

Social Studies, Geography & History

The Sikh Heritage Museum of Canada - OESSTA

Grade 8, Strand B Significant Moments Worth Remembering in Early Sikh Settlement

Students will inquire about events/moments that have had the most significant impact on Sikh Canadians in the early 1900s.

Inquiry question: Does a settler group's initial experience in a country continue to frame their future experiences as Canadian citizens?

Learning Goals	Success Criteria
Students will... <ul style="list-style-type: none">focus on the historical perspective of Sikh Canadians, how and when they arrived in Canada and what contributions they have made in the past 100 years to Canadian culture, thinking about what has changed and what has remained the same with regards to societal attitudes.	Students will know they are successful when they.... <ul style="list-style-type: none">Can state what they believe to be the historical perspective of the Canadian government with regards to Sikh Canadian immigration in the early 1900sCan infer whether the future for Sikh Canadians will remain the same or differ with regards to societal attitudes, using evidence from what they have learnedCan create effective questions to determine the most important information from the chosen article

Connections	
Inquiry Learning Goal:	Students will create effective questions, analyze informational text, draw conclusions and communicate their findings
Social Studies/ Historical Thinking Concept	Continuity and Change Historical Significance

Materials:

- Access to laptops/personal devices
- Websites offered to students
- Charts of questions for each student
- Group response chart (one per student)
- Sign with each event/moment and date written on it
- Final assessment question for each student

Minds On: Looking at the timelines the students created last class, ask them as a group to answer the following discussion questions:

- What appears to be the *historical perspective* of the Canadian government and citizens with regards to Sikh Canadians settling in BC in the early 1900s? Find 3 examples to support your response.
- How would you feel if you were in this situation at this time? Why do you think you might feel this way?
- Do you think that the journey of the Sikh Canadians will get better or worse after this time? Why do you think this? (**Continuity and Change**)

(see newspaper at end of lesson, written in 1907 that discusses this exact question)

Action

Have each student choose one question to answer in one-on-one conversation with teacher while working through the action

The Continuous Journey Regulation 1908/The Komagata Maru 1914/ Sundar Singh 1912/Asiatic Exclusion League 1907

The Continuous Journey regulation 1908

<https://www.pier21.ca/research/immigration-history/continuous-journey-regulation-1908>

The Komagata Maru 1914

<https://www.pier21.ca/explore/online/tell-me-more-about/komagata-maru>

other resource options:

<http://komagatamarujourney.ca/>

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=IESXKvQyb7M> (wonderful documentary on the Komagata Maru)

Sundar Singh 1912

<http://speeches.empireclub.org/62324/data>

<https://torontoist.com/2014/05/historicist-fair-play-for-sikh-pioneers/>

The Asiatic Exclusion League 1907

<https://thetyee.ca/Culture/2015/07/03/The-Riot-That-Changed-Canada/>

Place students in groups of 4. Have students choose one of the 4 topics. As a class, develop questions to determine what knowledge would be important to understand the material you read.

Class question

response/evidence

Write down the 5 most relevant points you found out

If doing as a google classroom assignment, submit independent responses before going to groups (even if not completed)

After answering the questions above, have students connect with other students who have also chosen this event for 30 - 40 minutes to discuss their findings.

1. As a group, summarize your article into 5 - 10 points (point form) and find a picture to accompany your information
2. Share answers to the questions above and assist each other in constructing confident responses

Return to original group and share your article (through the group summary and picture) and share two of the questions and responses you worked through

PART 2

Upon completion of each group's short presentation, fill in the chart below independently. Each student must answer 2 of the questions for each event/moment but each question must be answered at least once.

	What was this event/moment mostly about? (4 points)	Why is this event/moment more historically significant ?	Who is this event/moment significant for? How do you know?	What long term or short term consequences could this have?
Asiatic Exclusion League (1907)				
Continuous Journey Regulation (1908)				
Sundar Singh (1912)				
Komagata Maru (1914)				

Consolidation: Place a sign of each event/moment in the 4 corners of the room and ask students to think of their OWN response to the following question:

Which of these 4 events/moments do you think may have had the greatest impact on Sikh Canadians in the early 1900s?

Have students walk to the sign of the event/moment they believe is the answer to this question. If there is a sign with only one student, have teacher go and join student.

Have the students that are there share their reason for standing where they are standing with the group and then as a group formulate an argument why they are at the correct spot and share with the class.

Sikh Heritage Museum of Canada connection:

Museum Website has information about all 4 topics in their timeline link that students can use to further their understanding of their chosen topic.

<http://komagatamarujourney.ca/>

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=IESXKvQyb7M>

<http://speeches.empireclub.org/62324/data>

<https://torontoist.com/2014/05/historicist-fair-play-for-sikh-pioneers/>

Extensions

To learn more: After sharing time, have each student create a written response to the Following question: Choosing one of the significant moments the students have analyzed, “How do you think this event will impact future Sikh Canadians?” (**Continuity and Change**)

Appendix:

Class question	response/evidence

	What was this event/moment mostly about? (4 points)	Why is this event/moment more historically significant ?	Who is this event/moment significant for? How do you know?	What long term or short term consequences could this have?
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ANOTHER TYPE OF NEW CITIZEN

A GLANCE AT THE SPIRITED SIKHS OF INDIA WHO ARE BECOMING
A FEATURE OF THE INDUSTRIAL LIFE OF OUR PACIFIC COAST

TO those who are interested in the development of our country every type of new settler is a subject for study. The English and the Americans we know and the Irish and the Scotch, and of most of the people of Europe who are coming to us we have some broad idea. But there are arriving now on our Pacific coast men of a nation about whom most Canadians have only a very shadowy idea—the Sikhs of the Punjab.

Of the two hundred and ninety millions of people of India who owe allegiance to Great Britain, none offered more stubborn resistance to their conquerors, or when once subdued have been more loyal to their European masters than the Sikhs.

Their home is in the north-eastern part of India, in the native state of Punjab and its dependencies, and they form fully six per cent of the population of that country. Originally they were a religious sect founded in the fifteenth century. The sect rejected the institution of caste, idolatry and superstition, preached the existence of one spiritual ruler of the universe, and inculcated a higher moral life. As time went on the adherents of the sect, gradually becoming conscious of their numbers and their growing power, began to adopt something of a military organization, and in the end converted themselves into a powerful military community.

About the middle of the eighteenth century the Sikhs formed themselves into a number of tribal and territorial confederacies, which a few years later was welded into one organic whole. The consolidated Sikh confederacy made conquests on all sides except to the east, where then lay the frontier of Britain's Indian Empire. Having built up an army of 125,000 men, organized and trained on the European system, in 1845 they invaded British territory on a war of conquest, and then began one of the fiercest conflicts that Britain has ever waged in India. One of its most memorable battles was that of Chillianwalla, fought in 1849, which was left undecided in spite of very heavy losses on the British side. But one month later General Sir Hugh Gough finally crushed the Sikhs and effectually broke their power. The Punjab was then annexed to British India, and so successfully was its government organized and administered that on the outbreak of the Mutiny in 1857 the Sikhs not only refrained from joining the rebel Sepoys, but lent material assistance in quelling that formidable outbreak. From that day to this the Sikhs have loyally fought side by side with Britain's European troops in defence of the Indian Empire.

A few months ago a number of these people left their homes

in Northern India to try their fortunes on the western coast of Canada, and the writer has lately had an opportunity of seeing them at their work in British Columbia.

On Vancouver Island, forty miles distant by water from Victoria or fourteen miles by land, are situated the Vancouver Cement Works, an extensive plant, employing a large force of men and producing great quantities of that form of building material that every year is coming into more general use. The trip to the works by water from Victoria is not without interest. A considerable portion of the journey is among islands which suggest to an Easterner a combination of the beauty and picturesque-ness of the Thousand Islands and of Muskoka. Beyond

lay the shores of Vancouver Island, for the most part covered with the dark forest that greeted the eyes of George Vancouver more than a century ago. But commerce has already made one inroad into Nature's domain. Suddenly rounding a point the cement works came into view. Behind them rose a hill composed of clay and limestone, the material which industry is turning to commercial use. At the wharf lay a vessel taking on cement, and here we saw the first of our fellow British subjects—the Sikhs from the distant Punjab. They were trucking the

bags of cement up the wharf to the chute leading to the ship's hold—heavy work indeed, but they seemed to perform it with ease.

They were fairly tall men, bearded as is their wont, with heads and faces protected from the inquisitive camera by many a wrap of cotton or muslin, which to a considerable extent also shut out the dust that continuously rose from the moving bags of cement. Most of them were men in middle life, but not a few were on the wrong side of fifty, and here and there was a beardless youth. We watched them with interest as they worked moving the big trucks and sending a steady stream of bags down the chute to the every hungry hold. Far from their native Indian homes they seemed cheerful and contented.

They are employed in the various processes of cement manufacturing, and about two hundred Chinese and fifty whites work with them, but the Sikhs keep quietly to themselves, for in houses built by the company they have their own cooking and living quarters. At first Mohammedans were also employed, but this mixing of Orientals of different creeds was not a success. There was the difficulty of caste, and then each class demanded its own cooks and its own peculiar dishes and kinds of food. The Mohammedans were allowed to go and the Sikhs remained.



SIKHS AT THE CEMENT WORKS

The muslin turban of the first protects their heads and faces from the heat and the dust.

They have been here now for a full year, and having given perfect satisfaction they are looked upon as a factor of industrial life that may assist in solving the difficult labor problem that confronts British Columbia. At first, it may be, the Sikhs are a little difficult to "break in," but once that is accomplished they prove to be good workmen. Between them and the Chinese no trouble has arisen, nor is any likely to arise, for the two races let each other absolutely alone. There is no intercourse between them, and Sikh and Celestial seldom speak. Among these Sikhs at the cement works there are no women.

Death finds these Sikhs far as they have wandered from the land of their forefathers, and already the lives of some of them have come to a close in this strange land between which and their native India rolls the broad expanse of the Pacific Ocean. But the customs of their forefathers are not forgotten, and the bodies of their dead are committed to the flames of the funeral pyre. They religiously adhere to the practice of cremation, and the simple form they follow reminds one of the honorable mode of sepulture practised in the heroic age of Greece and which is so often described in detail in the immortal poems of Homer and of which frequent mention is also made in the history of the Roman Republic. Cremation is still practised generally in India, but without suttee or burning of the living widow with the corpse of the husband.

The smoke of the funeral pyre has already arisen on several occasions from the shores of British Columbia. There is something weird and pathetic in the ceremony performed by this little band of Sikhs on the forest-covered shores of Vancouver Island. The mourners are few, for the relatives and friends of the departed are thousands of miles away and many months would elapse before they would hear of his departure for the "unknown land." His comrades in toil and fellow-adventurers into the western world performed the last sad rites—gathered the wood, erected the pyre, applied the torch and offered up the funeral prayer.

A few days previous to my visit the body of a departed Sikh had been cremated and an officer of the company that had em-

ployed him and who had witnessed the strangely solemn scene, gave me an account of this Oriental practice now transferred to the shores of the New World.

The body had been carefully washed, wrapped in clean, perfumed linen and laid in a coffin, but with face exposed. Over the coffin was reared the funeral pile consisting of pieces of firwood orderly arranged. Three fellow Sikhs superintended the funeral ceremony. Heads bowed and chanting a solemn dirge they applied the torch. The crackling flames mounted high, soon licked up the pyre and the coffin and reduced the body to a few handfuls of ashes. Then the white spectators were asked to withdraw as only Sikhs could witness the remaining ceremony, which must be promptly carried out for evening was coming on and all must be done before the setting of the sun.

An old Sikh, the leader of the little band of exiles, addressed them, speaking in low, solemn tones; prayers were offered and another hymn sung. Then the faithful swept up the ashes and collected the teeth, which the fire had not destroyed. These remains were put into a little box, which was carried back to the Sikh headquarters. At the first opportunity it would be sent across the Pacific to the faraway homeland in the Punjab.

The Rev. W. A. Wilson, missionary to India, referred to these Sikhs in the course of an address delivered at the meeting of the Presbyterian General Assembly held recently in Montreal. On his journey to Montreal he stayed for a few days on the

Pacific Coast, and there he met a little party of expatriated Sikhs. He went among them and in their own language told them he had just come from India. In a frank, friendly manner they shook his hand, but when he said he was a missionary—"a father," as the Sikhs call the Christian teacher—they all shook his hand again, and this time with greater heartiness and warmth. They welcomed the missionary not only as a man from the homeland, but as a sincere friend, although they were Sikhs both by blood and religion.

What will be the outcome of this migration from crowded India to sparsely settled Western Canada? What success will these Sikhs have in a strange land and what part will they play in the industrial life of this country? These questions the future alone can answer.



SIKHS TRUCKING BAGS OF CEMENT

These willing workers from India may become a factor in the labor problem of British Columbia.



SIKHS WATCHING A FUNERAL PYRE

The pile of wood heaped over the remains of their late comrade is ready for the torch.