

5.2.1 - Asian Americans as Activists and Accomplices

The Asian American Education Project

Grade Level(s)	Grades 1-5
Lesson Overview	For Asian Americans living, working, and growing up in the margins in the United States during the 1960s and 70s, participating in social activism played an important role in advancing justice for them as citizens of the United States. Asian Americans worked in partnership with other ethnic and racial groups to overcome unfair treatment. Through the examples of the United Farm Workers Movement and the student strike at San Francisco State College, and at the Peace Rally after the L.A. Civil Unrest, students will learn how Asian Americans spoke out against injustice and stood up for the better treatment of all Americans.
Lesson Objectives	<p>Students will be able to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Identify ways in which Asian Americans were/are being treated unjustly during this time period (1960s to present)• Explain how Asian Americans used activism to overcome unfair treatment during this time period (1960s - present)• Identify the goals of social activism and explain the difference between being a bystander, an ally, and an accomplice.• Describe how Asian Americans built coalitions with different groups of people and the outcomes of such coalitions.

Asian Americans as Activists and Accomplices Essay:

For Asian Americans seeking justice against discrimination in the United States throughout the 1960s and 1970s, social activism was an important tool for change. Through strikes, protests, and rallies, Asian Americans built solidarity and coalitions across different racial and ethnic groups, demanded more fair treatment for themselves and others, and created stronger communities.

Larry Itliong was a Filipino American farm worker, activist, and labor organizer who started a grape strike in Delano, California in 1965. Filipino farm workers labored under backbreaking conditions for very little pay. The Filipino workers were mostly men, known as *manongs*, and were prevented from having families because of discriminatory laws that illegalized interracial marriage. The *manongs* wanted increased wages and better treatment but were ignored. Itliong recognized that it was important to work across racial differences in order to achieve a common goal. He partnered with Mexican American workers led by Cesar Chavez and Dolores Huerta, creating the United Farm Workers Union, and together, led a strike and national boycott that improved working conditions and pay for all farm workers.

Meanwhile, students at San Francisco State College, inspired by the Civil Rights Movement, built a coalition that spanned across racial groups called the Third World Liberation Front. United by a common purpose and goal, the students of color demanded that the college offer classes that reflected their own histories, taught by teachers and professors that also shared similar identities. Asian American students found solidarity with Black, Latino, and Native American students. They went on strike together and some even got arrested in an act of civil disobedience, just one of the many ways students made their demands heard. In the end, these students' demands created ethnic studies departments and multicultural learning centers across campuses in California and, later the United States.

The accomplishments of the cross-race coalitions built in the 1960s and 1970s, however, were seemingly forgotten as violence and racial tensions erupted between members of the Black and Korean American

communities during the 1992 L.A. civil unrest. One important reason for these tensions was that the newer Korean immigrants, who came to the U.S. after 1965, did not know and understand the history of Black people in America, like their long struggle for equal, civil rights. Escalating violence, feelings of resentment and fear, all rooted in racism and ignorance, led to devastating outcomes for members of both ethnic communities. A large peace rally was organized after the unrest subsided to promote hope and healing and to recognize the injustices that both communities felt. The rally was symbolic of people overcoming their differences for the promise of peace and a better tomorrow.

Remembering the joint efforts of activists in the 1960s and 1970s is a reminder of the justice, peace, and progress that is possible when people can set aside their differences and come together to take action. By lifting up the stories of how Asian Americans mobilized for social activism alongside others is a reminder not to be a bystander, but an ally and an accomplice working for greater justice for everyone.

Bibliography:

- Chang, Irene, & Krikorian, Greg. "A CITY IN CRISIS : 30,000 Show Support in Koreatown March : Demonstration: Various ethnic groups gather. They call for peace: 'We want no more fighting.'" *Los Angeles Times*, 03 May 1992. Web, accessed 02 May 2022. <<https://www.latimes.com/archives/la-xpm-1992-05-03-mn-1945-story.html>>.
- Morehouse, Lisa. "Grapes Of Wrath: The Forgotten Filipinos Who Led A Farmworker Revolution." *NPR*, 19 September 2015. Web, accessed 02 May 2022. <<https://www.npr.org/sections/thesalt/2015/09/16/440861458/grapes-of-wrath-the-forgotten-filipinos-who-led-a-farmworker-revolution>>.
- "The Third World Liberation Front and the History of Ethnic Studies and African American Studies." *University of California, Berkeley*, April 2022. Web, accessed 02 May 2022. <<https://guides.lib.berkeley.edu/twlf/articles>>.

Vocabulary:

- **Accomplice** – one who associates with marginalized people by being more than an ally in taking action against an institution or system in an attempt to right a wrong that has been done as a result of unfair treatment
- **Ally** – one who is associated with another as a helper by providing support to someone who is being treated unfairly
- **Bystander** – one who is present but not taking part in a situation or event, who watches an injustice being done but doesn't take any action
- **Civil Disobedience** - not obeying commands from those in charge, especially as a nonviolent and group method of forcing compromise from those in charge
- **Coalition** – an alliance of distinct parties, persons, or states for joint action
- **Ethnic Studies** – the critical and interdisciplinary study of race and ethnicity, that starts from the assumption that race and racism have been, and continue to be, profoundly powerful social and cultural forces in American society and in modernity at large
- **Injustice** – a violation of the rights of another
- **Protest** – to make a complaint, objection, or display of unwillingness usually to an idea or course of action
- **Rally** – a mass meeting intended to arouse group enthusiasm
- **Strike** – a demonstration in which people stop work in order to force an employer to comply with demands
- **Social Activism** – organized action to bring about social change such as better pay, improved working and living conditions, voting rights, etc.

¹ Definitions adapted from Merriam-Webster dictionary

Discussion Questions:

- What were the demonstrations of activism (i.e. strikes, protests, rallies, etc.) featured in Episodes 4 and 5? For each demonstration, consider the following: What might a bystander do? What would an ally do? What action would an accomplice take? What would you do?
- Why was it important for the United Farm Workers to be “united”? In what ways were they united? In what ways were they not united?
- What was the significance of the San Francisco State College Student Strike? Why are ethnic or cultural studies programs important? How do all people benefit from such programs?
- What can we learn from the L.A. Civil Unrest? How did people from different racial communities come together? Why is it important to heal after a major conflict?

Activity 1: Defining Activism

A. QuickWrite (Grades 1-5)

1. Distribute the worksheet entitled, “[Activism QuickWrite](https://docs.google.com/document/d/1dXmMyW9ayuaSUcD0m5OYSeQome9wTq3n/edit?usp=s_haring&ouid=116118658635613981157&rtpof=true&sd=true).”
https://docs.google.com/document/d/1dXmMyW9ayuaSUcD0m5OYSeQome9wTq3n/edit?usp=s_haring&ouid=116118658635613981157&rtpof=true&sd=true
Have students do a quickwrite given these prompts:
 - Have you ever been bullied? How did you feel?
 - Have you ever seen someone else get bullied? How did you feel?
 - Have you ever bullied anyone? How did you feel?
 - Have you ever stood up for yourself or for someone else? How did you feel?
2. Give students about 10-15 minutes to record their thoughts.
 - Tell students that they will not have to share their answers and assure them that only you will have access to their thoughts.
 - Give students the option of not submitting their work to you in order to respect their privacy.
3. Convene students as a whole group and facilitate a discussion by asking the following questions:
 - Why is bullying bad?
 - What can we do as individuals to stop bullying?
 - What can we do as a group to stop bullying?
4. Explain that over time groups have been bullied for their skin color, religion, etc. Ask students if they know of any groups that have been bullied or treated unfairly. Explain that things change because people fought back, they stood up for each other.

B. Activism Definitions (Grades 1-2)

1. Read this scenario aloud: *There are three students working together on a group poster in a classroom. They use markers, glue, and construction paper, making a mess. When the teacher tells the class to clean up and get ready for recess, all three students are still cutting and gluing paper. When it is time for recess, two students go to recess leaving one student to clean up alone. You are working in another group and you see this happening.*
2. Facilitate a whole-group discussion by asking the following questions:

- How is this unfair? To whom is it unfair?
 - What would you do? Would you be an ally and help the student clean up? Would you be an accomplice and tell the teacher what happened? Or would you be a bystander and leave this student to clean up alone?
 - Which course of action seems the most right and fair?
 - What is the difference between an accomplice, an ally, and a bystander?
3. At the end of this discussion, create a class definition for the three terms: accomplice, ally, and bystander. Students can write their definitions down on the worksheet entitled, “[Activism Definitions](https://docs.google.com/document/d/1MooQXEj13R6hK44rictFKWex0koS3ufu/edit?usp=sharing&ouid=116118658635613981157&rtpof=true&sd=true).”
- In the left column, students will write down the definitions of what it means to be a bystander, an ally, and an accomplice.
 - In the right column, students will write a sentence describing or draw a picture illustrating how a bystander, ally, or accomplice would react or behave in a situation where someone is being treated unfairly.

Activity 2: Identifying Main Idea and Examples (Grades 3-5)

- A. Show each set of video clips; prompt students to pay attention to how and why Asian American built coalitions with other minority groups:

United Farm Workers: <https://vimeo.com/687752371> [Run time: 00:06:56]

Trigger warning: footage of police violence about five minutes into the clip

San Francisco State Student Protests: <https://vimeo.com/687752393> [Begin video at 01:11, Run time: 00:05:53]

Peace March after the LA Civil Unrest: <https://vimeo.com/690082551> [Run time: 00:06:28]

Trigger warning: footage of destruction, fire, and people crying in the first half of the video.

1. For each set of video clips, give each student a copy of the worksheet entitled “[Activism Graphic Organizer](https://docs.google.com/document/d/1tSve_k3_YCsCF17RuWtJ_bDeoQ7KLK12/edit?usp=sharing&ouid=116118658635613981157&rtpof=true&sd=true).”
 - In the first box of the “Graphic Organizer,” have students identify the topic of the video.
 - In the second box have students record the main goal of the movement.
 - In the last three boxes, have students identify and record examples of how Asian Americans worked with other ethnic or racial groups in order to achieve this goal.
 - Convene as a whole group and review student responses.
2. After viewing all the video clips, organize students in groups of 3-4. Give each group a worksheet entitled, “[Activism Look for the Helpers!](https://docs.google.com/document/d/1xK3IHBnoOAxOLm_x9W9wDCRIoLzMzp6d/edit?usp=sharing&ouid=116118658635613981157&rtpof=true&sd=true).”
3. Tell students that Mr. Rogers said, “When I was a boy and I would see scary things in the news, my mother would say to me, ‘Look for the helpers. You will always find people who are helping.’”
4. Have each group complete the worksheet. Prompt students to discuss and record their answers to the following questions for each main topic (i.e. United Farm Workers, San Francisco State Protests, and Peace March after the L.A. Civil Unrest):
 - Who were the accomplices and what did they do?

- Who were the allies and what did they do?
 - Who were the bystanders?
 - Tell students to support their claims with specific examples.
 - Give students 10-15 minutes to complete this task.
5. Convene as a whole group and facilitate a discussion by asking these questions:
- How did Asian Americans build coalitions or partnerships with different groups of people?
 - In these examples of coalition building, did Asian Americans act as accomplices, allies, or bystanders?
 - What were the outcomes of such coalitions? Why is it important to build coalitions? Why are we stronger together?
 - When working towards a common goal, is it better to be an accomplice, an ally, or a bystander?

Activity 3: Analyzing Causes and Effects (Grades 3-5)

- A. After viewing the video clips listed in Activity 2, have students work in pairs. Give each pair the worksheet entitled “[Activism Analyzing Causes and Effects](https://docs.google.com/document/d/1uJYdDN8tARNJhmCQi4V6ITqvxr_2gJH8/edit?usp=sharing&oid=116118658635613981157&rtpof=true&sd=true).”
- https://docs.google.com/document/d/1uJYdDN8tARNJhmCQi4V6ITqvxr_2gJH8/edit?usp=sharing&oid=116118658635613981157&rtpof=true&sd=true
1. Explain how all actions have causes and effects.
 2. Ask students to list the three topics, United Farm Workers, San Francisco State Student Protests, Peace March after the L.A. Civil Unrest, in the first column.
 3. Have students answer and record their responses to the following questions:
 - How were Asian Americans treated unfairly (causes)?
 - What did they do about this unfair treatment (action)?
 - What were the effects of their actions?
 4. Allow students 10-15 minutes to complete the chart.
- B. Convene as a whole group and facilitate a discussion by asking these questions:
1. How did Asian Americans use activism to overcome unfair treatment?
 2. What are the causes and effects of activism, in general?
 3. What are the risks and benefits of activism? Is all activism good?
- C. Extension Activity:
- Encourage students to be activists.
 - Have them learn about a specific cause and create a plan to solve a specific problem.
 - Encourage them to recall what they learned from the video clips and these activities.
 - Facilitate discussion by asking them these questions:
 - o What did you learn from the examples of Asian American activism?
 - o How can you apply what they did to what you want to do?
 - o How can you work with others to support your goal(s)?

Further Information

Resources for Students:

- Visit the Asian American Curriculum Project, a bookstore in San Mateo, California that sells Asian American books: <https://www.asianamericanbooks.com>

- Visit a museum focused on Asian American history. These museums are actively preserving the cultural history of Asian Americans. An example is the Chinese American Museum in Los Angeles which hosted an exhibition about Asian American activism: <http://camla.org>
- Learn more about Vincent Chin: <https://www.pbs.org/video/pov-who-killed-vincent-chin-trailer/>

Works Cited and/or Resources for Teachers:

- Brimner, L.D. (2014). "Strike!: The Farm Workers' Fight for Their Rights." *Calkins Creek*.
- Chang, I., & Krikorian, G. (1992). "A CITY IN CRISIS : 30,000 Show Support in Koreatown March : Demonstration: Various ethnic groups gather. They call for peace: 'We want no more fighting.'" *The Los Angeles Times*, 03 May 1992. Retrieved from <https://www.latimes.com/archives/la-xpm-1992-05-03-mn-1945-story.html>.
- Jensen, S. H. (2019). "The Third World Liberation Front and the History of Ethnic Studies and African American Studies." *Berkeley Library*. Retrieved from <https://guides.lib.berkeley.edu/twlf>
- Morehouse, L. (2015). "Grapes of Wrath: The Forgotten Filipinos Who Led a Farmworker Revolution." *NPR*. 19 Retrieved from <https://www.npr.org/sections/thesalt/2015/09/16/440861458/grapes-of-wrath-the-forgotten-filipinos-who-led-a-farmworker-revolution>
- "San Francisco State Strike Collection (n.d.)." *San Francisco State University*. Retrieved from <https://diva.sfsu.edu/collections/sfbatv/2582>
- "When Mexicans and Filipinos joined together." (2005). *United Farm Workers*. Retrieved from <https://ufw.org/research/history/mexicans-filipinos-joined-together/>