

LESSON:
Anna May Wong
Creator: The Asian American Education Project

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GRADE	2
OVERVIEW	<p>According to California History/Social Studies Standards, students in the second grade study “the lives of actual people who make a difference in their everyday lives and learn the stories of extraordinary people from history whose achievements have touched them, directly or indirectly.” In practice, the people studied tend to be from the dominant classes. People of color and/or people from marginalized communities are often overlooked. As such, the narrative of Asian Americans are excluded. Asian American individuals have made significant contributions and lasting impacts. Anna May Wong, for example, was a trailblazer in the entertainment industry; she continues to inspire Asian Americans today. Her story, as well as many others, deserve to be heard.</p> <p>This lesson addresses the following standards:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● 2.5: Students understand the importance of individual action and character and explain how heroes from long ago and the recent past have made a difference in others’ lives.
OBJECTIVES	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Identify the contributions of Anna May Wong ● Explain how Anna May Wong impacted the entertainment industry
LESSON IMPLEMENTATION	<p>This lesson can be completed in one instructional session or over a period of 1-2 weeks. Here are options for lesson implementation:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● One instructional session: Complete Activity 2 plus Discussion Questions. ● Two instructional sessions: Complete Activity 2 plus Discussion Questions and One option from Activity 4. ● One week: Complete Activity 1, Activity 2 plus Discussion Questions, One option from Activity 3, One option from Activity 4, and One extension activity

ESSAY (SLIDES 2-19)

Early Childhood



Anna May Wong was born in 1905. She was born in the Los Angeles Chinatown area.

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Early Childhood



Her family owned a laundry business. That's where she and her siblings worked growing up.

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Early Childhood



Wong and her siblings attend a school with mostly white students. They were bullied because of their race. Their parents switched them to a Chinese School nearby.

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Early Childhood



As a young girl, Wong found joy in movies. Since she was nine years old, she dreamed of becoming a movie star. She would even skip school to visit movie sets and to watch films.

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American Film Career



In 1919, Wong turned 14 years old. She got her first movie role as an extra. She was in "The Red Lantern."

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American Film Career



She continued to chase after her Hollywood dreams. She took whatever roles she could get. She **auditioned** for many parts.

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American Film Career



She played a lead character in "The Toll of the Sea." She did this when she was seventeen years old. This role brought more attention to her.

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Challenges in Hollywood



But she still had a hard time getting leading roles. She often played supporting roles.

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Challenges in Hollywood



These roles tended to **stereotype** Asians as tragic or evil characters. She said, "I was so tired of the parts I had to play."

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Anna May Wong was born in 1905. She was born in the Los Angeles Chinatown area.

Her family owned a laundry business. That's where she and her siblings worked growing up.

Wong and her siblings attended a school with mostly white students. They were bullied because of their **race**. Their parents switched them to a Chinese school nearby.

As a young girl, Wong found joy in movies. Since she was nine years old, she dreamed of becoming a movie star. She would even skip school to visit movie sets and to watch films.

In 1919, Wong turned fourteen years old. She got her first movie role as an **extra**. She was in "The Red Lantern."

She continued to chase after her Hollywood dreams. She took whatever roles she could get. She **auditioned** for many parts.

She played a lead character in "The Toll of the Sea." She did this when she was seventeen years old.

This role brought more attention to her. But she still had a hard time getting leading roles. She often played supporting roles.

These roles tended to **stereotype** Asians as tragic or evil characters. She said, "I was so tired of the parts I had to play."

So, she left Hollywood in 1928. She went to work in Europe. Europeans were more open to Asian American movie stars.

In the 1930s, Hollywood asked her to return. She performed in over 50 movies, television shows, and plays.

She even started her own film **production** company. The company was called Anna May Wong Productions.

Wong made films about her Chinese culture. She protested against **discrimination**. She fought for better **representation**.

She wanted to see more Asian Americans in movies. She wanted Asian American actors to get better roles.

Departure from Hollywood



So, she left Hollywood in 1928. She went to work in Europe. Europeans were more open to Asian American movie stars than filmmakers.

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Return to Hollywood

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Anna May Wong's Impact



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Anna May Wong's Impact



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Anna May Wong's Legacy



She died in 1961. She was 56 years old.

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Anna May Wong's Legacy



She was the first Asian American movie star in Hollywood. She paved the way for future Asian American entertainers.

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Anna May Wong's Legacy



In 2022, the United States Mint honored Anna May Wong's **legacy**. They featured her on the American quarter.

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VOCABULARY (SLIDES 19-30)

Vocabulary

- ✦ **Audition:** a short performance to test the talent or skills of someone, like a musician, actor, or dancer
- ✦ **Discrimination:** treating some people worse than others without any fair or proper reason
- ✦ **Entertainer:** someone who provides amusement or performs for others
- ✦ **Extra:** a background actor who appears in non speaking roles
- ✦ **Legacy:** long-lasting impact

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- **Entertainer:** someone who provides amusement or performs for others
- **Extra:** a background actor who appears in non speaking roles
- **Legacy:** long-lasting impact
- **Mint:** a place where the coins and paper money of a country are made
- **Production:** the making or creating of something
- **Race:** any one of the groups that humans are often divided into based on physical traits regarded as common among people of shared ancestry
- **Representation:** the inclusion of diversity in media
- **Stereotype:** a widely held but fixed and oversimplified image or idea of a particular type of person or thing

Vocabulary

Mint: a place where the coins and paper money of a country are made



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Vocabulary

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Vocabulary

Legacy: long-lasting impact



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Vocabulary

Representation: the inclusion of diversity in media



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Vocabulary

Stereotype: a widely held but fixed and oversimplified image or idea of a particular type of person or thing



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DISCUSSION QUESTIONS (SLIDES 31-35)

Discussion Question:

Who is Anna May Wong? Why is she famous?

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Discussion Question:

What are some of the challenges Anna May Wong faced? How did she overcome them?

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Discussion Question:

How did Anna May Wong make a difference in the entertainment industry?

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- Who is Anna May Wong? Why is she famous?
- What are some of the challenges Anna May Wong faced? How did she overcome them?
- How did Anna May Wong make a difference in the entertainment industry?
- How does Anna May Wong inspire others? How does she inspire you?
- Why is it important to learn about Anna May Wong? Why is her work and legacy important?

Discussion Question:

How does Anna May Wong inspire others? How does she inspire you?

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Discussion Question:

Why is it important to learn about Anna May Wong? Why is her work and legacy important?

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(Suggested Time: 30 minutes)

**ACTIVITY 1:
ANTICIPATORY SET
(SLIDES 36-40)**

Introduction Activity



Write a list of people who have made a difference in your lives or the lives of others. With your selected partner:

- Select one person on your list and share who that person is and how that person inspired you
- Compare the two people you both have shared and identify their similarities

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Discussion Question:

What qualities or characteristics make a person inspirational?

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Introduction Activity



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Introduction Activity



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(Suggested Time: 10 minutes)

Have students write a list of people they know who have made a difference in their lives or the lives of others.

- Have them select a partner.
- Have each partner select one person on their list and share who that person is how that person inspired them.
- Have each pair compare the two people they shared and identify similarities between the two people.
- Facilitate a discussion with the whole group by asking, “What qualities or characteristics make a person inspirational?”

Have students identify Asian/Asian American entertainers and/or Asian/Asian American movies and shows. Record student responses on chart paper. Tell students that there’s always a need for more representation in the media.

Show students a picture of Anna May Wong.

- Ask if any students know who she is.
- Tell students that Anna May Wong was the first Asian American movie star and that she paved the way for all the Asian/Asian American entertainers mentioned above.
- Tell students that Anna May Wong inspired others just like they were inspired by the people they mentioned on their list.

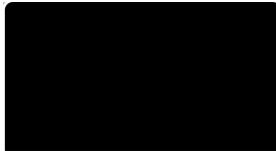
Say the following to students: “Decades ago, there weren’t many Asian American entertainers and that in some cases, white actors and actresses played Asian/Asian American roles. When Asian/Asian American entertainers were casted in movies and shows, they were often denied the leading roles. They played supporting roles or even villain roles. Anna May Wong is a big reason for why we see movies where Asian Americans are the heroes. Let’s learn more about Anna May Wong and how she made a difference.”

**ACTIVITY 2:
INSTRUCTIONAL
ACTIVITY
(SLIDES 41-48)**



Discussion Question:

What more did you learn about Anna May Wong from the video?



Discussion Question:

Why is Anna May Wong being recognized on the U.S. quarter?

Discussion Question:

What more did you learn about Anna May Wong from this video?

Discussion Question:

What are other ways we can honor Anna May Wong's legacy?

Instructional Activity



(Suggested Time: 40 minutes)

Read aloud [Shining Star: The Anna May Wong Story](#) by Paula Yoo. Ask students, “What more did you learn about Anna May Wong from this book?”

OPTION: Show students the video entitled, “[Anna May Wong: The First Asian American Movie Star.](#)” Facilitate a discussion about the video by asking: “What more did you learn about Anna May Wong from the video?” (Note that the video does have footage of Wong wearing scanty clothes.)

Show students the video entitled, “[Actress Anna May Wong honored on quarter.](#)” Facilitate a discussion by asking the following questions:

- “Why is Anna May Wong being recognized on the U.S. quarter?”
- “What more did you learn about Anna May Wong from this video?”
- “What are other ways we can honor Anna May Wong’s legacy?”

Have students make a T-chart listing Anna May Wong’s struggles in the left column and how she overcame those struggles in the right column:

Anna May Wong’s Struggles:	How Anna May Wong Overcame Her Struggles:

**ACTIVITY 3:
APPLICATION/
ENGAGEMENT/
INQUIRY ACTIVITY
(SLIDES 49-56)**

Teachers can choose one or more of the following options:

OPTION 1: Have students work in small groups to create a visual timeline of Anna May Wong’s life using ten images from the internet.

Application Activity: Option 1

In your small group, create and present a visual timeline of Anna May Wong's life using ten images from the internet. Make sure to caption and place the photos in chronological order.



Discussion Question:

What are other ways we can honor Anna May Wong's legacy?

Application Activity: Option 2

Corner 1 Anna May Wong broke barriers for more positive Asian American roles in entertainment.	Corner 2 Anna May Wong was a pioneer, becoming the first Asian American movie star.
Corner 3 Anna May Wong starred in more than 50 movies despite the stereotyping and discrimination she faced.	Corner 4 Anna May Wong became the first Asian American woman on U.S. currency.

Discussion Question:

Which corner represents Anna May Wong's greatest contribution?

Discussion Question:

Which corner or contribution would be ranked last among Anna May Wong's contributions?

Discussion Question:

Which corner or contribution are you most inspired by?

Application Activity: Option 2



Write a paragraph using this sentence frame:
 "Anna May Wong contributed to American history by _____.
 The effects of her contribution are _____."

(Suggested Time per Option: 30-45 minutes)

- Have students place the pictures in chronological order and caption each picture.
- Have students highlight the contributions.
- Have each group present their timeline to the class.
- Have them give reasons to why they chose those ten images.
- Facilitate a class discussion by asking the following questions: "What are similarities in all the timelines? What are differences between the timelines?"
- Have students agree on Anna May Wong's top three contributions based on their timelines.

OPTION 2: Have students do a "Four Corners" activity where they reflect on the legacy of Anna May Wong. In each corner, post a sign with the following:

- Corner 1: "Anna May Wong broke barriers for more positive Asian American roles in entertainment."
- Corner 2: "Anna May Wong was a pioneer, becoming the first Asian American movie star."
- Corner 3: "Anna May Wong starred in more than 50 movies despite the stereotyping and discrimination she faced."
- Corner 4: "Anna May Wong became the first Asian American woman on U.S. currency."

Ask the following questions and have students go to the corner that best reflects their responses; give each group about 3-5 minutes to discuss why they chose that corner and then discuss each question as a whole group:

- Which corner represents Anna May Wong's greatest contribution?
- Which corner or contribution would be ranked last among Anna May Wong's contributions?
- Which corner or contribution are you most inspired by?

Have students write a paragraph using this sentence frame: "Anna May Wong contributed to American history by _____. The effects of her contribution are _____."

**ACTIVITY 4:
ASSESSMENT/
WRITING ACTIVITY
(SLIDES 57-60)**

- Teachers can choose one or more of the following options:
- OPTION 1:** Have students create and present a creative biography (i.e., storybook, poster, flipbook, etc.) about Anna May Wong that includes the following:
- At least three facts about her life
 - At least two facts about her accomplishments or contributions.

Writing Activity: Option 1



Create and present a creative biography about Anna May Wong that includes the following:

- At least three facts about her life
- At least two facts about her accomplishments or contributions
- At least one way her work has affected our lives today

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Writing Activity: Option 2



Choose three important events or challenges in Anna May Wong's life. Write a diary entry from Anna May Wong's perspective. Each diary entry should include:

- A description of what is going on
- What Anna May Wong may be feeling or thinking

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Writing Activity: Option 3



It is 1960, and you are a journalist for a local newspaper. You have the chance to interview Anna May Wong. But, you only have ten minutes to talk to her.

- Write a list of at least five questions you would like to ask Anna May Wong
- Write a paragraph introducing yourself to Anna May Wong
- Write a paragraph explaining why readers should know about Anna May Wong

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(Suggested Time per Option: 45 minutes)

- At least one way her work has affected our lives today.

OPTION 2: Have students choose three important events or challenges in Anna May Wong's life (i.e., her early life, her being bullied at school, her early Hollywood career, her career in Europe, her return to the United States, etc.). Have students write a diary entry from Anna May Wong's perspective; each diary entry should include a description of what is going on and what Anna May Wong may be feeling or thinking.

OPTION 3: Present the following scenario to students: "It is 1960, and you are a journalist for a local newspaper. You have the chance to interview Anna May Wong. But, you only have ten minutes to talk to her."

- Have students write a list of at least five questions they would ask Anna May Wong.
- Have students write a paragraph introducing themselves to Anna May Wong. (Tell them that a good journalist would research their subject ahead of time and mention some facts in their introduction.)
- Have students write a paragraph explaining why their readers should know about Anna May Wong.

EXTENSION ACTIVITIES

Extension Activities:



Write a paragraph about the process and about the impact of having Anna May Wong's image on U.S. quarters. Write them a thank you note to the U.S. Mint explaining why Anna May Wong was a good choice.

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Extension Activities:

Research other women that have been on the U.S. Quarter. Who would you recommend for future quarters?



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Discussion Question:

Why is featuring Anna May Wong on the quarter a good way to honor her legacy? What are other ways to honor her?

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Extension Activities:



Imagine that Anna May Wong was still alive when she learned she'd be on the U.S. Quarter. Write a diary entry from her perspective describing her thoughts and feelings.

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- Have students learn more about the [U.S. Mint](#). Have students read the article, "[Anna May Wong is the First Asian American Woman on US Currency](#)." Have students write a paragraph about the process and about the impact of having Anna May Wong's image on U.S. quarters. Have students collect Anna May Wong quarters. Have them write a thank you note to the U.S. Mint explaining why Anna May Wong was a good choice for the U.S. quarter. (Option: Have students research other women and make recommendations for future quarters.)
- Have students discuss why featuring Anna May Wong on the quarter is a good way to honor her legacy. Have students think of other ways to honor her (i.e., art, mural, museum exhibition, building dedication, award, etc.).
- Have students imagine that Anna May Wong was still alive when she learned she'd be on the U.S. Quarter. Have students write a diary entry from her perspective describing her thoughts and feelings.
- Have students research and/or watch one of [Anna May Wong's movies](#). Have students create a movie poster about the film including a short summary of Anna May Wong's character in the film.

<p>Extension Activities:</p>  <p>(Suggested Time per Option: 30-60 minutes)</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Tell students that Anna May Wong was also known for being a fashion icon and that she would be considered an “influencer” today. Have students do a google search of Anna May Wong and design an Instagram post and caption and hashtags that she would use if she were alive today.
<p>FURTHER RESOURCES FROM THE ASIAN AMERICAN EDUCATION PROJECT</p> <p>[Note: These lessons will enhance the teacher’s knowledge. They are not designed for first graders.]</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● The Asian American Education Project lesson entitled, “Chinese Exclusion Act and the Exclusion of Asians, Pacific Islanders and Women”: https://asianamericanedu.org/chinese-exclusion-act-exclusion-of-asians.html ● The Asian American Education Project lesson entitled, “APIDAs on the Big Screen”: https://archive.advancingjustice-la.org/what-we-do/curriculum-lesson-plans/asian-americans-k-12-education-curriculum/episode-3-lesson-6 ● The Asian American Education Project lesson entitled, “Generation Rising, APIDAs Contribute”: https://archive.advancingjustice-la.org/what-we-do/curriculum-lesson-plans/asian-americans-k-12-education-curriculum/episode-4-lesson-4