Limehouse Chinatown

This Resource Pack is part of Yellow Earth Theatre’s Limehouse Chinatown Rediscovered project exploring and sharing research into London’s original Chinatown in Limehouse. There is an exhibition, website, audio walking guide and a production at Limehouse Town Hall of a specially commissioned play The Last Days of Limehouse by Jeremy Tiang.

Introduction from Kumiko Mendl, Artistic Director of Yellow Earth:
Today very few people are aware of the existence of the original London Chinatown that grew up around the Docks in Limehouse, East London.

The Last Days of Limehouse takes as its starting point a newspaper article that our writer Jeremy, discovered whilst he was researching the history of the Chinese community in the area. The article, dated March 1958, told of a public meeting that was held by the Council in the local Town Hall proposing the wholesale clearance of the area to make way for modern flats. A group of Chinese businessmen were mentioned as making objections to the plans at the meeting. From this dramatic starting point the writer imagined who these people might be and what life would have been like for a group of residents living under the threat of demolition to their homes and businesses in 1958.

Through a pre-show workshop, children will have an opportunity to play in-role and explore the emotional and practical responses to the Council’s proposals followed by an opportunity to meet the characters from the play in a specially designed performance at the old Limehouse Town Hall.

Our aim is that with the help of this resource pack the children will have an opportunity to find out about a little known community that once lived in their local area and explore what belonging and home means to them and how as communities and individuals we deal and cope with changes in our lives.

We hope you find it useful; any feedback would be gratefully received.

This resource pack forms part of Limehouse Chinatown Rediscovered, a Heritage Lottery Funded project that explores and brings to life the former Limehouse Chinatown.

Kumiko Mendl
Artistic Director
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www.yellowearth.org
Teacher Resource Pack
This resource pack explores this little known and forgotten community from the early Chinese sailors who arrived in the late 19th Century, through the early part of the 20th Century and the sensationalist headlines and myths that built up around the area fuelled by the Western press and writers of the time, to its final demise in the late 1950s.

Aim: A creative education pack to provide teachers with activities for Key Stage 2 pupils based around the heritage of Limehouse Chinatown. The pack can be used in preparation for seeing the Yellow Earth Theatre production of *The Last Days of Limehouse* or as a stand alone resource for class based activities.

How to use it:
The pack has been written as a collection of ideas that you can select depending on:
a) what you feel would be the most appropriate activity to do with your class;
b) time restraints;
c) space restraints.

You will find easy instructions on how to prepare and lead an activity as well as lots of examples that can be used to help you generate ideas with your pupils.

Activities are put in order as starter ideas, development ideas and then main activities. However, you can choose for yourself how you would like to structure the session and what activities to use.

The pack includes background information on different areas of Limehouse Chinatown as well as drama activities, art activities, literacy and numeracy ideas for each of the chapters, all aimed at developing your pupils’ learning and engagement with the theme.

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**Limehouse Chinatown**

A brief introduction

**Why Limehouse?**
The first Chinatown in London, a once thriving Chinese and Eurasian community, was based in Limehouse. It was a natural place for Chinese seamen to settle close to the docks while waiting for a job on a ship returning to China. Once the East India Company began trading across Great Britain's far-flung empire Chinese sailors began arriving in London on ships bringing goods from Chinese and other South East Asian ports. Some decided to stay, preferring a life on land to the hard life on board a ship at that time or they found themselves stranded. They found work at the docks or other land based activities and gradually they began to establish their own businesses: mostly small shops, cafes and laundries.

**Perceptions of Chinatown**
There were mixed perceptions over the Limehouse Chinatown.

1- **Hostility:** Even though the tiny Chinese minority provided little competition in the English or the London labour market, there was some prejudice against the East End Chinese community. This prejudice was initiated by the writings of journalists and authors who painted a negative view of Chinatown as a corrupt and dangerous place. It is said that many of the working-class population of the London docks held local resistance to the growing Chinese presence in the streets of Limehouse. One correspondent to the East End News in 1908 grumbled about the noisy Chinese fireworks, about the young Chinese men hanging around the streets cracking nuts and spitting on the pavements, about their association with young white women and about the outbursts of violence among them. However not everyone in the area was negative and some people opened boarding homes for the Chinese Seamen.

2- **Fear:** Because of these portrayals in fiction many people viewed the area to a 'no go and unsafe' neighborhood, a place where violence ruled the streets and illegal buying and selling would occur. As well as this it was deemed unsanitary and a dirty place to visit.

3- **The “Exotic”**: Many people were lured by the charm of the area where they could try food from China, meet and see people from China and experience what it might be like to be in a Chinese city.

**What was Limehouse Chinatown like?**

**Limehouse:**
By the beginning of the twentieth century, Limehouse and the whole riverside district of East London was a notorious slum area. Its streets of little terraced houses were squeezed among canals and railway-lines, timber-yards and sawmills, coal-yards, dry docks, ship-repair-yards, factories and workshops producing paint, varnish, tar, chemicals and rubber. There was overcrowding, along with low and irregular wages, foul air and bad sanitation, among the highest levels of child mortality and the highest levels of poverty in London.
Chinatown area:
However the British Press made the Chinese quarter sound much more alluring: "It had the aura of a timeless Orient. The Chinese names are up over the doors of the little shops, and inside them the unmistakable Celestial behind the counter and Chinese inscriptions on the walls.” It consisted of narrow alleys and cobbled streets. Its cafes, shops and lodging-houses were places to meet and exchange news and gossip. Shops served as post-offices where letters could be left and collected and banks where money could be deposited for safekeeping. There was no local Chinese newspaper but notice-sheets of news from China were sometimes pasted on a wall in Pennyfields; the signage above Chinese businesses was written in Chinese characters. There is no mistake that the area had a Chinese element.
Timeline

1672 East India Company started to trade with China, bringing goods to Britain via London’s docks. Hires Chinese sailors to work on its ships.

From 1780 Chinese sailors began to arrive in London’s docks in significant numbers. Stayed in local lodgings waiting for job on a ship returning to China. Some settle in Limehouse.

From 1803 During Napoleonic wars, British shipping companies hired Chinese sailors to replace British sailors conscripted to serve in the navy. Increases numbers of Chinese sailors arriving in Limehouse. Ex-Chinese sailors begin to open eating and gathering places, laundry shops and grocery shops to meet needs of other Chinese sailors and other settlers.

1833 East India Company’s monopoly of trade with China ended. Other British shipping companies began to carry goods to/from China, for example, the Blue Funnel Line.

1854 Many Chinese and East Asian sailors reported living at the ‘Oriental Quarters’ by the Thames in Shadwell, near present day Wapping tube station.

1857 Strangers Home for Asians, Africans and South Sea Islanders opened by Prince Albert on West India Dock Road in Limehouse. Built as a response to scandal of poor overseas seamen being found dead and dying on the streets around the Docks. One account of the home says in 1879 it sheltered 570 East Asian men, of which 200 were seamen.

1860 End of the 2nd Anglo-Chinese War. Chinese Qing government forced to sign unequal treaties with Britain and other western countries, opening up Chinese port cities for trade with European countries and allowing Chinese labourers leave to work in European colonies. This greatly increased number of Chinese sailors in the UK.

By 1890 Now two settled communities: Shanghai Chinese around Pennyfields, Amony Place and Ming Street; Chinese from southern China and Canton around Gill Street and Limehouse Causeway. Historian Walter Besant estimated total community at around 100 people.

1895 Local celebrations for marriage of Chinese man ‘Achi’ to local white woman ‘Canton Kitty’

1901 British & Foreign Sailors Hostel on corner of West India Dock Road opened as tensions over employment of Chinese seamen beginning to increase; increasingly violent attempts to exclude Chinese crews from British ships.

1901 First Chinese Laundry in Britain opens in Poplar.

1911 Chinese mostly in two small areas but whole Limehouse area starts to be known as Chinatown. Census reports around 5,000 Chinese men working in British merchant navy.

1912 Sax Rohmer first visits Limehouse doing research for the Daily Sketch. Was trying to find a ‘Mr King’, a criminal boss supposedly involved in local criminal activity. Rohmer never found Mr King, but later claimed he met Fu-Manchu in the narrow streets of old Limehouse.

1913 Publication of Rohmer’s first novel featuring invented evil criminal, Fu Manchu.

1919 Riots in Limehouse, as readers of wildly exaggerated newspaper stories about local Chinese men’s involvement in criminal activity took the law into their own hands and attacked Chinese businesses and homes.

1926 Film Twinkletoes released, featuring faithful reproduction of shop at 53 Pennyfields.

1934 Local council decide to demolish the restaurants and shops in Limehouse, as a part of a scheme to clear the ‘slum areas’ in London. Limehouse Causeway was widened and the shops, restaurants and clubs demolished. Slum houses in even worse condition were left untouched.

1935 First Chinese school opens in Pennyfields Set up by Irene Ho Tung as The Chung Hwa Club to teach Chinese and Chinese culture and history.

1940 World War Two Blitz bombing badly damaged Limehouse Causeway and Pennyfields areas. Many Chinese names appear on the casualty lists from the bombing raids.

1954 One of the most successful chains of Chinese Restaurants established by Charlie Chan, starting with Old Friends. Another of his, Good Friends, was voted one of the best 18 restaurants in the UK in the Good Food Guide of 1967.

1958 Local council resolve to demolish Pennyfields area, replacing it with the current estate of blocks of flats.

From 1961 Current blocks of flats constructed in and around the Pennyfields area.
MAP: Compare Limehouse in 1958 and now

1958 was just before the major redevelopment of the Pennyfields area and before the major road widening and new building of the Docklands area in the 1980s and 90s. Photocopy this page onto tracing paper. Then lay over the 2014 Google map of the same area. Align the stars exactly and then staple them together on one side. Flip from one map to another and compare the road, buildings and railways layout from 1958 to now.

Limehouse Area 1958 OS Map
1958 and 2014 MAP COMPARISONS QUESTIONS

(See separate sheets of 1958 and 2014 Google maps of Limehouse.)

What new area has been created near Pennyfields that wasn't there in 1958?

By what name is King Street (in 1958) now known?

What happened to Pekin Street (top right of both maps) between 1958 and 2014? Why is the name significant to people from China?

Is Oriental Street (middle right on 1958 map) still there in 2014?

What entirely new road has been built at the bottom centre of the 2014 map?

Does West India Dock Station (bottom right on 1958 map) still exist in 2014?

What new station is now on the railway line that wasn’t there in 1958?

What has replaced all the railway lines in the bottom right of the 1958 map?

What name did Limehouse Basin (on left of the Google map) have in 1958?

How has the route of the Limehouse Cut canal changed from 1958 to 2014?

What areas have changed the most?

Discuss all these questions and answers with the pupils and find out why they think these various changes might have been made.
Chinese Sailors arrive in London
Background Information

The first settlers: The first immigrants from China were Cantonese sailors marooned by the Blue Funnel Line who offered their deckhands no return passage East.

More sailors arrive: By 1880 the Chinese community that was based in Limehouse consisted of the Cantonese seamen who lived mainly on Limehouse Causeway and sailors from Shanghai who settled in Pennyfields and at first the two communities didn’t mix, speaking a different dialect and coming from very different and distinct areas.
In 1901 there were more than 40 Chinese sailors aboard the Bullys at the Royal Albert Docks many of whom stayed and by 1911 many Chinese sailors had settled in the Limehouse area and from that point the area was known as Chinatown.

Other reasons for coming: Many of the seamen hoped to come to England for better jobs and then to go back home a wealthier man. However as there was much poverty and not many jobs available they had to stay and work on the docks.

Once they arrived: When the sailors disembarked they’d be taken care of by a Chinese boarding master or shipping master and they’d find them accommodation in some of the big boarding houses. Many sailors stayed in the area and moved into their own small homes maybe got married to a local woman and started a business.

One such Chinese sailor was James Robson. He was the longest serving crew member of the Cutty Sark and served as ships cook under Captain Woodget from 1885 – 1895. James Robson was found as a baby floating on a raft in the South China Sea and was rescued by an English Captain and his wife and brought up in Poplar. You can meet him at the National Maritime Museum in the Trader’s Gallery on the last Saturday of the month and aboard the Cutty Sark. (http://www.rmg.co.uk/whats-on/events/james-robson0714)

Classroom Activities

Research Task:
Explore the different roles needed on board a cargo ship:
Draw a layout of a ship (see example drawing of the Cutty Sark) the class has to discuss/research the crew you would need to man a ship of this size and then draw pictures of the crew members with a title and their job description next to them on the image. Extension: Name the different areas of the ship for example: mast, deck, storeroom
Drama Activity One:

**Step one:** Map out your classroom/hall as a ship (this can be done verbally or if you have the option use masking tape to highlight different areas). Idea: A group of children could help you create this before/at the beginning of the session.

**Step Two:** Call out different areas of the ship and children have to go to the selected area and perform an action that reflects what takes place there (these can be decided by you previously or together as a class). Include: sleeping quarters, steering wheel, climb the riggings, scrub the deck, port, starboard, etc.

**Step Three:** Make an audience space away from the ship. Ask each child to go on board the ship and make a frozen position that captures the role they would like to take on board the ship. I.e.: looking at a map might be the navigator. The audience could try and guess the role each person is taking from their position. There are certain roles you will only want one of i.e. the Captain, so once this is filled emphasise that every role is essential. It would be good to document this by taking a photo of it. If the class is focused, ask them to mime their action.

**Step Four:** Once everyone is in a frozen image thought-track the different roles. Ask them questions like "How old are you? Is this your first voyage? How do you feel about being on board the boat? Why are you making this journey?"

**Step Five:** Choose characters that the rest of the group can hot-seat and ask any questions they would like.

**Extension Ideas:**
- Naming the ship. It could be a historical name or a made up name. (The Blue Funnel)
- Decide what your ship is carrying
- Decide the date it leaves and arrives
- Explore the route the ship would have taken
- Explore conditions on board the ship
- Research Chinese Names

**Literacy Activities:**
1. Create a character profile (use examples on page 12) and write all about your character and their experiences on board the ship.
2. Write a letter home to your family explaining what life has been like on board the ship and how you feel about leaving them behind (this could work well on tea-stained paper).

**Numeracy Development:**
Write out a list of numeracy questions that link into your curriculum i.e.:
- If the ship is traveling at..... knots.... How long would it take to arrive? (Add in variables)
- Estimate the total weight of cargo the ship will be able to carry without it sinking? (Create your own list of cargo with differentiated weights and how each one would be measured)
Get the children to write our questions for each other for them to consider what
mathematical equations they would need to decide when setting out.

**Drama Activity Two:**

**Preparation:** Look at images of the East End and the Thames at the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century. If you have time, they could research some together for you to make a slideshow of images to look at as a group.

**Step One:** All back on board the ship (if you can’t physically mark the ship out use chairs to make the different areas) and make your frozen image.

**Step Two:** Narrate to the class arriving into port. Example ideas: “You’ve been on board the ship for... you’re exhausted, you’ve been ill, you’ve run out of fresh food and its been stormy out at sea. You see England for the first time... what can you see?”

**Step Three:** In partners, they turn to each other and describe everything that they can see. Share back to the group and collect all of their thoughts on the board. Ask them to describe in lots of detail to increase their vocabulary and imaginations. Build up a picture as a group of what it looks like. Extension idea: They could sketch one thing they see on an A5 piece of paper, then you collect these and put them together to make one image getting the children to decide what goes where.

**Step Four:** What can you hear? Create a soundscape of the different sounds: factories, birds, children playing, etc. Ask one person to join in at a time with everyone now back in the circle. You could record this and play this back underneath dramatic scenes they do about arriving. Try and orchestrate the sounds too by playing with the volume and including repetition. If you were really confident you could place narration over the top to create more of a sound journey.

**Step Five:** What can you smell? Collect ideas as a group.

**Step Six:** Stepping off the boat: One by one they step off the boat and say one word about how they are feeling about arriving in London. Challenge them to come up with ‘better’ words.

**Step Seven:** Explore what the negative and positive experiences of arriving might be i.e. they aren’t greeted well by the locals, maybe they can’t find a place to stay, or haven’t been paid yet so don’t have the money to get any food. Positive experiences: they are really happy with their board, met some friendly locals. Hot-seat the characters about what their first day or so in Limehouse has been like.

**Literacy Activities:**
1. Write a diary entry about your experience of arriving in Chinatown
2. Newsboard: Write an article/sign for something that can go on a newsboard i.e.: Looking for a place to stay advert? Skilled carpenter needed? Come to this café...?

**Arts Activity:**
Create a painting of your first sights of arriving in London.
CERTIFICATE

No 65219

To all whom it may concern:

This is to certify that the bearer,

Mr. As Foo (艾紹富)

Age: 36 years  Pecunia: SEASON.

Place of Birth: HONGKONG.

Native Home: MACAO DISTRICT, CANTON.

Now residing at:

is a Chinese subject.

Given at the Chinese Consulate General, London, this 19th day of December in the 19th year of the Republic of China (1930).

[Signature]
The Growth of Chinatown
Background Information

At the beginning: In the 1890s, there were no Chinese businesses in Pennyfields; Limehouse Causeway had only a couple of tobacconists and a boarding house. By 1911 there were at least nine Chinese businesses around Limehouse – including several tobacconists and lodging-houses.

More Chinese people arrive: Chinatown was dependent on the port and if the port was thriving so was Chinatown. Therefore during the First World War when many new Chinese navy sailors came to England and the docks were used for military purposes, many new businesses popped up. The post-war years also saw a rapid increase. By 1919, there were many Chinese businesses – grocers, tobacconists, a boot-maker, a couple of restaurants. These businesses peaked in the early 1930s. Many of the Chinese people opened launderettes as they found it very difficult to get work in other professions. They quickly established a reputation for delivering well laundered (all hand washed) and neatly folded clothes and would take in the washing from the Boarding Houses and the sailors.

The arrival of women: At first, Limehouse Chinatown was a society of men as the first British authorities forbade Chinese women to live in England. The seamen who settled at the beginning began relationships with English women, and so the growth of a population of Chinese children of mixed heritage began. However, the British government relaxed their regulations and eventually Chinese women were allowed to settle.

Drama Activities:
ONE: Make a Shape
STARTER: Put children in groups of 4/5 and tell them to make the shape of something they would see in Chinatown. Examples are: Boarding house bed, boat, factories, lanterns etc. They have to use each other’s bodies to create the image. You then give a point to the team who has worked the best and made the most interesting image. You can give 20 seconds for them to make it so it gets them thinking quickly.

TWO: Cat and Mouse Game
STARTER: Set the space up like the alleys of Limehouse, describe the dark grimy walls, the smells. Get them to decide the reason why they are running away from the chaser i.e. stolen a loaf of bread/didn’t pay their rent at the boarding house. The group stands in rows of equal numbers (5 rows of 5) they either all face front with their arms out or left with their arms out therefore making the potential of different directional lines. One person is the prey and one the predator that runs around inside the armed corridors of the class and another person chases them. The runner calls out “change” (which means the armed corridors change directions) to try and stop the chaser getting them. When the runner is caught another person has a go.

THREE: Walking through the alleys
DEVELOPMENT: Create an alley space with children standing on either side, call out words/phrases that you might hear (in English) when walking around Limehouse
Chinatown i.e. “get your noodles here, finest shark fin soup served all day, do you need somewhere to stay, hiring sailors!” They could also make the sounds that could be heard. One person walks down it at a time and then relays their experiences.

FOUR: Blindfolded walk
DEVELOPMENT: In partners one person is blindfolded and the other person leads them around the bustling Chinatown and describes to them everything they see, hear and feel in as much detail as they can to give them an imaginary sensory experience. Swap over and share ideas at the end with the whole group to get a complete sensory image of what it looks like. Get them to emphasise the narrow alleys, tunnels and docks. In preparation for this, to help them generate ideas, get everyone to walk around the space at the same time and you describe what they see/hear/smell – it is good to include ideas for their physical reactions i.e. you step over a large muddy puddle, look down the Thames and feel the wind on your face, take a deep breath in and the smell of rotting vegetables makes you feel sick, you hear a really loud bang, it makes you jump, was it a gun?

FIVE: Mapping out Chinatown
DEVELOPMENT: You could create signage (maybe even using Chinese characters) of shops, cafés, lodgings etc of signs for the different places that are popping up as it grows. You could use masking tape again to create the key roads like Limehouse Causeway to build up an image of what it might have looked like.

SIX: I would like to buy a space
MAIN ACTIVITY: Each person writes a letter to try and persuade a building owner to give them a space so they can start a business i.e. a café. They have to include all details about what they want it to be called, what it will look like inside, what they will offer. With the letters in groups they have to read it aloud/pitch their idea to someone in role as the owner who then decides if they think it is a well thought through plan. (These could be written from the point of view of the character who they have already developed who has maybe been living in Chinatown for a while, and doesn’t want to go back to sea). A budget could also be included as an extension (see numeracy activity).

SEVEN: Timeline freeze frame
DEVELOPMENT: Referring to the timeline and the information above talk through what happened in Limehouse. Get different people up to represent groups arriving and Limehouse growing i.e. 1) the first to arrive were a small group of sailors - they start the picture of sailors getting off the boat; 2) The boarding houses grew in size as more sailors arrived; 3) Shops, cafes etc started to open; 4) Women arrive; 5) children were born; 6) school opened etc. By the end everyone should be up in the image and we see how bustling it all is.
IDEA: The walking down the alley activity could happen at the end of this.

EIGHT: Accounts of how it has grown
MAIN ACTIVITY: Either you/a pupil/group of pupils are in role as someone who has been in Limehouse Chinatown since the 1880’s. (Maybe it’s their characters from before but now a lot older). The class then interviews the character to try and find out as much information as they can about how it has grown and changed.
**Literacy Activities:**
1. Letter to building owner to rent out a space for a business idea
2. Create your own timeline
3. Write a description to a friend on the directions and route they need to take to find you at your chosen address: i.e. Enter the alley next to the Chinese store, go down the alley, it’s a bit dark so watch out as there can sometimes be animals lurking about there like chickens, come out at the opening and in front of you, you will see...

**Numeracy Activities:**
1. Write out your start-up budget, weekly budget for your business. Include your incomings/outgoings. What profits can you make? How many of something will you need to sell to ensure that you can make a profit?
Running a Boarding house for sailors

Lodgings: Many seamen lived in lodgings called the Eastern Quarter which gave them temporary accommodation when their boat was docked. These were frequently run by English women who could speak the language of the sailors. The women went by names such as Chinese Emma or Canton Kitty. One of the lodgings was not far away from Limehouse Causeway and was called Strangers’ Home on the north side of West India Dock Road.

What it may have looked like:
- Fire escapes in the top rooms to go onto the roof.
- Great big steel ladder down past all the windows where the seamen were boarded so that they could escape.
- Toilets at the back because in those days they never had toilets indoors.
- The front door was fireproofed and it opened inwards and outwards so that in the event of fire you could run out.
- On the stairs, there were buckets of sand and buckets of water as a regulation in those days. In the bedroom there might have been a steel ladder leading up to a trapdoor which led to the ceiling.
- There would have been lots of traditional big seamen’s bags lying around inside the boarding house or out the back in a shed.
- Crowded rooms with everyone sleeping in bunkbeds.

Drama Activities:
ONE: Wax Museum
STARTER: In pairs one person sculpts the other person as a person in the Boarding House. They decide what they are doing and what role they are playing, for example: waiting in line for the toilet, being greeted by the owner, sleeping on their beds, playing games with their friends. The sculptor gives them an action/piece of dialogue to say which they practice and then go back to their wax museum freeze. Then all the sculptors are greeted into the museum of sailors and are instructed to
press the imaginary “Go button” on everyone’s shoulder they bring them to life where they say their phrase, do their action and then freeze.

**TWO: Welcome to the boarding house**

IMPROVISATION: In pairs one person is the boarding house owner and the other is a new arrival. The boarding house owner shows them around and tells them all about how it all works. Decide as a group beforehand exactly what it might look like and map out the space. Perform sections of it back to each other.

**Literacy Activities:**

1. **RULES:** Write up the rules for the boarding house, try and include 10 different things. Get the class to consider what rules would need to be in place to ensure the boarding house is run smoothly and is safe for everyone. Consider the fire hazards.
2. **DIARY:** Write a diary entry about arriving in the boarding house for the first night, meeting a character like Canton Kitty and making some new friends. Focus on the things they saw, smelt and heard as well as their individual feelings, are they worried? Anxious? Are they missing home?
3. **POSTER/ LEAFLET:** Draw a poster/ leaflet to for the boarding house detailing its name, what the features are of it, cost per night, expectations etc.

**Numeracy Activity:**

1. Decide how much money a sailor will get from the voyage and how long this will last for him to stay at the boarding house and for him to buy his own food. Put a budget together.
Working life in Chinatown

Employment in Chinatown:
The Limehouse Chinatown at its peak consisted of shops, boarding-houses, launderettes, a grocery shop, a Chinese clothier, a provisions store and several cafes. The Chinese people who had settled in Limehouse would have worked in these places. Sailors’ jobs would have been a ship’s carpenter, ship’s steward as well as the general crew. There would have been teachers, with scholars employed at the China Institute which was founded in 1933 and where over 200 scholars (some of whom still hold eminent positions in China) were educated/taught.

Drama Activities:

ONE: Miming jobs
STARTER: As a group, explore all the different jobs you could do and chose an action to reflect these. You call out the different jobs and moving around the room the children complete the action. You could get them to move around the space thinking about how they would move around the streets, i.e. happily greeting their friends/they’re cold because it’s winter.

TWO: What are you doing?
STARTER: One child begins by entering the circle and miming an action that takes place in Chinatown from one of the different jobs previously discussed i.e. mopping the café floor. The next child must then ask ‘what are you doing?’ in a puzzled fashion. Without hesitation, number 1 must reply by saying something completely
different, such as ‘making the boarders’ beds’. Then the next child enters the circle and takes his place and the game continues.

**THREE: Guess our job?**

**STARTER:** In groups of about 4/5 either give them/allow them to decide for themselves a type of work that would be found in Chinatown. As a group they have to create a picture of the work happening and present it to the rest of the class who has to guess what the employment is.

**THREE: Interviews for jobs**

**MAIN ACTIVITY:** A panel is set up in the room and questions are pre-considered for a particular role. In character (maybe as the one they chose in the sailors arriving section) put themselves forward for the job and get interviewed by the panel. Try this out with the whole group observing then work in smaller groups. You could prepare job descriptions to start with.

**FOUR: Group Café**

**MAIN ACTIVITY:** Set up the classroom like a café (they could choose the name for it—could be one that has previously been used in the sign-posting activity in the previous chapter) include the kitchen area and the seating area. People choose/you allocate different roles they each can take and then they form a frozen image that shows the scene. Choose a signal of when we will start/stop the action and then get them to free-play being in this environment. People can be taking orders, cleaning, preparing/serving food. The customers could all be talking about their days at work so far. Pause the action and ask what’s happened so far. Ask to replay sections of it that involve a small selected group so you can build up a clear picture of all the different lives happening.

**Literacy Activities:**

1. **JOB DESCRIPTION:** Write a job description for different roles for the Chinese workers, include wages, hours to work, conditions of working, tasks. This could be a good starter activity for the job interviews.
2. **DIARY:** entry about my working life/today I went to the café. Could complete and add to other diary entries to build a book of diary entries.
3. **COMIC STRIP:** Write a day in the life comic strip of things that happened to your characters at work. Include any funny/poignant moments that would have happened. Include captions.
4. **LETTER:** Write a letter to someone you met in the café today.
The Decline of Chinatown
Background Information

Reasons for the decline:
1. Slum Clearances in the 1930's due to the poor housing.
2. The Blitz in WWII had seriously damaged Limehouse Chinatown leaving many homes and businesses in ruin. In addition, many people had been evacuated to the safer areas around London.
3. Decline of the Docks which occurred over an extended period due to bigger ships unable to make it as far down the Thames and newer ways of transporting goods into the country seamen and goods were no longer arriving in sufficient numbers to keep alive cafes, groceries and clubs.

In 1958, the local Council ordered the clearance of what remained of the Pennyfields area which meant the end of Limehouse Chinatown. They issued a £114,000 redevelopment scheme where the Council took over 22 houses, shops, workshops, yards, a derelict cinema, two public houses, the commercial tavern. Even though many Chinese people objected to the scheme they went ahead to clear the land and build houses for 340 families. Current residents would be found alternative accommodation and other premises for people to carry on business.

What happened next:
The new London Chinatown emerged in and around Gerrard Street close to Soho.
Drama Activities:

Use the characters from *The Last Days of Limehouse* as examples for these exercises (Pages 24 and 25)

**ONE: Conscience alley/ Feelings Tunnel**
STARTER: Everyone creates a phrase, sound, word that echoes the emotions/thoughts on the demolition. In this activity a chosen person walks down the alley/tunnel that is created by two lines of children as the walls. Everyone has a character/standpoint and we can hear how everyone feels about this central character as they walk past them. When the participant in role walks past them they call out lines which are then repeated for impact. These comments from the ‘tunnel’ children will include expression, stance and action to add to the feeling. You could do it three times. One with everyone feeling optimistic, second time with everyone talking about how unfair it is and thirdly each side of the wall saying opposing views focusing on creating a debate scenario.

**TWO: Create freeze frames about why this happened to educate another group**
Each group is given a slip of paper the information at the top of the page. They create a scene that starts and finishes with a freeze-frame that informs the other groups from the character’s perspective. There should be five groups all together.

**THREE: Telling the family**
DEVELOPMENT ACTIVITY: In groups as a family unit, inclusive of grandparents/cousins and children, one person has to share the news with everyone else in the family about the demolition. They have to consider the emotions and feelings of how their character would feel about this. Would they be optimistic about a new start? Would they get angry at the Council and think about action to stop this happening.

**FOUR: News report**
MAIN ACTIVITY: A TV company is called to Limehouse Chinatown when the residents have just been told they are going to be evicted. Include newspaper articles and opportunities to research this online first to report on the demolition of Limehouse Chinatown (see newspaper article on page 23). We see two sides of the argument about the Council talking about how they are going to build new homes for 340 families but the residents who have been there for 40 years losing their businesses. In groups of 6/7 create a scene and perform back to the group. If time they could script these out first and also film these properly. (If you were multi-media confident they could also edit their reports).

**FIVE: Debate between the council/Chinese population**
MAIN ACTIVITY: A meeting is held with local people and council officials. Give people particular roles for this like the Chair, the Mayor, the demolition team, the local people who aren’t Chinese and the Chinese population. Encourage a live debate where one person talks at a time and can express their thoughts or questions about this, encourage them to respond to any comments rather than avoid them to enrich the discussion.

**SIX: Saying goodbye- making a time bank of favourite memories?**
Make a class time capsule of everything that the group have created and written
about Limehouse Chinatown. Include character’s writing treasured moments that they could have had whilst living in Limehouse. Decorate the box as a group and place everything inside.

**Literacy Activities:**

1. **STORY BOARD:** write a script and storyboard your news report
2. **LETTER:** Write a persuasive letter to London City Council about how you feel it is unfair to demolish Chinatown.
3. **DIARY ENTRY:** It’s the night you have found out your house and business are going to be relocated. You’ve been here for so many years, reflect on your journey.
4. **PHOTOGRPAHS AND CAPTIONS:** For the timecapsule draw 2/3 photographs of your favourite moments from living in Limehouse and write a description underneath it about what was taking place. For example, a picture of your wedding day, a picture of getting your first house, a picture of you and your friends playing Pukka Pu (see page 29) outside a café.
TIME CATCHES UP WITH LIMEHOUSE

Demolishers in London Are Leaving Only Memories

By LAWRENCE FELLOWS
Special to The New York Times

LONDON, June 1 — Within a few weeks, London's Chinatown will have vanished like an opium smoker's dream.

Bulldozers are tearing away at the last of Limehouse, in London's East End. They are opening the squalid passages of Limehouse Causeway and Pennyfields, demolishing the shuttered hovels that remain. Four big blocks of apartments and a tiny string of a dozen shops will be erected there by the London County Council.

Not since early in World War II has the area had any of the combine and ordinary opium dens that once fired the imaginations of so many Chinese devotees of the juice of the poppy. Thomas Burke and other writers wove romantic tales around the iniquities of Chinatown.

The area gave the inspiration for such songs as "The Limehouse Blues." But now it is just another sleazy dockside area.

Lotteries and Battles Gone

Gone are the dark chambers where inscrutable Chinese sat at tables and accepted sixpence colors to be invested in pa ko p'lo. The lottery Londoners pronounced "puckkah pohnh.

Not since before the war have the police of Limehouse had to break up tong wars, in which rival Chinese gangs battled sometimes the whole length of Pennyfields or Ming Street with knives, meat cleavers, bottles, bricks and whatever other weapons came to hand.

Limehouse began to change when seagoing ships stopped docking in London. Chinese sailors had found the precarious existence of Limehouse better than a life at sea. They knew that Scotland Yard detectives found it practically impossible to identify them.

Before the war much of Limehouse was torn down to make room for St. Vincent's Estate, a huge block of apartments.

But the war really finished Limehouse.

The district was bombed heavily by the Germans. It was only a question of time before the redevelopment planners got around to what was left.

Not everyone knew Limehouse, especially the police, will mourn its passing. But some are taking it hard, including Ching Ding, who runs one of the last Chinese restaurants there.

His restaurant is called "Ding All Ching" after himself. "People all time call me Mr. Ching," he says. "Me Mr. Ding."

The chubby, 71-year-old Mr. Ding has been promised new premises across the street when the new buildings are completed. But he does not fancy the living quarters.


"Work hard, much money," he adds. "Like you say, lose pa ko p'lo. Okay."
Characters from *The Last Days of Limehouse*

**Eileen Cunningham**
Born: 1921 Limehouse, London  
Occupation: Housewife  
Address: 6 Collingham Gardens, Kensington, London SW5  
"I am shocked and appalled at the proposed destruction of an entire community that has been part and parcel of the East End of London for generations. Instead of completely destroying everything and effectively erasing history, the Council could fix the place up and make it better for the residents who currently live there. They could do the job they were supposed to do in the first place! It isn't the neighbourhood's fault that everything is falling apart -- they should have made the buildings better when they were constructed! Why should humble, ordinary people suffer for the mistakes of those in charge? I will fight for maintaining and preserving the unique character and spirit of Limehouse with everything I can. Chinese people in England need a place to call their own so LET LIMEHOUSE LIVE!"

**Francis Foong**
Born: 1907, Hong Kong  
Occupation: Founder and Head of the Chung Kuo Chinese Sunday School, Limehouse

**Iris Wong**
Born: 1932, Bloomsbury, London  
Daughter of Francis Foong  
Occupation: Runs Friendship Noodle with husband Johnny Wong  
Address: Friendship Noodle, 12 Pennyfields, Limehouse, London  
E14  
"It's hard to let go of something you've always known, especially a place that has been your home all your life. I wasn't born here but Limehouse is all I remember; it's where I grew up, fell in love and I'm about to have my first child. My mother was an indomitable woman, she set up a school for Chinese children to learn the language of her parents and everyone was welcome. What she did was important and she should be remembered. With the school building bombed during the Blitz and Limehouse Chinatown about to be demolished, will anyone ever remember Frances Foong? Call me a romantic but the most important thing for me isn't to keep Limehouse the way it is but to remember my mother's legacy."
Johnny Wong
Born: 1932, Limehouse, London
Occupation: Chef and manager at Friendship Noodle
Address: Friendship Noodle, 12 Pennyfields, Limehouse, London E14
"'Course it'd be great to stay in Limehouse and cook for my loyal customers. I've got some great friends here and I've lived here all my life. But I think it's time my wife and I moved on. Limehouse could do with a fix-up. Since the War so many buildings gone, bombsites all around, and the ones left standing like our restaurant are not in a great state. I think I could find some fortune elsewhere, , I've heard takeaways are the new thing - maybe move out of London! Chinese food is going to be enormous and I want to be at the forefront of that!"

Mary Cheah
Born: 1930, Limehouse, London
Occupation: Typist
Address: 27 Trebovir Rd, Earls Court, London SW5
"I am mostly in favour of the proposed clearances to Limehouse. I would very much like my parents to live in better conditions and the council have promised that they would get a new flat with their own toilet and a modern kitchen, neither of which they have at the moment. I do not live in the area anymore and although I grew up there I do not feel any strong attachment to Limehouse. In an ideal world, I suppose it would be nice to save some little reminder of Limehouse Chinatown and its community but I think the main priority should be to thoroughly clean up the area as it is so run down, dirty and frankly, unsanitary."

Stanley Lim
Born: Date unknown, Canton
Occupation: Helps out in the Friendship Noodle. Formerly ran a boarding house for Sailors
Address: Friendship Noodle, 12 Pennyfields, Limehouse London E14
"It will be very sad if the council knocks down all of Limehouse. It is my home and it is all that I know. It is safe here and I belong here, Johnny and Iris are like family to me - my real family have all passed on – no one is left in China. If I have to move, where will I go? I am afraid that I will be all alone. I want to stay here, why can't stay here? this is my home"
A writing lesson with Francis Foong

Francis Foong is based on a real woman from Hong Kong; Irene Ho. She was the daughter of a wealthy Hong Kong Eurasian Sir Robert Ho Tung and was the first woman to take a degree at Hong Kong University in 1921. She came to London in 1932 and in 1933 she visited Limehouse and was surprised and saddened to learn that the Chinese and Eurasian children there did not know much about their homeland. She set up the Chung Hwa Sunday School in order to remedy that. The children were taught the language and also about China and Chinese culture.

Suggestions for leading:
1. Leading from the front in role as Francis Foong and the children have paper and try out the characters themselves with you explaining.
2. Give them this worksheet and they read it through in partners and try it out for themselves.

Francis Foong: “But for now, it’s back and forth to the library every day. Your British books are so heavy – maybe it’s because English words are so long. Listen to me rattling on about myself – let’s learn some Chinese! Do any of you already know the language? Can anyone tell me how to say one-two-three in Mandarin, or Cantonese? Yi-er-san! Let’s repeat that. Yi – one, er – two, san – three. Yi-er-san.

Now I’ll show you how to write these: 一，二，三. Easy, right? Let’s have a go...
The first three numbers are easy as anything.

Right? Now let’s try something a little more challenging. So, this is ‘person’ – 人. It’s pronounced ‘ren’. Just one stroke down this way, and one down the other. It even looks like a person. See? [she mimics the character – in silhouette, arms by her side]

Remember what I said a minute ago, about English words being long? You see what I mean now – how do you spell person? P-E-R-S-O-N. And in Chinese? Just two quick strokes like that. ‘Ren’.

Next, I want to show you ‘female’ – 女. Nü. Again, just three strokes. Let me show you again – here, here and here. You always write Chinese characters in a particular order, and each stroke starts on the left hand side, and goes to the right. If you don’t follow the strokes, you’ll get yourself in a right pickled, and it looks funny. Not as nice as when I did it properly.

Not all Chinese words are pictures, of course, but if you look at this one, I believe you can see a woman. Can you? Holding out her hands, maybe carrying shopping bags... You’re right, she has no head. Let me draw one in... Can you see it now? 女 just means ‘female’. To get ‘woman’, we need to say ‘female person’. Anyone remember ‘person’? That’s right, ‘ren’! So ‘woman’ is 女人. And ‘women’? Still 女人. Plurals in Mandarin are the same. So don’t let anyone tell you Chinese is difficult. See how easy it is, and you’ve all done so well.
Chinese School in Limehouse 1950's
A tasty receipe for Vegetable Lo Mein Pu

Johnny and his wife Iris run the Friendship Noodle café in Pennyfields. One of Johnny’s signature dishes before the war was beef lo mein – now customers have to make do with vegetable lo mein as meat is still scarce and rationing has only just finished.

Ingredients
10 Oz. Chinese lo mein noodles (or use fresh lo mein noodles/spaghetti)
1 onion, thinly sliced
1-1/2 cups mushrooms, stems removed and sliced
2 inch ginger, thinly sliced
2-3 garlic, or as per taste
1 red bell pepper, julienned
1 generous cup of frozen edamame
7-8 cups of mustard greens, chopped (1 large bunch)
2 tbsp of hoisin sauce (or as per taste)
5-6 tbsp soy sauce (or as per taste)
1-2 tbsp sesame oil

Method
1: Prepare the noodles as per packet instructions. Tip: drain the water and rinse it lightly in cold water after cooking then toss it with little sesame oil (abt 1 tbsp or as needed) to lightly coat the noodles. Set it aside.
2: Make sure to keep all the vegetables prepped since we are going to be cooking all of them on high heat and quickly. In a skillet, add 1 tbsp of sesame oil/peanut oil on high heat. Add the garlic, ginger and onions.
3: When slightly soft, add the bell peppers and mushrooms
4: When the bell peppers get slightly soft yet retain their crispiness, add the mustard leaves.
5: When the leaves start wilting, add the noodles along with the frozen edamame.
6: Add the soy sauce and hoisin sauce and give it a quick toss to incorporate all the vegetables together.
How to play Pukka Pu

This description of Pukka Pu is taken from a Sailor's account.

It’s mostly the Chinese who run the games, and Englishmen playing. You hand over sixpence and get a slip of paper with Chinese characters on. You pick out ten of them – cross them out – then the slips get taken away, it’s like playing the lottery and a little boy runs up the street with them to hand over to a banker. For safe-keeping, till the results of the game come out! Saves arguing, I suppose. I’ll teach you the rules. It’s really easy. This one’s like Chinese bingo. So, here’s how it works – I’ll hand out these cards (see below p30. They each have 24 Chinese characters on them. What you do is choose any 10 characters and mark each one with a little x. Done? Now I’ll pick out 6 characters out of this pile, and if the one I pick out matches the one you’ve chosen put a circle round it. Then, the person with the most matching characters wins. OK? Right, let’s play!

So, the first word is ‘da’ (大) – that means big. It’s easy to remember because the character looks like big. See...

[He stretches out his arms and legs, to resemble the character]

And the next word is... ‘xiao’! (小) That means small. You can make that shape too...

[He pulls in his arms and legs, hands splayed out, to resemble the character]

If I was doing this in one of the gambling dens, there’d be more of a song and dance about it. Those guys don’t just pull out the words like I’ve been doing, they’ll go, oh, for example...

[He draws a third character]

Right, Koh Coca Cola Koh, that means mouth and if you look at it looks like a mouth

[He looks at the cards, points out any that people have missed – ‘Whoops! That’s a ‘da’ over there.’ ‘Oh no, that’s not a ‘xiao’ – you can see there’s an extra line on top.’ etc.]

Next, is (二) Ee dwai Kwai tzer ‘two” That was always my favourite one.

This one’s wor hao, ni hao, da ja ‘hao’ (好) – good, that means good. That’s a woman on the left – nü (女) and child, zi, on the right. So a mother and child – that’s good.

Last card now! What’ll it be? Dah duh dah dah... It’s another number – ‘liu’! (六)

Liu liu zan sher liu, 6 6’s are 36 that means ‘six’.

And that’s your lot! Let’s see who got the most... no cheating now, show me your cards.

[Some banter with the ‘punters’ – ‘Oh shame, you were just one short. That’s your sixpence gone...’ and for the winners: ‘Congratulations!}
### Table 1: "Pukka A Pu"

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Country</th>
<th>UK</th>
<th>Where</th>
<th>Summer</th>
<th>Forest</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
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<td>英国</td>
<td>哪儿</td>
<td>夏天</td>
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<th>Please</th>
<th>Four</th>
<th>Come</th>
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<tbody>
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<td>请</td>
<td>四</td>
<td>来</td>
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<th>Good</th>
<th>Goodbye</th>
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<td>好</td>
<td>再见</td>
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</tbody>
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<th>You</th>
<th>Spring</th>
<th>Winter</th>
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<tbody>
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<td>您</td>
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<th>Small</th>
<th>Thankyou</th>
<th>Double</th>
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<tbody>
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### Table 2: "Pukka A Pu"

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<td>小</td>
<td>再见</td>
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<table>
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<tr>
<th>happy new year</th>
<th>Sun</th>
<th>You</th>
<th>Spring</th>
<th>Winter</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>新年好</td>
<td>太陽</td>
<td>您</td>
<td>春天</td>
<td>冬天</td>
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<table>
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<tr>
<th>Autumn</th>
<th>I</th>
<th>Large</th>
<th>Thankyou</th>
<th>USA</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>秋天</td>
<td>我</td>
<td>大</td>
<td>谢谢</td>
<td>美国</td>
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Hunting for clues in your Neighbourhood

Activity:
Go on a photo safari walk to see what clues you can find in the local area for the Limehouse Chinatown. Street names, inscriptions on buildings, memorials and names of parks or blocks of flats are all part of the everyday archeology of our neighbourhoods. You can also include photographs of period details such as narrow streets, waterways and Victorian brickwork. Using digital cameras or phone cameras, explore the hidden corners of your local area. Consult the local history section of your library to find out more about your discoveries. What stories can you uncover? Create a slideshow of your findings and invite guests to come and watch it.

Clues to help you:
1. Street Names: The area was marked with lodgings for seamen and restaurants. These streets were heavily bombed during the Blitz. Now only their names remain to evoke the past community. There are names such as Canton Street, Mandarin Street, Pekin Street, Ming Street and Nankin Street.
2. A tin dragon sculpture at the end of Mandarin Street hints at what used to be.
3. The old dock gates by West India Dock Road are closed, no longer guarding mountains of sugar and spice.
4. Around Pennyfields, was the Shanghai Chinese community: yet more shops, Ting Kee Refreshments, and a Christian mission to compete with the Confucian temple and local Tong HQ. Amid ‘60s blocks, only a street name remains – Ming (formerly King) Street.
5. On commercial Road is the striking deco British & Foreign Sailors’ Hostel (or ‘Sailors’ Palace’), and you can spot the pictograms of the Chinese Association of Tower Hamlets.
6. Star of the East pub has original gaslights outside and appears to be a Victorian Gothic take on a Chinese temple.
7. At the end of Canton Street lies the Chinese Sunday School & Chun Yee Society, a drop-in centre for older members of the community in the basement. Perhaps there are people here with actual memories of Chinatown, before the community relocated to Soho in the ’50s.

Creative Activity:
Take photographs of yourselves in key positions as the characters who once lived on these streets; for example, a sailor arriving for the first time with the Thames behind him, a group of friends in an alley.