

BIG STORIES, LITTLE INDIA

<http://www.savac.net/big-stories-little-india/>

Introduction

Big Stories, Little India teaches students about the history and people of the South Asian community of Little India, which sits in east Toronto. The project is also meant to show that neighborhoods, like people themselves, mature, adapt and change. Neighborhoods evolve, often spurred by outside influences. This also applies to the secondary subject of pop culture maturing, as shaped by foreign ideas, traditions and movements. In this world, change is the rule.

Title: The Evolution of Immigrant Communities in Canada

Subject: Media Studies, Geography, History, Political Science, Art History

Grades: 9-12

Time Required: 375 minutes

Overview: Students will begin by studying a history of Little India in Toronto, and go on to examine other neighbourhoods in the city. They will also explore the relationship between tradition, ritual and culture, discussing personal family histories.

Purpose: To highlight civic histories and personal histories, through research, discussions and images.

	Subject / Strand	Expectations
1.3	Language – Oral Communication	· demonstrate an understanding of the information and ideas in increasingly complex oral texts in a variety of ways
1.6	Language – Oral Communication	· extend understanding of oral texts, including increasingly complex texts, by connecting, comparing, and contrasting the ideas and information in them to their own knowledge, experience, and insights; to other texts, including print and visual texts; and to the world around them
2.2	Language – Writing	· establish a distinctive voice in their writing appropriate to the subject and audience
2.5	Language – Writing	· identify their point of view and other possible points of view, evaluate other points of view, and find ways to acknowledge other points of view, if appropriate
1.2	Language – Media Literacy	· interpret increasingly complex or difficult media texts, using overt and implied messages as evidence for their interpretations
1.4	Language – Media Literacy	· demonstrate understanding that different media texts reflect different points of view
3.4	Language – Media Literacy	· produce a variety of media texts of some technical complexity for specific purposes and audiences, using appropriate forms, conventions, and techniques
		· to engage in a formal debate
		· produce a cogent argument based on fact and logic, and formulate counter-arguments to challenge opposing viewpoints
		· to see several sides on an argument

<http://www.savac.net/big-stories-little-india/>

Lesson 1: Understanding The Creation of an Immigrant Community in Canada

Materials:

- LCD Projector/TV
- Computer connected to the Internet

1. Ask the class: *Where is Little India in Toronto?* If students know, ask them to describe the area, particularly if the student or his/her family has lived there. If they don't know, have them speculate: Ask them: *What do you think Little India is? Who lives there? What kinds of businesses operate there?*

2. If students don't know where Little India is, then project a map of Toronto on screen and show them the Gerrard/Coxwell area of east Toronto. Ask: *Do you know the origins of Little India? When and how it started?* Mostly likely students won't know, so have them speculate on the area's origins.

3. Do a read aloud of the introductory note, "Demystifying Gerrard Street" by Aparita Bhandari: **APPENDIX A** or <http://www.savac.net/big-stories-little-india/about/bhandari.html> Ask students a general question: *After reading this note to introduce the website what can you now tell me about Little India?*

4. Do a read aloud or silent reading of David R. Filbey-Haywood's essay about Little India over the years: **APPENDIX B** or at <http://www.savac.net/big-stories-little-india/about/filbey-haywood.html>

5. Ask students questions about the essay: *What is the Naaz? What has happened to it? What years are we talking about? How important was the Naaz to the community, and why? What was the Naaz's role in building this community? What has happened to the Naaz since? Are there plans to reopen the Naaz?*

6. Have students read aloud "South Asian market and Gerrard India Bazaar" from this Wikipedia entry: **APPENDIX C** or

http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Gerrard_Street_%28Toronto%29

Ask: How is Little India different from Chinatown or Little Italy? If students can't answer, ask: *Who lives in Little India? Who shop there on the weekends?* (Answer: South Asians don't live in Little India en masse, but rather operate businesses there and shop there. In Chinatown and Little Italy the Chinese and Italian communities, respectively, live and work there.)

7. Show part of the video of Little India shop owners at: <http://www.savac.net/big-stories-little-india/artists/mawani/zaheed.html>

Note: The movie is silent and lasts 16 minutes, so you will probably need to show only a few minutes for the students to get a taste of the businesses in Little India. After showing the video, ask: *If I was a tourist and I asked you to describe Little India, what would you say? What could I see? What could I buy? Eat? Smell?* Ask students, *Is this what you imagined Little India to be? Why/why not?*

8. Whether students know about Little India or not, ask them: *Why is there a Little India – or a Chinatown or a Little Italy for that matter?*

Have students draw upon their own familial experiences if their parents or grandparents are immigrants. For other, ask them to put themselves in the shoes of an immigrant: *You've just moved to, say, Japan, where nobody speaks English or few understand your customs. How do you find housing? Who do you ask to find work? Where do you go if you want everyday things like Canadian food or hockey scores or clothes you're used to wearing?*

9. Why might immigrants, when they first arrive in Canada, or any other new country, tend to settle as a group, in a close-knit community? Make a list of reasons on the board.

Homework Assignment:

Students must find out when and why their families moved to Toronto (or the GTA). Did they come from elsewhere in Canada, or from another country? Was the previous hometown a stepping-stone to the GTA?

Who came? Did they know anyone here?

What did they do for a living before and after arriving in Toronto? Where did they settle, in the City of Toronto, or in a nearby suburb?

How has the family expanded and changed since the first (and, if applicable, second) arrival?

How much of an attachment do you personally feel towards your ancestors' place of origin? Have you visited? If so, how often, and what was it like? If not, why, and would you like to in the future?

Lesson 2: The Challenge of Assimilation

Materials:

- LCD Projector/TV
- Computer connected to the Internet

1. Students present their homework assignment. This doesn't have to be a formal presentation by each and every student, but a random check and enough to generate discussion about the students' own immigrant roots.
2. Ask: *What struggles and difficulties and/or obstacles did your parents or grandparents endure after they moved to Canada?* Prompts may include: finding jobs and housing, discrimination based on race, religion or nationality, adapting to new customs, learning a new language, adjusting to a different climate and geography. Compare challenges faced by the first generation with those the second generation might face. Did parents and/or grandparents have a hard time adjusting their children's new lifestyles?
3. Write the word ASSIMILATION on the board and ask the students what it means. If they don't know offer them examples of the word in sentences such as "Compared to some other groups, Indians were able to assimilate into Canadian society a little easier because English is spoken in India." Using this new word, ask students how their own families have assimilated into Canadian society. For some it won't be an issue, but for others it may be an ongoing one if they are recent arrivals.
4. Without introduction, read aloud these handwritten letters: **APPENDIX D** or <http://www.savac.net/big-stories-little-india/artists/siddiqui/ambereen.html> Have an open discussion that encourages debate: *Would you change Gerrard Street to Mahatma Gandhi Way? Why/why not? Aren't street names changed to honour people? Is opposition to this idea necessarily racism? Does the response in the letter reflect the time period? Would the response be different today?*
5. OPTIONAL: Take a look at the Map of a residential area in Mississauga. **APPENDIX E**. Notice that there is a street named Gandhi Way. This is from Mississauga's city centre. Do you see any other streets with culturally specific names? Discuss the names, why they might be so, whether the area has a specific history, the ideology behind the names etc.
6. Have a read aloud of the transcript of Salma Latif's interview. **APPENDIX F** and also at <http://www.savac.net/big-stories-little-india/artists/siddiqui/ambereen.html> Encourage a discussion about racial profiling by asking: *Does Salma feel that the police treated this man fairly? Do you see him as the victim of police harassment? Or did race*

have nothing to do with this incident? Do you understand why some minority groups may interpret some actions as racist, whether they are or not? Are they being paranoid, or is their reaction justified based on past experience? Ask students if they themselves have ever been victims of racial discrimination, or have felt that they were treated differently because of race.

7. Ask students if they feel “Canadian” or “_____–Canadian” with “_____–” representing their ethnic background (i.e. Chinese). *Members of your family may come from one place, but where do you feel you belong? Do you feel attached to more than one place? How much of an attachment do you personally feel towards your ancestral home? Have you ever been back? If so, what was it like? How did it surprise you?* As before, encourage an open-ended discussion about identity.

8. Staying on the subject of identity, ask students how strictly they follow their culture's customs, including holidays, prayers and most importantly customs. Ask: *Is there a custom that your parents pressure you to do, but you don't understand?*

9. Break up the class into groups of four. Assign each one to produce three customs from their various cultures to teach the rest of the class. This could include birth, coming of age, wedding, or funerary customs.

10. After five minutes of conferring, the groups teach their customs to the class.

11. A final question: *If you were to forget the customs your parents taught you, would you still feel that you belonged to your family's culture? How does language fit into cultural identity?*

Homework Assignment:

Assign the essay, “Indian Summer” by Cynthia Brouse (**APPENDIX G**) to be read:
<http://www.savac.net/big-stories-little-india/about/brouse.html>

Lesson 3: The Transformation of Immigrant Communities in Canada

Materials:

- LCD Projector/TV
- Computer connected to the Internet

1. Follow up on the homework assignment by asking questions about Cynthia Brouse's essay: *They're both immigrant communities, but what's the key difference between Little India and say, Greektown or Chinatown?*

(Answer: Greeks settled in Greektown, then moved out of the area. The Chinese settled in one of several Chinatowns but succeeding generations have moved out to places such as Richmond Hill. South Asians live across Toronto, but have been visiting Little India for shopping and entertainment.)

2. Tourist attraction: Have students look at Brendan Fernandes's photos of Little India: <http://www.savac.net/big-stories-little-india/artists/fernandes/brendan.html> (**APPENDIX H**) Ask: *Why did he add the words "made in little India" to these photos? Why did he choose these subjects, such as storefronts and the auto rickshaw?*

3. Ask: *How do the local residents regard Little India? How would you describe relations between the residents and businesses?*

(The answer lies in the 11th paragraph of the Brouse essay, starting with: "But legitimate complaints are bound to arise in any neighbourhood that exists cheek by jowl with a tourist area...")

4. Ask: *How does the younger generation regard Little India today? Do they want to go to Little India or stay in the suburbs? (The answer lies in the sixth paragraph of the Brouse essay, starting with: "Does the Bazaar exert any pull on that second generation? Devjani Raha is a 34-year-old filmmaker..."*

Why do some members of the younger generation insist on going to Little India when their shopping needs can be met in the suburbs where they live?

5. Show students this map illustrating where the South Asian population lives in GTA (**APPENDIX J**):

http://www.toronto.ca/demographics/atlas/cma/2006/ct06_cma_south_asian.pdf

Ask: *Where is the S.A. Population concentrated? Also look at the Chinese population:*

http://www.toronto.ca/demographics/atlas/cma/2006/ct06_cma_chinese.pdf

How does the Chinese demographic compare to the South Asian one?

Remind students: Remember that the two groups are the two largest cultural groups in the GTA, together exceeding one million people in a city of less than three.

Why do you think these two major groups are settling in the suburbs?

6. Read aloud this article using the projector (**APPENDIX K**):
<http://actew.org/blog/2008/04/changing-settlement-patterns-impact.html> Who is settling in the suburbs and the “inner suburbs”? What does the term “inner suburbs” mean? Why is there this stark difference in settlement?

7. Read aloud this second article using the projector (**APPENDIX L**):
<http://www.canadianimmigrant.ca/moneybusiness/realestate/article/3412>
Students may take note of the article's URL.
Ask students if these findings surprise them. *Why are immigrants settling outside the city core? Which groups are settling in these areas?*

8. Return to the earlier discussion about how young suburban Indians regard Little India. Ask students to ponder the future of Little India, considering the declining interest by younger generations.
Will tourists continue to visit Little India in the future? Are more or fewer tourists visiting Little India nowadays (the Brouse essay says that numbers are slipping).
Will tradition and historical significance keep the numbers up?
Gerrard Street was featured on BBC Travel’s week on Toronto. What does this demonstrate? (<http://www.bbc.com/travel/feature/20101027-torontos-world-map>).
What does the Filbey-Haywood essay say about the idea of there no longer being a Gerrard Street?

9. Ask: *How are neighbourhoods like people?* A prompt: *Do they mature and evolve?*
Have students consider other neighbourhoods across the G.T.A. such as Parkdale, Kensington Market and the Beaches.
Ask students: *Did you know that mansions once lined Jarvis Street? Do you know why Jewish synagogues rest in Kensington Market next to Portuguese, Caribbean and Vietnamese shops? Have you been following the construction of condos in Regent Park?*
The answer to this question is, Yes. *Neighbourhoods are like people. They change.*

Culminating Task

Due two classes from now

PORTRAIT OF A COMMUNITY

Choose one neighbourhood and tell us about its present state, history, and plans for the future.

Break the class into groups of 5. Choose one immigrant neighbourhood and tell us:

- how it began and when; what was there before
- who settled there, and why they came to Canada
- were there any problems they encountered assimilating into Canada
- where the community is today: has it changed? Moved on?
- Local events, festivals
- Is there a BIA?
- Are there development plans? Has the area gone through a period of rapid, drastic change? Gentrification?

Communities to choose from:

- Chinatown: any of Toronto's various Chinatowns (e.g. downtown, Broadview, Agincourt)
- Little Italy
- Kensington Market (Jewish community)
- Polishtown (Roncesvalles)
- Little Ukraine (Runnymede/Bloor)
- Koreatown (Christie/Bloor)
- Greektown
- Cabbagetown
- or one that the group chooses with the teacher's approval

Groups must go to the community and take original photographs, observational notes. Video, including cell phone footage, is encouraged. Audio recordings (interviews) are optional. The presentation must last 5-10 minutes. Stress that original research is required, and may only be supplemented by images from other sources.

Accomodations:

Students who cannot visit the neighbourhoods must use articles from legitimate newspaper and journals, documenting the history, and any development plans for the area. Local festivals and events should be discussed, and images can be found in official archival sources, journals, and if needed, on Flickr.

Lesson 4: The Influence of non-western Culture on Western Pop Culture

1. Begin or end this lesson with time devoted to checking the progress of each group's project. Ensure that students have planned their presentation and at least begun research.

2. Ask students what each of these is: Bollywood, saris, bhangra and curry. Chances are they'll know, but ask them, *What is your experience with each of these things?* For example: *Have you ever seen a Bollywood film or a Bollywood dance number in a film* (e.g. *Slumdog Millionaire*, *Score: A Hockey Musical*).

3. Ask: *When did Indian culture begin to influence western pop culture?*

Encourage speculation, but offer hints: *Who were one of the most popular rock groups to incorporate elements of Indian music into their own work?* By now, the class should've deduced that the answer is the sixties, with The Beatles being the first rock band to fully embrace Indian music.

Can you see a how Indian clothing influenced fashion in the '60s and '70s, especially the hippie movement?

How do contemporary musicians like Talvin Singh, M.I.A., who are members of the diaspora, influence popular culture, and it's images of South Asians? How about artists like Ravi Shankar, and Raja Ravi Varma? What about writers, filmmakers, designers and chefs?

4. Ask: *Are these influences lasting or merely trends? What does exposure to another culture's music or clothing have someone from a different culture? Could that adaptation lead to something else? Could someone who listens to the sitar study the history of that music? Could they learn other aspects of that culture? Does eating curry or practicing yoga, make you want to learn about India?* How do these influences get filtered and altered through the mainstream? (Eg. Instant curry mix, or Yoga that is separated from religion). Allow an open-ended discussion with examples that do can center on India, but can also draw on other cultures. Examples: the influence of Hong Kong action cinema on Hollywood's Quentin Tarantino; Brazilian music on today's dance club music; black inner city rap giving way to mainstream hip hop.

5. Recalling Lesson 3, ask students: *Who visits Little India? What is one reason that tourists go there?* (A: To shop.) *What do they buy?*

6. Show students the saris at

<http://www.savac.net/big-stories-little-india/artists/varma/story.html> (**APPENDIX M**)

Would you call this a traditional Indian sari?

Play the statement from Inder Jandu, owner of Sonu's Sari Palace. Available at

<http://savac.net/big-stories-little-india/artists/varma/story.html>

Ask: Who are the store's customers? Are you surprised? Why would a theatre company use saris for costumes that are not about South Asian subject matter? What was this shop selling when it first opened? Are you surprised that the products were Japanese?

Post-WWII, Japan began to manufacture saris. These were machine-made, printed, saris made of synthetic fabrics¹, often referred to as "wash and wear."

Ask: Why would these saris be appealing, compared to a traditional silk, embroidered, hand-woven sari? Why was there a demand? Discuss post-war trade relationships, a demand as the urban population rose for lower-maintenance, less traditional, brightly coloured fabrics.

When you visit another country, what do you buy?

7. Write the words "exotic" and "xenophobia" on the board. Have students use each word in a sentence, with the context for "exotic" being travel or foreign cultures. Ask students why they travel: *What do you want to find that you can't get here? Why not stick with the same clothes, music or food?*

8. Turning to the word "xenophobia" ask students if they have ever been afraid to try something new that was "foreign" to them, like a new type of food, or a foreign film. *Why does cultural xenophobia exist? At the same time, why are people fascinated with the "exotic" or the "other." Can a person be attracted to the exotic yet be xenophobic towards other things?*

9. Ask: *If none of these foreign influences we've discussed had an impact on the art forms, could culture evolve? For example, can't rock music remain the same over time?* Encourage an open discussion, citing trends and examples from film, food, fashion and music. Steer the conclusion to the fact that culture, like individuals and neighborhoods, constantly evolve and outside influences nurture their maturity. Conversely, without these influences culture would stagnate and suffer. (Eg: the influence of 19th century travels, and the artifacts from these tours – African masks, Japanese prints – on the works of Picasso, Manet etc.)

¹ <http://www.scribd.com/doc/53288396/Japanese-Saris-story-so-far-11042011>

Lesson 5: Presentations of Culminating Activity

Each group presents their neighbourhood. Groups should explain and analyze the evolution of their neighborhood and not merely the surface history. What forces have changed that neighborhood? Transit, housing, business etc? Why? Where is the neighborhood going?

Allow students from other groups to ask each presenting group questions.

Credits

Lesson Plan written by Allan Tong, Education Officer, SAVAC, 2010