



LESSON 8

THEME

WORKING TOGETHER

FAMILY FOCUS **THE WONGS** im/migration year: 1965

IMPORTANT INFORMATION

There are many common myths about immigrants and immigration. Among them are: that immigrants are taking jobs from American citizens, that certain immigrant groups have negative characteristics based on their cultural or religious identity.

Im/migrants bring everyday objects and traditions with them when they come to a new place to continue their cultural practices and find connection and comfort.

Im/migrants adapt to new living conditions and types of communities, often with creativity and resourcefulness. Communities help people meet their needs in a new place.

Neighborhoods with many immigrants and their children develop because they provide work, support, access to culture, less racism and discrimination, and friendship. While adult immigrants often spend time with people who speak their home language, children often make friends across difference.

Cities like New York, and neighborhoods like the Lower East Side, have many jobs for newcomers and immigrants. Many of these jobs are difficult, but work can be a place where people find community to continue their cultural or religious practices, and also where they influence and impact American society, culture(s), and economy.

ESSENTIAL QUESTION

How do people work together to face challenges in their new homes?

AIM

How do we do history detective work with a video to learn about a family?

CONNECTION QUESTION

When was a time you worked really hard on something. What was that like?



STANDARDS	NEW YORK STATE SOCIAL STUDIES FRAMEWORK PRACTICES	A.1 A.2 A.3 A.6 C.2 E.1 E.3 E.4 F.4
	NEW YORK STATE NEXT GENERATION ELA LEARNING STANDARDS	4R1 4R3 4R6 4R7 4R8 4R9 4W1 4W3 4W4 4W5 4SL1
	COMMON CORE LEARNING STANDARDS FOR ENGLISH LANGUAGE ARTS & LITERACY	RI.4.1 RI.4.3 RI.4.6 RI.4.7 RI.4.9 W.4.1 W.4.1.B W.4.3 W.4.3.A SL.4.1 SL.4.1.C SL.4.3

PROCEDURE

Wong family: Chinese immigrants in the garment industry, working together to support their families

1 Gather students together and set the purpose for this work.

You might say: *This is a video of a clothing factory, also called a “garment factory,” in New York City in the 1980s. In this video you’ll hear from a woman named Mrs. Wong who is an immigrant from China. This factory is similar to the factory she worked in for many years in New York City until she stopped working and retired. In this video, you will see what it was like working in that factory and you will hear her say, “Everyone sewed garments like their lives depended on it.” Have you heard that expression before, where someone says they were doing something “like their life depended on it?” If someone said that to you today, what do you think they were trying to tell you?*

- Students might say: “It’s really important,” or “They had to do something or else they would get hurt.”
- Probe their thinking by asking: “*If we saw you doing your homework ‘like your life depended on it,’ what would that look like? How would you be acting?*” When Ms. Wong says this, what do you think she might mean about working in that factory?

NOTE Do **NOT** tell students what might be obvious to you, that they were working furiously in order to make a living and that they were paid for each piece of clothing they completed. You want them to discover this as historians by watching the video and drawing upon what they know about immigrant life and work.



PROCEDURE

2 Watch the Video: 1980s Garment Factory Footage.

BEFORE

Ask students to watch closely and notice at least 3 things about working in that factory that might help us understand what Mrs. Wong meant when she said, “Everyone sewed garments like their lives depended on it.” Ask them to hold a finger near their chest for each detail they notice as they watch.

NOTE This method of engagement allows students to show you that they are watching actively and it allows you to assess who is watching closely without having students distract each other by raising hands..

DURING

Model for students that you too are actively watching the video, noticing details in the video, and raising a finger near your chest for each thing that you are noticing (ie. people working very quickly, people eating lunch at their workstations, people focused on their work and not chatting while working, children in the factory).

AFTER

- Commend the class for watching so closely and noticing signs that people in the factory were working “like their lives depended on it.”
- Turn and Talk: Ask students to talk with their neighbor about what they noticed. As they share, move about the group and listen in on what they share so you can highlight some observations with the whole group.
- Share & record observations in whole-group: Ask students to share observations about the factory workers. Record main observations in left hand column of the chart (below) as students watch.
 - If students make general statements like “they all work so fast’ ask them to also explain what they see that makes them think that (e.g. the man pressing shirts on the iron was moving in fast motion, the woman at the machines was pushing fabric through the machine very quickly...)
- Discuss in whole-group what those observations could mean.
 - “You noticed that they worked so quickly? Why might they work so quickly? They have to sew all day. Why don’t they take their time?”
 - “You noticed that they were sitting at their sewing machines while they ate lunch. Why are they not taking their lunch break somewhere else? Why wouldn’t they take a break, get some fresh air, go outside and buy lunch?”
 - “You noticed that their children were there. Why do you think they brought their children to work with them? Why don’t they get a babysitter or put them in day care?”



PROCEDURE

- Continue the discussion until you arrive at the idea that they sewed like their lives depended upon it because they needed to be productive in order to make as many garments as possible during their time at work. Students may come up with the idea that they got paid for each piece they made.

Watching the Garment Factory Video with Mrs. Wong

Mrs. Wong: “Everyone sewed garments like their lives depended on it.”

<i>WHAT</i> did we notice?	<i>WHAT</i> do we think that tells us? <i>WHAT</i> could this mean?

3 Read and create One-Pager.

- Now show the children the excerpt, “Mrs. Wong and the Union.” Tell them, “This is a section from an article about the Wong family. You are going to read it and collect your ideas by drawing on this sheet. This is called a one-pager. On it you can draw and write the ideas you are learning from the article.” Show an example of a one-pager that you have created or a photo of one like this:
- Send students off to read the excerpt and create their one-pagers. When they are finished, pair students to share their work with each other. Call the students back to the rug and ask, “What stood out for you in Mrs. Wong’s experience?” Guide the discussion to help students see the ways that Mrs. Wong had a network of support and cooperation through her work that helped to balance the difficulty of the work itself and benefitted the Wong family in reaching their goals of creating a better life for their children.



(From the website [Spark Creativity](#)): A one-pager is a way to visually share key ideas and information from what you have learned. When you create a one-pager, you are trying to use both visual symbols and important words to both clearly and concisely share your most important takeaways with someone else.

4 Share more information that historians have learned about the Wong Family.

Introduce the family article, “The Wong Family Story,” and give each student a copy. “Here is an article written about the Wongs’ lives using information gathered from interviews with the Wong family members. It is a secondary source, it was created later by people who were not there when the events happened. We can still listen to interviews and see videos of the Wong family to learn more about them along the way.”

NOTE Use the “The Wong Family Story” and its accompanying activities and sources in the way that works best with your teaching schedule and class. We recommend doing lesson 8 before reading *The Wong Family Story* and following the story with Lesson 9.



Mrs. Wong and the Union

Mrs. Wong and the other garment workers had to work very hard, and they made less than a dollar per dress. They worked long hours each day and many people worked on Saturdays as well. Yet there were lots of things about working at the factory that were good. Mrs. Wong was able to join an organization called a union through her work at the factory. Unions were created to advocate, or speak to the factory owners for the workers. Garment workers who had come many years before Mrs. Wong had fought to make workplaces safer. Many of these women had been immigrants from Eastern Europe or migrants from Puerto Rico. Because of their efforts, the factory owners could not ask the women to work more than a certain number of hours per week and they had to pay them a fair wage for their work. The union helped Mrs. Wong get healthcare for her family and take classes to learn English. They also tried to help the workers and their families have fun. They organized trips to parks outside of the city and planned big cookouts where the families of the garment workers from all over the city met each other. At these cookouts, children described trying foods from different cultures. Mrs. Wong also met other people in the neighborhood who were part of the union and made friends with them and their families.

At the factory, too, Mrs. Wong built friendships with many of the women she worked with. Often these women shared meals together, had their children play together, and helped each other in times of need. Though the work wasn't easy, the hours were long, and the pay was low, Mrs. Wong was able to save some of the money she earned. Because of this, she was able to send her children Yat Ping, Alison, and Kevin to college.