coffee, making it a luxury commodity. Pamphlets and articles on the health benefits of tea further bolstered its popularity. Between 1720 and 1750, imports of tea to Britain through the British East India Company more than quadrupled. To undercut the sale of smuggled tea in the American Colonies, the British Parliament imposed the Tea Act of 1773. The Boston Tea Party, when anti-taxation colonists destroyed an entire shipment of East India Company tea by dumping it into Boston Harbor, was one of the major precursors of the American Revolutionary War.

By the 19th century, tea had reached the British working class, and it was soon considered an everyday necessity for all British people. At that time, the only source of tea was China, who carefully guarded its plants to maintain its monopoly. Additionally, China restricted all trade with the West to the port of Canton (Guangzhou), further controlling the export of tea (and the price). The First Opium War and the Treaty of Nanking loosened these restrictions, creating more trade routes and giving the British more options for negotiating tea prices. In 1851 a Scottish botanist smuggled the tea plant out of China and began cultivating it in British-controlled India, destroying China’s monopoly. Within a generation, India was a world leader in tea production.

# CHINA IN THE 1800S

At the time of the play, China was an empire in decline. Mongol rebels were attacking from within, and Western nations were encroaching upon its borders. Even without these military threats, China faced enormous problems, many of them resulting from an escalating population. By the mid-19th century, China's population reached 450 million or more, more than three times the level in 1500. The inevitable results were land shortages, famine, and an increasingly impoverished rural population. Heavy taxes, inflation, and greedy local officials further worsened the situation. Meanwhile, the ruling Qing regime neglected public works and the military, and as bureaucratic efficiency declined, landowners, secret societies, and military strongmen took over local affairs.

Another issue plaguing China at this time was opium, a highly addictive narcotic extracted from poppies. In the 18th century, a trade imbalance had developed between China and Britain: the British wanted Chinese luxury goods, but Britain had little to sell that China wanted. To counter this imbalance, the British East India Company began to grow opium in British-occupied Bengal and allowed private British merchants to sell opium to Chinese smugglers for illegal sale in China. The influx of narcotics reversed the Chinese trade surplus while draining the Chinese economy of silver and creating vast numbers of opium addicts in China.

When China seized a warehouse of British smuggled opium, the British government insisted on the principles of free trade and equal diplomatic recognition among nations, backing the merchants. In the First Opium War (1839-1842), the British navy, with its technologically superior ships and weapons, defeated the Chinese. The Treaty of Nanking (Nanjing) required the Chinese to pay Britain an indemnity, to cede the Island of Hong Kong to the British as a colony, and to end the Chinese limitation of all trade to Canton only, opening up four other Chinese Treaty Ports. This was followed in 1843 by the Treaty of the Bogue, which granted Britain extraterritoriality and most favored nation status. These were the first of what later Chinese nationalists would call the "unequal treaties."

Today the Chinese describe the years from 1839 to 1949 as the "century of humiliation," an era of intervention and subjugation of China by Western powers (Britain, France, Germany, the United States), Russia, and Japan. During this time, a series of military defeats forced China to sign numerous "unequal treaties" requiring China to cede land, pay reparations, open treaty ports, give up tariff autonomy, legalize opium import, and grant extraterritorial privileges to foreign citizens.



Internal rebellion and lawlessness and foreign exploitation continued to plague the Qing regime until the Revolution of 1911 ended China's imperial tradition and created the Republic of China.

*Painting by Edward Duncan (1803-1882) of the East India Company's iron steamship Nemesis attacking Chinese war junks, January 1841.*

# AMERICA IN THE 1800S

*In The Chinese Lady, Afong Moy mentions a number of people, places, and events from 19th century American history.*

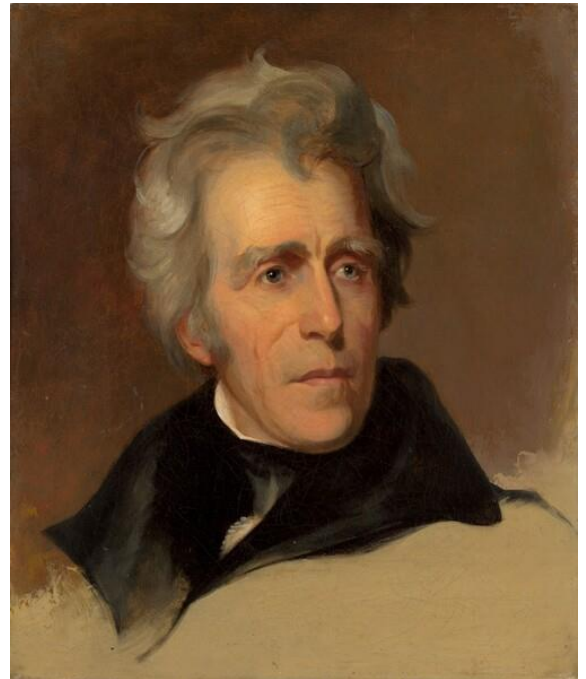


## THE LIBERTY BELL

The Liberty Bell was commissioned by the Pennsylvania Provincial Assembly in 1751 and was cast with the words “Proclaim LIBERTY Throughout all the Land unto all the Inhabitants Thereof,” a Biblical reference from the Book of Leviticus. The bell first cracked when rung shortly after its arrival in Philadelphia, and was twice recast. The bell is thought to have acquired its distinctive large crack while ringing after the death of Chief Justice John Marshall in 1835. The bell became famous after an 1847 short story claimed that an aged bell ringer rang it on July 4, 1776, upon hearing of the Second Continental Congress’s vote for independence. Although the story is not true, the tale was widely accepted as fact, even by some historians, and the Liberty Bell passed into legend as one of the most iconic symbols of American independence.

## PRESIDENT ANDREW JACKSON

Andrew Jackson (1767–1845) was the seventh president of the United States. Born in the colonial Carolinas, Jackson became a frontier lawyer. He represented Tennessee in the United States House of Representatives and served as a justice on the Tennessee Supreme Court. He became a wealthy planter and owned hundreds of African American slaves. As a Major General in the War of 1812, he led the victory at the Battle of New Orleans, making him a national hero. After serving briefly in the United States Senate, he was elected president and served two terms, from 1829 to 1837. Although often praised as an advocate for ordinary Americans and for his work in keeping the states together, Jackson has also been criticized for demagoguery and for his racial policies, particularly his role in the forced removal of tens of thousands of Native Americans from their ancestral homelands.



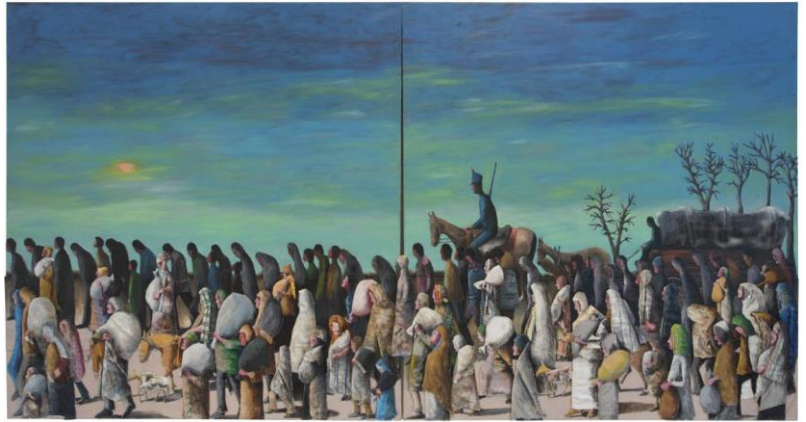
## THE GEORGIA GOLD RUSH

There are many different stories about who first discovered gold in Georgia in 1828, but by 1829 the Georgia Gold Rush was in full swing. By 1831 as many as 15,000 miners had moved in.

## THE TRAIL OF TEARS

When European explorers and colonists arrived in what is now North America, the Cherokee, Chickasaw, Choctaw, Creek, and Seminole tribes were native to what is now the Southeastern United States. White settlers pressured the U.S. federal government to remove these Native Americans. The Georgia Gold Rush only exacerbated the situation. In 1830 Andrew Jackson signed the Indian Removal Act. Over the next two decades, 60,000

indigenous people were forced from their ancient homelands in an act of ethnic cleansing. Native Americans on the Trail of Tears walked as far as 800 miles from North Carolina to Oklahoma. They suffered from exposure, disease, and starvation while en route to their newly designated Indian reserves. Thousands died from disease before even reaching their destination.



*Trail of Tears, painting by Benny Andrews, 2005.*

## THE CALIFORNIA GOLD RUSH

In 1848, gold was found at Sutter's Mill in Coloma, California. Over the next few years, approximately 300,000 people (forty-niners) flooded to California from the rest of the United States and abroad (including 24,000 Chinese men). The effects of the Gold Rush were substantial. Gold seekers attacked indigenous societies and pushed them off their lands. Agriculture and ranching expanded throughout the state. San Francisco grew from a small settlement of about 200 residents in 1846 to a boomtown of about 36,000 by 1852. Roads, churches, schools and new towns were built throughout California. In 1849 a state constitution was written, and in 1850, California became a state.

## THE TRANSCONTINENTAL RAILROAD

North America's first transcontinental railroad was constructed between 1863 and 1869. This 1911-mile continuous railroad line connected the existing eastern U.S. rail network at Council Bluffs, Iowa, with the Pacific coast at the Oakland Long Wharf on San Francisco Bay. The resulting coast-to-coast railroad connection revolutionized the settlement and economy of the American West. It brought the western states and territories into alignment with the northern Union states and made



transporting passengers and goods coast-to-coast considerably quicker, safer, and less expensive. Chinese labor was integral to the construction of the First Transcontinental Railroad—20,000 men, some 80% of the work force. White men received between one and three dollars per day, but the workers from China received much less—and had to pay for their own food. This type of steep wage inequality was common at the time.

*Chinese immigrants working on the Transcontinental Railroad.*

## MANIFEST DESTINY

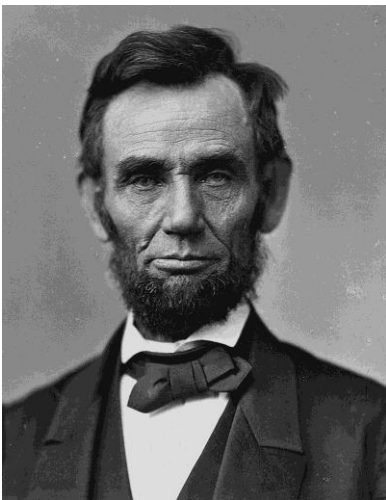
Manifest destiny was a cultural belief in the 19th-century United States that White American settlers were destined to expand across North America. Manifest destiny expressed conviction in the morality and value of expansionism that complemented other popular ideas of the era such as American exceptionalism (the idea that America is inherently different from other nations and therefore makes its own rules). Some contemporary historians have condemned manifest destiny as a justification for dispossession and genocide against Native Americans. Critics of American foreign policy have characterized U.S. interventions in the Middle East and elsewhere as products of manifest destiny, seeing it as the underlying cause of what is denounced by some as American imperialism.



*American Progress (1872) by John Gast is an allegorical representation of manifest destiny. Columbia, a personification of the United States, leads civilization westward with White settlers, forcing Native Americans into retreat.*

## THE CIVIL WAR

The Civil War (1861–1865) was fought between the United States (the Union) and eleven Southern states that seceded and formed the Confederate States of America. The principle issue of the war was slavery. The war produced about 970,000 casualties (3% of the population), including approximately 620,000 soldier deaths—two-thirds by disease. The war accounted for more casualties than all other U.S. wars combined: 8% of all white males aged 13 to 43 died in the war, including 6 percent in the North and 18 percent in the South. At the end of the war, the Union was restored, slavery was banned, and about 4 million enslaved black people were freed. Sadly, more than 150 years later, our nation still struggles with the trauma of race discrimination.



## PRESIDENT ABRAHAM LINCOLN

Abraham Lincoln (1809–1865) was the 16th President of the United States, serving from 1861 until his assassination in 1865. Lincoln successfully led his country through its greatest constitutional, military, and moral crisis—the Civil War—preserving the Union while ending slavery, and promoting economic and financial modernization. Reared in a poor family on the western frontier, Lincoln was mostly self-educated. His Gettysburg Address is one of the best-known and most quoted speeches in American history. He has been consistently ranked by scholars and the public as one of the three greatest U.S. presidents, the others being George Washington and Franklin D. Roosevelt.

# THE CHINESE EXCLUSION ACT

As the U.S. economy declined after the Civil War, labor and government leaders began to blame Chinese laborers for depressed wage levels. In 1882, the federal government passed the Chinese Exclusion Act, which banned all immigration of “skilled and unskilled laborers” from China for a period of 10 years.

The Chinese Exclusion Act was the first time in history when a particular ethnic group was banned from entering the United States on the premise that it endangered the good working order of the nation. Provisions of the act also banned Chinese immigrants from becoming U.S. citizens, thus making permanent aliens of those who were already here. Further restrictions forced Chinese Americans into urban conclaves called Chinatowns. Like other immigrants, many Chinese men who had immigrated here eventually hoped to bring their families to join them. With the passage of the act, they were faced with a choice: return to China to stay, or never see their families again.

The Chinese Exclusion Act was renewed in 1892 for another ten years by the Geary Act, named for California Representative Thomas J. Geary. The law required all Chinese residents of the United States to carry a resident permit, a sort of internal passport. Failure to carry the permit at all times was punishable by deportation or a year of hard labor. In addition, Chinese were not allowed to bear witness in court and could not receive bail in *habeas corpus* proceedings. In response to Chinese government efforts to leverage better conditions for Chinese travelers to the United States, the Chinese Exclusion Act was extended indefinitely in 1902. The Immigration Act of 1924 banned immigration from East Asia entirely.

The Chinese Exclusion Act was finally repealed by the 1943 Magnuson Act. World War II had made China and the United States allies against Japan, and Congress wanted to create an image of fairness and justice. The Magnuson Act permitted Chinese nationals already residing in the country to become naturalized citizens and stop hiding from the threat of deportation. While the Magnuson Act overturned the Chinese Exclusion Act, it allowed a national quota of only 105 Chinese immigrants per year. The passage of the Immigration and Nationality Act of 1965 finally ended these restrictions; but Cold War conflicts between the United States and Communist-led China continued to keep numbers of immigrants low.



*Linden Taylor & David Shih in the IRT's 2022 production of The Paper Dreams of Hairy Chin. The play by Jessica Huang focused on issues for Asian American immigrants caused by the Chinese Exclusion Act.*



# ATTACKS ON CHINESE AMERICANS

*In The Chinese Lady, Afong Moy mentions several 19th century massacres of Chinese Americans.*

## LOS ANGELES CHINATOWN MASSACRE OF 1871

On October 24, 1871, approximately 500 White and Hispanic Americans attacked, harassed, robbed, and murdered the ethnic Chinese residents of the old Chinatown neighborhood of the city of Los Angeles, California. The mob gathered after hearing that a policeman and a rancher had been killed as a result of a conflict between rival tongs. Rumors spread that the Chinese community “were killing whites wholesale.” Twenty Chinese immigrants were killed, fifteen of whom were later hanged by the mob in the course of the riot, but most of whom had already been shot to death before being hanged. All but one of the Chinese victims killed in the massacre had not been involved in the inciting incident. Those killed represented more than 10% of the small Chinese population of Los Angeles at the time, which had numbered 172 prior to the massacre. Ten men of the mob were prosecuted and eight were convicted of manslaughter in these deaths. The convictions were overturned on appeal due to technicalities.

## ROCK SPRINGS MASSACRE OF 1885

The Rock Springs massacre occurred on September 2, 1885, in Sweetwater County, Wyoming. The riot and resulting massacre of immigrant Chinese miners by White immigrant miners was the result of racial prejudice toward the Chinese miners, who were perceived to be taking jobs from the White miners. When the rioting ended, at least 28 Chinese miners were dead and 15 were injured. Rioters burned 78 Chinese homes, resulting in approximately \$150,000 in property damage (equal to \$4.52 million in 2020 terms).

## SNAKE RIVER MASSACRE OF 1887

On May 25, 1887, a gang of seven horse thieves robbed, murdered, and mutilated 34 Chinese American gold miners along the Snake River in Hells Canyon, Oregon. The bodies were thrown into the Snake River; due to high spring waters, they were not found for some time. Estimates of the value of gold stolen range from \$4,000 to \$50,000.

## ANTI-ASIAN ATTACKS DURING COVID

Over the past three decades, there has been an average of 8.1 anti-Asian attacks a year in the United States; but 2020 and 2021 saw an average of 81.5 anti-Asian attacks per year. Attacks on both people and property rose considerably. The number of Asian Americans killed or injured in anti-Asian attacks rose from 8 per year to 25 per year. Almost half of the anti-Asian attacks in 2020 and 2021 were motivated, at least partially, by anger and animosity associated with COVID-19, a disease first identified in Asia.

# P. T. BARNUM & HIS AMERICAN MUSEUM

Phineas Taylor Barnum (1810–1891) was an American showman and businessman. After running a general store and a book auctioning service, speculating in real estate, and starting a statewide lottery network and a weekly newspaper, Barnum moved to New York City in 1834. He embarked on an entertainment career, first with a variety troupe called “Barnum’s Grand Scientific and Musical Theater” and then with his American Museum (see below). In 1850, he promoted the American tour of Swedish opera singer Jenny Lind, paying her an unprecedented \$1,000 a night for 150 nights. He suffered economic reversals in the 1850s due to bad investments, as well as years of litigation and public humiliation, but he used a lecture tour as a temperance speaker to emerge from debt. At the age of 60 he founded the Barnum & Bailey Circus (1871–2017) with James Anthony Bailey.

Barnum’s American Museum was located at the corner of Broadway, Park Row, and Ann Street in what is now the Financial District of Manhattan. In 1841 P. T. Barnum purchased Scudder’s American Museum, which had been in operation since 1810. Barnum expanded its natural history collection to make his attraction a combination zoo, museum, lecture hall, wax museum, theatre, and freak show. Barnum filled his American Museum with dioramas, panoramas, scientific instruments, modern appliances, a flea circus, a loom powered by a dog, the trunk of a tree under which Jesus’s disciples supposedly sat, an oyster bar, a rifle range, waxworks, glass blowers, taxidermists, phrenologists, pretty baby contests, Ned the learned seal, the Fiji Mermaid (a mummified monkey’s torso with a

fish’s tail), dwarves, Siamese twins Chang and Eng, a menagerie of exotic animals that included beluga whales in an aquarium, giants, Native Americans who performed traditional songs and dances, Grizzly Adams’s trained bears, and Afong Moy, as well as performances ranging from magicians, ventriloquists, and blackface minstrels to adaptations of Biblical tales and *Uncle Tom’s Cabin*. The museum was a central site in the development of American popular culture. At its peak, it was open fifteen hours a day and had as many as 15,000 visitors a day. Some 38 million customers paid the 25 cents admission to visit the museum between 1841 and 1865. The total population of the United States in 1860 was under 32 million. After three successive fires, however, Barnum closed the museum in 1868.



*Barnum’s American Museum, 1858.*

# HOW MUCH FOR A TICKET?

The rising price of a ticket to see Afong Moy shows her growing popularity as a public attraction.

## 1834

**Adults: 25 cents**

25 cents in 1834 is worth about \$8.50 today

**Children: 10 cents**

10 cents in 1834 is worth about \$3.50 today

## 1836

**Adults: 50 cents**

50 cents in 1836 is worth about \$16 today

**Children: 25 cents**

25 cents in 1836 is worth about \$8 today

## 1837

**Adults: 75 cents**

75 cents in 1837 is worth about \$23 today

**Children: 50 cents**

50 cents in 1837 is worth about \$15 today

FOR ONE WEEK ONLY,  
(Owing to other engagements.)

### Unprecedented Attraction,

In the large HALL of the

**NORTH AMERICAN HOTEL,**

Corner of Bienville and Levee streets,

Commencing Monday, March 28, and to close,  
positively, on Saturday, April 2d.

Exhibition to commence each evening at 8 o'clock

Tickets ONE DOLLAR, children half price.

### THE CHINESE LADY, AFONG MOY,

Lately exhibited in Mobile, Providence, Boston, Salem, Philadelphia, Baltimore, Washington, Richmond, Norfolk, Charleston, New York and New Haven, will have the honor of appearing before the Company in a splendid

CHINESE SALGON,  
fitted up with rich Canton  
Satin Damask Chinese  
Paintings, Lanterns,  
and Curiosities.

AFONG MOY is a native of Canton city, about sixteen years of age, mild and engaging in her manners; addresses the visitors in English and Chinese, and occasionally WALKS BEFORE THE COMPANY, so as to afford an opportunity of observing her

#### ASTONISHING LITTLE FEET!

For which the Chinese Ladies are so remarkable. Afong's feet is FOUR INCHES and an eighth in length, being about the size of an infant's of one year old. She will be richly dressed in



And in order to give the audience an idea of the Language and Cadence of her country, she will sing

#### A CHINESE SONG.

AFONG MOY is at present under the care of the Lady of the conductor of the exhibition, and is making rapid progress in acquiring the English language. Various Chinese curiosities will be shown and explained to the Company, and every pains taken to satisfy the curious, as to the manners and customs of these singular people

She was brought to this country by Captain Obear, of the ship Washington, under a heavy guarantee to return her to her parents in two years and is now on her way to New York for that purpose, to embark for Canton in the 'Mary Ballard' just arrived from China. The conductor of the exhibition, consequently, can remain but a very short time in each city going up the river, by the way of Pittsburg, and confidently hopes, the same liberal patronage shown in other cities, will not be withheld in this, after travelling so many thousand miles to solicit the favor.

87—A small quantity of beautiful Chinese Paintings, on rice paper, for sale.

# INDIANA ACADEMIC STANDARDS

## ALIGNMENT GUIDE

Seeing *The Chinese Lady* at the Indiana Repertory Theatre is a great way to help make connections for students and facilitate their understanding of a text. Some key literature standards to consider on your trip would be:

### READING LITERATURE

- RL.1 Read a variety of literature within a range of complexity appropriate for one's grade.
- RL.2 Build comprehension and appreciation of literature by identifying, describing, and making inferences about literary elements and themes
- RL.3 Build comprehension and appreciation of literature, using knowledge of literary structure, and point of view
- RL.4 Build comprehension and appreciation of literary elements and themes and analyze how sensory tools impact meaning

### READING--VOCABULARY

- RV.1 Build and apply vocabulary using various strategies and sources
- RV.2 Use strategies to determine and clarify words and understand their relationship
- RV.3 Build appreciation and understanding of literature and nonfiction texts by determining or clarifying the meaning of words and their uses

### SPEAKING AND LISTENING

- SL.1 Develop and apply effective communication skills through speaking and active listening
- SL.3 Develop and apply active listening and interpretation skills using various strategies

### MEDIA LITERACY

- ML.1 Develop an understanding of media and the roles and purposes of media
- ML.2 Recognize the purpose of media and the ways in which media can have influences

### THEATRE CREATING

- TH.Cr1 Generate and conceptualize artistic ideas and work

### THEATRE RESPONDING

- TH.Re.7 Perceive and analyze artistic work
- TH.Re.8 Interpret intent and meaning in artistic work
- TH.Re.9 Apply criteria to evaluate artistic work

### THEATRE CONNECTING

- TH.Cn.10 Synthesize and relate knowledge and personal experiences to make art
- TH.Cn.11 Relate artistic ideas and works with societal, cultural, and historical context to deepen understanding

## LANGUAGE HISTORY

- LH.3 Build understanding of history/social studies texts, using knowledge, structural organization, and author's purpose

## ETHNIC STUDIES

- ES.1 Cultural Self-Awareness
- ES.2 Cultural Histories within the United States Context and Abroad
- ES.4 Historical and Contemporary Contributions

## SOCIOLOGY

- S.2 Students examine the influence of culture on the individual and the way cultural transmission is accomplished. Students study the way culture defines how people in a society behave in relation to groups and to physical objects. They also learn that human behavior is learned within the society. Through the culture, individuals learn the relationships, structures, patterns and processes to be members of the society.
- S.3 Students examine the process by which people develop their human potential and learn culture. Socialization will be considered as a lifelong process of human social experience.
- S.4 Students identify how social status influences individual and group behaviors and how that status relates to the position a person occupies within a social group
- S.7 Students identify the effects of social institutions on individual and group behavior. They understand that social institutions are the social groups in which an individual participates, and that these institutions influence the development of the individual through the socialization process
- S.8 Students examine the changing nature of society. They explain that social change addresses the disruption of social functions caused by numerous factors and that some changes are minor and others are major
- S.10 Students examine the role of the individual as a member of the community. They also explore both individual and collective behavior

## GEOGRAPHY AND HISTORY OF THE WORLD

- GHW.3 Students examine the physical and human geographic factors associated with population characteristics, distribution and migration in the world and the causes and consequences associated with them.
- GHW.4 Students examine the physical and human geographic factors associated with the origins, major players and events, and consequences of worldwide exploration, conquest and imperialism.
- GHW.6 Students examine physical and human geographic factors that influenced the origins, major events, diffusion, and global consequences of new ideas in agriculture, science, culture, politics, industry, and technology.
- GHW.7 Students explore the physical and human geographic factors affecting the origins and the local, regional and supranational consequences of conflict and cooperation between and among groups of people.

# DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

## BEFORE SEEING THE PLAY

What is cultural appropriation? How have attitudes about cultural appropriation changed in recent years?

Everyone in the United States who is not a Native American is from an immigrant family. What does this fact reflect upon changing attitudes towards immigrants throughout US history, from the first settlers in the 1600s to today?

Did your students see the IRT's production of *The Paper Dreams of Harry Chin* this past spring? What do they remember about the Chinese Exclusion Act?

## AFTER SEEING THE PLAY

Compare and contrast the Chinese experience as depicted in the play with the work, social, and family lives of more recent immigrants. How are they different? How are they similar?

Atung, the translator, is described as "irrelevant" in the beginning of the play. Do you agree with this statement? What role does he play in Afong's life and why might she describe him as "irrelevant"? How does he become more or less relevant throughout the rest of the play?

What is Imperialism? What are some examples of Imperialism that are presented in the play? Why are they brought up in the play?

Discuss the structure of the play. The story of Afong's life is told over a long period of time with large gaps, and each new chapter has distinct elements of repetition. How did this process work for you? Why do you suppose the playwright chose to tell this story in this fashion? How does the structure of the play embody certain ideas and themes in the story?

How does Afong's knowledge of China change throughout the play? How does her knowledge of America change throughout the play? How does her *opinion* of America change throughout the play? How about Atung?

What does the Room represent in the play? Why does this set stay the same throughout the whole play?

What is the one element of Afong's performance routine that never changes? What does this element represent?

Read this passage from the playwright's script notes:

"The characters should be played by Asian or Asian American performers. They should speak in their natural and organic speaking voice, with no affected dialect or accent ... the characters should simply talk the way the actors talk."

Why do you think the playwright specifically asks that Asian or Asian American performers play these roles? Why do you think the playwright tells the actors to speak in their organic voice, without adding an accent?

Read the following passage from the scene where Atung plays as Andrew Jackson and himself:

AFONG: It has been my great honor to be a guest in your most powerful and benevolent nation, and it is my hope that my presence here can lead to greater understanding between the peoples of China and America.

ATUNG (*translating*):

Thank you much for let me be inside America. I hope Americans will like Chinese.

ATUNG AS JACKSON:

I do like Chinese yes, in fact I've often found Oriental people to be quite winsomely exotic.

ATUNG (*translating*):

I admire the Chinese people very much for their many fine qualities.

Why do you think Atung translates to Jackson for Afong as he does? Why do you think Atung translates to Afong for Jackson as he does? Think back to the rest of the scene. What is the result of the miscommunication between Andrew Jackson and Afong Moy? How does this miscommunication make you feel?

Read the following passage::

ATUNG AS JACKSON:

This was a marvelous diversion. I've always adored carnivals and freak shows. As a boy I would delight in them, and it's been a long time since I've recaptured the memory. I must take my leave now, and turn my attention to more important matters.

AFONG:

Atung, what did he say?

ATUNG:

He said ... He said that. You, Afong Moy, are a special and most outstanding person, and your work in this country is an important step in the fruitful exchange of cultures and in the promotion of world peace.

What does this tell you about how Andrew Jackson may have truly felt about meeting Afong Moy? Why do you think Atung lied to Afong Moy about what Jackson said?

At the end of the play, Afong says:

"It is but a replica, a performance. This is not my voice, for it was never recorded; these are not my clothes, for they were not kept; this is not my body, for it no longer exists."

What does this mean? Why might the playwright have chosen to break the fourth wall in this way?

Read the following passage from the play:

“We set systems in place so that we can provide a structure. So that we can feel secure. And then, at some point, as we evolve, these systems become unnecessary. But before we can move on to a new set of traditions, we must live in a slow dismantling of the old ways. It may take time. But it is useful work.”

What are some examples of traditions that are presented in the play? What traditions does Afong break from and what traditions does she continue? What are some examples of traditions that still need to be dismantled today?

How do the costumes and set contribute to the overall feeling of the play? How do they change throughout the play?

Do you think that Afong Moy had any affect upon Americans' view of Chinese culture and women? Why or why not?

In one scene of the play, when Afong is questioning the morality of her performances and her presence in America, Atung interrupts her and says “Please. They are watching.” Who is “they?” Why would Atung encourage her not to say those things in front of them?

Read the following passage from the play about the Liberty Bell:

“The crack in the bell appeared after the very first time it was rung. I think this is such a beautiful detail, isn't it? A beautiful poem, for it tells us that liberty is fragile. The crack is growing, as well. Even though the bell no longer rings, the crack continues to grow. Simply through the passage of time. This is another poem. It tells us that liberty has a cost. And an expiration.”

What does Afong mean when she says that “liberty has a cost. And an expiration?” What is the cost of liberty? How does liberty expire, and what happens when it does?



# WRITING PROMPTS

Choose either Afong Moy or Atung from the play. Think back to the details given in the play, and write a journal entry from that character's perspective about their very first day in America. What do they do? What do they say? How are they treated? Then do the same thing for the other character. What is their first day in America like? Who do they interact with and how do they feel being in a new country? As you write the second journal entry, think about how the experience may have been different for each character and why.

Write a letter home from the perspective of Afong Moy. What would she tell her family? What questions would she ask them? What would she tell them about her performances? About the cities she visits? What would she say about the people who come to see her show? What would she say about Andrew Jackson? How would she describe Atung?

Write a letter home from Atung. How does he see his role in the exhibition? How do his perspectives differ from Afong's? What would he say about the people who come to see the show? What would he say about Andrew Jackson? How would he describe Afong?

If you could live for 200 years, what stories would you tell about your life? Who would you stay close with? What parts of your childhood would you want to be remembered? And what do you think will have changed in that time? Write a speech detailing your trials and tribulations, memories, and hopes for the future world on your 200th birthday.

What happens to Atung after he leaves Afong? Using clues from the play, or making up something entirely new, write a scene detailing the rest his life. It might be a monologue or a dialogue. Does he continue to interpret for the next "Chinese Lady?" Does he ever meet Afong Moy again? Does he ever return to China? The choices are yours. Read your scenes in class and discuss the different points of view shown in the various scenes.

Write a review of the play. A well-rounded review includes your opinion of the theatrical aspects—scenery, lights, costumes, sound, direction, acting—as well as your impressions of the script and the impact of the story and/or themes and the overall production. What moments made an impression? How do the elements of scenery, costumes, lighting, and sound work with the actors' performance of the text to tell the story? What ideas or themes did the play make you think about? How did it make you feel? Did you notice the reactions of the audience as a whole? Would you recommend this play to others? Why or why not? To share your reviews with others, send to: [education.irt@gmail.com](mailto:education.irt@gmail.com)

# ACTIVITIES

## YOUR ROOM

Using Afong Moy’s show as a template, create a short presentation of who you are. Include your name, your age, and where you are from, as well as a description of your favorite meal. Demonstrate one activity that is an integral part of your life, and show one object that encapsulates your interests. Make it a point to include something that you think nobody in your class knows about you. Wear an outfit that makes you feel like yourself.

After everyone has presented their show, discuss your experiences. Was it easy to choose one thing to encapsulate who you are and what you like? How did you feel “exhibiting” yourself to others? What did you learn about your classmates that you didn’t know before? What did your classmates’ presentations suggest to you about the priorities in their lives?

## TRANSLATOR

This activity focuses on the difficulties of communication with a language barrier. It is best for older, creative and outgoing students. This activity can be done as a class or in small groups. Divide the class in half, and work in separate rooms. Each of the two groups will create a short story involving three main elements: a person, a place, and a conflict. For example, your story might be about George Washington in Paris with a sore tooth. Two to three students will then volunteer to improvise the scene, making sure all three elements of the story are clear, while the remainder of the class watches.

Bring the class back together. One group will perform its scene again, this time without words: the students can only use mime and/or gibberish to communicate the story. The other group should try to figure out the person, place, and issue that the story is about. Then the “watchers” should recreate the scene, using words to show who, where, and what the scene is about. Then go through the same process with the other group. The point of the game is not to be great at charades, but it is to show the challenges of a language barrier.

After both groups have gone through the process, discuss. What changed between the first plan of the scene and the final performance of it? What did the “watchers” get right? What did they get wrong? Was it frustrating to know what the story was about and to have it be miscommunicated? What might be some challenges for someone in a new country who doesn’t speak the local language? What might be some challenges for an interpreter or translator who is not completely fluent? How does this activity make you feel about the scene in *The Chinese Lady* where Atung translates Afong Moy’s conversation with Andrew Jackson?

## HISTORICAL CONTEXT

There are several times that the play jumps forward in time through Afong Moy's life. Several important years are mentioned throughout the play, and they each have unique significance for Afong Moy and Asian American history. Assign one of the following years in Afong Moy's life to each student, and have them research significant historical events related to Asian American history within that year. Have each student give a one-minute oral report on their year, its major events, its significance in Afong Moy's life, and its significance in Asian American history. OR have each student create a small collage on their year, and create a large wall of Asian American history from 1820 to today in your classroom.

1820, the year Afong is born.

1834, when she is 14 years old and newly arrived in America.

1836, when she is 16 years old.

1837, when she is 17 years old.

1849, when she is 29 years old.

1864, when she is 44 years old.

1871, when she is 51 years old.

1882, when she is 62 years old.

1885, when she is 65 years old.

1887, when she is 67 years old.

1892, when she is 72 years old.

1902, when she is 82 years old.

1924, when she would be 92 years old.

1943, when she would be 123 years old.

1965, when she would be 145 years old.

2022, when she would be 202 years old.

## WORD ASSOCIATION

In this activity, students will hear a series of words that represent important themes in the play and be given a few seconds to write down the first three words or concepts they think of when they hear the word. This is all about word association, so they should write down their immediate responses. After all the words have been read and students have been given time to respond, the instructor will ask for examples of what the students thought of for each word and write them on a board. The words are:

Liberty    Manifest Destiny    Memory    Culture    Gold    Truth

Discuss. How many students had similar responses? Which words had a negative connotation?

Which had a positive connotation? How did this play influence their immediate idea of each concept?

Have students make direct connections between the concepts presented and parts of the play.

Finally, ask students to point out which words they think Afong Moy would associate with each concept.

For example, if somebody suggested "greed" and "shiny" for the concept of "gold," which of those would Afong Moy best identify with in her own perspective? The goal of the activity is for students to understand their own perspective of each concept, and how it may have changed since viewing the play. It is also intended to deepen their awareness of Afong's situation and empathize with perspectives they may not share.

# RESOURCES

## BOOKS

*The Chinese Lady: Afong Moy in Early America* by Nancy E. Davis

*Ghosts of Gold Mountain: The Epic Story of the Chinese Who Built the Transcontinental Railroad*  
by Gordon H. Chang

*Imperial Twilight: The Opium War and the End of China's Last Golden Age* by Stephen R. Platt

*The Chinese in America: A Narrative History* by Iris Chang

*The Making of Asian America: A History* by Erika Lee

*The Good Immigrants: How the Yellow  
Peril Became the Model Minority*  
by Madeline Y. Hsu

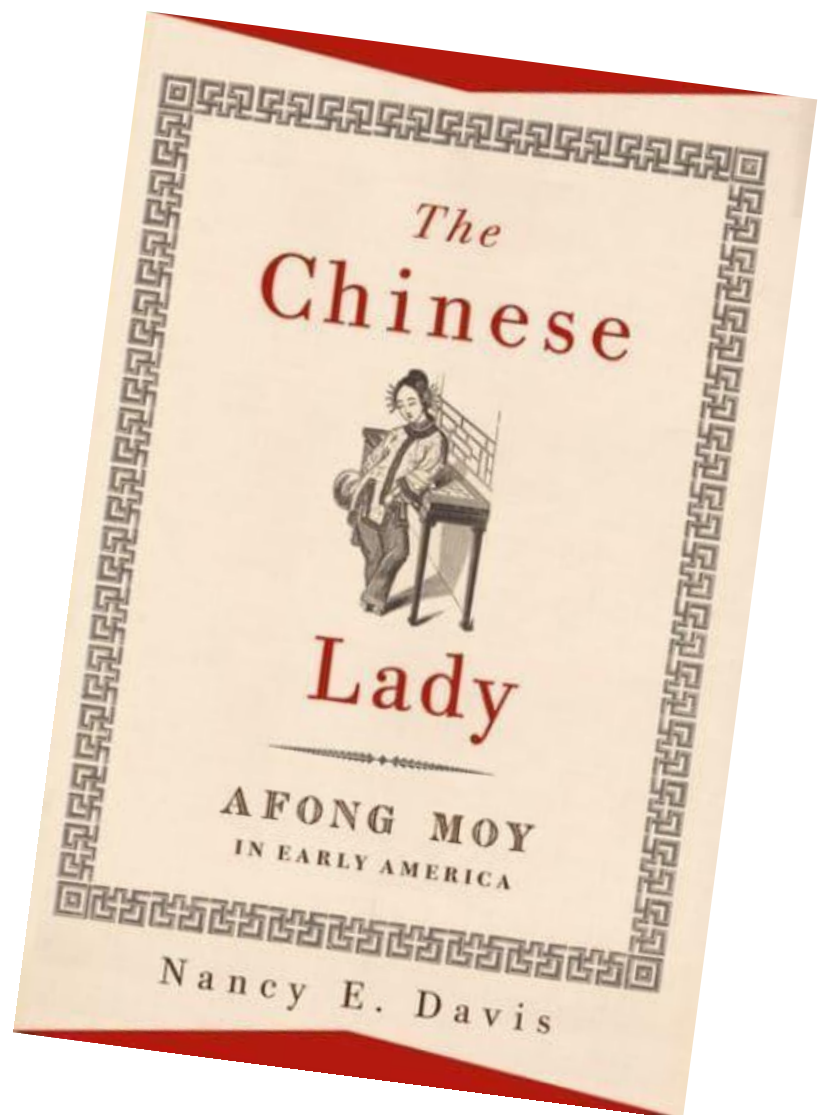
*We the People: The 500-Year Battle over  
Who Is American* by Ben Railton

*At America's Gates: Chinese Immigration  
during the Exclusion Era, 1882-1943*  
by Erika Lee

*The Chinese Must Go: Violence,  
Exclusion, and the Making of the Alien  
in America* by Beth Lew-Williams

*Forbidden Citizens: Chinese Exclusion  
and the U.S. Congress*  
by Martin B. Gold

*Closing the Gate: Race, Politics, and the  
Chinese Exclusion Act*  
by Andrew Gyory



## THE INTERNET

Interviews with Lloyd Suh:

<https://timelinetheatre.com/2022/05/lloyd-suh-interview/>

<https://www.wbur.org/hereandnow/2018/08/02/chinese-lady-play-afong-moy>

Patriotism vs Nationalism, Educational Video:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=efjH-ISwdNE>

Imperialism, Video:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=s1oW5e4eYA>

Crash Course: Chinese Immigration and Segregation (video)

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=RRhjgqe750A>

Ted-Ed, the Chinese Exclusion Act (video)

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=2K88pWCimZg>

Afong Moy:

[https://www.chsa.org/wp-content/uploads/2012/01/2011HP\\_02\\_Haddad.pdf](https://www.chsa.org/wp-content/uploads/2012/01/2011HP_02_Haddad.pdf)

<https://lithub.com/the-life-of-afong-moy-the-first-chinese-woman-in-america/>

<https://www.nyhistory.org/blogs/afong-moy-the-chinese-lady>

Foot Binding:

<https://www.smithsonianmag.com/history/why-footbinding-persisted-china-millennium-180953971/>

<https://www.npr.org/2007/03/19/8966942/painful-memories-for-chinas-footbinding-survivors>

The Opium Wars:

<https://asiapacificcurriculum.ca/learning-module/opium-wars-china>

<https://history.state.gov/milestones/1830-1860/china-2>

Transcontinental Railroad:

<https://www.history.com/news/transcontinental-railroad-chinese-immigrants>

<https://www.nps.gov/gosp/learn/historyculture/a-legacy-from-the-far-east.htm>

PBS Series:

<https://www.pbs.org/show/asian-americans/>

Public Theater Interview with Nancy Davis (author of The Chinese Lady...)

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-OmT89deWtw>

# GLOSSARY

## corset

Corsets have been in use since the 16th century, but the word corset was fairly new at the time of the play, having only come into general use in the 1820s. While most women wore corsets, some saw them as a dangerous moral evil, promoting promiscuous views of female bodies and superficial dalliance with fashion whims. Corsets could also create health risks, such as damaged or rearranged internal organs, infertility, and inability to perform basic physical activities. As Afong Moy points out in the play, in terms of physical limitations, pain, and subjugation of women, there are many ways in which corsets are comparable to foot binding.

## erhu

&gt;

The *erhu* is a Chinese two-stringed bowed musical instrument. It is used as a solo instrument as well as in small ensembles and large orchestras, in both traditional and contemporary music.

## Guangzhou

Guangzhou is a city on the southern coast of China, about 75 miles east of Hong Kong. Today it is the capital of the Guangdong province and the third largest city in China. (At the time of the play, Americans would have called both the city and province Canton.) When Afong Moy was growing up there in the 1820s and 30s, Guangzhou was one of the world's great ports, the only Chinese port accessible to most foreign traders. It was the world's third largest city, with a population of more than 800,000.

## Orient

The Orient is an outdated Western term for the East, meaning the parts of the world east of Europe. Today the term *oriental* is considered an offensive term by many, especially when used to refer to people of Asian descent. In 2016, President Obama signed legislation replacing the word *Oriental* with *Asian American* in federal law.



### **Peale's Museum**

Rubens Peale (1784-1865) was the son and brother of famous portrait painters. Peale's Museum, opened in 1825, featured stuffed animals in natural settings, display cases of butterflies and insects, exhibits and lectures on pre-Darwinian scientific theories, demonstrations of mesmerism, and two imported Egyptian mummies, as well as paintings and portraits by his own famous family and other respected painters. While the museum was popular for over a decade, the Panic of 1837 sent it into debt, and the debut of P. T. Barnum's American Museum in 1841 proved to be unassailable competition. Peale was forced to sell his museum and its contents to Barnum in 1843.

### **Peking**

Peking is what Europeans called the city of Beijing from the 1500s, when Portuguese explorers first encountered China. Beijing has been the capital of China through various dynasties since 1420.

### **Pwan Ye Koo**

P. T. Barnum replaced Afong Moy with Pwan Ye Koo in May 1850. Barnum advertised that Pwan Ye Koo had arrived in New York from Canton the previous month on the sea vessel *lanthe* with a retinue of five: her professor of music and his two young children, a maid, and an interpreter. There is, however, no surviving passenger list from the *lanthe* to confirm this claim. Barnum said that Pwan Ye Koo was the first real "Lady" to visit the United States from China (ignoring the fact that he had previously made the same claim for Afong Moy). Meanwhile, Pwan Ye Koo's authenticity and alleged nobility were challenged in newspaper articles that claimed that visitors had heard her speak in a "low Yankee slang" and suggested that, in fact, she was born in New York. This was exactly the sort of controversy that Barnum loved, believing that it increased ticket sales.

### **Qing Dynasty**

The Qing dynasty ruled China from 1636 to 1912.

### **Sierras**

The Sierra Nevada runs 400 miles along the California-Nevada border. It includes Yosemite, Sequoia, and Kings Canyon National Parks, as well as Mount Whitney and Lake Tahoe.

### **Susquehanna River**

The Susquehanna River is the longest river on the East Coast of the United States. It flows 444 miles from Cooperstown, New York, to the Chesapeake Bay in Maryland.

### **Transatlantic Slave Trade**

The transatlantic slave trade involved the transportation by slave traders of enslaved African peoples, mainly to the Americas. The enslavement of Africans began in the colonial Americas in 1526 and continued in the United States until 1865

### **Union Station**

A union station is a railway station at which the tracks and facilities are shared by two or more separate railway companies, allowing passengers to connect conveniently between them.

# THE ROLE OF THE AUDIENCE

*You, the audience are one of the most important parts of any performance. Experiencing the theatre is a group activity shared not only with the actors, but also with the people sitting around you. Your attention and participation help the actors perform better, and allow the rest of the audience to enjoy the show. Here are a few simple tips to help make each theatre experience enjoyable for everyone:*

Leave mp3 players, cameras, mobile phones, and other distracting and noise-making electronic devices at home.

You may think texting is private, but the light and the motion are very annoying to those around you and on stage. Do not text during the performance.

Food and drink are not allowed in the building during student matinees.

The house lights dimming and going out signal the audience to get quiet and settle in your seats: the play is about to begin.

Don't talk with your neighbors during the play. It distracts people around you and the actors on stage. Even if you think they can't hear you, they can.

Never throw anything onto the stage. People could be injured.

Remain in your seat during the play. Use the restroom before or after the show.

Focus all your attention on the play to best enjoy the experience. Listen closely to the dialogue and sound effects, and look at the scenery, lights, and costumes. These elements all help to tell the story.

Get involved in the story. Laugh, cry, sigh, gasp—whatever the story draws from you. The more emotionally involved you are, the more you will enjoy the play.

Remain at your seat and applaud during the curtain call; this is part of the performance too. It gives you a chance to recognize a job well done and the actors a moment to thank you for your attention.

