



TITLE

INTERIOR CHINATOWN LESSON PLANS

GRADE LEVEL: 9-12, AP LITERATURE

DISCIPLINE: English

TOPIC: *Interior Chinatown* by Charles Yu

STANDARDS: AP Literature standards: 1A, 1.C, 5.C, 4.D, 4.C, 2.A, 3.A, 3. D, 3.E, 7.A, 7. D, 1.A, 3.B, 3.E, 3.F, 7.B

OBJECTIVES:

- Analyze the function of character in the book *Interior Chinatown* and how the characters relate to identity.
- Analyze the narrative structure and its significance to plot and theme.
- Identify textual evidence and create persuasive arguments.
- Use textual evidence to analyze setting and its relation to theme.
- Discuss the conflation of one "Asian identity" in America when there are really many distinct Asian identities and cultures.
- Analyze *Interior Chinatown's* narrative style and what it reveals about how society sees Asian Americans.
- Analyze different events in the plot and what they reveal about the experiences of Asian Americans.
- Connect events described in the plot to real-world events.
- Contrast multiple plotlines.

ESSENTIAL QUESTIONS:

- How does characterization in *Interior Chinatown* reinforce or contrast with societal roles that are placed on Asian people in America?
- What does characterization in *Interior Chinatown* portray about Asian American assimilation?
- How does the narrative structure influence Yu's message?
- What does this act say about intersectionality in regards to race, class, and gender?
- What does Chinatown, as a setting, represent?
- How does Yu use the lens of the television show to portray Asian American identity and how American society perceives that identity?
- What does Yu say about anti-Asian stereotypes and what are the techniques he uses to do so?
- How does the content of the book relate to real-world historical events?
- What do Wu's story and his parents' stories reveal about difficulties in assimilation or moving away from Chinatown (literally or metaphorically)

MATERIALS NEEDED:

- [Digital student workbook](#) (can be edited/ printed [here](#))
- Book: [Interior Chinatown](#) by Charles Yu

KIT INCLUDES:

- 4 lesson plans, each about one chapter (or "act") of *Interior Chinatown* Chapter summaries
- Teacher instruction outline
- [Student workbook slides](#)
- Glossary of Terms

CLASSROOM HOURS NEEDED:

In total, classroom hours is estimated to be between 3.5 and 6 hours. Lesson plans on Acts 1, 2, and 4 could be taught without reading the entire book.

FINAL ASSESSMENT TYPE:

Thesis (or essay, at the teacher's discretion)

CREDIT AUTHOR AND CONTACT: *Rose Clubok*
rolubok@ediversifyournarrative.com

LAST UPDATE: May 11, 2022

INTERIOR CHINATOWN: ACT ONE LESSON PLAN

CHAPTER SUMMARY

We are introduced to the main character, Willis Wu, who's life dream is to be "Kung Fu Guy." We are also introduced to Wu's mother and father and the parts they have played, and the location of the interior of the Golden Palace Chinese restaurant. Wu describes his father's aging and the decline of his parents' relationship. We also meet Older Brother, the unofficial "Guardian of Chinatown."

INTRODUCTION:

Prior to class, students should have read Act. 1: "Generic Asian Man" starting on page 2 of *Interior Chinatown* by Charles Yu

ACTIVITY 1: CHARACTER ANALYSIS

- Students create a list of characters that have been introduced in this chapter, and the "roles" that the book "assigns" with each character. Do this either as a large group or in small groups (5-10 minutes, student workbook slide 3)

Example list:

Willis Wu (Asian Actor) pg 7

- Generic Asian Man
- Disgraced Son
- Delivery Guy
- Silent Henchman
- Caught between Two Worlds
- Guy who runs in and get kicked in the Face
- Striving Immigrant

- Discussion as a full class (10-20 minutes, student workbook slide 4):
 - What do we learn about the narrator through his description of the other characters? What is the narrator's relationship to his parents? What does he think about the other characters?
 - How does the narrator describe Older Brother? What is the narrator's view of Older Brother?
 - How does the character of Older Brother contrast with or reinforce the other Asian "roles"?
 - How does Yu use character to portray the limits of Asian identity in America?

ACTIVITY 1 CONTINUED

- Discussion as a full class (10-20 minutes, student workbook slide 4):
 - What do we learn about the narrator through his description of the other characters? What is the narrator's relationship to his parents? What does he think about the other characters?
 - How does the narrator describe Older Brother? What is the narrator's view of Older Brother?
 - How does the character of Older Brother contrast with or reinforce the other Asian "roles"?
 - How does Yu use character to portray the limits of Asian identity in America?

ACTIVITY 2: OLDER BROTHER MONTAGE

- As a class, read Older Brother Awesomeness Montage on page 25
- As students read, instruct them to make a list of the ways Older Brother diverts from his expected role (5 minutes, student workbook slide 5)
- Discussion (15-30 minutes, student workbook slide 6):
 - The narrator describes Older Brother as "The mythical Asian American man, the ideal mix of assimilated and authentic" pg 38. What does the narrator think is the "ideal mix of assimilated and authentic?"
 - How is the Older Brother limited by society's view of his identity?
 - The narrator says that "Even for our hero, there were limits to the dream of assimilation, to how far any of you could make your way into the world of "Black and White" What does the character of Older Brother tell the reader about Asian American assimilation?
 - (Student workbook slide 7) On page 25, the narrator describes Older Brother's as "a whole bunch of myths, overlapping, redundant, contradictory. A mosaic of ideas, a thousand and one puzzle pieces that teased you, let you see the edges of something, clusters here and there, just enough to keep hope alive that the next piece would be the one, the answer snapping into place, showing how it all fit together" What are some of the contradictions, redundancies, or mythical elements of Older Brother's character? In what ways are contradictions part of stereotypes/ societal roles?

ACTIVITY 3: NARRATIVE STRUCTURE

- As small groups, have students find references to screenplays in Act 1 (5-10 minutes, student workbook slide 8)
 - Example quotes:
 - "Your relationship having turned into a **pantomime**" pg 19
 - "**Staying in character** avoided all of that, allowed you to prolong your **respective roles** tor just a bit longer" pg 19
 - "**They'd lost the plot** somewhere along the way, their **once great romance spun into a period piece**, into an immigrant family story, and then into a story about two people trying to get by" pg 21

ACTIVITY 3 CONTINUED

- Discussion (10-20 minutes, student workbook slide 9):
 - How does the structure of the narration contribute to the plot so far?
 - How does the point of view (second person) contribute to the narrative style?
 - Yu creates a sort of fictionalized world because it's written like a screenplay, but he reminds the reader that the "play" has real world consequences: "10 minutes late to the audition which equals you don't get to play the part of Background Oriental with a Downtrodden Face" (page 21). What are some other real world consequences of the "play?"

FINAL DISCUSSION: (INTERSECTIONALITY: RACE, CLASS, GENDER) (15-20 MINUTES)

- Student workbook slide 10
 - On the page before the start of the chapter, Yu includes a quote that says: Chinatown "stands in for the ambiguous Asian anywhere." What does this mean? How does the description of characters like roles in a television show relate to this "ambiguity"?
 - What comments does Yu make about class in this Act? How does the characters playing the roles relate to poverty?
 - What does Act 1 say about gender? Many of the roles are gendered, for example there's "Dead Asian Man," but also "Dead Beautiful Maiden Number One." How do the characters' roles differ according to gender?

☐☐☐ INTERIOR CHINATOWN: ACT TWO LESSON PLAN

CHAPTER SUMMARY

We are introduced to a Law and Order-esque cop show called "Black and White," and its leads, Sarah Green and Miles Turner. Wu describes the living spaces above the Golden Palace and his past relationship with his mother. Old Fang dies in the shower, and the Golden Palace restaurant staff have a karaoke night. Act 2 contains the first scene when Generic Asian Man steps into focus.

INTRODUCTION:

Prior to class, students should have read Act. 2: "Int Golden Palace" starting on page 33 of *Interior Chinatown* by Charles Yu

ACTIVITY 1: SETTING

- (10-20 minutes, student workbook slide 12 or 13) Have students choose a quote from Act 2 (especially from pages 46-49) and draw the setting (not the characters) it describes. Have them incorporate their textual evidence into the illustration, and the quote from which they got their textual evidence. Alternatively, have the students choose a concrete object or description on pages 46-49 and draw or write what they think it symbolizes. Use textual evidence to support.
- Gallery walk (5-10 minutes): place the finished drawings around the room and have students walk around to view the drawings
- Discussion (15-20 minutes, student workbook slide 14-15)
Did others draw the setting or symbol how you imagined it?
- How does Yu use descriptive language to create an image of the setting in readers' minds?
- Much of the description of the setting involves descriptions of the histories of the people who live there. How do people/community impact settings? Think of a setting that's important to your life. How do the people there influence your memory of that place?
- On page 58, the narrator says: "The idea was that you came here, your parents and their parents and their parents, and you always seem to have just arrived and yet never seem to have actually arrived. You're here, supposedly, in a new land full of opportunity, but somehow have gotten trapped in a pretend version of the old country." What does Chinatown represent? How does Yu relate it to the immigrant experience?
- On page 47, the narrator says, "You never really leave the Golden Palace, even in your dreams." Why does Willis Wu feel "trapped"?

ACTIVITY 2: ASIAN IDENTITY

(10-20
MINUTES,
STUDENT
WORKBOOK
SLIDE 16-17)

As a class or individually, read page 39 from "And there's just something about...." What is the narrator saying about the exclusion of Asian people in the show "Black and White?" What does the narrator say is the reason for the exclusion? What does it say about real life experiences of Asian Americans?

On page 60, the narrator's friends complain that, "They the television writers want Chinese punching and Korean kicks. They don't know what they want. They want cool Asian shit... If only you could figure out what that means." How is this similar to the construction of a "Generic Asian Man" character? What do the television writers really want?

**ACTIVITY 3:
ARGUMENTATIVE
PARAGRAPH**
(STUDENT
WORKBOOK
SLIDE 18)

Instruct students (or as a class) read page 72, and in groups write an argumentative paragraph answering these questions (take 10-20 minutes to write, student workbook slide 17):

The structure of the narrative as a script at times obscures what really occurs. So, what do you think happened? Use textual evidence to support your argument.
What is the significance of Willis's action? How does it change the course of the plot?

☰ **INTERIOR CHINATOWN: ACT THREE LESSON PLAN**

CHAPTER SUMMARY

The plot of the cop show progresses as Wu climbs up the ladder to different roles. He meets Detective Lee, who seems to be helping his character stay on the show, but just as he's about to progress to the next scene his character dies.

INTRODUCTION:

Prior to class, students should have read Act. 3: "Ethnic Recurring" starting on page 79 of *Interior Chinatown* by Charles Yu

**ACTIVITY 1:
NARRATIVE
STYLE
DISCUSSION**

(15-30 MINUTES,
STUDENT
WORKBOOK
SLIDES 20-22)

- As a class or individually, have students read the Evering Goffman epigraph on page 31, and then discuss the following questions
 - How does Yu make it unclear about what is the script and what is reality?
 - In this chapter, Wu is now actively playing a part in the show *Black and White*. How does the script warp the reality of Chinatown?
 - How do the stereotypes and preconceived notions about Chinatown and the people who live there influence the plot of the script of *Black and White*?
Find examples of how something that is true gets turned into something stereotypical and false. (For example, Older Brother really did leave Chinatown, but the cops falsely believe that he has run away and is involved in some sort of money laundering scheme).
 - How does Wu push back at false or twisted claims? Find examples of Wu contradicting the cops.

ACTIVITY 2: JIGSAW

Break students into groups and have each read sections and discuss the associated questions for about 15 minutes. Alternatively, choose a passage and discuss the questions as a whole class.

Jigsaw questions:

• **Group 1:** (student workbook slide 23)

- Read page 91 from "Old Asian Man looks at you" to "Turner breaks the silence."
- Why is Old Asian Man not okay?
- What does it say about the looks about the struggles with second generation assimilation? What does it say about the status of Asian Americans in American popular imagination?

• **Group 2:** (student workbook slide 24)

- Read page 91-92 from "Why does he mean "It's a form of protection"?"
- What does he mean?" to "break up your grammar a bit more."
- What are the results of this kind of "protection"?
- Read page 94 from " There we go." to "Green sheepish." Contrast both passages. How does playing this role provide both a twisted form of "safety" and constant othering?

• **Group 3:** (student workbook slide 25)

- Read page 95 from the beginning of the page to Turner's line on page 97. How does Turner's place in American society compare with Wu's? How does Wu see Turner's position in American society? How does Turner see Wu's position in American society?
- According to Harvard Law, "Since its introduction in popular media more than a half century ago, the term "model minority" has often been used to refer to a minority group perceived as particularly successful, especially in a manner that contrasts with other minority groups." How does this conversation portray the pitfalls of the Model Minority Myth?

Have the groups come back together and share what they discussed. What do each of these sections reveal about aspects of Asian American experiences? (15-20 minutes)

INTERIOR CHINATOWN: ACT FOUR LESSON PLAN

CHAPTER SUMMARY

This chapter covers Willis Wu's parents' histories and his own beginning of a relationship.

... **CREDIT AUTHOR** *Rose Clubok*
AND CONTACT: rolubok@ediversifyournarrative.com

LAST
UPDATE: May 11, 2022



INTRODUCTION:

Prior to class, students should have read Act. 4: "Striving Immigrant" starting on page 120 of *Interior Chinatown* by Charles Yu

Note: this chapter does contain some slurs, so make sure that students know not to read them aloud and to contain a trigger warning before introducing the chapter.

ACTIVITY 1: HISTORICAL TIMELINE (STUDENT WORKBOOK SLIDES 27-28)

As a class, identify historical events described in the chapter (5-10 minutes)

- Split students into groups and instruct each group to research one event. (15-20 minutes) Have them look for and record:
 - The time period and date
 - Related events
 - Effects on Asian people and Asian American people
 - Create a timeline of actual historical events that the book references. Incorporate the information found through the research portion. This can be done on a powerpoint, on a chalkboard, or on posters. (10-15 minutes)
- Discussion (10-15 minutes):
 - What does this montage of his parents' life reveal about Wu's life, his family, and immigrant and Asian American experiences?
 - What does it reveal about Asian American assimilation or identity?

ACTIVITY 2: THESIS

- Discussion: Contrast Wu and his parent's "romance story" and personal lives. How does the story of Wu's romance follow or deviate from his parent's story? (5 minutes, student workbook slide 29)

In partners, have students spend 15 minutes creating a thesis statement that conveys a defensible claim about this question: What do Wu's story and his parents' stories reveal about difficulties in assimilation or moving away from Chinatown (literally or metaphorically) (student workbook slide 30).