

# The Ghosts of ANGEL ISLAND



Angel Island today

In 1934, 12-year-old Wong Kai Chong leaves everything he knows in **China** and travels to the United States to join his father. When he lands in San Francisco, he is **detained** on Angel Island, an **immigration** station off the coast of California. Kai is shoved into crowded **barracks** and fed soggy rice.

During his stay, Kai is **interrogated**. “What is the name of your village in China?” the immigration officer barks. “How many rooms were there in your house? What did the chairs look like?” Kai knows that his answers must match what his father said before him. If they don’t, he will be sent back to China.

Kai’s experience is detailed in the book *Kai’s Journey to the Gold Mountain*. The story **depicts** the difficult passage of more than 175,000 Chinese immigrants through Angel Island from 1910 to 1940. The people suffered harsh conditions to immigrate to the United States.

In December 2005, President George W. Bush signed the Angel Island Immigration Station Restoration and Preservation Act to help **commemorate** the immigrants’ difficult journey. The **legislation** provides up to \$15 million to establish a museum and research center on the island.

## On the Border

Chinese people didn’t always have difficulty entering the United States. The earliest Chinese immigrants arrived during the California gold rush in the late 1840s and 1850s. They called their new home *Gam Saan*, or “Gold Mountain.”

But as the number of Chinese immigrants rose, Americans became less welcoming. In 1882, the U.S. government passed the Chinese Exclusion Act, making it almost

impossible for Chinese workers to enter the United States.

Immigration officials detained newly arrived Chinese families at Angel Island while they decided whether the people should be allowed to enter the United States. The process was dramatically different from that of Ellis Island—the New York **entry port** for European immigrants.

On Ellis Island, more than 90 percent of travelers were processed immediately and allowed into the country. On Angel Island, however, Chinese immigrants were held for weeks, months, and sometimes years. After interrogation, more than 30 percent of those immigrants were sent back to China.

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### Lesson focus:

Students will learn, using all of their senses, to visualize in order to maintain engagement with, develop deeper understanding of, and evaluate evidence in a social studies text.



### Text type: Informational text

Literary nonfiction (exposition)

Pages 37–38 of this book include the following vocabulary support for ELLs and struggling readers:

*China, detained, immigration, barracks, interrogated, depicts, commemorate, legislation, entry port*

### Follow-up activity

**Objectives**  
Use the text to find and practice visualizing to help you understand key ideas, concepts, and vocabulary words presented in an exposition.

**Prior to reading**  
Skim and scan the text, the poem, and the map to get a sense of their meaning and purpose, and to identify clues and words.

**Interacting with the text**  
Read the text and visualize the scene that you see when you get to the poem. Highlight the most striking and descriptive words that describe how the Chinese immigrants felt. Compare and contrast the secondary information in the coloring from the primary information in the text at the bottom of the page.  
Take notes on the poem about:  
Place the transparency over the page. With the marker, draw a circle around the phrases in the poem that help explain how the poet feels. Circle using the poem taught but this way.  
Use your own words to describe your feelings. Write a paragraph explaining the different feelings, and identify the words, phrases, and sentences that help you to develop a deeper understanding of the text presented in the text.

**Reflecting on the text**  
Discuss with your group how immigrants on Angel Island were on the walls and why their writing mattered so.  
Discuss how information presented in the text and other sources reflects your feelings and secondary sources.

**Writing activity**  
Write a poem or story to complete the graphic organizer on page 62 of the Student Cooperative Activity Book.

**Powerful Poetry**  
Angel Island was closed in 1954 when China and the United States became allies during World War II (1941–1945). The island's main immigration station was scheduled to be demolished in the 1970s and a park (Angel Island Poetry) was built in its place.  
The Chinese immigrants used poetry to leave their mark on the island. "My Chinese Eye," a poem by a San Francisco Chinese immigrant, "When you walk through the hallway of the immigration station, you are surrounded by the ghosts of these people."  
The poem describes the despair, hopelessness, and isolation that many people felt at Angel Island. Poets used their poems to express Chinese characters, immigration officers and detained Chinese people, and even their own poems. Since 1980, poets and artists have recovered more than 1,000 poems.  
THE POEMS THEY LEFT BEHIND  
Immigrants recently found this poem carved in Chinese characters on a wall on Angel Island.  
It's been a long time since I left my home village  
Who could know I'd end up imprisoned in a wooden building?  
I'm here when I see my reflection, my handkerchief is soaked in tears  
I ask you, what crime did I commit to deserve this?  
—Li Jial of Chongqing, Yunnan

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Student Cooperative Activity Book



### Lesson focus:

In this lesson, using all of your senses, you will be able to visualize in order to maintain engagement with, develop deeper understanding of, and evaluate evidence in a social studies text.



### Note:

Before you begin the lesson, mask the text so that only the title shows.

### Prior to reading



State the lesson focus. Display the title and read it aloud. Ask students what they think the text will be about.



Display the entire text.



Model, by thinking aloud, how to skim and scan a text to get a sense of its meaning and purpose, and to find key ideas and words. For example, "As I skim and scan the text, the words 'China' and 'Immigration' jump out at me. I realise that the text is about actual people, not ghosts, who perhaps moved from China to Angel Island. I also see a lot of dates, numbers and statistics. So, it seems like the text's purpose is to inform the reader about a historical event, or series of events, on Angel Island. I need to read closely to see if I'm right and to find out more information."



Visualize your home or a favorite place. Describe to your learning partner(s) your mental picture as it forms in your mind. Listen to your partner(s) describe their mental picture.



### Interacting with the text



Model a close reading of the first two paragraphs. Show students how you evaluate evidence in a social studies text. For example, "How can I trust Kai's account of his evaluation?"



With your partner(s), read paragraph three closely. Discuss how the accounts of many immigrants might give credibility to Kai's account.



Model how to read paragraph four closely. For example, "The president's actions further validate Kai's account."



Read the rest of the text closely. Share your visualizations of each scene. Discuss how well the author supports each key idea with evidence in the text.



### Reflecting on the text



Discuss why you think Chinese immigrants were treated differently from European immigrants. Discuss the author's point of view: what words and phrases in the text show you this?



Facilitate a whole-group discussion about how the strategy of visualizing helps readers develop a deeper understanding of the text.



### Writing connection



Imagine you are a Chinese immigrant detained on Angel Island. Write a letter to your family back in China, describing your circumstances and how you feel about your situation in the United States.

## Visualizing

**Prior to reading:** Skim and scan the text, the poem, and the map. Creating pictures in your mind (visualizing) helps you to develop a better understanding of words on a page. With your learning partner(s), discuss any words you saw during your skim and scan that may be powerful for visualizing.

**Interacting with the text:** Read the text (but not the poem) to your partner(s). Together, locate the words that describe how the Chinese immigrants felt. Create a mental picture of a place or situation that would make you feel this way. Describe it to your partner(s).

Take turns reading the poem aloud. Working together, locate the words that help explain why the writer of this poem feels so sad and frustrated. Think about what being away from your home, family, and friends would be like for you. Create a mental picture of yourself experiencing “homesickness.” Share your visualization with your partner(s).

**Reflecting on the text:** With your partner(s), discuss why the Chinese immigrants on Angel Island wrote on the walls. Discuss why people write on walls today, and whether today’s graffiti might be tomorrow’s poetry. Visualizing enables you to place yourself in the story. Discuss how this helps your comprehension.

**Writing activity:** Work with your partner(s) to complete the graphic organizer. Think of a place or situation where you felt “out of your comfort zone.” In the spaces provided, write down the visualizations as described by your partner(s). You could also include a sketch.



# The Ghosts of ANGEL ISLAND

## Powerful Poetry

Angel Island’s doors closed in 1940 when China and the United States became **allies** during World War II (1939–1945). The island’s main **immigration station** was scheduled to be demolished in the 1970s until a park ranger found poetry engraved in its walls.

“The Chinese immigrants used poetry... to leave their mark on the island,” says Charles Egan, a **professor** at San Francisco State University. “When you walk through the hallways of the immigration station, you are surrounded by the ghosts of these people.”



The poems describe the despair, frustration, and sadness that many people felt at Angel Island. Because the poems were written in **Chinese characters**, immigration officers had dismissed them as graffiti and covered them with paint. Since 1980, Egan and his team have uncovered more than 60 poems.

## THE POEMS THEY LEFT BEHIND

*Historians recently found this poem carved in Chinese characters on a wall on Angel Island.*

It’s been a long time since I left my home village  
Who could know I’d end up imprisoned in a wooden building?

I’m heartsick when I see my reflection, my  
handkerchief is soaked in tears  
I ask you, what crime did I commit to deserve this?

—Li Hai of Nancun, Taishan

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# The Ghosts of

# ANGRIE!



Sketch or write about your visualizations of the poem from the text.

Student name(s):

Our visualizations  
of the poem