

Gilded Age to World War II

Acting History. Bring History to Life with Original Plays

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Introduction

Some Strategies to Maximize the Effectiveness of Plays

1. **Open with the Vocabulary Activity.** Each unit has a vocabulary practice worksheet. Completing this exercise before acting out the play prepares students for difficult words and helps them make sense of the content. It can also be a good idea to practice pronouncing these words as a class.
2. **Read stage directions aloud during the play.** This reminds students of what to do and allows you to direct while you read.
3. **Consider assigning yourself the narrator's role.** Due to the number of high-level vocabulary words, the job of the narrator can be tough for many students. If a student is going to play the part, make sure he or she is a strong reader.
4. **Give students time to highlight or practice their lines.** This could be done for homework or at the beginning of class.
5. **Choose a lead who is extroverted and a good reader.** Both qualities in a lead help to make the play more enjoyable and fluid.
6. **Assign roles ahead of class.** Although it can be fun to have students lobby for certain parts, preassigned roles make for a calmer start. Also, if you need to assign two roles to one person, it gives you time to make sure they aren't in overlapping scenes.
7. **Read through the play with room set-up in mind.** You will want to think ahead of time about where some scenes will take place and what extra furniture you might want at the front of the room.
8. **Be sensitive to student responses to stage directions.** One of the most fun aspects of these plays is students acting out stage directions (running, high fiving, dropping to the floor, etc.). That being said, some students will be reticent, particularly if the directions require contact between girls and boys. These situations can't be totally planned for since girls often end up playing boys' parts. Be flexible and conscious of this while students act out their parts. Students will let you know what parts they don't want to do.
9. **Facilitate a discussion about historical accuracy.** It can be helpful to remind students that even though the dialogue and some of the actions are fictional, everything is based on historical facts.

Introduction

10. **Perform the play twice.** Often, students want to perform the play again. Not only does this give them another opportunity to hear and learn about the history, but the plays also run more smoothly the next time through. It can also be fun to allow students to trade parts for the second show.
11. **Edit the play.** Add to or change the plays to better fit your class's focus. You also might want to edit some of the vocabulary to minimize students stumbling over words.

Common Core Standards

Reading Standards for Literacy in History/Social Studies » Grades 6–8

- CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RH.6-8.1 Cite specific textual evidence to support analysis of primary and secondary sources.
- CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RH.6-8.2 Determine the central ideas or information of a primary or secondary source; provide an accurate summary of the source distinct from prior knowledge or opinions.
- CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RH.6-8.4 Determine the meaning of words and phrases as they are used in a text, including vocabulary specific to domains related to history/social studies.
- CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RH.6-8.8 Distinguish among fact, opinion, and reasoned judgment in a text.
- CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RH.6-8.10 By the end of grade 8, read and comprehend history/social studies texts in the grades 6–8 text complexity band independently and proficiently.

Writing Standards for Literacy in History/Social Studies » Grades 6–8

- CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.WHST.6-8.1 Write arguments focused on discipline-specific content.
- CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.WHST.6-8.2 Write informative/explanatory texts, including the narration of historical events, scientific procedures/experiments, or technical processes.
- CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.WHST.6-8.4 Produce clear and coherent writing in which the development, organization, and style are appropriate to task, purpose, and audience.
- CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.WHST.6-8.9 Draw evidence from informational texts to support analysis, reflection, and research.

- CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.WHST.6-8.10 Write routinely over extended time frames (time for reflection and revision) and shorter time frames (a single sitting or a day or two) for a range of discipline-specific tasks, purposes, and audiences.

English Language Arts Standards in Speaking and Listening » Grade 8

- CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.SL.8.2 Analyze the purpose of information presented in diverse media and formats (e.g., visually, quantitatively, orally) and evaluate the motives (e.g., social, commercial, political) behind its presentation.
- CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.SL.8.3 Delineate a speaker's argument and specific claims, evaluating the soundness of the reasoning and relevance and sufficiency of the evidence and identifying when irrelevant evidence is introduced.

English Language Arts Standards in Writing » Grade 8

- CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.W.8.3 Write narratives to develop real or imagined experiences or events using effective technique, relevant descriptive details, and well-structured event sequences.

I've Been Working on the Railroad: Chinese Immigration

I've Been Working on the Railroad Chinese Immigration

Few people know just how badly the Chinese were treated when they immigrated to the United States. That they added so much to our country despite physical intimidation, racism, and discriminatory laws penned specifically against them is astounding. The following play centers on a fictional character named Ming Chu. The scenes are representative of what many Chinese people experienced after immigrating to America.



I've Been Working on the Railroad

Chinese Immigration

Characters

- Narrator
- Ming Chu
- Li Chu
- Ming Chu's Friend
- Chinese Miner 1
- Chinese Miner 2
- White Gold Miner 1
- White Gold Miner 2
- White Gold Miner 3
- Tax Collector
- Dynamite
- Mountain
- Snowdrift
- Poon Chu
- Fong Sing
- Immigration Official
- Chinese Railroad Worker 1
- Chinese Railroad Worker 2
- Chinese Railroad Worker 3
- Native American
- Angry White Worker 1
- Angry White Worker 2
- Railroad Owner
- Politician
- Sam Chu
- John Candy
- Albert Pujols
- Sergey Brin
- Levi Strauss

scene 1. Gold Diggers

MING CHU and LI CHU stand at the front of the room.

NARRATOR. The first Chinese immigrants arrived in the early 1800s. They came in small numbers and were mostly merchants. This changed in 1848, when the discovery of massive amounts of gold at Sutter's Mill caused people from all over the world to "rush" to California. A Chinese population of around 4,000 in 1850 exploded to over 100,000 by 1880—about one-tenth of California's population.

LI CHU. So, you're leaving tomorrow.

MING CHU. Yes.

LI CHU, *annoyed*. And why are you doing this again?

MING CHU. I hear there are mountains of gold. I'll pick up a few piles, bring it back home, and we can live in luxury for the rest of our lives.

LI CHU. Right, since it's so easy to cross the Pacific Ocean.

MING CHU. It'll be worth it, I promise.

LI CHU. And I get to stay here, raise our kids, and take care of your parents.

MING CHU. Yes.

LI CHU *folds her arms and glares at MING CHU.*

MING CHU. Would this be a good time to say I love you?

LI CHU. This would be a good time to keep out of my way.

Exit LI CHU. Enter MING CHU'S FRIEND.

NARRATOR. An estimated 95 percent of the Chinese that came during this time were male. Women were expected to stay at home, raise the kids, and take care of their husbands' families. Most men did not expect to remain long in America. They hoped to strike it rich in the gold fields and return.

MING CHU. We made it to California!

MING CHU'S FRIEND. Let's go find one of those mountains of gold we've heard so much about.

MING CHU. I can't wait to be the richest person from Guangdong!

MING CHU and MING CHU'S FRIEND, *together.* Let's do this! *(They chest bump. They then pretend to pickax the floor.)*

Enter WHITE GOLD MINER 1, WHITE GOLD MINER 2, and WHITE GOLD MINER 3. All three stand off to the side.

MING CHU, *straightening up.* Have you found anything yet?

MING CHU'S FRIEND. Nope. There seems to be a lot of dirt on this mountain of gold.

MING CHU. We'll get there. Don't give up.

MING CHU'S FRIEND. Oh look, here comes someone to meet us.

WHITE GOLD MINERS *walk up to them.*

WHITE GOLD MINER 1. Gobbly googly boggly woob.

MING CHU. I didn't quite get that. Could you try that slower?

WHITE GOLD MINER 2, *slowly.* Jeeby jeeba bobby woob yooda.

MING CHU'S FRIEND. Nope, I didn't get that either.

WHITE GOLD MINER 3, *holding a fist near their faces.* Bajja wooja.

MING CHU'S FRIEND. Now I think I know what they're getting at.