Teaching history from
DIVERSE PERSPECTIVES

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Asian American Voices for Education

5th Grade Lesson Plan on
America at the Turn of the Century: Immigration, Labor and Resistance among Filipino Nurses

Georgia Social Studies Standards

SS5H1 Describe how life changed in America at the turn of the century.

c. Explain how William McKinley and Theodore Roosevelt expanded America's role in the world; include the Spanish-American War.
d. Describe the reasons people immigrated to the United States, from where they emigrated, and where they settled.

Background Information

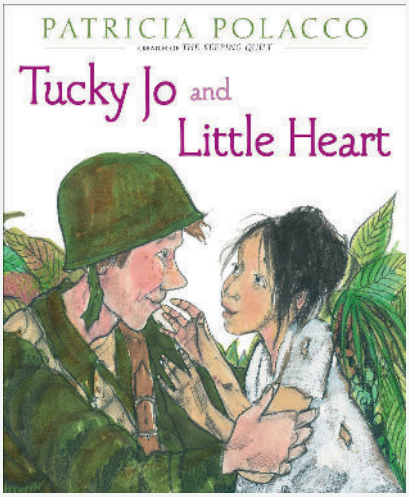
This lesson explores the long-term human legacies of U.S. imperialism at the turn of the century by connecting the Spanish-American War to subsequent waves of Filipino immigration, labor and activism in the United States.



Spanish-American War and U.S. Colonization of the Philippines

The Filipino American community is the third-largest Asian American group with a population of over 4.2 million. Although Filipinos in North America were first documented in the 16th century, mass migration did not begin until the United States seized control of the Philippines after the Spanish-American War of 1898.

Prior to becoming a U.S. colony, the Philippines had been a Spanish colony for more than 300 years. When the U.S. came to the Philippines in 1898, Filipinos had already begun an anti-colonial revolution against Spain. After the war, the United States ignored the Filipino people's desire for independence and colonized the Philippines.



Four decades of U.S. colonial rule Americanized the Philippines, transforming its language, education, political system, and economy according to U.S. customs. Between 1903 and 1939, many young Filipinos went to the U.S. to study. As poverty increased under colonial rule, more Filipinos came to the U.S. for work. Unlike other Asian groups who were banned by anti-Asian immigration laws in the early 1900s, Filipinos could still travel to and work in the U.S. as U.S. nationals.



The History of Filipino Nurses

The US colonial administration established Western-style nursing schools in the Philippines to implement U.S. medical standards. Because these nurses were trained in English and educated using U.S. curricula, they were highly compatible with the U.S. healthcare system.
Mass migration began mid-century and was expanded by the Immigration and Nationality Act of 1965, which prioritized skilled healthcare employment to meet severe nursing shortages in U.S. hospitals. The labor demand in the United States led to the rise of a labor export system in the Philippines in the 1970s, with the overwhelming majority of nurses trained there ultimately working abroad. By the 1980s, almost 80% of foreign-trained nurses in the U.S. were from the Philippines.

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The COVID-19 Connection: This legacy of working on the medical frontlines exacted a devastating toll during the COVID-19 pandemic. While registered nurses of Filipino descent make up only about 4% of the registered nurse workforce in the United States, they accounted for a disproportionate 25% to 31.5% of all COVID-19 related deaths among registered nurses nationwide. This was primarily because they were vastly overrepresented in high-risk bedside placements, acute intensive care units (ICUs), and emergency settings.

Complete Article and Lesson Plan

Photo Credit:
(Top to Bottom, Left to Right)

1. Hamilton, Grant E. "The Filipino's First Bath," in Judge Magazine, 36, no. 921 (June 10, 1899). Via Wikimedia Commons
2. Polacco, Patricia. Tucky Jo and Little Heart. New York: Simon & Schuster Books for Young Readers, 2015.
3. Photo of Nursing class of 1929, St. Paul's Hospital, Intramuros, Manila, Philippines: Misses Yadao, Fink, Andaya, Abuan, Peralta and Tapaoan. Photo courtesy of University of Southern California Libraries/J. Tewell.

For more information, see Choy, Catherine Ceniza. Empire of Care: Nursing and Migration in Filipino American History (Durham: Duke University Press, 2003).

Contact us at info@aaved.org

History is the context of "**now**", "**why**", and "**how**".

Teach interwoven history.



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