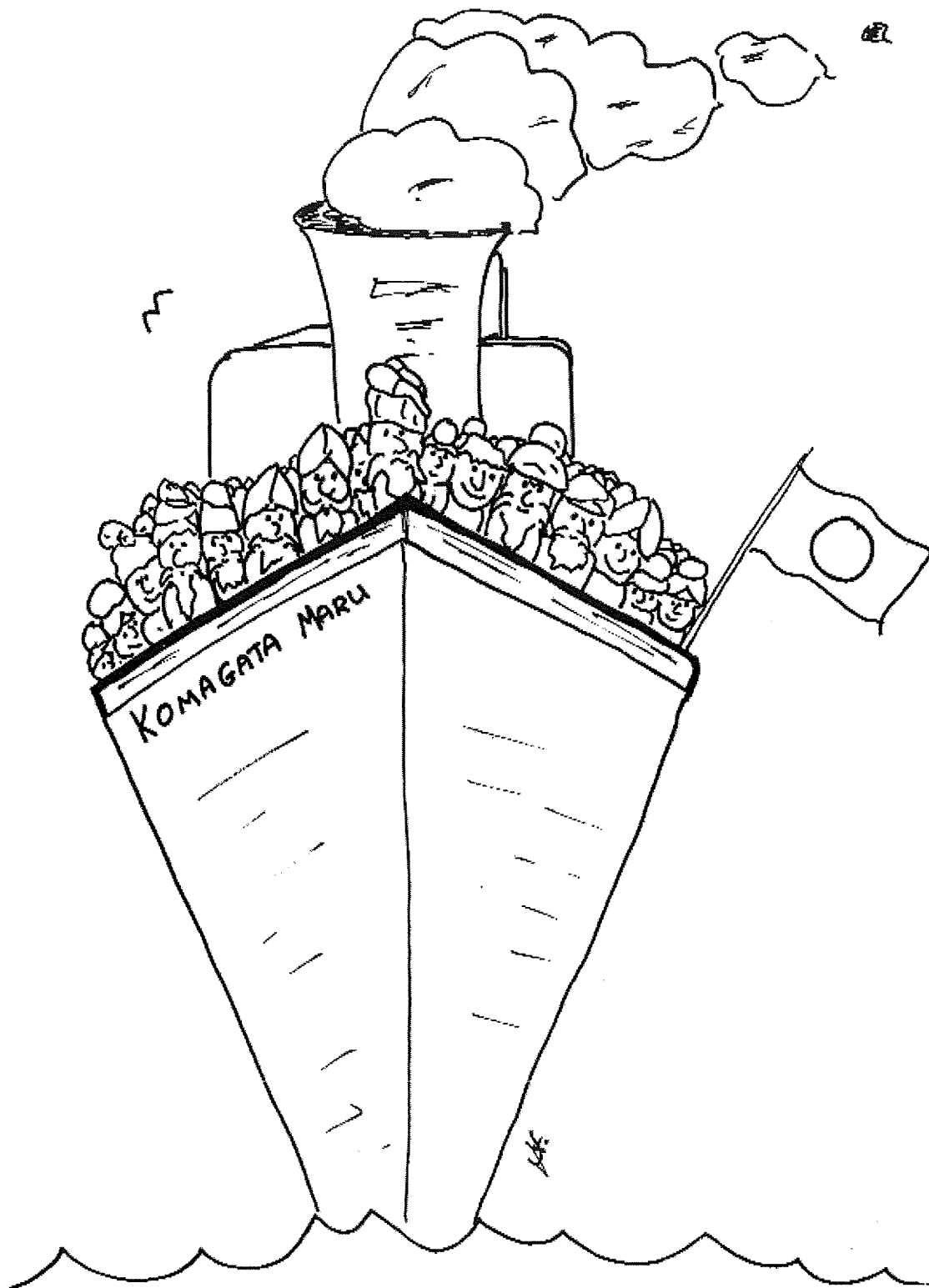


The Komagata Maru:

A Study Guide



Introduction

The Komagata Maru: A Study Guide is a comprehensive thematic unit. Its 45 reproducible pages are filled with a wide variety of ideas designed for use with children and young adults.

The strength of this book lies in its balanced approach, which involves young learners in every aspect of the communications process (speaking, reading, writing, listening, and drawing). In this way skills and knowledge grow quickly as children are stimulated by involvement and interest in the topic at hand.

Moreover, not only are academic skills improved upon but so are social skills. A development which can no longer be neglected let alone taken for granted in today's ever-communicative world. Children must learn to work cooperatively in order to be successful in modern society; and parents and teachers must do their best at including social objectives as well as academic in their child's education.

This thematic unit contains:

- Work sheets: basic summary of theme
- Drawing guides: confidence-building techniques to enhance observation, motor, and creative skills
- Internet scavenger hunt: activities that challenge children to use and become more familiar with computers as a research mechanism
- Writing ideas: suggestions for writing activities
- Creative thinking: ideas for creative thinking
- Bibliography: suggested literature, software and Internet resources



EAST INDIANS FIRST VISIT CANADA

In 1897 a unit of Sikh British soldiers participated in a London parade to celebrate Queen Victoria's Diamond Jubilee (sixtieth anniversary of Queen Victoria's coronation). On their way back to India they passed through other countries belonging to the British empire. One of these countries was Canada. There they saw a large country with too sparse a population to take care of all the land. In retirement many of these soldiers left India to live in other parts of the empire as free movement within the empire was a guaranteed right to all British subjects. (Canadians could visit India and, likewise, Indians could visit Canada.) Though they had heard many awful rumours about how European pioneers treated Asian pioneers in Canada, many Indians moved to Canada nevertheless.

For many years Canada could not legally stop Indians from entering the country, so the federal government installed two orders-in-council directed against Indian immigration. They raised the head tax on all Asians to such a

degree that an Indian farmer working all his life could not afford to move to Canada. They also required that all immigrants come to Canada by continuous passage from their country in origin. Then they cleverly persuaded steamship companies to halt all India-Canada service.

Their orders-in-council worked so well that where 2 623 Indians moved to Canada in 1908, only 6 entered in 1909.



Test me on the above

1. Why were Canadians allowed to visit India?
2. How did the Canadian federal government stop Indians from immigrating to Canada?
3. What do you think it means to be a citizen of a country or a subject of an empire?
4. If you were not allowed to move freely throughout Canada, would you feel like you were really Canadian? How do you think these British subjects felt when they realized that the best and most prosperous parts of the empire were closed off to them?

ASIATIC EXCLUSION LEAGUE

To keep Canada a white man's country and exclude all immigration from Asia, prominent politicians, government officials, and labour leaders in Vancouver formed the Asiatic Exclusion League (AEL). They often staged protests against Asians and on September 8th 1907 they caused the anti-Asian riots. Screaming racist slogans, they worked up a mob of 9 000 Vancouverites and encouraged them to ransack Chinatown. They caused thousands of dollars in damage to Chinese property.



Test me on the above

1. What does AEL stand for?
2. Why was the AEL formed?
3. Who formed the AEL?
4. What did the AEL cause on September 8th 1907? How?

CANADA IN 1914

In 1914 Canada was not an autonomous nation. It was a colony of the British empire. Accordingly, the Dominion of Canada was subject to British law like all other British colonies. It was Prime Minister Borden (1911-1920) who, after the First World War, after losing thousands of men to Britain's cause, demanded that Canada be considered an independent nation. He also argued for Australia, New Zealand, and South Africa. He said that these colonies were no longer colonies and that they were self-sufficient and as such should be permitted to manage their own affairs. Britain soon agreed and these four colonies became nations. Though they became autonomous nations, they formed a society which they called the Commonwealth of Nations so that they could conduct business together.



Test me on the above

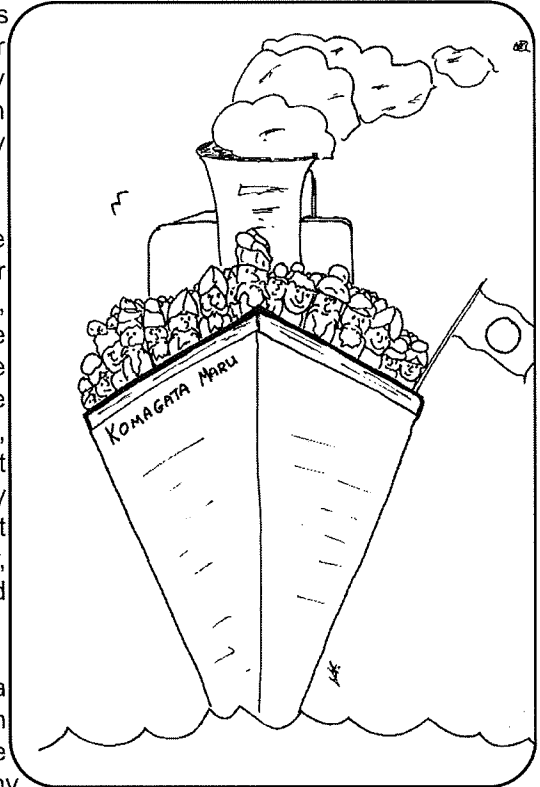
1. In 1914 was Canada referred to as "Canada" or the "Dominion of Canada" ? Why?
2. When did Canada officially attain its autonomy as a nation?
3. Research what the Statute of Westminster did for Canada?
4. Research when Canada finally attained its own constitution.
5. Nowadays if you sue the Canadian government who do you sue? Canada or the Queen?

THE KOMAGATA MARU INCIDENT

In 1914 a wealthy man named Gurdit Singh travelled to Hong Kong for business reasons. While there he could not help but hear the demands being made by Indians who wanted to go to Canada but could not because all steamship companies refused to sell tickets to East Indians. So Gurdit thought he could use his organizing skills to help his people. With a few friends he set out to find a ship. After examining three steamships, he chose the Komagata Maru (the most expensive of the three) for its apparent seaworthiness. After signing the charter, he and his friends spent a few days cleaning it up and preparing it for the passengers. They installed latrines and bunks and they even made a gurdwara in the lower deck. They also took on a shipment of coal to sell to a buyer in Vancouver, which they did to help pay for the final instalment of the charter.

They began their journey in Hong Kong and made stops in Shanghai and Yokohama before they set out for Vancouver. In total there were 376 passengers (340 Sikhs, 24 Muslims, 12 Hindus) on board and most of them were from the Punjab. The Komagata Maru travelled through the Pacific ocean for 21 days and arrived in Vancouver on the 23rd of May, 1914. When they anchored in the Burrard inlet, the passengers were not allowed to disembark. They did not understand why they were not allowed to disembark as they were all British subjects and as such were permitted to visit any part of the empire. In 1914 Canada was a British colony, and so the passengers (pre-dominantly ex-soldiers) wished to exercise their rights as loyal British subjects.

These loyal British subjects refused to leave Canada and demanded justice. They, however, saw no justice in Canada as the immigration officers were willing to ignore many laws to prevent them from disembarking. Among many other things, the immigration officers did the following to force the ship back home: (1) For weeks they refused to give the passengers any reason or explanation for why they were being held prisoners out in the Burrard Inlet; (2) For the first week they refused to allow the passengers legal representation; (3) When finally they were allowed to see a lawyer, they were not allowed to consult with him in private; (4) Without just cause or being given any reason whatsoever, Gurdit Singh was not allowed to sell his cargo of coal to his client; (5) The immigration officers refused to allow the ship to be provisioned hoping that hunger and thirst would send the passengers back home; (6) By law every British subject was entitled to his or her own hearing, but the immigration officers, much to the displeasure of the passengers, only allowed one test case. After countless humiliations and defeats the passengers decided to return to India and tell their fellow countrymen about their true status within the empire.



Test me on the above

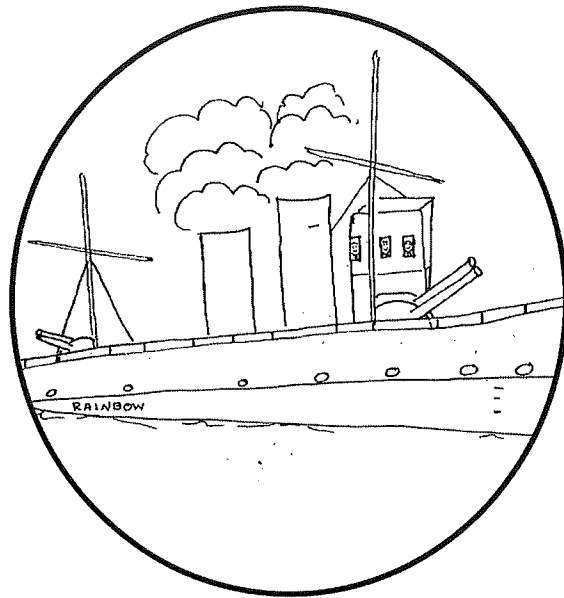
1. Who chartered the Komagata Maru?
2. How many passengers were on the steamer?
3. Do you think that sometimes police and immigration officers should have the right to ignore the law? Or do you think they should always be examples of the law?

BATTLE OF BURRARD

After almost two months of attempting to starve the passengers home, the Canadian authorities decided they would try to seize the ship by force. On July 19, 1914, in the early morning, a tug boat (Sea Lion) filled with approximately 130 armed police officers and immigration officers approached the steamer and attempted to board it. They, however, proved no match for the hungry and unarmed passengers as many of them happened to be ex-soldiers of the British army who had seen far worse battles.

The Canadian authorities were easily beaten and were beaten with the coal that they had refused to allow Gurdit Singh to sell when he had first arrived. They won what is now referred to as the "Battle of Burrard". The very same day the immigration officers wired Prime Minister Borden begging for help from the Navy. A few days later, when the passengers had decided to take their case back to India, an old, heavily armed cruiser (HMCS Rainbow) escorted the Komagata Maru into

international waters. It was a strange scene: a British ship bullying British Subjects out of British waters in order to prevent them from setting foot on British soil.

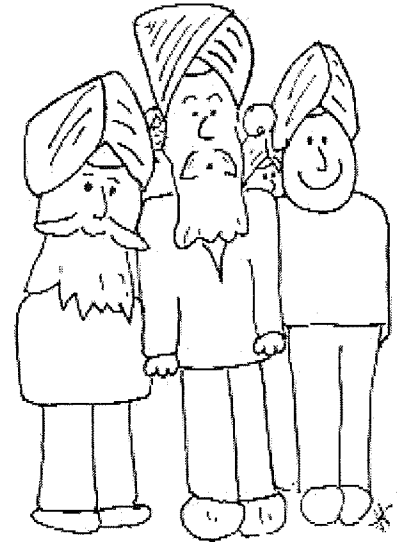


Test me on the above

1. What was the name of the tug boat that the Canadian authorities used to approach the Komagata Maru?
2. How did the immigration officers play a role in their own defeat at the Battle of Burrard?
3. Who was the Prime Minister during the Komagata Maru incident?

THE COMMITTEES

During the Komagata Maru affair, two committees were formed. The Passengers Committee and the Shore Committee. The Passengers Committee, led by Gurdit Singh, consisted of the men who had helped organize the voyage of the Komagata Maru. They were the ones who cleaned up the ship and prepared it with bunks, latrines and a kitchen. They were also the ones who usually met every night to discuss the events of the day and the actions they and all the passengers would take as a whole. Because of their leadership and because they kept the passengers united, they were able to endure two months of thirst, starvation, oppression, and loneliness.



The Shore Committee was formed as a positive force against the negative actions of the AEL and immigration officers who tried to starve the passengers back to India. They consisted of concerned community leaders already living in Vancouver who wanted to help the passengers of the Komagata Maru seek the justice to which they were all entitled. Among many other things they--men saving their money for their wives and children--sacrificed their savings and raised over \$100 000 for the passengers. They found a lawyer for the passengers. They fought for their rights and demanded that each passenger receive the hearing to which he was entitled. They even provisioned the ship. And, most notably, when the immigration officers prevented Gurdit Singh from selling his coal to stop him from paying the last instalment of the charter, they held a meeting and raised enough money to not only pay the remainder of the charter but to provision the entire ship.

These concerned men, who had been pushed around by the Canadian authorities for over a decade, fought back with unity. Without them, there is a good chance the Komagata Maru would have been bullied back to India within the second or third week of its arrival. That is why it is always important to be concerned for those whose rights are being trampled. A little help can go a long way. A little help can save lives. Their help sure did!

Test me on the above

1. Why is it important to stay united?

2. If the immigration officers had followed the law, and had every passenger received a hearing, do you think they would have still been sent back to India?

BUDGE BUDGE RIOT (SEPTEMBER 29, 1914)

When finally the Komagata Maru reached the Budge Budge harbour, the passengers were not given any opportunity to speak about how they were treated in Canada. Britain was about to enter the First World War and was not about to chance losing their Indian soldiers. As the passengers waited to make their grievances heard, they sat down to pray. The District Magistrate, not respecting their evening prayers, shouted and demanded to speak to Gurdit Singh. As the prayers were coming to an end, and all the passengers rose to recite Ardas (last supplication to God), he entered the procession, pushing men out of his way and hitting them with his lathi. In searching for Gurdit Singh, the District Magistrate desecrated the Guru Granth Sahib (Sikh Holy Book). He was quickly and understandably restrained by one of the passengers.



Deeply insulted, the District Magistrate pulled out his pistol and shot the passenger twice. The passengers then restrained the District Magistrate and, seeing this, the British troops opened fire on the passengers. 19 passengers were shot dead and 23 were hospitalized. After the Komagata Maru incident and the Budge Budge riot, many disillusioned Indians in North America sold their land and abandoned their jobs and returned to India to fight for freedom. They realised that they would receive no justice in other Dominions of the empire if they had no justice in their own.

Test me on the above

1. Were the passengers given an opportunity to protest when they arrived at Budge Budge?
2. Why did many East Indians living in Canada move back to India?
3. Research the date when Britain entered World War I. How far is this date from the Budge Budge riot? Why do you think the British authorities wanted to keep the passengers of the Komagata Maru silent?
4. Research how many Indians lost their lives in World War I fighting for the British.

AFTERMATH

On the 21st of October, 1914, Mewa Singh walked into the corridor of a Vancouver courthouse and fatally shot William Hopkinson, an immigration officer who was accused by many in the Indian community as being a corrupt government official who often fabricated lies against the community, who took bribes, and who was chiefly responsible for their oppression. After Mewa shot the immigration officer, he waited for the police, turned himself in, and was subsequently tried and sentenced to hang. On January 11, 1915 Mewa Singh went to the gallows singing hymns. Before he was hanged he had spoken to a granthi (priest) at the Vancouver gurdwara. These were his last words:

"My religion does not teach me to bear enmity with anybody, no matter what class, creed or order he belongs to, nor had I any enmity with Hopkinson. I heard that he was oppressing my poor people very much. I made friendship with him through his best Hindu friend to find out the truth about what I heard. On finding out the fact I, being a staunch Sikh, could no longer bear to see the wrong done to my innocent countrymen and the Dominion of Canada. This is what led me to take Hopkinson's life and sacrifice my own life in order to lay bare the oppression exercised over my innocent people through his influences in the eyes of the whole world. And I, performing the duty of a true Sikh and remembering the name of God, will proceed towards the scaffold with the same amount of pleasure as the hungry baby does towards its mother. I shall gladly have the rope put around my neck thinking it to be a rosary of God's name. I am quite sure that God will take me into his blissful arms because I have not done this deed for personal interest but to the benefit of both my people and the Canadian government."
(San Francisco Chronicle, January 12, 1915)

Test me on the above

1. What did the Indian community think about William Hopkinson?
2. Who shot William Hopkinson? Why do you think the shooter turned himself in to the police? Did the shooter believe he was committing a crime? Why or why not?
3. Is it ever justifiable to break the law?
4. If you were not allowed to move freely throughout Canada, would you feel like you were really Canadian? How do you think these British subjects felt when they realized that the best and most prosperous parts of the Empire were closed off to them?