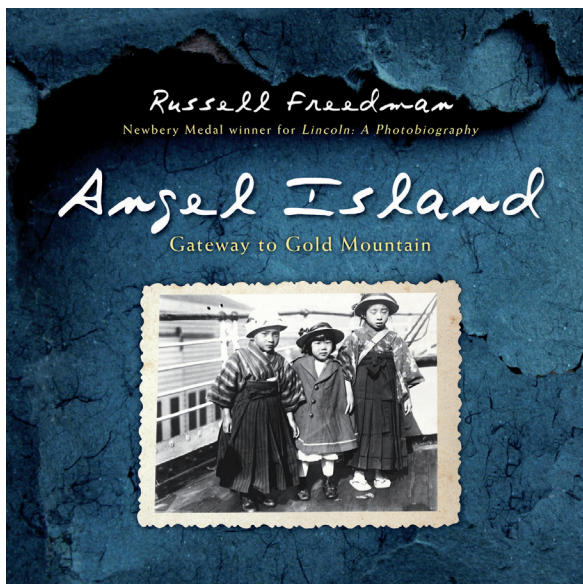


Angel Island: Gateway to Gold Mountain

by Russell Freedman

Chinese Poems Translated by Evans Chan



“For many immigrants, Angel Island was the gateway to a new life in America. For the others—those who were denied entry to the United States—it was a locked gate through which they caught a glimpse of America before they were sent back to their native land.”

About the Book:

In 1970 poetry was discovered inscribed on the walls of the abandoned Angel Island Immigration Station in San Francisco Bay. Thus begins Russell Freedman’s compelling story of Chinese immigration to America. Interweaving reminiscences from Asian newcomers in a lucid and fluid narrative, the Newbery medalist sympathetically examines the violence, discrimination, and resistance that began with the California gold rush and led to the Chinese Exclusion Act of 1882. The extension and expansion of this anti-Asian legislation resulted in the establishment of the Pacific coast detention center, where from 1910 to 1940 about half a million people from more than eighty countries were processed. Tracing the challenging journey of immigrants over land and sea, Freedman details their hardships on Angel Island, where they could be detained for weeks, months, or even years. Bolstered by extensive research, attractive archival photographs and paintings, and thoughtful book design, this well-organized and accessible account ends on a note of reconciliation with the 2009 opening of the renovated Angel Island Immigration Station, where all visitors are welcome.

Pre-Reading Activities:

Take a virtual class field trip to the Angel Island Immigration Station at www.aiisf.org. Working in pairs or alone, students can use a dictionary to define the following terms: *immigration, discrimination, resistance, exclusion, emigrant, documents, detention, segregation, interrogation, deportation, and reconciliation.*

CCSS Language 5.4, 5.5c; 6.4, 6.5 b-c; CCSS Reading Information 5.4, 6.4

Discussion:

CCSS Language 5.1, 5.3, 5.5; 6.1, 6.3, 6.5; CCSS Speaking & Listening 5.1, 5.4; 6.1, 6.4 applies to the following:

- Describe the steamship voyage in steerage class for the majority of Chinese immigrants who crossed the Pacific Ocean to San Francisco.

CCSS Reading Information 5.1, 5.3; 6.1, 6.3

- Like many nineteenth-century immigrants to California, Chinese workers came to “Gold Mountain” in search of wealth. What kinds of labor did they secure in the United States? How did these Asian pioneers contribute to the building and expansion of America?

CCSS Reading Information 5.1-3; 6.1-3

- Freedman writes that the Chinese Exclusion Act of 1882 was “the first time a group had been denied entry into America based on nationality or race.” What was the primary reason given for such legalized discrimination? What are other possible explanations for the violence and persecution suffered by Chinese immigrants? How did the immigrants fight back?

CCSS Reading Information 5.1-3; 6.1-3

- Explain how the San Francisco earthquake and fire of 1906 affected the implementation of the Chinese Exclusion Act, which allowed entry only to the Chinese elite and the wives and foreign-born children of native citizens.

CCSS Reading Information 5.1-3; 6.1-3

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- Using excerpts from the memoirs, diaries, and letters cited by Freedman, identify and compare reactions to the challenges of internment among teenage boys, the largest group on Angel Island, with those of the adult immigrants who were also imprisoned there.

CCSS Reading Literature 5.3, 5.6; 6.3, 6.6

- Freedman writes that the young Chinese immigrants known as “paper sons” “obtained false [documents] showing that they were the foreign-born children of U.S. citizens.” What evidence does Freedman use to illustrate this widely used practice?

CCSS Reading Information 5.8, 6.8; CCSS Reading Literature 5.6, 6.6

- Discuss the major themes and emotions expressed in the poems and inscriptions on the walls of the detention center on Angel Island.

CCSS Reading Literature 5.2, 6.2

- How does the overall sequence and arrangement of the book (chronology, comparison, etc.) apply to the events and ideas in Chapter 8, which begins with the destruction by fire of the Angel Island administration building and the repeal of the Chinese exclusion laws in the early 1940s?

CCSS Reading Information 5.5, 6.5

- Although the United States is based on the principles of freedom, equality, and opportunity for everyone, Freedman demonstrates that this was not the case for most Chinese immigrants. Drawing on personal knowledge, family history, and current events, discuss how other immigrant groups, including African Americans, have suffered discrimination, persecution, and segregation that have excluded them from full participation in American society.

- The Angel Island Immigration Station Historical Advisory Committee has declared, “This is our Plymouth Rock, our Valley Forge, our Alamo, our Statue of Liberty, our Lincoln Memorial, all rolled into one.” What does each of these sites symbolize? How does each apply to the experiences of Chinese immigrants on Angel Island?

CCSS Informational Text 5.1-3; 6.1-3

Activities:

Language Arts:

- Explain the simile in the wall poem “Time was like an arrow shooting through a cool autumn.” Contrast it with the metaphor “Counting on my fingers, several months have passed, leaving me still at the beginning of the road” (page 29). Ask students to write a simile and metaphor about a Chinese immigrant’s journey to America and internment on Angel Island.

CCSS Language 5.5, 6.5; CCSS Reading Literature 5.4, 6.4; CCSS Writing 5.10, 6.10

- The Chinese idiom “paper tiger” describes someone who appears to be strong but is actually weak. The term “paper son” is derived from it. Ask students to create a labeled, full-page drawing of someone or something that is not what it seems and also write a definition for a glossary in a “paper tiger” class book.

Language 5.1-5.6; 6.1-6.6; Reading Information 5.4, 6.4; Writing 5.2, 5.4 -5, 5.9-10; 6.2, 6.4 -5, 6.9-10

- Using the transcript on page 42, ask pairs of students to take turns acting out the roles of interrogator and applicant on Angel Island. Students wishing to do more role-playing can also access the interrogation transcripts of Chinese American comedian and actor Byron Yee’s family at www.paperson.com.

CCSS Speaking & Listening 5.1b, 5.6; 6.1b, 6.6

- At the heart of Freedman’s book are the experiences of the Chinese immigrants on Angel Island. Taking on an immigrant identity, students should write a narrative about internment on this “other Ellis Island.” Include physical segregation, medical examinations, life in the barracks, food and recreation, governance, and interrogations. Have students working with adults and peers, to plan, write, edit and revise their stories.

CCSS Language 5.1-6, 6.1-6; CCSS Writing 5.3 -5.5, 5.9; 6.3- 6.5, 6.9

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- Digitally record an interview with family members, friends, or neighbors who have immigrated to America. Why did they leave their ancestral homeland? How did they get here? What languages do they speak? Where have they lived in the United States? Do they have a family here? Is their job or occupation the same as it was in their birthplace? Do they believe they have achieved the American dream? Compile the recorded interviews to make a class movie that can be shared with the school and community.

CCSS Speaking and Listening 5.1, 5.5-6; 6.1, 6.5-6; CCSS Language 5.1, 5.3; 6.1, 6.3

Science:

- Because Chinese immigrants came to America on steamships and many labored on the trans-continental railroad, the steam engine figured prominently (if inconspicuously) in their lives. Have the class conduct a soda can/Styrofoam cup steam engine experiment based on the pioneering theories of the Greek mathematician and scientist Hero of Alexandria, which can be found at www.pbs.org/americanfieldguide/teachers/transportation/studinst.pdf.

CCSS RI 5.3; 6.3, 6.7

Social Studies:

- Use a computer or online program to create a captioned timeline of life on Angel Island, beginning with the Coast Miwok Indians and concluding with current ferry service to the beautiful yet remote location.

CCSS Language 5.3, 6.3; CCSS Reading Information 5.3, 6.3; CCSS Writing 5.2, 5.8-9; 6.2, 6.8-9

- Ask students to work in small groups and use a world map to plot the journeys of Asian and European immigrants from their homelands to Angel Island, as highlighted in Chapter 7. Include Indian and Korean freedom fighters, a famous Russian composer fleeing revolution, picture brides from Japan, and European Jews fleeing Nazi persecution.

CCSS Reading information 5.1-3, 5.6; 6.1-3, 6.6

- “The Magic Washer” political cartoon from the 1880s showing Uncle Sam kicking a Chinese launderer out of the country (page 10) is visual evidence of “anti-Chinese prejudice.” Have students create political cartoons that depict Chinese immigrant responses to the discrimination they experienced in America during the nineteenth and early twentieth century.

CCSS Language 5.3, 6.3; CCSS Reading Information 5.2, 5.7; 6.2, 6.7; CCSS Writing 5.2, 5.4, 5.9; 6.2, 6.4, 6.9

- Read aloud *Landed* (Farrar, 2006), Milly Lee’s fictionalized picture book based on her father-in-law’s experiences on Angel Island. Using a Venn diagram or chart, ask students to compare and contrast the similarities and differences between Lee’s “true son” Lee Sun Chot and the “paper sons” whom Freedman profiles. What might account for any discrepancies between these accounts of the same event? [Note: In the Acknowledgments, Freedman thanks Lee, who is also a librarian, for motivating him to write *Angel Island: Gateway to Gold Mountain*.]

CCSS Reading Information 5.1-4, 5.6-7, 9; 6.1-4, 6.6-7, 6.9; Reading Literature 5.1-4, 6.1-4; CCSS Writing 5.10, 6.10

- Angel Island is often referred to as the “Ellis Island of the West.” Using Internet sites like the National Park Service’s “Ellis Island” (www.nps.gov/ellis/index.htm), the “Statue of Liberty-Ellis Island Foundation” (statueofliberty.org) and books in the library, ask students to compare and contrast the experiences of immigrants at these bicoastal processing stations. Divide the class into two groups and ask students to debate whether or not they agree with Freedman’s assertion that the experiences of immigrants at these two entry ports were “very different.”

CCSS Language 5.1-5; 6.1-5; CCSS Reading Information 5.6-7, 9; 6.6-7, 9; Speaking & Listening 5.1-4, 6; 6.1-4, 6; CCSS Writing 5.7, 6.7

About Russell Freedman:

Russell Freedman received the Newbery Medal for *Lincoln: A Photobiography*. He is also the recipient of three Newbery Honors, a National Humanities Medal, the Sibert Medal, the Orbis Pictus Award, and the Laura Ingalls Wilder Award, and was selected to give the 2006 May Hill Arbuthnot Honor Lecture. Mr. Freedman lives in New York City and travels widely.