Document 1: Lesson Strategy

Mayo Singh Manhas and the Unique Community of Paldi, B.C.

**Introduction:**

Although the Social Studies curriculum is under revision, this lesson is clearly aimed at Social Studies 10 and 11 students. Like many other lessons associated with Knowledge Network Vignettes, the Mayo Singh story dovetails well with discussions of resource development at the Grades 10 or 11 levels. However, as there is currently no Provincial Final Examination in the Social Studies 10 curriculum, teachers and students of Social Studies 10 may have more luxury to delve more deeply into this fascinating case study of individuals struggling in the intersection of prevailing racial attitudes and the resource exploitation of British Columbia throughout seven decades of the twentieth century.

The Mayo Singh story forms a rich basis for project, or student-based Inquiry. Among other topics, this lesson relates to discussions of the:

* Komagata Maru incident and the rejection by Canada of Sikhs (British subjects);
* Change and continuity in racial attitudes towards Chinese, Japanese, and Indo-Canadians;
* Participation of Indo-Canadians, Chinese, and Japanese in BC resource development;
* Role of Individuals and groups in community formation;
* Bias, viewpoint, and content emphasis in journalism, specifically newspapers

**Classroom Activities:**

**1. Begin with questioning and assessing students’ prior knowledge**. Depending upon the ethnic constituency of the class students may be more or less familiar with early twentieth century ethnocentric and racist attitudes towards Indo-Canadians. Enquire what students already know of the participation of Indo-Canadians in the forestry industry.

**2. View and debrief the Knowledge Network vignette, *Mayo Singh,*** which focuses on a single individual who, essentially, “learns the ropes” of the lumber industry, and who together with the help of a syndicate of resourceful relatives and other Sikhs, begins to purchase and operate sawmills in the Lower Mainland and southern Vancouver Island in the early 1900s. Emphasize and illustrate with examples, the common metaphor that workers, and not pharaohs “built Thebes.” Similarly, Mayo Singh is not the “lone agent” in community building. Given the racialized context and the low status of “Hindoos” in early British Columbia sawmills (See Select Narratives below), Singh employed kinship and ethnic ties (including relationships with Chinese and Japanese lumber co-workers) to not only survive, but thrive in a Canada that was relatively hostile to Indo-Canadians and other Asians. In sum, Singh helps build the ethnically diverse community of Mayo, in which individuals, despite inevitable individual differences, lived in separate sectors of the community, but in a relatively cohesive manner.

If this is “too rosy a picture,” it may be useful to remind students that Mayo Singh arrived in British Columbia in 1906, a year before the 1907 Vancouver race riots against the Chinese and Japanese, but at a time of rising social animosity toward Indo-Canadians which culminated in the 1914 *Komagata Maru* incident. In one sense, the Mayo community is an artifact of a racist British Columbia society. The Mayo case study clearly illustrates what ethnic historians have termed, “psychic shelter” against an unfriendly and unsympathetic host society.

**3. Handout and review, “Select Narratives for General Classroom Discussion.”** (Activity 1) The nine Sources help situate the Mayo Singh story in the context of Indo-Canadians, as well as Chinese and Japanese in the forestry industry. This discussion prepares students for the following newspaper assignment. If you wish to avoid that assignment for the sake of time, at least direct students to review the sources individually, in pairs, or in groups. The narratives form a good basis for a simple whole-classroom discussion lesson that in itself that might occupy half or more of a single classroom period.

**4. Handout and review Assignment, “Writing a newspaper story for the Victoria *Times Colonist*, September, 1928.”** (Activity 2) Essentially, after becoming familiar with the Mayo Singh story, the Select Narratives (above), and the two online resources (identified below), students are asked to role play a Victoria *Times Colonist* journalist who travels to Mayo (renamed Paldi in the 1930s), on Southern Vancouver Island, in 1928 in order to write a “human interest” story on the bustling community and eight of its individuals. ***Emphasize to students that for the purposes of this assignment, all characters except Mayo Singh, are fictitious***.

Guide students to the character profiles in the Handout, “Journalist’s Notes on the People of Mayo,” which has clear instructions to students. Clarify their task: use all provided resources (the *Mayo Singh* vignette, Select Narratives, and online resources) to develop their fictitious character profiles. Teachers should photocopy all necessary handouts. Ideally, they should make available a lab of computers, or make available the identified on-line resources for students.

As explained on the Assignment Handout, the final product is a newspaper article including:

* A title
* A brief biography of Mayo Singh
* Descriptions of the village of Mayo
* Very selective portions of interviews with some of its residents – the fictionalized characters – which will together create a portrait of a unique town; direct students to the the views of whites: the store operator, female schoolteacher, and retired sawmill owner.
* Journalist’s opinions on the town based on what s/he have come to understand
* Choice of a historical photograph or two attached to the story

**5. Options other than a newspaper assignment:**

* + Listed resources provide a good basis for project, enrichment, or Inquiry based learning for capable students;
  + If the newspaper is too lengthy or complex as a component, students simply complete character profiles in order to prepare for whole class discussion; or
  + Students complete character profiles by groups: Group 1 covers and “reports out” on Mayo Singh, while Group 2 covers and reports out for Surjit Singh, etc.
  + Informal class discussion based on perhaps, Komagata Maru incident and Handout of Select Narratives (this might be appropriate in a fast-paced Social Studies 11 class);
  + Other written assignments based on *Singh* vignette and Handout of Select Narratives.

**Closure**:

Given the nature of the subject matter, and the tendency of this subject matter to promote discussion vectors in unintended directions, teachers must be sensitive to the racial composition of their classroom and approach this assignment employing professional judgment and discretion.