



Won Alexander Cumyow

Film Summary: Through the story of Won Alexander Cumyow, this film explores the history and early experiences of Chinese Canadians in British Columbia and examines how Won Alexander Cumyow's struggle to win the right to vote was connected to a wider struggle in Canada for the universal franchise.

Curriculum Application

Social Studies 9/10
Social Justice 12

The Essential Question:

How was Won Alexander Cumyow's struggle to win the right to vote connected to a wider struggle in Canada for the universal franchise?

Summary of the Lesson Activities

1. Includes a teacher-led discussion of Cumyow's life, visible minority rights and the expansion of democracy in Canada.
2. Lesson includes: Background information, Activity guide, Primary sources, and discussion questions.
3. Focus questions on the vignette provide a short lesson option (15 minutes)

Learning Standards

1. Make connections between universal voting rights and a stronger, more inclusive democratic society. (**significance, continuity and change, ethical judgement**)
2. Appreciate the historic struggle for voting rights among visible minorities, women and men without property in Canada. (**cause and consequence**)
3. Demonstrate an understanding of the challenges and accomplishments of Chinese Canadians in early BC (**continuity and change, ethical judgement**)

Materials and Resources Provided

- [Won Alexander Cumyow - Working People: A History of Labour in British Columbia](#)
- Lesson overview sheet (Document 1)
- Six sets of information data sheets for distribution to groups of students. (Lesson Activity 1)

Additional Suggested Materials

- [BC Untold History: Episode 3 Migration and Resilience](#)
- [BC Untold History](#)
- [Exploring Identity, Inclusion and Citizenship: The 1907 Vancouver Riots](#)
- [Ties that Bind: Building the CPR, Building a Place in Canada](#)
- [On the Line: A History of British Columbia Chapter 2 BC and Canada take Root](#)
- [Bamboo Shoots Chinese Canadian Legacies in BC](#)
- [BC Heritage Map: Chinese Canadians](#)

Vignette Questions

1. Chinese workers immigrated to Canadian the 1880's to build what railway?
2. What problems did the Chinese workers face when the railway was completed in 1885?
3. What profession was Won Alexander Cumyow trained for? How did he use his training to assist his fellow Chinese residents of Canada?
4. What racial events took place in Vancouver in 1907? What caused these events?
5. What restrictions were place on Chinese immigrants by the Canadian government?
6. What democratic freedom did Chinese Canadians gain in 1949?

Lesson Activities

1. This lesson can be taught in one or more of 3 curriculum areas.
 - a. Social Studies 10 unit, complementing the chapter on the fight for women's suffrage in the early 1900s in Canada and the racist policies immigration policies of the Canadian government before and after World War I.
 - b. Social Studies 9/10 unit on early BC history and the immigration experience.
 - c. Social Justice 12 (on the topics of democracy and racism).
2. The teacher can begin the class with a brief introduction of the topic of the struggles of racialized people in early BC, specifically Chinese-Canadians, with some discussion of the Chinese Head Tax and the Chinese Exclusion Act of 1923.
3. See the provided detailed lesson overview sheet for further information

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Credit: Teaching Activities and Lesson Plan developed by Janet Nicol

Document 1: Lesson Strategy

Introduction:

Won Alexander Cumyow was the first person of Chinese heritage born in Canada—yet he (and all Chinese-Canadians) were denied voting rights.

Ask students to think about the challenges and accomplishments of Won Alexander Cumyow and then show the vignette. Discuss his challenges/accomplishments.

Next, focus on Cumyow's battle for the vote, brainstorm with students, with these suggested prompts:

Which groups in Canada have been excluded from voting? Why were they excluded? How does not having the right to vote impact on individuals? How did excluded individuals win the right to vote?

Body:

Ask students to form groups of four and distribute the set of information handouts to each group. Each student takes one of these information sheets. The teacher is encouraged to supplement this activity sheet with resources gathered from the list of additional suggested materials.

Also distribute a large piece of paper to each group and a marker. This paper will be a "placemat" for the group to write on. Ask one student in the group to write the essential question, "*How was Won Alexander Cumyow's struggle to win the right to vote connected to a wider struggle in Canada for the universal franchise?*" in the centre of the flip chart paper and to draw lines out in to four quarters, with space for each student to answer the question. (Alternatively the teacher can prepare these placemats before the lesson.)

Using the information sheets, students will write answers on their section of the placement. They will then share their answers with the group.

Suggested secondary activity: Students flip the paper over and write a second essential question. It could be a question the teacher--or students--create based on the vignette, "Won Alexander Cumyow."

Closure:

Students share their groups' answers with the class. This could lead to further class discussion about democracy and voting rights. What are the factors which have led to expanded voting rights in Canada? Does the universal right to vote strengthen democratic society?

Assessment: Suggested activities

1. Students write a paragraph based on the answers on the placemat and classroom discussion.
2. Homework assignment – Using the internet, research another Canadian or groups of Canadians who fought for the right to vote.
3. In the next class, in groups of four, be prepared to share your findings using the placemat format.

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Lesson Activity 1:

Information Data about Won Alexander Cumyow & the Right to Vote

Cumyow voted for the first time in 1890 in British Columbia but provincial legislation in 1895-1896 stripped Chinese (and Japanese and First Nations) voting rights in elections in BC. The voters' list in federal elections came from the provincial election's voters' list, and so the federal franchise was also blocked. The federal Chinese Exclusion Act was repealed on May 14, 1947. Cumyow voted again in the next federation election of 1949, making him the only Chinese-Canadian to have voted both before and after the disenfranchisement.

-edited excerpt from *Wikipedia* (Subject: Won Alexander Cumyow)

BC Electors-Qualification

Every male of the full age of twenty-one years, ...having resided in this Province for twelve months, and in the Electoral District in which he claims to vote for two monthsand being duly registered as an elector under the provisions of this Act, shall be entitled to vote at any election: Provided that no person ...shall have been convicted of any treason, felony, or other infamous offence,

No Chinaman, Japanese, or Indian shall have his name placed on the Register of Voters for any Electoral District, or be entitled to vote at any election. Any Collector of Voters who shall insert the name of any Chinaman, Japanese, or Indian in any such register, shall, upon summary conviction thereof before any Justice of the Peace, be liable to a penalty not exceeding fifty dollars.

-edited (and underlined) from the *Revised Statutes of British Columbia, 1897*

B.C. VOTERS LIST 1898

NAME / RESIDENCE / PROFESSION, TRADE, or CALLING / DISTRICT

Cummins, James, 64 North Park St, Lineman, VicC
Cummins, Robert, Port Moody, Labourer, WDew
Cummiskey, Thomas John, Sicamous, Agent, C.P.R., YN
Cummmgs, James, 150-Mile House, Carpenter, Car

Cumye, Won Stephen, Cornwall St, Butcher, NWC
Cumyow, Won Alexander, 1060 Carnarvon St, Merchant, NWC

Cundill, Christopher, Vesuvius Bay, Farmer, VicN
Cuniff, Thomas, Herald St, Labourer, VicC
Cunliffe, Franklin, Comox, Farmer, Com
Cunliffe, Henry S., Suburbs of Nanaimo, Carpenter, NanC
Cunliffe, John F., Suburbs of Nanaimo, Teamster, NanC
Cunning, Robert, Three Forks, Miner, KWS
Cunningham, Archibald, Suburbs of Nanaimo, Miner, NanC
Cunningham, Arthur, Hall's Landing, Farmer, KWRe

Excerpt from the Sessional Papers of the British Columbia Government, 1899

(Note: The two underlined names are Cumyow and his brother, Stephen, whose surname is incorrectly spelled. NWM means “New Westminster”)

-Information excerpts compiled by J. Nicol