Labour History Project Working People: A History of Labour in BC



**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](https://www.labourheritagecentre.ca/cumyow/)
* 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](https://www.knowledge.ca/program/british-columbia-untold-history/e3/migration-resilience)
* [BC Untold History Timeline](https://bcanuntoldhistory.knowledge.ca/)
* [Ties that Bind: Building the CPR, Building a Place in Canada](http://www.mhso.ca/tiesthatbind/index.php)
* [On the Line: A History of British Columbia Chapter 2 BC and Canada take Root](https://www.knowbc.com/books/On-the-Line/Chapter-2)
* [Bamboo Shoots Chinese Canadian Legacies in BC](https://www.openschool.bc.ca/bambooshoots/)
* [BC Heritage Map: Chinese Canadians](https://heritagebc.ca/cultural-maps/)

**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?

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**Lesson Activities**

1. This lesson can be taught in one or more of 3 curriculum areas.
   1. 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.
   2. Social Studies 9/10 unit on early BC history and the immigration experience.
   3. 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

Credit: Teaching Activities and Lesson Plan developed by Janet Nicol