

ASIAN AMERICAN LIBRARIANS AND LIBRARY SERVICES

Activism, Collaborations, and Strategies

**Edited by Janet Hyunju Clarke,
Raymond Pun, and Monnee Tong**

Foreword by Clara M. Chu

Contents

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and Library Services

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Chapter Fifteen

Asian American Studies and the Association of Chinese Teachers Meet the Public Library

*A Multi-Community Approach to
Planning APIA Programs*

Jerry Dear

Public libraries, traditionally viewed as the last bastions and guardians of knowledge, have expanded their roles in society, serving as beacons to fostering community engagement. For some, libraries mark the first exposure to an educational experience in one's childhood—an experience that continually influences various stages throughout one's life. Similarly, media shapes the psychological mind-set of children as they transition into adulthood, with libraries guiding and bridging the educational gaps of knowledge along this journey. This chapter explores how academic institutions like the Asian American Studies (AAS) Department at San Francisco State University (SFSU), in conjunction with the Association of Chinese Teachers (TACT), can collaborate on creative programs with libraries to educate the general public about Asian American historical and contemporary achievements instead of merely hosting programs featuring food and music. Through this multi-collaborative effort, alliances are formed with each constituency pooling their efforts to form mutually confluent partnerships.

For the past five years, the Asian American Studies Department at SFSU along with TACT have collaborated with the San Francisco Public Library on developing cultural and educational events designed to raise awareness of

Asian Pacific Islander American (APIA) cultural, historical, and literary contributions to American society. Take for instance the realm of children's literature: To the mass public, children's picture books, graphic novels, and young adult novels serve as pathways that connect youth to the wonders and pleasures of reading. Works of youth literature, however, rarely garner high critical attention in popular culture or even APIA communities for that matter, paling in comparison with their adult literary counterparts. Consequently, these three organizations unified their efforts to produce theme-based programs oriented toward people of all ages with a distinct APIA focus.

In the fall of 1996, the preeminent Asian American Children's/Adolescent Literature class (AAS 502, now renumbered to AAS 512) was taught at San Francisco State University. Conceived and designed by Professor Lorraine Dong, this class introduced students to the world of youth literature with a unique focus on APIA issues and themes—an underrepresented topic in Asian American studies. The recurring theme of stereotypes surfaces in many Ethnic Studies classes, and while these disparaging stereotypes permeate literature and film, they can impact young minds on a profound level that shapes their thinking and perceptions of the world. This survey class, then, examined the various ways APIAs are portrayed in children's literature, using a historical approach that traced the evolutionary development of this field and highlighting challenges that continue to persist in the publishing industry today. As the class evolved over time, a community service component was added, and students now apply their knowledge by working on a project in the APIA community, thereby leading to one of the major collaborations with TACT.

An educational organization growing out of a demand for a culturally relevant curriculum in the 1960s, TACT continually strives to develop instructional design around topics that highlight APIA accomplishments. *Crossing Boundaries*, a TACT signature publication, is an activity book designed to introduce elementary, middle, and high school students and educators to the pioneering contributors of APIA history. A major mission of TACT revolves around designing and developing curricular materials that incorporate APIA history to support the cultural competencies of K–12 educators across the nation so they can be utilized in classrooms to tell a more complete story of the historical development of America.

The first collaboration in this pioneering venture occurred in 2013 at the Merced Branch of the San Francisco Public Library with an underlining theme to highlight APIA biographies. Students researched prominent APIAs and sketched brief profiles describing their contributions to American history and to society. Since AAS 512 focused on children's literature, students were instructed to choose an individual, decide upon which aspects of his or her life to examine, write a biographical profile suited to the reading level of a child, and illustrate the subject—thereby adopting the complex process chil-

dren's writers and illustrators undertake when creating picture books for young readers. A selection of the best representative student projects would then be showcased at a capstone event during national APIA Heritage Month or another related cultural event. As a community service project, this event entailed developing curricular activities so that participants of all ages could gain valuable and meaningful knowledge. Honored at this groundbreaking event was the late Donald Chee—a Chinese American who advocated for the establishment of the F-line streetcar in San Francisco's downtown. This streetcar served as a major thoroughfare running down Market Street into the heart of the downtown district. TACT supported this event by donating copies of *Crossing Boundaries* for teachers and librarians, leading origami activities such as folding a vintage streetcar, and featuring representative APIA youth literature at a display table. Students conducted brief presentations on their selected biographies, and the library served as a community space where people could gather at a family-oriented recreational and educational event in honor of APIA Heritage Month.

This collaborative program expanded in 2014 wherein students in Professor Dong's Asian American Children's/Adolescent Literature class researched historical streets and public spaces named after prominent APIAs in San Francisco. Together, they formed a map of "APIA Stars," each star representing a site on a map of San Francisco. Joining this project was Irene Collier, a retired educator and longtime member of the TACT Curriculum Committee, who worked with teachers to develop crafts and activities with an Asian American theme. This time, the event took place at the more spacious Main Branch of the San Francisco Public Library. With a versatile community meeting room enhanced by media equipment, this event expanded to accommodate multiple activities and displays. Students and teachers worked together, setting up tables and chairs for activity stations, each preparing an educational activity for the young and old alike. Whether coloring portraits of famous APIAs or crafting a mini-trading card booklet of APIAs featured in *Crossing Boundaries*, each activity introduced participants to an important person or event connected to APIA history. Other sections along the perimeter of the room featured a *Jeopardy!* game for teenagers and adults so they could test their knowledge of APIA historical landmarks and streets in San Francisco, a table of books written by and about APIAs, and a storytelling corner for young children.

The following year (2015), a new theme emerged, this time focusing on APIA women. The library hosted an event entitled "APIA Women Breaking History," to honor APIA women and their historical contributions to shatter long-standing stereotypes perpetuated through the mainstream media. The student community service component entailed designing and building a "Wall of Fame" featuring thirty-two colored portraits of APIA women such as Olympian diver Victoria Manolo Draves, investigative reporter Vicki

Nguyen, and artist and writer Mine Okubo. Other set pieces included a table featuring books written by and about APIA women accompanied by a recommended reading list compiled by TACT members.

In March 2016, this theme was replicated for National Women's Heritage Month and retitled to "APIA Women Making History" in connection with the makerspace movement at the San Francisco Public Library. While the makerspace program revolved around do-it-yourself crafts and activities, the APIA event incorporated educational components to highlight APIA themes. The Square and Circle Club, the first and oldest Chinese/Asian American women's service organization in the United States, joined this collaborative effort, hosting a table with literature and historical memorabilia, all the while playing a looping video about their organization. In addition to the students' iconic Wall of Fame, a separate wall featured APIA women appearing on selected magazine covers from the Main Library's Magazines & Newspapers Center. While the San Francisco History Center of the San Francisco Public Library curated unique artifacts and memorabilia from their Square and Circle Club archival collection in a small display case, the Magazines & Newspapers Center highlighted magazines featuring APIA women on the covers: From vintage photos of Suzie Wong posing in a cheongsam (*Life* magazine) and former journalist Connie Chung (*Jade*) to comedian Margaret Cho (*Hyphen*) and actress Ming Na Wen (*A. Magazine*), these publications showcased the breadth and scope of the library's periodical collection from both mainstream and alternative presses.

In May 2016, another theme surfaced just in time for the 130th anniversary of the Summer Olympics: "APIA Olympians Shooting for Gold." By now, lecturer Jeannie Woo was teaching a second section of AAS 512. Student projects from both sections offered a variety of APIA Olympian profiles including gymnast Amy Chow, diver Sammy Lee, paralympian racer Raymond Martin, and of course figure skaters Michelle Kwan and Kristi Yamaguchi. Taking this one step further to spotlight the library's collection, the library presented photos of prominent APIA Olympians from the library's periodical archives and electronic image collection from EBSCO. Once again, students joined this effort in conjunction with TACT to produce art and craft activities for all ages and, most importantly, highlight the crowning achievements of APIA Olympians.

A wall map of San Francisco pinpointing streets and landmarks named after Asian Pacific Islander Americans, a Wall of Fame featuring famous APIA women and Olympians, an interactive *Jeopardy!* game, and recommended reading lists by and about notable APIs from all walks of life—these elements comprise some of the set pieces arising from a multi-collaborative program between the Asian American Studies Department at SFSU, the Association of Chinese Teachers, and the San Francisco Public Library. This synergistic partnership operates in mutually confluent ways: Asian

American Studies students at SFSU conduct research at their college and local public libraries to work on community-based projects; TACT networks with the department to help students earn community service hours; the library furnishes a central venue serving as an outreach tool to draw in the community so patrons will gain a deeper understanding and cultural appreciation of the APIA community while learning about the library's archival and electronic collections simultaneously. More importantly, such multi-collaborative approaches empower institutions like public libraries to present cultural events that educate the public and transcend mere superficial narratives perpetuated by the mass media about APIA communities, focusing on topics such as pioneering individuals who contributed to the historical formation of America. Future endeavors may entail having a TACT teacher-hosted story time by reading picture books that more accurately reflect Asian American experiences. Variant themes have opened opportunities to connect with additional community partners such as the Square and Circle Club, and at this writing, the Angel Island Immigration Foundation. Overall, this multi-community effort offers a dynamically engaging approach to presenting APIA cultural knowledge and literacy in compelling and creative ways, demonstrating that concerted efforts with varying constituencies in the community can produce far-reaching results, the library serving as a nexus in unifying them all.

Jerry Dear, information strategist at the San Francisco Main Public Library, enjoys tackling complex research questions. He also teaches in the Library Information Technology program at City College of San Francisco. He earned an MFA in writing from the University of San Francisco and an MLIS from San Jose State University. His passion for reading, writing, and advocating for the Asian Pacific Islander American community led him to serve on and chair several APALA Literature Award committees in the adult fiction, young adult, and children's literature categories. In his free time, he indulges in Asian American literature and film, reads graphic novels, and watches anime.

ADDENDUM

Revised content

On page 138, paragraph 2, this sentence was removed:

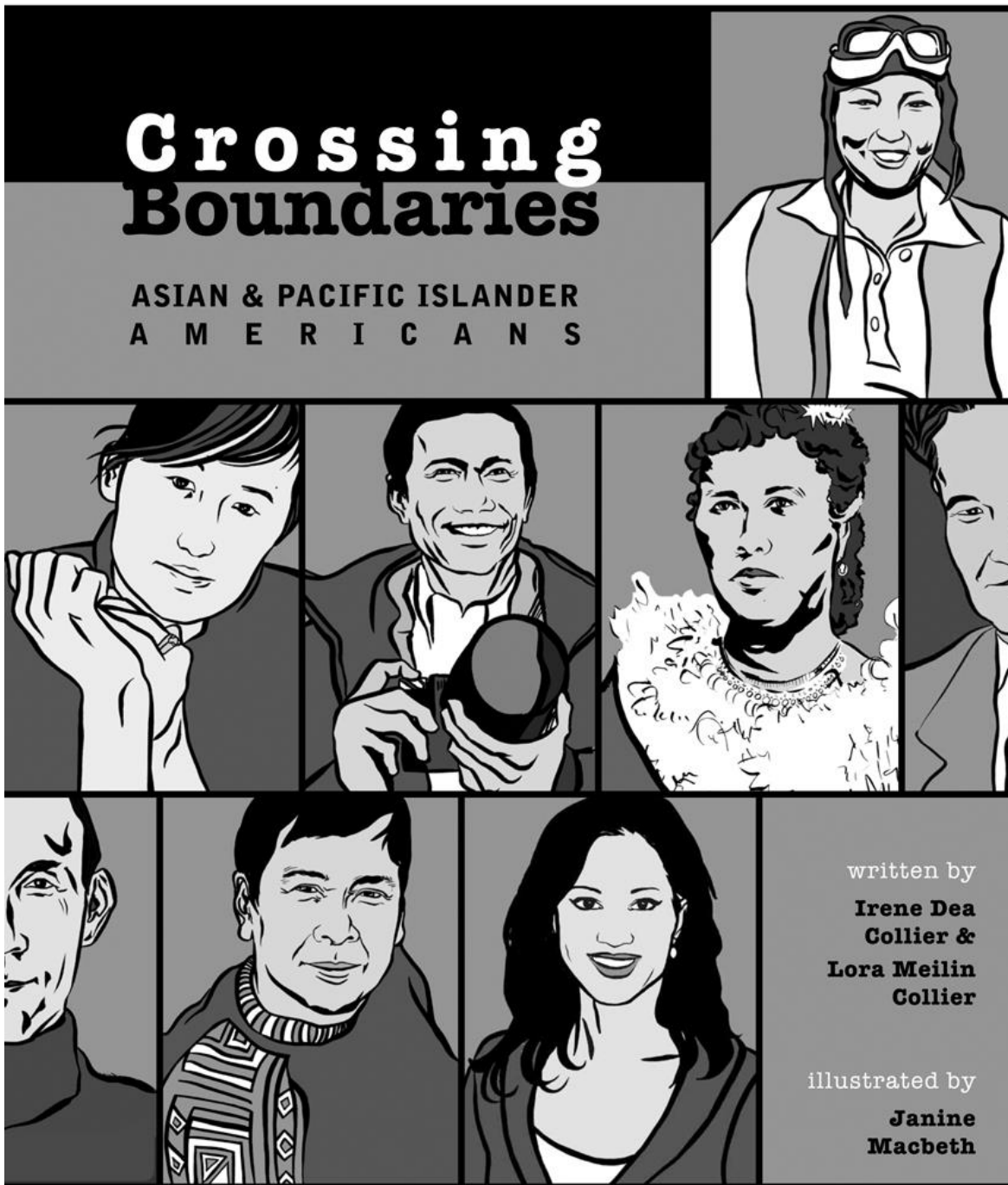
“By now, lecturer Jeannie Woo was teaching a second section of AAS 512.”

On page 136, paragraph 1, Jeannie Woo is introduced and incorporated into the last sentence of the second paragraph to more accurately identify her as teaching a section of AAS 512 much earlier and helping with coordination of the event (APIA Biographies) at the Merced Branch Library:

“As the class evolved over time, lecturer Jeannie Woo taught a second section of the class, a community service component was added, and students now applied their knowledge by working on a project in the APIA community, thereby leading to one of the major collaborations with The Association of Chinese Teachers (TACT).”

The following images were not included in the original article:

Figure 1 – Page 136, paragraph 2



A PROJECT OF THE ASSOCIATION OF CHINESE TEACHERS

Figure 2 – Page 137, paragraph 1

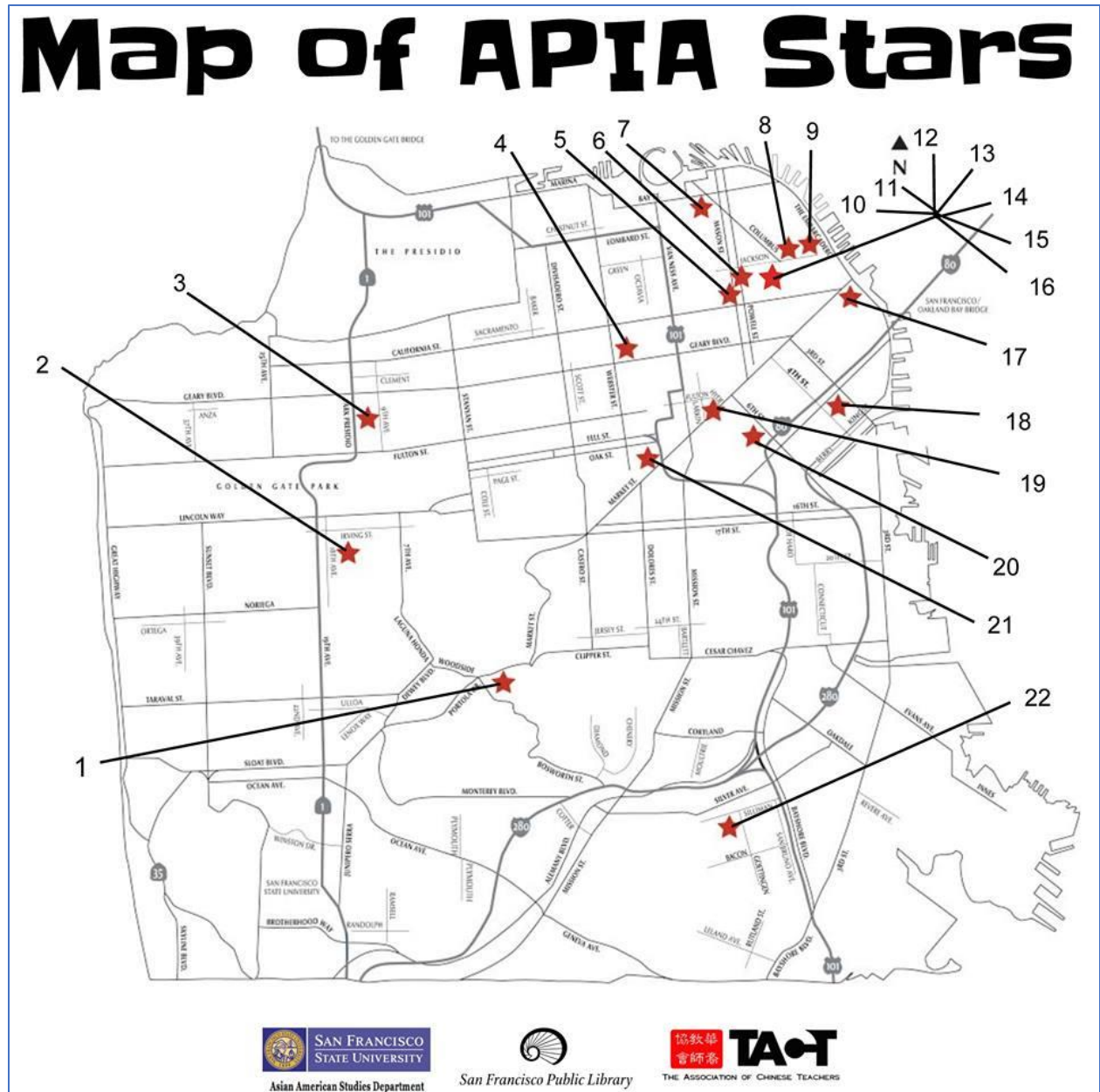


Figure 3 – Page 137, paragraph 2

IN CELEBRATION OF **ASIAN PACIFIC ISLANDER AMERICAN HERITAGE MONTH**

APIA WOMEN BREAKING HISTORY



**FIRST 50 CHILDREN
AGES 12 & UNDER
GET A GOODY BAG!**

**GAMES, ARTS & CRAFTS ACTIVITIES FOR ALL AGES, APIA WOMEN
WALL OF FAME, DISPLAY OF BOOKS BY & ABOUT APIA WOMEN!**

SATURDAY, MAY 16, 10AM -12:30PM
SAN FRANCISCO MAIN LIBRARY
LATINO/HISPANIC COMMUNITY MEETING ROOM
100 Larkin St.



The Association of Chinese Teachers (TACT) logo, San Francisco State University Asian American Studies Dept logo, and San Francisco Public Library logo.

The Magazines & Newspapers Center, San Francisco History Center, Fisher Children's Center, The Mix at Main, and the Filipino American Center of the San Francisco Public Library in association with the Asian American Studies Department at San Francisco State University, The Association of Chinese Teachers (TACT), and the Square & Circle Club present

ASIAN PACIFIC ISLANDER AMERICAN WOMEN MAKING HISTORY MARCH 12, 2016 10:00 AM - 12:30 PM

SAN FRANCISCO PUBLIC LIBRARY
LATINO/HISPANIC COMMUNITY MEETING ROOM
100 LARKIN ST. (415) 557-4277 SFPL.ORG

In celebration of Women's History Month
Games and craft activities for all ages, APIA Women Wall
of Fame, display of books by and about APIA women



San Francisco Public Library
designed by Michelle Yuan



Grace Lee Boggs
Activist and Writer



Jacqueline Nguyen
United States Appellate Judge



Velma Veloria
State Legislator

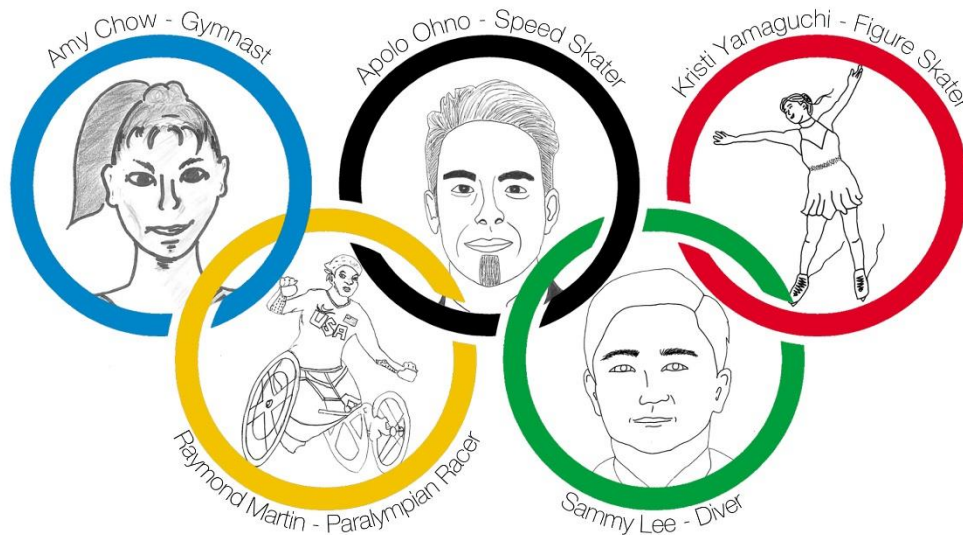
And More!

Figure 5 – Page 138, paragraph 2

The Magazines & Newspapers Center, Art, Music & Recreation Center, Library for the Blind and Print Disabled, Fisher Children's Center, and The Mix at Main in association with the Asian American Studies Department at San Francisco State University and The Association of Chinese Teachers (TACT) present

ASIAN PACIFIC ISLANDER AMERICAN OLYMPIANS SHOOTING FOR GOLD

MAY 14, 2016 @ 10 AM - 12:30 PM



San Francisco Main Public Library
Latino/Hispanic Community Meeting Room
100 Larkin St., San Francisco

In celebration of Asian Pacific Islander American (APIA) Heritage Month. Games and craft activities for all ages, APIA Olympian Wall of Fame, display of books and periodicals about APIA Olympians.

First 50 children ages 12 and under get a goody bag!



Designed by Micholc Yuan

Figure 6 – Page 138, paragraph 2

