



VIRUS HAS NO NATIONALITY

GRADE LEVEL: MIDDLE SCHOOL AND ABOVE

Coronavirus and Infectious Racism

OVERVIEW

In December of 2019, cases of pneumonia from an unknown cause were treated by Chinese authorities in Wuhan, China. Those cases, which are now known to have been caused by the coronavirus, or COVID-19, were the first documented cases of a pandemic. A pandemic is “an epidemic occurring worldwide, or over a very wide area, crossing international boundaries and usually affecting a large number of people.” The coronavirus has spread to at least 147 countries since then.

The first case in the United States was found in Washington State, on January 21st, 2020. Since then, cases have surged, especially in Italy, Iran and the U.S. Travel restrictions are in place and shelter-

at-home orders have been given to large parts of the U.S. Most students, K-12 and above, are home from school, unsure of when they will be able to go back to class.

With the increase in coronavirus cases has come an increase in reported hate crimes and racist acts against Chinese Americans, or those perceived to be Chinese American. Interviews show Chinese Americans, or those perceived to be Chinese American, being yelled at, spit on and physically assaulted. Russell Jeung, a professor at San Francisco State University, found a 50 percent rise in the number of articles mentioning anti-Asian discrimination and the coronavirus.



Learning Objective

Use the resources and activities below to expand your understanding of how the Coronavirus pandemic is increasing racism against people who are of Chinese or Asian descent, and what you can do about it.



Materials Needed

- [How Coronavirus Racism Infected My High School](#) (The New York Times Opinion Video)
- [A Timeline of the Coronavirus](#) (The New York Times)
- [WHO best practices for naming of new human infectious diseases](#) (World Health Organization)

Building Common Understanding

Start by reflecting on what you already know about the coronavirus. You can look at the [timeline](#) of the virus for help. Then, review the following definitions to help you understand concepts and information you encounter throughout this lesson.

anti-immigrant bias

The marginalization and/or oppression of people who are of immigrant origin, transnational or outside the dominant national identity or culture.

bias

An inclination or preference either for or against an individual or group that interferes with impartial judgment.

coronavirus

Also known as COVID-19, is an infectious disease caused by the coronavirus. It is spread primarily through saliva or discharge from mouth and nose when an infected person coughs or sneezes.

nativist/nativism

relating to or supporting the policy of protecting the interests of native-born or established inhabitants against those of immigrants.

pandemic

an epidemic occurring worldwide, or over a very wide area, crossing international boundaries and usually affecting a large number of people.

racism

The marginalization and/or oppression of people of color based on a socially constructed racial hierarchy that privileges white people.

scapegoating

Blaming an individual or group for something based on that person or group's identity when the person or group is not responsible. Bias, prejudicial thinking and discriminatory acts can lead to scapegoating.

Chinese Virus vs. Coronavirus: Why Does It Matter?

1. Watch the [NYT Opinion Video](#).
2. Reflect on what you've watched by answering the following questions. Consider making a short video of your responses.
 - What surprised you from the video?
 - Have you seen, heard about or experienced anti-Chinese rhetoric or acts in your school? In your community? In the news?
 - The video mentions another virus that is not the coronavirus. What virus are they talking about? Why do you think this other virus is spreading?
 - How could you act as an ally if you hear something that is racist, anti-immigrant or nativist?



3. Some, including lawmakers, have referred to Coronavirus as the “Chinese Virus.” This term, and others like “Kung-flu” directly and indirectly promote scapegoating and stereotyping against Chinese and Chinese Americans. In 2015, the World Health Organization released a [set of guidelines](#) for naming new infectious diseases (see Table B). They did this “with the aim to minimize unnecessary negative impact of disease names on trade, travel, tourism or animal welfare, and avoid causing offense to any cultural, social, national, regional, professional or ethnic groups.” The World Health Organization uses the term Covid-19, while the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention call it Coronavirus. Knowing this, answer the following reflection questions.
 - Why is it important to use names of infectious diseases that the World Health Organization approves? In what ways do the names of infectious diseases create scapegoats?
 - How could calling the coronavirus the “Chinese Virus” incite fear, anti-immigrant bias and nativism?
 - How could you respond to someone if they use the term “Chinese Virus”?
 4. In 2020, there was an alarming increase in hate crimes against the Asian American Pacific Islander community. During an eight-week period between March-May 2020, [more than 1800 racist incidents](#) were reported against Asian American people in the U.S. Attacks included physical assaults, vandalism, verbal harassment, denial of access to services and public spaces. Early in 2021, the violence continued with two [attacks in the San Francisco area](#) that led to the death of two Asian American people and other incidents, many going unreported. In January, President Biden signed an executive order that condemned this wave of racism targeting the Asian American Pacific Islander community.
-

How Can I Learn More?

Consider doing the following to learn more about the Coronavirus, racism, anti-immigrant bias and nativism against Chinese Americans.

Audit

Complete an audit of what you are hearing on the news and from those around you. Keep track of every time you hear the term “Chinese Virus,” or you hear or see racism, anti-immigrant bias or nativism against Chinese Americans. After your audit, reflect on what you found.

Historical Research

Research [Chinese American history](#). You can search about the history broadly, or focus specifically on acts such as the [Chinese Exclusion Act](#).

Book Reading

Read books about [Asian Americans](#) authored by Asian Americans.

Infectious Diseases

Research other infectious diseases that used marginalized communities as a scapegoat. Some examples include: The Black Death and 1918 Influenza Pandemic.

What Can I Do to Help Positive Change in My Community?

Think about what you can do during the Coronavirus quarantine to make a change. Here are some suggestions.

Social Media

Share resources on your social media that link to facts about the Coronavirus.

Support

Support Asian American stores and restaurants.

Be an Ally

Act as an ally if you see or hear racism, anti-immigrant bias or nativism. [Fight the Virus.](#) [Fight the Bias.](#)