

A Hidden History: The Chinese Community

INTRODUCTION – The Autry Museum of the American West is a museum located in Griffith Park in Los Angeles, California. The Autry Museum tell stories about the diverse peoples of the American West. Groups of people who have something in common such as culture, ethnicity, interests, location, race, or religion are called communities. You can learn about different communities in the American West by looking at artifacts from the Autry Museum. Artifacts are documents, objects, and artwork.

Below is an artwork from the Autry Museum that tells a story about the Chinese community. The Chinese community has been, and continues to be, an important part of the American West. Thousands of Chinese **immigrants** came to the United States, especially California, in the 1850s during the California Gold Rush. Chinese gold miners were treated unfairly. They were often attacked while looking for gold. Chinese gold miners also had to pay a **foreign miners tax** to look for gold. Many of these men became cooks and **launderers** or found other jobs instead.

Look closely at the artwork below. It shows Chinese gold miners looking at a gold nugget as other men watch in the distance. Find some clues (e.g. tools) that show these men are gold miners. Then circle these clues on the artwork.



The Gold Nugget, Chinese Camp 1850 by Mian Situ

Glossary

Foreign: having to do with a different country

Immigrants: people who move from one country to another country

Launderers: people who wash, dry, and iron clothes

Tax: money collected by the government from people or businesses for public use

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PART 1 – Sometimes the history of a community can be hidden. You will be searching for a hidden history by **analyzing** two pieces of artwork. One artwork includes the history of the Chinese community. The other artwork hides the history of the Chinese community. During this activity, you will answer the question: *Which artwork best tells the story of the Chinese community in the 1800s?* You will answer this question by looking closely at both pieces of artwork and reading their object labels. Object labels include detailed information about artwork.

Artwork #1 is also from the Autry Museum. Take a moment to look closely at Artwork #1 below.



Artwork #1

Glossary

Analyzing: studying or looking at closely

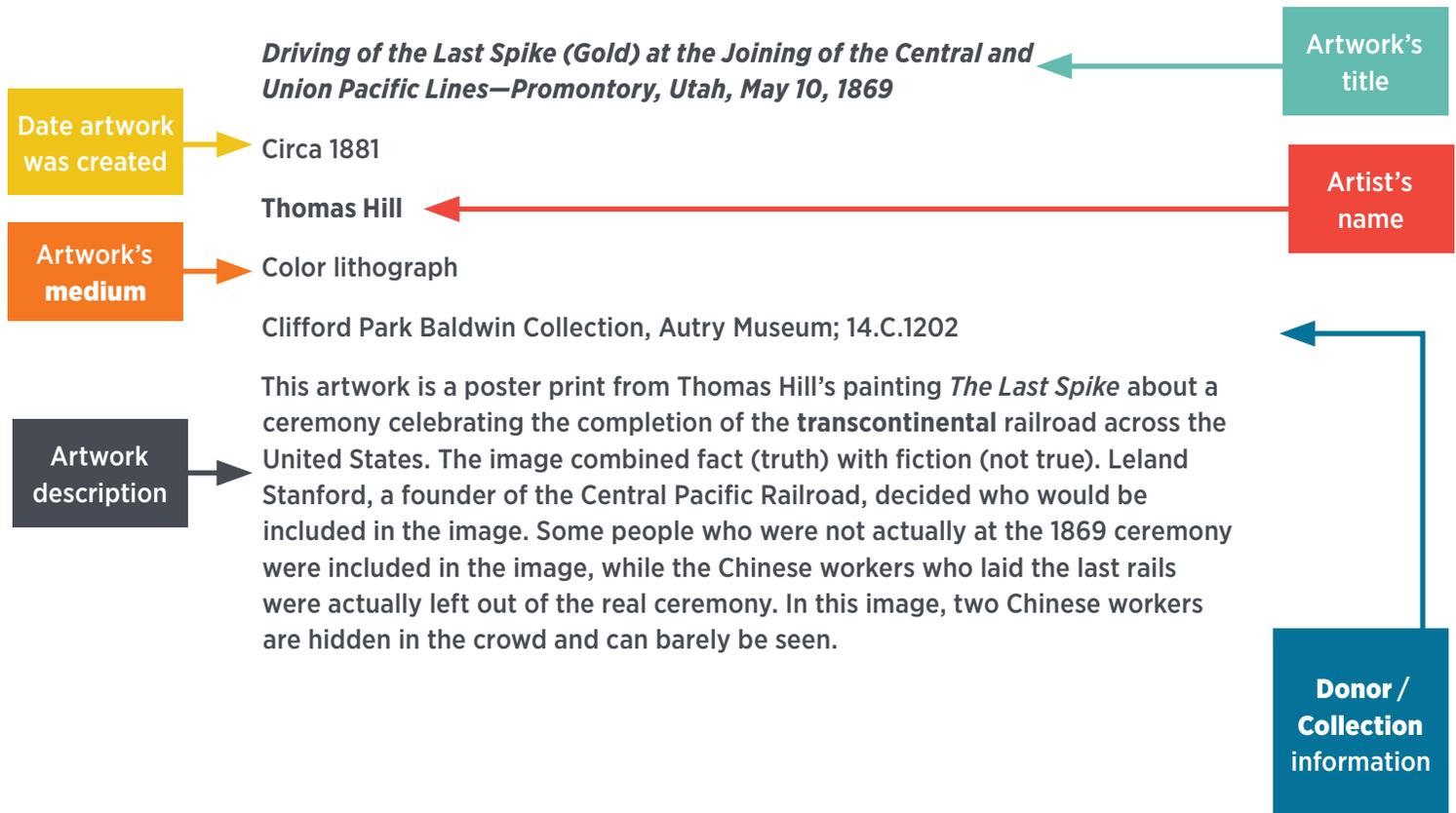
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PART 2 – After looking closely at Artwork #1 from PART 1, describe what you see by answering the questions in the chart below. Write your answers in the space provided or on a separate document.

ART ANALYSIS QUESTIONS	MY DESCRIPTION
What types of different people do you see?	
What are the different people doing?	
What type of transportation do you see?	
What do you see in the environment (clouds, land-forms, plants, etc.)?	
What do your eyes focus on in the artwork? Why?	
What else do you notice about the artwork?	
What questions do you have about the artwork?	

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PART 4 – Prove or disprove your hypothesis by reading the object label below. This object label includes detailed information about Artwork #1 from PART 1.



Glossary

Collection: a group of items that have been collected to study or to show to people

Donor: people who give something to other people or organizations

Medium: the materials used to create artwork; the various types of artistic expression

Transcontinental: going across a continent

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PART 5 – Now that you have learned what Artwork #1 is about by reading the object label from PART 4, answer the questions about the object label in the chart below. Write your answers in the space provided or on a separate document.

OBJECT LABEL QUESTIONS	MY ANSWERS
Who is the artist?	
What is the title of the artwork?	
What year was the artwork created?	
What is the artwork's medium?	
Which historical event (event from the past) is the artwork about?	
Who was included in the artwork?	
Does the artwork hide the history of anyone? If so, who was hidden in the artwork?	

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PART 6 – The Autry Museum borrowed Artwork #2 from the Hronopoulos Family of La Jolla, CA. Take a moment to look closely at Artwork #2 below.



Artwork #2

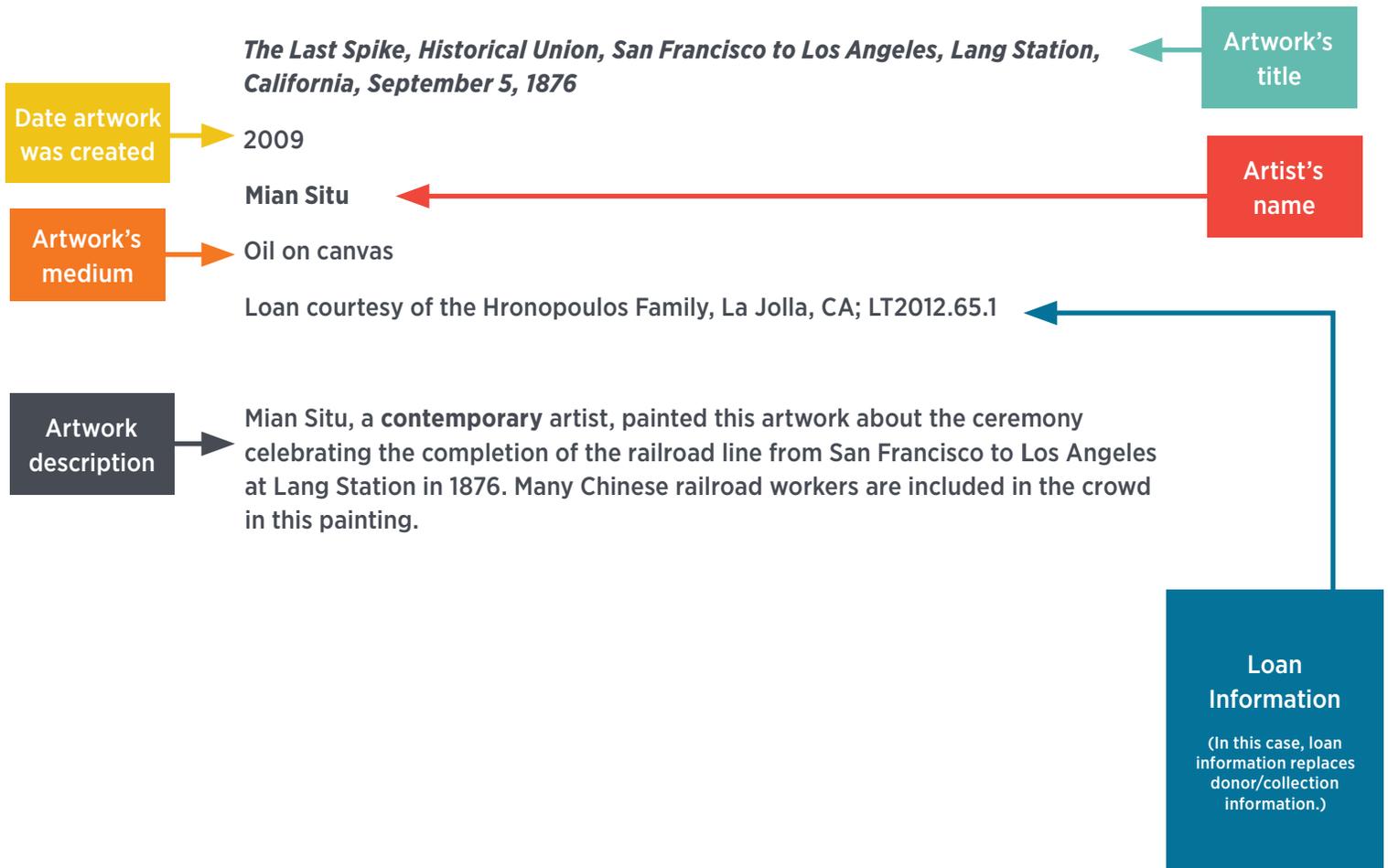
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PART 7 – After looking closely at Artwork #2 from PART 6, describe what you see by answering the questions in the chart below. Write your answers in the space provided or on a separate document.

ART ANALYSIS QUESTIONS	MY DESCRIPTION
What types of different people do you see?	
What are the different people doing?	
What type of transportation do you see?	
What do you see in the environment (clouds, land-forms, plants, etc.)?	
What do your eyes focus on in the artwork? Why?	
What else do you notice about the artwork?	
What questions do you have about the artwork?	

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PART 9 – Prove or disprove your hypothesis by reading the object label below. This object label includes detailed information about Artwork #2 from PART 6.



Glossary

Contemporary: modern

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PART 10 – Now that you have learned what Artwork #2 is about by reading the object label from PART 9, answer the questions about the object label in the chart below. Write your answers in the space provided or on a separate document.

OBJECT LABEL QUESTIONS	MY ANSWERS
Who is the artist?	
What is the title of the artwork?	
What year was the artwork created?	
What is the artwork's medium?	
Which historical event (event from the past) is the artwork about?	
Who was included in the artwork?	
Does the artwork hide the history of anyone? If so, who was hidden in the artwork?	

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PART 11 – In the 1800s, thousands of Chinese workers helped build the railroads. It was very hard, and at times, dangerous work. One artwork includes the history of the Chinese community working on the railroad. The other artwork hides this history about the Chinese community. Look closely at Artwork #1 and Artwork #2 below to help you answer the question: *Which artwork best tells the story of the Chinese community in the 1800s?*



Artwork #1



Artwork #2

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PART 13 – After learning about the Chinese community through artwork, create an artwork that tells a story about one of your communities. Plan your artwork before creating it by answering the questions in the chart below. Write detailed answers in the space provided or on a separate document.

ARTWORK PLAN QUESTIONS	ANSWER EXAMPLES	MY ARTWORK PLAN ANSWERS
Which community do you want to tell a story about through artwork?	Family community Neighborhood community Religious community School community Sports community Other community	
What type of artwork will you create?	Drawing Painting Other artwork	
What materials will you need to create your artwork?	Chalk Colored pencils Crayons Cup with water Markers Paint Paintbrushes Paper Paper towels Pens Pencils Other materials	
What story will your artwork tell about your community? What will your artwork be about?	Think of an event that is important to your community such as a/an: Celebration Ceremony Historical event Other event	
What else will you include in your artwork?	Animals Environment People Places Transportation Other things	

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PART 14 – Create your artwork using your plan from PART 13.

PART 15 – After you create your artwork, write an object label that includes detailed information about your artwork using the object label format below. You can also look at the object labels in PART 4 and PART 9 to help you with your label. Write your object label in the space below or on a separate document.

Object Label Format

My artwork's title

Date my artwork was created

My name

My artwork's medium

Write an artwork description explaining what your artwork is about.

My Object Label

Resources

Painting by Mian Situ, *The Gold Nugget, Chinese Camp 1850*, 2014-2015, oil on canvas. James R. Parks Trustees' Purchase Award. Autry Museum; 2015.4.1

Poster print from Thomas Hill painting *Driving of the Last Spike (Gold) at the Joining of the Central and Union Pacific Lines—Promontory, Utah, May 10, 1869*, circa 1881. Clifford Park Baldwin Collection. Braun Research Library Collection, Autry Museum; 14.C.1202.

Painting by Mian Situ, *The Last Spike, Historical Union, San Francisco to Los Angeles, Lang Station, California, September 5, 1876*, 2009, oil on canvas. Loan courtesy of the Hronopoulos Family, La Jolla, CA, LT2012.65.1.

“Tax.” *Merriam-Webster.com Dictionary*, Merriam-Webster, <https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/tax>. Accessed 17 Mar. 2021.

“Transcontinental.” *Merriam-Webster.com Dictionary*, Merriam-Webster, <https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/transcontinental>. Accessed 17 Mar. 2021.

**Do you want to see the artwork and object label that you created
on our Instagram or Twitter?**

Ask an adult to send a photograph of the artwork that you created along with your name, your age, and your object label to outreach@theautry.org for a chance to be featured on our social media! Accepting work from artists of all ages. Must be 18-years or older to submit.