



Sun Wing Wo general store and herb shop: A Safe Space

Grades 1-3

The Sun Wing Wo store served the Chinese American community in many ways and was much more than a general store. One of the very important ways was as a safe space, a place where the Chinese could go and feel accepted and safe from the racism and discrimination they faced from the outside world.



1. What made the Sun Wing Wo store a safe space for Chinese in the United States?

2. Where do you consider a safe space? Why is this a safe space for you?

3. Do you think safe spaces are needed for people now? Why or why not?

4. What can you do to make a space safe for other people?

5. Create a picture of your safe space on a separate sheet of paper. Write a story about your safe space.

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The purpose of this exercise is to have students think critically about the environment people create for them and that they create for other people, the importance of space and the multi-faceted functions of a space, through learning about the history of Chinese Americans and their experiences with the specific space of the Sun Wing Wo store.

This exercise can also be used as an enhancement for class discussions on racism and discrimination and how people cope with and/or escape these.

It is important here that safe and safety be understood on multiple levels, being physically secure and out of harms way, and also on the level of feeling personal acceptance and liberty.

The Sun Wing Wo Background Information should be gone over in class to provide historical context and pertinent information about Chinese American experiences before completing this exercise. It is also a good idea to discuss and define racism and discrimination in class pre-exercise, and how this affects one's ability to feel safe. These and other terms are defined in the Sun Wing Wo Glossary.

Students should complete this exercise individually then share with each other in small groups. The teacher can then lead the entire class in comparing answers.

For more information on Chinese American history and experience, please refer to the bibliography provided, and our "Chinese Americans in Los Angeles: A Timeline," posted on our website www.camla.org, under the Education Program link.

Possible answers for the following question:

1. What made the Sun Wing Wo store a safe space for Chinese in the United States?

It was a space where the Chinese were accepted. People spoke each other's language, and had some common cultural experiences. The Sun Wing Wo provided a space where people were unified and bonded by their shared experiences as Chinese newcomers in the United States. The Store provided the company of other Chinese who could empathize with and support each other through the hardships of discrimination.