

2017 NEH Summer Institute: Immigrant Experience in California through Literature and Theater

Title: In search of a Golden Mountain, one might find a Golden Cage

Amount of time needed for Lesson Plan: One to three days

Objective: To have students identify, annotate and analyze the universal human struggle found in two distinct genres of immigrant literature---the poetry of Angel Island Chinese immigrants and the 'musical-poetic form' of contemporary Mexican Corridos.

Materials: Excerpts from *Island: Poetry and History of Chinese Immigrants on Angel Island (2014)* by Judy Yung and the English translation *La Jaula de Oro* by Los Tigres del Norte  
Additional websites that can be used are found within the procedure list.

Procedure:

1. Begin the lesson asking the students to briefly and independently journal/free-write on what thoughts/ideas/sensations/memories/images come to mind when one hears the word "CAGE".
2. Discuss students answers, some may know an ample amount, while others may not be so quick to participate, as it can be a perplexing word. Share thoughts and ideas, and questions.
3. As per one's own teaching style, present to the students some background information regarding the Angel Island Immigration Station, as well as the poems found carved into the walls of the dormitories. In addition to the resources found in *Island*, one may utilize this website: <https://aiisf.org/>
4. Put special emphasis on the structure of the poems found at Angel Island. For example: "Most of the poems are written in the styles of classical Chinese poetry which originated during the T'ang Dynasty period - the same period that gave root to many of the widely known Chinese poets such as Li Bai (or Li Po), Tu Fu, and Wang Wei. The main formats are five characters per line (wu-yan-jue-ju or wu-yan-li-shi) or seven characters per line (qi-yan-jue-ju or qi-yan-li-shi), with four or eight lines in most poems." As referenced from this website:  
<http://www.kqed.org/w/pacificlink/history/angelisland/poetry/>
5. Read three poems (your choice) selected from *Island* as well as the poem found in Figure 1. Students should annotate the poems as needed, focusing on syntax and analysis of themes.
6. Ask--what does the word "cage" mean in this final poem, and why? Discuss, analyze, reflect.
7. Introduce some background information on Mexican corridos, using this website as a starting point by which to shape your discussion: [http://artsedge.kennedycenter.org/~media/ArtsEdge/LessonPrintables/grade-9-12/corridos\\_about\\_mex\\_rev\\_what\\_is\\_a\\_corrido.ashx](http://artsedge.kennedycenter.org/~media/ArtsEdge/LessonPrintables/grade-9-12/corridos_about_mex_rev_what_is_a_corrido.ashx)  
As was done with the poems from Angel Island, have the students pay special attention to the particular structure of the corrido, and how and why it was written in such a specific format. For example: "36 lines (6 stanzas of 6 lines each or 9 stanzas of 4 lines each)".
8. Analyze two corridos, one of them being *La Jaula de Oro* by Los Tigres del Norte, use Figure 2.
9. Annotate the songs, analyze the structure, the themes, and with all the poems in front of them, ask the students to make connections between the two styles and genres of writing. How are these two types of literature the same? How are they different? How and why is the term "cage" used? How does the term "cage" connect or disconnect from the term "human"? Why?  
Discuss, relate, reflect, and repeat as needed.

Figure 1. Poem carved on wall used in Step 5. (picture taken at Angel Island Immigration Station)

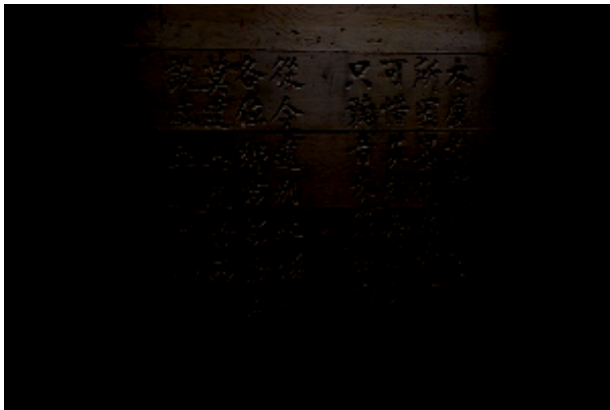


Photo by Amy Grenier

Figure 1. English translation

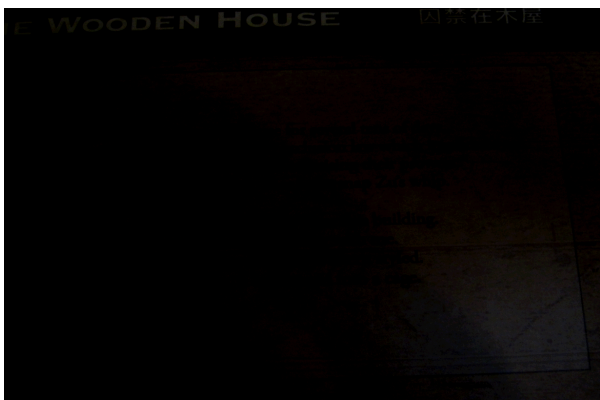


Figure 2—lyrics and translation found at: <http://lyricstranslate.com/en/la-jaula-de-oro-golden-cage.html>  
La Jaula de Oro por Los Tigres del Norte c. 1984 (Spanish/original version)

Aquí estoy establecido  
en los Estados Unidos.  
Diez años pasaron ya  
en que cruce de mojado.  
Papeles no he arreglado,  
sigo siendo un ilegal.

Tengo mi esposa y mis hijos  
que me los traje muy chicos  
y se han olvidado ya  
de mi México querido  
del que yo nunca me olvido  
y no puedo regresar.

De que me sirve el dinero,  
si estoy como prisionero,  
dentro de esta gran nación,  
cuando me acuerdo hasta lloro,  
aunque la jaula sea de oro,  
no deja de ser prisión.

«Y escuchame hijo,  
¿te gustaría que regresáramos a vivir México?»  
Whatcha talkin' about Dad?  
I don't wanna go back to Mexico,  
no way Dad.

Mis hijos no hablan conmigo  
otro idioma han aprendido  
y olvidado el español.  
Piensan como americanos  
niegan que son mexicanos,  
aunque tengan mi color.

De mi trabajo a mi casa,  
no se lo que me pasa.  
Que aunque soy hombre de hogar,  
casi no salgo a la calle,  
pues tengo miedo que me hallen  
y me pueden deportar.

De que me sirve el dinero  
si estoy como prisionero  
dentro de esta gran nación.  
Cuando me acuerdo hasta lloro,  
aunque la jaula sea de oro,  
no deja de ser prisión.

The Golden Cage Written and performed by Los Tigres del Norte c. (English Translation)

I'm established here  
In the United States  
Ten years have passed  
Since I crossed as a wetback  
With no proper documents  
I'm still an illegal

I have my wife and children  
Whom I brought when they were young  
And they've already forgotten  
My beloved Mexico  
Which I can never forget

And cannot return to

What's money good for  
If I live like a prisoner  
In this great nation  
When I'm reminded of this, I cry  
Although this cage is made of gold  
It's still a prison

Listen son,  
Would you like to go back and live in Mexico?  
"What are you talking about dad?  
I don't want to go back to Mexico,  
No way dad."

My kids don't speak to me  
They've learned another language  
And they've forgotten Spanish  
They think like Americans  
They deny that they're Mexicans  
Though they have my skin color

From work to my house  
I don't know what's going on with me  
Although I'm the head of the household  
I almost never go out  
Because I'm afraid that they'll catch me  
And deport me

What's money good for  
If I live like a prisoner  
In this great nation  
When I'm reminded of this, I cry  
Although this cage is made of gold  
It's still a prison

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