

Inhabiting a Journey: Understanding the Immigration Experience Through Genre Study

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INTRODUCTION

When Martin Morales arrived in Houston two and a half years ago, he considered his family lucky. While many Mexican immigrants risk their lives crossing the border to look for the proverbial “greener pasture” in the United States, Martin, his parents, and his three sisters journeyed by plane. Their entry into the United States was facilitated by a temporary tourist visa that was issued back in Mexico City. When his father got a job as construction worker and his mother started working in a restaurant long after they had overstayed their visas, he considered his family even luckier. For the first two years, life was good for Martin and his family: the children were enjoying school and were rapidly learning to speak, read, and write English; the parents were earning enough to afford to rent a modest apartment, buy a pre-owned truck, and remit a couple of hundred dollars to his grandparents in Mexico every month; and the family was able to occasionally have fun in places like Six Flags Astroworld, Galveston, and the Kemah Boardwalk. These days, however, Martin does not feel as lucky anymore. His parents work long hours and in different shifts, so the whole family rarely has time to even share a meal together. His mother constantly and loudly complains about his two older sisters for spending more time outside with friends and for turning into what his mother calls “more American than the Americans.” Meanwhile, his younger sister has become more introverted, and acts like she doesn’t want to be associated with the family. As for himself, his problem is how to pass the upcoming TAKS since he feels that his English is not yet good enough. He thinks that not doing well on a standardized test could jeopardize his dream of getting into a good university. Martin is keen on succeeding on this journey: “My destination is a college degree,” he says, although he knows that both his parents would rather see him working right after high school so he could help pay rent. When asked if he still wants to live in America despite all these problems, he replied: “Why not? America has been good to us. We would have similar problems had we stayed in Mexico. My parents complain about working too much, but I think that’s better than when we were in Mexico when they complained about not having any work at all. My parents do not support me much in my career plans, but America is good to people with independent spirit.” Martin does not only have an independent spirit, he also has innate optimism that is quite atypical of a twelve-year-old Mexican student at F.M. Black Middle School.

Like Martin, Monica Nguyen, a thirteen-year-old Vietnamese 8th grader, is in my English class. Her parents left Vietnam in 1989 on a family reunification visa sponsored by her father’s sister who had earlier come to the United States as refugee in 1975. His father owns and manages a gas station, while her mother tends to her own Vietnamese restaurant in downtown Houston. Although she and her two brothers were all born in

Houston, all of them are fluent in Vietnamese since her parents strictly impose a “Vietnamese-only” rule at home. Monica likes to talk about her aunt’s (the one who sponsored her family) educational history and how it has affected her and her family:

She was fifteen-years-old when she arrived in California, alone, with no money, and no English. The Catholic Charities supported her for a while until a kind American couple adopted her. In three years time, she graduated valedictorian in high school, and was chosen as one of fifty or so students across the nation to undergo an intensive medical degree program at University of California in Riverside. She became a medical doctor in seven years time, and is now making a lot of money doing private practice in Los Angeles. My parents think that if she could do it, so could we, and so there is much pressure at home to do very well especially at school.

This pressure has turned Monica into a very serious and studious student, and in school she is often teased as a nerd because of that. “We do nothing at home but study. My parents find time to tutor me, and when they are too busy, they hire someone to tutor me. Since I am the oldest, my main job is to tutor my younger brothers.” Does she have any complaints about this rigid schooling-oriented family life? Monica says that she complains about not having any close friends and not doing what other girls her age typically do like sleeping-over, chatting with friends on the telephone or the Internet, and watching movies, but she appreciates the fact that her parents are success-oriented and are going out of their way to make her and her brothers become successful. As to whether her parents like it here in the United States, Monica thinks for a moment and then gives a reluctant yes. “My father,” she says, “is happy of his modest success in this country, but I think he feels that he has not really arrived in a country he could call his own. Last year when he came back from a month-long vacation in Vietnam, he told the family that he would just see that all of us have finished college, then he would move back to Saigon to finally end his journey.”

Another student in my English class, Patricia Cunanan, lives in a house two blocks away from F.M. Black Middle School, with her father, mother, two brothers, and her father’s elderly mother. Their home is well-furnished, with a huge plasma TV in the living room. The two younger children, both boys, attend a private, catholic school quite far from where they live. Why isn’t Patricia in a private school like her siblings? Patricia explains:

My mother thinks that the neighborhood school is the worst place to send young boys right now because gangs and drugs are so rampant. Since I am a girl, and girls are supposed to be more responsible and mature, my parents think that I would be okay. Actually, they did want me to go to that catholic school, but I pleaded and begged them to let me finish 8th grade here. I didn’t want to lose my friends. They’re all I have because there aren’t too many Filipino families living

around here. Besides, there really aren't any gangs and drugs in my school, and the kids here are really cool. I think I'm in good hands.

Patricia thinks that her parents' paranoia is a result of their unfamiliarity with the American public school system. Their mind set is that only private schools are good schools, and public schools, like the ones in the Philippines, are places where students learn all the "bad influences." Patricia was seven-years-old when she moved to the U.S. Her mother, a nurse at the Texas Medical Center, came first on a work-visa. Three years later, when she got her green card, the rest of the family followed. Her father, an accountant back in the Philippines, now works for a computer company and seems to be on an upward mobility there. The grandmother was petitioned a year ago on a family reunification visa. She helps around the house, and has become Patricia's "teacher" in Tagalog, which her mother forces her to re-learn. She used to be very fluent in both English and Tagalog, but having no one to use the language with, her Tagalog skills soon deteriorated. Her two brothers think the language is funny and resent learning it, but the mother keeps a blind eye to this saying: "It's okay, they're boys. Boys need to be good in only one thing to be successful in life, but girls have lesser opportunities, so they need to learn more." Patricia feels that this double standard will not do her any good, so right now she is thinking of several options once she is old enough to decide for herself (that means 16 years old, at the very least): Plan A – move with her cousins to California and learn computer programming there; Plan B – move with her mother's parents to the Philippines and learn computer programming in the best public university there; and Plan C – learn computer programming anywhere in America that's far from her parents. Whatever it takes, Patricia is determined to succeed. In a voice that echoes conviction she says: "My parents journeyed to successful life here in the U.S. with almost nothing. I could do that too, even without their help. The first thing to do is embark on my own journey."

Martin, Monica, and Patricia are children of immigrants whose journey to America has become the subject of a literary genre called *new immigration literature*. Their stories typify the experiences of 478 other students of F.M. Black Middle School, who like them, are new immigrants, or children of new immigrants. This number represents 66% of the total number of students at F.M. Black. Of this total number, an overwhelming 96% are Hispanics who originally came from Mexico, Latin America (including the Caribbean), and South America. The remaining 4% are Asians from Vietnam, China, and the Philippines. Forty-four percent of this population were born in their countries of origin, and the average age of these foreign-born immigrants when they entered the U.S. is ten years old. Thirty-five percent of the total immigrant population is in the school's developmental ESL program that serves ESL levels 1, 2 and 4, while the rest, levels 3 and 5, are served in the mainstream inclusion and sheltered-English oriented classrooms. Understandably, there are no data that show how many of these students have legal papers to reside in this U.S., or how many are undocumented, and/or have overstayed their visas. However, based on my trained personal observation, my guess is that not less than 20% of the total number is undocumented.

F.M. Black’s immigrant demographics reflect statistics similar to that of the whole Houston Independent School District (HISD). Figures from the district’s Title III office, the office that administers the federal funds for the district’s immigrant and refugee students, show that approximately 60% of the district’s total student population is composed of new immigrants and of refugees, or children of new immigrants and of children of refugees who came from various countries in the Latin and South American regions (including the Caribbean), from various regions in Asia including the Pacific Islands, and from a few countries in eastern Europe and in Africa. All of these students have to be served in the various ESL and bilingual programs in the district, consequently creating a critical shortage of qualified and certified ESL and bilingual teachers in almost all schools across the district. Forty-five percent of this population is born outside of the United States, and similar to the figures of F.M. Black, the average age of these foreign-born students when they entered into the U.S. is 10 years old. Again, there are no available records as to the number of undocumented and overstaying students from this pool.

HISD is the largest ISD in Houston and in Texas; in fact, it is the seventh largest in the country. It is no surprise then, that HISD’s immigrant population data mirrors that of the whole city of Houston. The most recent Houston Area Survey (2003) estimates the total number of immigrants and refugees at about 1.5 million, including undocumented and overstaying aliens. This is more than a third of the city’s total population! HISD’s immigrant demographics, likewise, is the city’s replica: the largest immigrant group are the Mexicans, followed in order by the Chinese, the Indians, the Filipinos, and then the Vietnamese. The rapid increase of these groups of people was first noticed in the 1980’s, and since then, the number of new arrivals continues to rise even up to this day, with no discernible end in sight. In 2002, more than a hundred thousand immigrants settled in the city. This is a 4% increase from the previous year and more than 40% increase since 1981. Houston, like all other big cities in the U.S. has become a magnet to a variety of immigrants who desire to partake in the city’s many opportunities for success.

Needless to say, Houston’s immigration demographics predictably typify the immigration statistics of the whole country. A recent survey conducted by the U.S. Bureau of Census and the Center of Immigration Studies (*Time for Kids 5*) ranks the top five immigrant groups of the country today, namely the Mexicans, Chinese, Filipinos, Indians, and Cubans (see Table 1.1). The cities that host the most number of this population are, in order, Los Angeles, Miami, New York, Houston, and San Francisco.

Mexico	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●
China	●	□									
Philippines	□	□									
India	□	□									
Cuba	□										

● = 1 million foreign born people
 □ = less than a million foreign born people

Source: U.S. Bureau of the Census; Center for Immigration Studies

As the above statistics show, the sheer number of immigrants and children of immigrants who have come and established roots not only at my school and district, but also in Houston and in many places in the United States, should, with absolute certainty, convince anyone to agree to the idea that this population has been transforming, and will continue to transform many aspects of American life, society, and culture as we know them today, and of their immediate and distant future forms. Thus, it is not only essential and significant, but also with a strong sense of necessity and urgency that we, in the field of education, must take ourselves to task to teach the *whats*, *hows*, and *whys* of immigration, and to create lessons that allow our students to participate in the broader discussion of the impact of immigration to the lives of immigrants, and the effects of immigration to the lives of ordinary Americans. Thus, in general, the goal of this curriculum unit is to promote an understanding of the issues of immigration, of the experience of immigration, and of the thoughts and feelings of immigrants so that students could come out from the learning experience with a more sympathetic attitude to differences of race, language, and culture.

The crucial questions that confront any teacher planning to create these lessons are: 1) What, of the various kinds of materials and resources about immigration, should be used in order to effectively simplify for adolescent and young adult students the inherently difficult and complex issues of immigration?; and 2) How should these issues be presented to young students so that they do not only sustain their interest on the topic, but they also internalize the issues so that in the end they are moved into demonstrating a better understanding of the diversity around them, and a sympathetic attitude towards these diverse groups of people? In the discussions that follow, I will first expound on the *new literature of migration*, the body of work that will be used in this curriculum unit to present the issues of immigration, and then outline the *genre study approach* to teaching that will be used to allow students to encounter fun yet meaningful experiences in this endeavor to learn more about immigration.

UNDERSTANDING THE NEW LITERATURE OF IMMIGRATION

The moment an immigrant decides to leave his country of birth for another foreign country, he/she embarks on a real and symbolic journey that may never end within a lifetime. The extent and implications of this journey on the immigrant, in particular, and on the collective consciousness of the American people and their sense of nationhood, in general, are profound and extensive, so much so that they have been the subject of bounteous writing. In general, there are two kinds of writing that deal with immigration issues. First are the writings of such familiar names as Ronald Takaki, Ruben Rumbaut, Peter Brimelow, Pat Buchanan, Thomas Sowell, Nestor Gonzalez, to mention a few, who have been arguing on the policy debates around immigration from a variety of perspectives raging from the multiculturalist Left to the isolationist Right. This voluminous output of studies and opinions by social scientists, policy makers, and journalists has so dominated public discourse that we often ignore the other and more potent kind of writing on this subject, i.e. those written by poets, essayists, novelists,

playwrights, and movie screenplay writers. The output of these literary writers – which are as plentiful, if not much more so, as those of the first group of writers – represent the experience of immigration in ways that are markedly different from those of a policy maker or a journalist. For example, a poet like Li Young Lee (*The City in Which I Love You*, 1997) lyrically expresses the wonder and the challenge experienced in coming face-to-face with a new immigrant, or a fiction writer like Sandra Cisneros (*The House on Mango Street*, 1991) composes a profoundly evocative story presenting the tragic outcome of immigrating to a hostile society, or an essayist like Julia Alvarez (*How the Garcia Girls Lost their Accents*, 1992) offers a subtle and personal rumination of the refuge offered by America. In myriad ways, immigration literature presents the subjective experiences of immigrants in ways difficult, if not impossible, in the other kind of writing. In general, immigration literature concerns itself with these questions: What is the emotional terrain of immigration? What are the subjective experiences of the immigrants and their children? What psychological motivations and consequences accompany the experience of immigration?

Immigration literature is itself divided into three distinct subcategories, namely: the *old immigration literature* that came out in the earlier decades of the 20th century and lasting through War II, the *ethnic literature* that came out during the period after WWII and before 1965, and the *new immigration literature* that started after 1965 till now. Payant and Rose (1999) point out the thematic distinctions between these body of works: The first group, composed during a period of immigration to the United States that was arguably the most intense, sketches out many of the paradigmatic themes of immigrant literature – themes such as “issues of identities, cultural and generational conflict, assimilation and guilt, and alienation, sometimes from the old-world traditions and sometimes from American culture.” Examples of such works are O.E. Rolvag’s *Giants in the Earth* (1927), Vilhelm Moberg’s *The Emigrants* (1951), James Farrell’s *Studs Lonigan Trilogy* (1932-1935), Carlos Bulosan’s *America is in the Heart* (1943), Condrado Espinosa’s *The Texas Sun* (1926), Michael Gold’s *Jews Without Money* (1930), Mary Antin’s *The Promise Land* (1912), and Abraham Canan’s *The Rise of David Levinsky*. In his introduction to the book *Immigrant Voices* (1999), Gordon Hutner suggests that by and large this older literature of immigration can be divided into a narratives of immigrant “prairie pioneering,” and an urban Jewish literature. It is a problem, however, that many other reviewers of this period of immigrant literature conveniently miss to include the contributions of non-European and non-white writers such as the Filipino Carlos Bulosan, and the Hispanic Condrado Espinosa.

In the decades following WWII, this tradition of writing died out. Literary critics point out that during this period, this notion of an “immigrant literature” gave way to “ethnic literature.” The reasons for this change are not hard to discern. Immigration began to be restricted in the 1920’s and in the decades that follow, the effects of the previous flow of immigrants gradually dissipated. Accordingly, the tradition of writing so dependent on the particular experience of immigration also declined. Fewer and fewer writers wanted to or were able to depict the immigrant experience from within the

immigrant communities. “Ethnicity,” it would seem, now did some of the work of “immigration” in representing an evolving America to itself.

It is not well after 1965 that the experience of immigration becomes once again the subject of intense and varied literary expression. While the issues of identity, cultural and generational conflict, and assimilation have remained dominant concerns in this *new literature of immigration*, in other important respects, however, it reveals new ones. At this juncture, before we get into a detailed discussion on the themes and literary characteristics of this body of work, it may be beneficial to briefly survey the history of immigration in the U.S. in order to understand the context from within which springs this new literature of immigration. In what follows, I will define “new immigration” and clarify the attendant problems that tend to confuse the distinction between “old” and “new” immigration. Then I will briefly outline a legal map of the history of the immigrant journey to the United States, and explain the restrictions imposed by this government to people desiring to move to this country. Finally, I will return to the discussion on *new literature of immigration*, this time explaining in detail the genre’s dominant themes.

Defining “New Immigration”

Our purpose for defining immigration in general and “new immigration” in particular, is to provide an understanding of the “journey” of the new immigrants that we refer to in the title of this curriculum unit. In other words, this discussion will explain how the “new immigrants” and their children, e.g. Martin Morales, Monica Nguyen, and Patricia Cunanan – the second or third generation immigrants presented at the beginning of this paper – navigate through the new life they have in the U.S. The first difficulty in understanding the concept of “new immigration” is in deciding what we mean by immigration. Typically, the history of immigration into the United States is divided into three major phases beginning with the early nineteenth century. This traditional paradigm ignores the first great wave of non-indigenous peoples that came before the United States was established as a nation-state. For the first three centuries after European settlement and colonization of the Americas the principal source of new entrants to the Americas and the Caribbean was Africa not Europe. It was the early nineteenth century before the accumulated total of European settlers in the Americas surpassed the almost 10 million Africans who were carried across the Atlantic after 1492. No doubt there are important reasons to distinguish both (European) settler and (African) slave from immigrant; but the three do share at the very least the experience of transportation to a new land and a new life, as well as of rupture with an established way of life, whether by force or by choice.

The difficulty with definitions of immigration, however, recedes somewhat after 1776, when the more conventional understanding of immigration – as a journeying to a new life in a new country with new laws by individuals of varying degrees of ability to choose to make the journey – becomes more clearly paradigmatic. The first major period of immigration in this conventional sense after 1776 began in the late 1840s and came to

a climax in the 1880s. During the decade of the 1880s the number of immigrants was more than 5 million. The majority of these immigrants, leaving because of famines and social upheavals, came from the United Kingdom, Ireland, Germany, and Scandinavia.

But it is the first quarter of the 20th century that constitutes the most intense period of immigration into the United States. About 17 million people – about half the total number who had entered the country since 1820 – came during this period. These immigrants were the first “new” immigrants. Mostly Italians, Poles, and Jews from central and eastern Europe, they were different from the “old” immigrants who had come from northern and western Europe. This intense period of immigration, which continued to be marked by bias against immigrants from non-European parts of the world, came to an end in the 1920s with new legislative restrictions aimed at stemming the flow of immigrants.

A more expansive attitude to immigration does not return to official policy until after WWII, and the 1965 legislation is a key – albeit contradictory, as we will find out in the next section of this essay – step in this process of liberalization. In the three-and-a-half decades since 1965, more than 20 million immigrants have come from Asia and Latin America. From 1980-1993 European immigrants were only 13 percent of the total, whereas from Asia were 39 percent, and those from Latin America (including the Caribbean) were 43 percent. More than half of these “new” immigrants have come from the following seven countries: Mexico (where Martin Morales is from), the Philippines (where Patricia Cunanan is from), China, Vietnam (where Monica Nguyen’s parents are from), Korea, India, and the Dominican Republic. According to a report by the Urban Institute, the absolute number of immigrants who enter each year and stay – currently about 1.1 million (legal and illegal) – matches the previous historical peak. The proportion of this immigration in relation to the current population of the United States is better captured by another figure. According to the U.S. Census Bureau, foreign-born people represented 8.7 percent of the American population in 1994. This is just a bit more than half the proportion that they made up in the census of 1910. Arguably, then, despite the alarmist rhetoric (e.g. Daniel James, Pat Buchanan) in some quarters about the impact of the new immigration taking place after 1965, the intensity of immigration was much greater during 1900-1925 than during 1965-1995 – though surely it is beyond dispute that the last thirty years constitute a significant period of immigration in ways both historically unprecedented and similar to earlier periods in U.S. history.

The contemporary politics of immigration are as complicated as ever. On the one hand, the recent arrivals to the country like the families of Martin Morales, Patricia Cunanan, and Monica Nguyen have generally been opposed by conservative movements desirous of preserving a “traditional,” if not mythical, view of the United States as an Anglo-European nation. On the other hand, there has also been antipathy to immigration from some elements in the African American communities who might otherwise be opposed to conservative policies. For many African Americans, these new Americans appear as rivals for economic and social opportunities.

The Legal Map of the Immigrant's Journey

To understand why there are “new Americans” and “old Americans” in the population of the United States requires a brief look at history. The year 1965, as mentioned earlier, was the watershed of a massive and significant shift that radically transformed the demographics of this country. To many savants (e.g. Douglas Massey, Alejandro Portes), the 1965 Hart-Celler Immigration Act signals a liberalizing turn from exclusion to inclusion. For 100 years before 1965, immigration laws have shaped what we now understand as “racist” policies in the United States. Most immigration scholars trace the origins of racist exclusion policies from the U.S. to the 1882 Chinese Exclusion Act which prohibited the immigration of Chinese laborers for ten years. Prior to this, however, the Page Law of 1875, a law that is often ignored by researchers due, perhaps, to its subject, almost completely halted the immigration of Chinese women through its focus on purported prostitutes from “oriental” countries. The 1882 law was followed by a series of legislative acts that in piecemeal fashion excluded immigrants from other countries.

Nativism, a form of racism, was rampant at this time, and it did not only work to exclude “Orientals,” it also was characterized by both racial differentiation among white immigrants as well as the consolidation of a white identity. In 1907, the congress-formed Dillingham Commission recommended the restriction of the more recent immigrants from southern and eastern Europe because they were deemed inferior to earlier immigrants from northern and western Europe. In 1908, the Gentleman's Agreement severely restricted Japanese immigration, for the same reason. Still, in 1917, a law was passed that prohibited immigration from a “barred zone” that included south Asia through Southeast Asia and islands in the Indian and Pacific Oceans. It must be noted, however, that nativism during this era occurred within a broader racial mapping of the United States that featured the conquest and genocide of American Indians, the enslavement and segregation of Blacks, and the territorial disposition of Mexican Americans. In 1921 and 1924, legislative acts created national origin quotas in an attempt to re-create the U.S. in its northern European image. The 1924 Immigration Law differentiated Europeans according to nationality and ranked them in a hierarchy of desirability. At the same time, the law also helped construct a white American race by accepting only those Europeans that shared a common “whiteness,” and rejecting those who were considered “unassimilable to the nation,” and “aliens ineligible to citizenship.”

Aside from racial considerations, economic demands, exclusions based on moral and sexual concerns, and politics have defined overlapping and at times competing state policies about immigration. The U.S. used (and continues to use) immigration to meet capitalist economic demands as painfully apparent in the history of importation and deportation of workers from Mexico. For example, during the labor shortage in WWI, Mexican immigration was encouraged, only to be followed by mass deportation during the Great Depression. Then again, during the labor shortage in WWII, the Bracero Program was created to import hundreds of thousands of Mexicans without labor

protection, followed again by the deportation of more than one million Mexicans in a program named “Operations Wetback” carried out during the recession of the early 1950s.

Economics fused with morality succeeded in barring those considered least desirable as members of the American nation. Lunatics, idiots, and any person likely to become a “public charge” were barred from landing in 1882. Paupers, polygamists, and those with certain contagious disease were excluded as of 1891 and so were the epileptics, insane persons, and beggars as of 1903. In 1907, the “feebleminded,” carriers of tuberculosis, and those with some mental or physical defects that could affect their ability to learn were added to the list. Ten years later, alcoholics and psychotics, along with the illiterates were appended to this already long list. In 1952, banned were the drug addicts, those afflicted with psychopathic personality, epilepsy (again), or a “mental defect” which was understood to cover those whose sexuality was considered deviant. In 1965, Congress clarified its intent by adding the phrase “or sexual deviation” and deleting epilepsy from the list of undesirable aliens.

The force of the law has also been used in the United States to shape immigrant flows in the service of politics. In 1903, a congressional act excluded anarchists or those who sought the overthrow of the U.S. government, or all other governments. In 1950, Congress made past or present membership in, or an affiliation with the Communist Party as specific ground for exclusion, and created a broad ground of exclusion for those who sought to engage in activities “prejudicial to the public interest.” Meanwhile, the McCarran-Walter Act of 1952 (at the height of the McCarthy era) declared that there were in the U.S “indigestible blocks” which could not assimilate, referring to those who have written or published or circulated writings advocating certain political views including communism, anarchy, or overthrowing of the U.S. government or all other governments. This law was, in fact, used at various times to bar such figures as Yasir Arafat, Gabriel Garcia Marquez, Carlos Fuentes, and Graham Greene.

Then came 1965. The Hart-Celler Immigration Act was aimed to update immigration policies to reflect the social transformation of the times, and to rationalize preferences based on human rights considerations. The act abolished the national origins formula and replaced it with an overall ceiling of approximately 300,000 immigrant visas, which were divided between the Eastern Hemisphere, set at 180,000, with a maximum of 20,000 per country, and 120,000 for the Western Hemisphere. An elaborate system of preferences was followed wherein priority was given to reuniting families and to bringing in those who had certain desirable or needed skills. The impact of this policy can be illustrated through statistics. Overall immigration to the U.S. had been heavily Northern Europeans – 49% of the worldwide total of lawfully admitted immigrants from 1821-1995 were from northern Europe. When Canadians are combined to the total, the figure rises to 56%. However, in 1991-1995, Northern Europeans and Canadians together comprise only 16% of the immigrant pool. The countries of birth of the greatest numbers of immigrants in 1995 were, in order, Mexico, the Philippines, Vietnam, the Dominican

Republic, The People's Republic of China, India, Cuba, Ukraine, Jamaica, and Korea. In 1990, another congressional act lifted the ceiling to a worldwide limit of 700,000 for three years, to drop to 675,000 thereafter. Of these visas, 480,000 were made available for family reunification, 140,000 for employment-based immigrants (for highly-skilled professional labor, for example multinational executives and managers, and outstanding professors and researchers), and 55,000 were allotted for a new category called "diversity immigrants." The 1990 act also finally repealed the statutory provision excluding "homosexual aliens."

While Congress was regulating immigration through these series of legislative acts, its demographics were also being shaped by refugees. Americans were largely opposed to the admission of refugees in the 1930s, although war-fleeing refugees from Europe were admitted in the 1940s. The 1965 Act however, created a new immigrant category for aliens fleeing persecution in a "communist dominated" country, or a country within the general area of the Middle East, or for those uprooted by catastrophic natural calamity. Twenty years later, through the Refugee Act of 1980, a more comprehensive piece of refugee legislation, allowed for the admission of 40,000 Hungarians, 750,000 Indochinese, and 700,000 Cubans.

On the surface, the watershed 1965 Act signifies an exemplary "revolution" in immigration law. To some scholars (e.g. Barry Chiswick, Donald Huddle), however, the picture is not all that rosy. While 1965 has indeed signaled a significant demographic shift, celebrating the growth of racial populations, it fails to address multiple ways in which immigration continues to be restricted (for example, on the basis of class, HIV status, political perspective, and U.S. foreign policy), and also ignores the massive regulatory apparatus that has been constructed post-1965 to limit admissions, to expedite deportations, and to restrict the rights of immigrants. The contradictions posed by a more open immigration policy as to national origins with the continued restrictive regime makes manifest both how immigration law services the crass demands of U.S. economic and foreign policies and a real ambivalence about the identity of the United States as a multiethnic nation.

Based on recent events that exposed the vulnerability of the United States to terrorist attacks, it is not unreasonable to predict that Congress will pass more restrictive policies regarding immigration. Through the USA Patriot Act of 2001, laws have already been passed legalizing indefinite detention of immigrants certified as suspected terrorists and creating sweeping new definitions of "terrorists" who will be deported or excluded from the United States. This Act may yet be another watershed that will completely transform both immigration law and the experiences of immigrants in this country. As I write this, explicit calls are being made for racial profiling, for a moratorium on immigration altogether, for a moratorium on student visas, and for a complete surveillance of immigrants. As always, anger and frustration appear to be channeled through the enactment of overboard legislation targeting immigrants.

Themes of the New Literature of Immigration

The above discussion helps us see how the legal, political, economic, and social milieu impacts the experience of immigrants. Having seen this, a fuller understanding of the nature and characteristics of the new literature of immigration, and a consequent understanding of the “journey” of new immigrants are now possible. This body of work is defined as the literature emerging out of communities formed or re-formed by post-1965 immigrations (Muller 1999). Sometimes immigrants write the works themselves. Sometimes the children or grandchildren of immigrants write them. Nonetheless, the defining characteristic of this literature is that the works are written by those living and writing in close proximity to the experience of immigration either because they are immigrants themselves or because they are members of communities in which the experience of immigration is ongoing and foundational (Payant and Rose 1999).

Earlier in this section, we pointed out the fact that although the issues of identity, cultural and generational conflict, and assimilation have been carried over from earlier forms of immigrant literature, the new literature of immigration deals with new concerns. One such concern is the preoccupation with race and the limitations imposed by it in America. Current writers overwhelmingly deal with immigration experiences of people who are not from Europe or not of European descent. Critics have noticed a difference in mood in the telling of immigration experience. Payant and Rose (1999) express the point well when they write, “One salient difference between older and more recent immigrant writing is the tendency of newer writers to critique American culture and find it wanting.” In *New Strangers in Paradise*, Gilbert Muller (1999) makes the same point when he writes of the “shifting, dualistic, increasingly oppositional behavior to American culture that becomes the hallmark of the immigrant experience in (contemporary) American fiction.” Perhaps also contributing to this mood is the fact that the vast majority of the new immigrants come from countries with long experiences of colonialism and neocolonialism, thus a critical knowledge of racial prejudice is almost second nature to them. Assimilation remains an option in the new literature of immigration, but in some of the works, there is a deep and thoroughgoing rejection of it. Nevertheless, in some other works there is an attempt to step around the issue without thereby being led to a rejection of America – rather than about *becoming* American, these works are about *being* American.

Of course, the experience of immigration has itself changed enormously since the days of the *old literature of immigration*. Now, in the era of email and inexpensive telephone calls, most immigrants can expect to stay in close contact with their countries of origin, even if they are not able to travel back on a regular basis. It would seem then that the experience of immigration has become less wrenching. This has led some critics to wonder whether the very notion of a literature of immigration is not approaching an end. One critic, Alpana Sharma Knippling (1996) broached the question: Can the immigrant experience survive the inexorable shrinking of the globe by the technologies of communication? She suggests that “the figure of the new immigrant” points to a

transcending of “national concerns.” National boundaries and national identities no longer have the power that they once had to control the movements, communications, and allegiances of immigrants.

But the experience of immigration is not primarily about ease of travel or communication. It is also about the depth of engagement, willing or involuntary, with the “host” nation into which the immigrant, in whatever spirit, enters. In this respect, the immigrant is different from the traveler, the tourist, or even the exile. The exile may live in the host country for as many years as the immigrant but without engaging with it in quite the same manner. The very power of a literature of immigration springs from this engagement that is such an important part of the experience of immigration: this engagement is the source of its profound ability to call forth for scrutiny, validation, and rejection of the deepest acknowledged beliefs of the host country. At its best, the new literature of immigration will make audible to the reader both untold aspects of “America,” that symbolic space into which every immigrant to the United States journeys, and unheard articulations of the subjective experience of that journey.

The journey to America is not one thing alone. It is freedom and death, violence and happiness, hate and love. The story of that journey, too, is not made into literature in one way alone. There are poems and short stories, essays, novels, letters, memoirs, journals, pictures, and films. There are recognizable writers and others most readers will encounter for the first time. There is humor and sadness, anger and sympathy. In all this variety, these works are united and made into what we call a new literature of immigration by the following: an engagement in however explicit or subtle manner with the idea of “America,” and an experience of a journeying across a legally and otherwise policed line to that fateful encounter with America.

TEACHING STRATEGY: GENRE STUDY

If there is one approach to teaching that could fully serve the goals I have set for this curriculum unit, it would be the genre-study approach. In *Thinking through Genre* (2003), Heather Lattimer defines genre-study as “an inquiry into a text form.” “It is a teaching strategy that allows students to become insiders in the world of that text form by inhabiting that genre” (Bomer 1995). The aim of this approach is to train students to become craftspersons of the genre they are studying. The process begins with the students learning about the genre, probing into their themes and structures, and analyzing the author’s style and genius of writing. From these exploratory beginnings, the students are then led into a discovery of their own strengths and weakness as writers as they try to produce their own writings by following the standards of the genre they have just learned.

My expectations for my students after they learn “Inhabiting a Journey” are high, but all are achievable. First, I want my students to get to a level of expertise appropriate for their age and cognitive levels on the various issues related to immigration. Second, I expect my students to leave the unit with a sense of ownership of both the thematic and

stylistic features of the new immigration literature to an extent where they can produce original writings that utilize these features. Third, I anticipate that my students will become proficient readers and writers who are able to navigate through the nuances of this form of writing in the future. Finally, I count on my students to develop a sense of awareness of the many challenges that immigrants go through and to empathize with the plight of immigrants, not only of this country but also those in other places in the world. I am convinced that giving my students the freedom to interact with *new immigrant literature*, coaching them towards a deeper understanding of this literary form, and having them inhabit the genre they are studying, is the best way that I have found to achieve these goals.

My conversion towards becoming a classroom practitioner of this approach happened as a result of an epiphanic moment I experienced one January morning a few years ago, when I chanced upon students enthusiastically discussing poetry in the classroom of Melody Torres, an esteemed colleague. The students were all focused on the poem they were studying. They used in their verbal interactions the meta-language of poetry almost with a professorial ease. They went through the steps of literature study with very little intervention from Melody: critiquing the author's style, analyzing the author's purpose, evaluating the artistic merits of the poem, and synthesizing the poem's insights with their own perceptions and experiences of life. Later, towards the end of the one-hour-and-thirty-minute session, the students took out their writer's notebooks and quietly wrote their reflections. Glancing over their heads and being careful not to disrupt anybody's train of thought, I observed the students writing their own poems: some using the rhyme scheme of the poem they had just studied; others writing an original free verse on the same theme as the poem's; while a few others composing their own poems using most of the literary elements they had discussed earlier. Sometimes, a stretch of silence would be broken by someone whispering clarifications to Melody, or with someone's restrained self-talk, sighs, and *aha!* Touched by the magic of the moment, I made a mental note to myself to suggest to Melody that she hang a sign on the door: "Silence: Authors at Work!" Indeed, it would be irreverent to disrupt the creative energy that had so gripped the students at that time. It was in the midst of that productive silence when I realized how different Melody's class was from mine: her students had become experts of the literary form they were studying!

It was not that my classroom didn't have its share of academically engaged students and shared moments of success; in fact, on the surface, my classroom appeared to be functioning well. I had always been a student-centered kind of teacher who could instinctively turn any lesson into an integrated and interdisciplinary learning experience. Give me any kind of classroom and I would transform it into a learning center. All my students were engaged in independent reading books that they themselves chose and which all had my *imprimatur*. Each of them had a response journal wherein they dutifully wrote their reflections. Discussions were done in *literature circles* (Daniels 1994) and the students wrote using the highly effective *6 Traits of Writing* (Culham 2003) and Barry Lane's *Writing Toolbox* techniques (*Reviser's Toolbox* 1998). I spent a lot of time

conceptualizing my lessons to ensure that learning was fun yet challenging and meaningful. Using a variety of cooperative learning (Johnson, et al 1991) structures, I managed to keep the classroom environment supportive and comfortable. Other activities designed to lower the students' affective filters (i.e. games, role-playing, etc.) were regularly implemented, and these had produced students who were knew how to care for each other's needs, to share their ideas and time, and to celebrate their success. But still, I was not satisfied. I was concerned that Martin had not been able to produce writings that demonstrate a good grasp of literary elements despite all the A's he had been getting in group writing projects. I was worried that Monica's reading preference was limited to fiction and that she would often dismiss nonfiction as boring and difficult to understand. I was afraid that Patricia's knowledge about the "depression era" and the "dust bowl," and the reading skills she picked up during our reading of Karen Hesse's *Out of the Dust* would not carry over to our next reading, and would soon be forgotten. What I witnessed in Melody's classroom made me realize that there was something beyond the student-centered strategies that I knew back then. I realized that I could aim not just at developing my students into competent and proficient readers and writers of literature, but also as *experts* of the literary genres that we study in the classroom.

New literature of immigration is a special genre to study. Like all other literary genres, this category of writing has predictable narrative patterns. Here, the story starts from the immigrant's preparation for departure from his/her country of birth. Then it progresses to the immigrant's journey to and arrival at the country of destination. Conflicts and problems occur as inevitable consequences of the immigrant's attempts to adjust to the new culture. The action builds to a climax when the immigrant confronts the bittersweet and paradoxical realities of living in a foreign country. The narrative ends with the immigrant's ruminations about his/her ambivalent existence as a hyphenated American. Like all other genres, new literature of immigration depicts life's broad themes of love, death, forgiveness, birth, etc; however, what makes this genre unique is that it paints all these themes solely on the canvass of the immigration experience. Furthermore, unlike in other genre studies where we focus only on one form of writing (e.g. short story, or editorial, or fairy tale, etc.), in this genre-study we will concentrate only on the patterns of narrative presentation. This is because as a body of work, *new literature of immigration* uses a variety of writing forms, i.e. there are poems, memoirs, novels, short stories, diaries, editorials, feature articles, etc. within the genre, all of which describe and depict the immigration experience. It is important to point out at this juncture that I take the definition of "genre" at its broadest sense. Genre, as it is commonly known, narrowly refers to a single writing form, thus, if a genre study is done on short story, for example, students will need to read and analyze a body of works of several representative authors, and of a variety of themes and styles in order to analyze how commonly or distinctly all or each of the authors utilize the short story format. I believe that genre study is much more than this. In *Time for Meaning* (1995), Bomer explains:

Every piece of writing, every text, comes to us both as a *text* – the piece it is – and a *kind* of text – an instance of genre. And what kind of thing it is puts some limits

as to what we expect to find there. Genre, an oft-overlooked cueing system in reading constrains our prediction, and lays down a tract for our reading.

New literature of immigration is a kind of text, and those who are familiar with this body of work are right away cued to its distinct narrative pattern. This “cueing” experience is the same kind of automatic response that we have whenever we watch, for example, a Quentin Tarantino film: we right away predict that it is going to show a lot of violence, that there is going to be sophisticated camerawork, and that it uses “pulp fiction” as treatment to its narrative. We have a different set of expectation when we watch or read, for instance, a romantic comedy. The distinct processes, structures, and narrative patterns that authors use to describe events or ideas cue us to the kind of reading strategies we should use to analyze literary pieces. Literacy researchers such as Lucy Calkins, Randy Bomer, and Don Murray insist on immersing students in a genre and allowing them to inhabit its themes, forms, and structures so that they may reach the depths of learning. As Calkins (1994) explains:

We regard genre studies as fundamental enough to shape our curriculum around them. We find that when an entire class inquires into a genre, it is life-giving. It opens doors and leaves a lot of room for variety and choice, while also allowing the classroom community to inquire deeply into something together.

The obvious question to ask at this point is: How does genre study work for *new immigration literature*? In the section that follows, I will present a step-by-step procedure that describes the process from beginning to end. Many of the ideas that I will use here are borrowed from and modified from the writings of some of the most prominent researchers and practitioners of the approach like Atwell (1998), Allen and Gonzalez (1998), Bomer (1995), Calkins (1994, 2001), Murray (1982), Romano (2000), and Lattimer (2003).

Step 1: Selecting Appropriate Works From the Genre

Crucial to the success of the unit is the choice of materials that embody the distinct characteristics of *new immigration literature*. Surely, there is no shortage of fiction, non-fiction, and poems that narrate, explicate, and reflect on the experience of immigration however, not all of them would be appropriate for a classroom full of adolescent and young adult students. Thoughtful consideration is needed in choosing specific works that we require for our students to inhabit with.

I would suggest the following criteria that I have modified from Lattimer (1995), to guide us in choosing the readings. First, a *new immigration literature* work must be selected based on what we observe in our students’ prior knowledge and attitude towards immigration. Lattimer tells us that “observation of student behaviors, both academic and social/emotional, provides teachers with clues as to what would be the most effective work to study.” If your students are predominantly Hispanics and if many of them are

second or third generation immigrants, they would probably benefit more from reading non-fictional and fictional accounts of the immigration experience of some of our most prominent Hispanic authors such as Francisco Jimenez' *The Circuit*, Gary Soto's *Living Up the Street: A Summer Life*, and Sandra Cisneros' *The House on Mango Street*. A diverse classroom calls for a diverse list of readings, so you might want to add to the list Yoshiko Uchida's *The Invisible Thread: An Autobiography*, Lawrence Yep's *The Lost Garden*, and Carlos Bulosan's *America Is in the Heart*. Diversity does not only mean the students' race and/or cultural heritage; it also refers to the variety of emotional and social needs that adolescent and young adults experience as they grow up. Many of them, for example, are confronting issues in belonging-ness and identity crisis. These personal conflicts provide a relevant opportunity to discuss works that depict an immigrant's search for identity (e.g. Julia Alvarez' *How the Garcia Girls Lost Their Accents*), adjustment to the new American way of life (e.g. Achy Obejas' *We Came All the Way from Cuba So You Could Dress Like This?*), and intergenerational conflicts (e.g. Richard Rodriguez' *Days of Obligation: An Argument with My Mexican Father*).

Second, our choice of works should be based on what we know about the genre itself. Since *new immigration literature* generally treats the immigration experience with a more serious, reflective, introspective, and critical tone, works that parody and/or romanticize the immigration experience have no place in the curriculum. This criterion, therefore limits the kind of readings that we can do in the classroom to only those that potentially provide a meaningful interaction with students such as memoirs (see sample titles above); editorials written by noted immigration pundits such as Peter Brimelow, Pat Buchanan, and Daniel James; articles from highly respected sources like TIME and NEWSWEEK magazines, novels by Jessica Hagedorn, Amy Tan, Pam Munoz Ryan, to mention a few; poems by Maxine Hong Kingston, Tato Laviera, Agha Shahid Ali, and Judith Ortiz Cofer; and films and videos especially those produced by such respected companies like the Public Broadcasting System and the Corporation for Public Broadcasting. Others may frown on this self-censorship, but there is practicality to this logic: there are thousands of works in this genre many of which contain little, if not, zero artistic merit and whose depiction and interpretation of the immigration experience are at best, trivial. Additionally, readings should also be evaluated for their authenticity. Lattimer suggests that we ask these questions: Can adult readers interact meaningfully with these texts? Do adolescent and young adult readers purchase, read, and discuss the works in this genre? Is the author critically acclaimed? Indeed, if we are to make this learning experience meaningful and significant for our students, we ought to choose our materials responsibly and with a sense of purpose.

It is important to have more than enough textual and non-textual materials when doing genre study. Nothing can erode interest in the lesson faster than having an inadequate supply of interesting and relevant materials. Once texts are identified, you can then classify and organize them according to their purpose in the curriculum. A few of these readings (about 8–12 outstanding titles) can be used as *common texts*. These are “short, high-quality texts exemplifying the genre that serve as models of outstanding

texts” (Lattimer 1995). Through these required readings, students can build a common vocabulary, analyze literary structures and elements, discuss themes, and use them as models of their own writings. The bulk of the supply of materials will be used for *independent readings*. These are texts that students can read on their own outside the classroom. The purpose for reading these materials is to have pleasure and entertainment, thus the stories must be compelling and interesting enough for even the most reluctant readers to enjoy. These may not necessarily be only about the experience of immigration: related readings should be included so that students will learn how to see the many connections between and among various genres. Finally, the other group of materials that must be made available to students throughout the duration of the genre study is the *response journal books*. These are readings that provide excellent sources of prompts that students can respond to at the end of a sustained silent reading activity. Regular response journal writing is essential to transforming our students into active participants during peer discussions because the independent reflection that they do during this activity can give them the chance to clarify their thoughts before sharing their ideas.

The third and final criteria from which we should base our choice of materials are the standards required by our state, district, and school. Like Lattimer, I observe that most of the English and Language Arts standards enumerated by the Texas Education Agency (or in California where Lattimer works), and in Houston ISD are relatively broad, allowing teachers a great deal of flexibility while demanding that we expose our students to a range of culturally diverse written text formats. With accountability becoming more and more a professional issue among teachers, teaching to the TAKS objectives must also be considered in our choice of materials. Questions such as the following can help us to decide whether a particular *new immigration literature* material could also be used to prepare students for TAKS: Does the reading present many opportunities for students to understand culturally diverse written texts? Does it contain a variety of literary elements for students to identify, distinguish, explain, and describe? Will the reading challenge the students into applying specific reading strategies? Will the reading allow the students to practice their critical-thinking skills?

Step 2: Conceptualizing the Unit

Once materials are selected, the next logical step is to conceptualize and plan the unit. Planning starts by immersing yourself in the genre. Lattimer (10) suggests that we first read, reflect on, and analyze outstanding adult-level materials in the genre because they provide the essential reference point. This immersion process will enable the teacher to reflect on his/her own notions and understandings of, and convictions towards the genre. Consequently, this can transform him/her into an expert teacher of the genre. This is crucial. After all, if our aim is to make our students experts in *new literature of immigration*, we should be experts ourselves. Required readings for teachers should include both fiction and non-fiction texts such as Portes and Rumbaut’s *Legacies: The Story of the Immigrant Second Generation* (2001); Muller’s *New Strangers in Paradise: The Immigrant Experience and Contemporary American Fiction*; Hutner’s (ed)

Immigrant Voices: Twenty-four Narratives on Becoming an American; and Solomon's (ed) *Other Voices, Other Vistas: Short Stories from Africa, China, India, Japan, and Latin America*.

Teachers who inhabit the genre that they teach are teachers who are effective in setting goals that are rigorous yet appropriate for their students. The best goals are those that are “worthy of an enduring understanding” (Wiggins 1998). The key question to ask is: What of the *new immigration literature* and the immigration experience are essential to our students' present and future lives? Goal-setting needs another careful consideration. At the start of the process, your students' needs and abilities should not yet figure in the equation, since genre study depends primarily on the genre itself and not on what the students can and cannot do. The goals of the unit should reflect the knowledge and skills of a proficient reader and writer of the genre. It is only after the goals are established that we begin to consider how to help our students move towards those goals. In this stage of the conceptualization process, breaking down the goals into chunks of discrete and specific objectives can allow us to plan for a single lesson or a series of lessons. Following Lattimer's curriculum design in *Thinking Through Genre* (12), I have divided the focus of this curriculum unit into three distinct learning categories, namely: 1) *Supporting Activities* – these are non-genre specific lessons such as an introductory lesson at the start of and a culminating activity at the end of the unit, and other reinforcement activities such as spelling, grammar, and vocabulary lessons aimed at promoting literacy, although not directly connected to the goals of genre-study; 2) *Reading Learning Activities* – these are lessons aimed to teach the reading strategies needed to allow students to successfully understand and interact with the texts in the genre; and 3) *Writing Learning Activities* – these are lessons aimed at teaching skills to help students analyze text structures and to apply this skill in their own writing.

In the following section I will describe how to teach “Inhabiting a Journey.” I will start with an explanation of the design of the curriculum, then a description of the structure of a typical genre-based lesson. Some sample lesson plans will follow. Support activities, when needed, will be described briefly. These activities should be taken as suggestions rather than as required components of the unit. These lessons are suitable for Grade 8-10 students in Language Arts, Reading, and/or English classes in urban or suburban schools. They may be given to students with advanced literacy levels or to those who are significantly below grade level. Experienced and novice teachers who are comfortable with student-centered strategies, and who are used to reflecting on their own teaching practices may find these lessons useful and essential to their goals of providing students with implicit learning experiences and explicit literacy instructions.

Step 3: Teaching the Unit

The unit opens with a set of support activities aimed at providing an overview of the topic and a brief explanation of the goals and topics of the curriculum, and expectations in the classroom. This is done through a warm-up activity like *You Have To Live in Somebody*

Else's Country To Understand, a lesson described in PBS: The New Americans Teacher Guide (www.pbs.org), in which students are presented an opportunity to experience the feelings of immigrants or anyone else that the dominant society considers “outsiders;” or through a simulation activity called *Salad Bowl*, where students understand the concept of diversity by preparing, mixing, and then partaking of a real salad bowl. At this early stage of the unit, novels for independent reading should be given out to students. Some titles that I think would interest 8th graders are: Patricia Beatty’s *Lupita Manana*, Pam Munoz Ryan’s *Esperanza Rising*, Amy Tan’s *The Joy Luck Club*, and Jeanne and James Houston’s *Farewell to Manzanar; A True Story of Japanese American Experience During and After the World War II Internment*.

After the introductory activity, lessons can then proceed through any of the following three strands. One strand includes activities based on common readings that define immigration and identify and locate the new immigrants in the United States. Aside from short stories and poems, the resources for this set will include maps, graphs, photographs, and excerpts of such films as *In America*, *Far and Away*, *Mi Familia*, and videos like *Teen Immigrant: Five American Stories* produced by the Corporation for Public Broadcasting). A second strand in this curriculum unit includes mostly readings of the experience of relocating from one country to another and of learning to become an American—of how the new Americans have had to adjust to an unfamiliar culture and a new language, in addition to how they have had to find a way to make a living. Common readings will include some of the following full or excerpted stories: *Interpreter of Maladies* - Jhumpa Lahiri’s (1999 Pulitzer Prize winner for fiction) collection of short stories that explores the lives of Indian immigrants; *The Circuit: Stories From the Life of a Migrant Child* - Francisco Jimenez’ tale of a family’s odyssey of impermanence, poverty and hope; *In the Year of the Boar and Jackie Robinson* - Bette Bao Lord’s story of how Shirley Temple Wong embraces American Life in 1947 Brooklyn; *Journey of the Sparrow* - Fran Leeper Buss’ account of how a young girl endures a harrowing flight from El Salvador to Chicago; and *The Gangster of Love* - Jessica Hagedorn’s novel of the Filipino immigration experience. Since this strand involves mostly reading, many of the TEKS and TAKS standards will be learned here, for example: demonstrating competence in the general skills and strategies of the reading process, gathering and using information for research purposes, and demonstrating competence in understanding the stylistic and rhetorical aspects of reading. A third strand includes mostly writing. To complete the students’ learning experience in this endeavor to explore and understand the experience of immigration, students must produce writings that show the depths and breadths of their personalization, realization, identification, and internalization of the themes and issues of the genre. These products will include (but not limited to) reports of information, responses to literature that use interpretive and critical processes, journal entries, narrative accounts, presentations, interviews, profiles, and family history research. These are the writings that students will include in their portfolios which they are expected to present at the end of the unit.

Here is why “Inhabiting a Journey” is structured into strands and not into sections by which a curriculum is typically organized: I envision learning in this unit to occur in a holistic way and not in a segmented, linear manner. It means that all throughout the unit, there is no prerequisite to the learning of any topic. For example, to get into writing, students do not have to finish the audio-visual presentations and read the stories listed in the reading list. Writing can occur anytime, and so do the reading and viewing of films and videos. Every activity in each strand is complete and independent so that once students have gone through one activity they will be ready to create products that show how much they have personalized the issues of immigration. This curriculum unit will have to be organized this way in order to allow students to inhabit the genre, and to make such learning experience relevant, life-changing, and attitude-forming for them.

From the curriculum design described above, we can now lay out the three structural elements of a successful genre-based lesson, namely: *presentation*, *workshop*, and *discussion*. In the presentation phase of the lesson, the teacher creates opportunities to model reading and writing processes, and for teaching new concepts. It is also the time for students to clarify their prior understanding and expectations of the topic. Here, in this part of the lesson, both teacher and students work together for a common understanding of key concepts of the genre. Following the presentation is the workshop phase. Here students explore for themselves - individually or in groups - the concepts presented in the previous phase. The teacher uses the time to confer individually with students to help them apply the knowledge and strategies that they learned during the presentation phase of the lesson. When needed, the teacher intervenes, either to the whole class or to smaller groups, to clarify a concept, re-teach a skill, encourage reflection, or teach a new but related concept. The discussion phase towards the end of the period is the gathering together of the class for a few minutes of sharing. The teacher can ask a simple question as to what worked and didn't work during the workshop, or have students share responses to one or two focus questions. A set of sample lesson plans follows step 5.

Step 4: Assessment and Evaluation

During the three phases of the lesson, assessment and/or evaluation may be conducted. A well-thought out strategy involves creating an assessment and evaluation design even before the genre-study begins. Basically the design is based on these questions: What are the standards from which learning will be measured? How will learning be measured? What artifacts or behavior will be analyzed to evaluate the learning? What are the consequences of failing to meet the standards? Assessment, the informal measuring of student progress, should be done regularly for every period a class meets. The results of the assessment of students' progress should inform decisions to adjust instruction to better support learning. Evaluation, on the other hand, is the final measuring of students' knowledge and skills against a very rigorous set of standards. Here, the teacher becomes a harsh critic by asking the question: Did they meet *all* the learning objectives or not?

Of the many measurement tools available to us, the most effective for a student-centered curriculum is the rubric. Rubrics should be developed when students have already demonstrated meaningful understanding of the genre being studied. And they should be developed with students. Together, you could decide on the categories to be measured, the criteria to be used, and the evidence to be analyzed. Rubrics may be used to assess and evaluate the whole class, a small group, or even individual students. They may be used over and over again until students show another level of understanding and ability, in which case a new rubric should be constructed.

Step 5: Celebrating Success

Student achievement needs to be celebrated, thus an essential part of this curriculum unit are the activities that celebrate their achievement. These celebration activities could include hosting a story reading, recognizing the best works by giving out certificates and other awards, publishing a class magazine, submitting papers to local or district-wide contests, etc. Parents, administrators, teachers, and students in other classes could be invited to witness student presentations and exhibits. Knowing that a public celebration of their work is expected motivate students to take greater ownership of their writing and to put more effort into their work. Furthermore, setting this kind of expectation could develop the habit of work and instill the value of quality amongst our students.

SAMPLE LESSON PLANS

Lesson 1: The Immigration Experience of Francisco Jimenez in *The Circuit*

Curriculum Strand

Readings on the experience of immigration.

Genre-Study Focus

Recognizing the author's experience and its influence on the author's narrative techniques.

Skill Focus

Reading comprehension strategies

Common Text

The Circuit by Francisco Jimenez

Procedure

To prepare for the lesson, you may want to familiarize yourself with the various accounts of the immigration experience particularly those of the "new immigrants." If you do have the luxury of time, a solid grounding on the history of U.S. immigration and the laws that shaped it to what it is now would be useful. Earlier in this essay, I provided a summary of the characteristics of the experience of immigration and a discussion of the various issues

related to it. Aside from the readings mentioned in the earlier sections of this paper, the following books are excellent references to these topics: *Lost in Translation: Life in a New Language* by Eva Hoffman; *Barrio Boy: The Story of a Boy's Acculturation* by Ernesto Galanza; *China Men* by Maxine Hong Kingston, and *Migration, Globalization, and Ethnic Relations: An Interdisciplinary Approach* by Mohsen Mobasher and Mahmoud Sadri. Additionally, since most of the readings in this curriculum strand are personal non-fictional accounts like memoirs, biographies and autobiographies, reading exceptional works of these writing forms is integral in your own immersion in the genre. I would suggest that you read the following works: Anne Lamott's *Operating Instructions: A Journal of My Son's First Year*, Walter Dean Myers' *Bad Boy: A Memoir*, and William Zinsser's *On Writing Well: The Classic Guide to Writing Nonfiction*.

The first thing to do is to present the focus of this lesson. Gather the students in a circle around you in front of the classroom. Tell them that stories, especially memoirs and autobiographies are written to share the author's experience with us so that we might learn from it and make better sense of our own lives. As readers we need to consider more than just the events in a memoir; we also need to think about the author's experience in those events. On the overhead place the first page from Francisco Jimenez' *The Circuit*. With the students following along in the overhead, read the first section of the text. This touching memoir describes the experience of a migrant child during once circuit of crop harvesting – his feelings of frustration and isolation as he is repeatedly uprooted to follow the harvest. At the conclusion of the reading, have the students enumerate and describe the events of the story. Inform them that what you find really intriguing is the author's experience of those events. Ask "Do you think everyone would feel the same way if they move around constantly to follow the harvest?" What are some other reactions that people might have? Continue with this questioning pattern for a few minutes to allow students to absorb what you mean by understanding the author's experience. Prompt the students to consider the events described in the text, the author's experience, and direct text evidence that would support their understanding of the experience. When you are convinced that students have already understood the concept, release them to continue reading the story and do the task of analyzing the author's experience independently.

What follows is a workshop where, for the next twenty minutes, students read, reread, write notes on the margin, and underline text evidence. So that students will be reminded on what to do, post a chart on the board with the following tasks: 1) consider the events, 2) consider the author's experience, 3) make notes of your understanding of the author's experience in the margins, and 4) underline appropriate text evidence. As they work, make the rounds reading margin notes over the students' shoulders, asking questions about their interpretations, probing for text evidence, pushing them into digging deeper, and providing clarifications and support for those who are confused.

When students reconvene for a discussion at the end of the period, have them share what they understand of the text. Then ask students to consider the effect of using this

reading strategy. Most importantly, ask them about Francisco Jimenez' immigration experience and have them connect this experience with what they know in real life.

Lesson 2: Questioning the Text of P. Gonzalez and R. Rodriguez's Editorial Essay: "\$4,000: The Price of a Mexican"

Curriculum Strand

Readings on the experience of immigration

Genre-Study Focus

Questioning and criticizing the text

Skill Focus

Critical thinking strategies

Common Text

"\$4,000: The Price of a Mexican" by P. Gonzalez and R. Rodriguez (an opinion/editorial piece from Universal Press Syndicate, August 31, 2001).

Procedure

To prepare for the lesson, immerse yourself with these two things: the text structures of editorial and opinion writing, and the social, economic, and political issues of immigration. Editorials reflect the essence of democracy. This is a form of writing that is entirely dedicated to civic discourse, to shaping opinions, changing minds, and effecting change. Immersing our students to editorials is essential if we want them to become thoughtful, critical, and participatory members of our society. In learning activities that teach editorials, we want our students to ask questions, carefully consider alternatives, and choose wisely on topics that are controversial and life-affecting. Immersing yourself with the tone and structures of editorial writing can help you become an effective teacher of this writing form. Immigration issues have been one of the regular hot topics written about in many editorials in various newspapers around the country. As I write this, pundits are still debating on the advantages and disadvantages of President George W. Bush's proposal to congress to issue a limited work permit to overstaying and undocumented immigrants. Many of us have mixed feelings about it, and part of the reason is that we don't have enough information on the issue. Even when we read news articles on the subject, we still struggle to understand our response to the facts. In this instance, reading opinions and editorials of newspapers, listening to opinion pieces on National Public Radio, and intense discussions with friends and colleagues can help us figure out where we stand. Authors who can help you understand the whats and hows of editorial writing include Anna Quindlen, Dorothea Thompson, William Zinsser, and Randy and Katherine Bomer. Good sources for opinions, editorials, and reports on immigration issues that are appropriate to the reading levels of our students include Newsweek's My Turn column, USA Today, Write Time for Kids, and New York Times Upfront.

Start, as usual, with a presentation of the topic and objectives of this lesson. Say: “As a reader you shouldn’t just nod your head and agree with everything that authors tell you. It’s your responsibility to question what they say, their evidence, their ideas, and their arguments. Asking hard questions, not all of which need to be answered, is one great way to figure out the strength of a writing and determine where you stand on the issue.” Put a transparency of “\$4,000: The Price of a Mexican” on the overhead. This editorial was written in response to a story about a south Texan rancher who was fined only \$4,000 for shooting from behind an unarmed Mexican. The article contains very strong reactions to the dehumanization of Mexican immigrants along the southern border. Read the piece one time to ensure basic comprehension, and then return to it to think more critically about its content, stopping every paragraph to reflect, ask questions, and to record your queries in the margins.

Model how to respond to a paragraph by asking the following questions: Why was the rancher fined only \$4,000 for the life of the Mexican? Why would an American rancher kill a Mexican? In what way is this incident a case of dehumanization and racism? Who are to blame for this incident? Is the government doing enough to stop this dehumanization? After rereading and questioning the text, explain how this process can help them think differently about the editorial and the issues contained in it. Then, process the questioning and presentation activities you just had by having students describe what you did and what kind of questions you asked.

To make sure that the students understand the scope of the potential questions to ask when they actually analyze an editorial themselves, develop with the students a list of questions, for example: Where did the author get this information? Is it reliable? What are the author’s assumptions? Would all people agree to these assumptions? What are other ways to address this problem? What will be the consequences? Who will benefit? Who will face more problems? Which of the author’s arguments are confusing? What is the author really saying? Is there any information relevant to the issue that is not included in the editorial? How will this information change the arguments? Explain that these questions can help them clarify their stand on the issue. Tell them that this list could also be used as guide to help them brainstorm and organize ideas for the essay they will write in a future lesson.

Break up the class for the workshop activity. Pass out a copy of the text and a two-column graphic organizer sheet. Instruct the students to read the column again and then write what they agree about the author’s opinions on one column, and what they disagree on another column. Do the usual monitoring of student’s work. Due to the emotional nature of the topic, allow students to think aloud. You could engage in an informal conversation with small groups or with individual students, but be careful not to disrupt the ongoing thinking and reflecting.

Regroup the class for the discussion. A logical consequence of a lesson such as this is a debate: when students begin to question the details and ideas of the editorial text, their

understanding improves, and they begin to state their opinions more thoughtfully and to explain their ideas in greater depth. Discussions then become more engaging and involved. It is natural to expect the class to divide along 2 or sometimes 3 sides – the pros and cons, and the undecided. It must be clear even to the students that in real life, people take sides, and that for many, persuading other people to take their side is a lifetime preoccupation. End the lesson when you are already convinced that the students have learned some new insights into the issues of immigration, and when they can already demonstrate the ability to critically tear apart a text; never mind if the issues remained unresolved.

Lesson 3: Writing a Character’s Perspective in a Short Story

Curriculum Strand

Writing about the experience of immigration

Genre-Study Focus

Revealing a character’s perspective

Skill Focus

Creative writing

Common Text

Any story that had been previously studied in this unit (e.g. Jimenez’s *The Circuit*).

Procedure

As in the previous lesson plans, you will need to do preparations on two essential areas before teaching this lesson to your students, namely: the thematic and narrative patterns of new immigration literature, and the art and techniques of writing a short story specifically writing to reveal a character’s perspective. At the start of this paper, I wrote a brief discussion on the themes of new immigration literature, and listed some books and authors that you can refer you on this aspect. I will not be repeating that discussion here due to lack of space. However, a few things need to said about writing character perspectives. Great stories depend upon great characters. Developing a character out of thin air can be a challenge. The first step towards helping our students write a character in a short story is by immersing them in reading. Reading short stories, understanding and interacting with characters as a reader can provide students a glimpse of how a character should look like. Providing them with great models can help them construct models of their own that they can then apply in their own writing. For more information on how to develop creative writing skills, refer to the following authors: Barry Lane, Ralph Fletcher, Ron Hansen and Jim Shepard, Donald Murray, and Katherine Paterson.

Begin your presentation with this statement: “Authors reveal their characters’ perspective in a variety of ways – through their words, their actions, and their thoughts. In your writing, one of the things you need to work on is revealing the perspective of

your character. Most of the time when I write I concentrate on the events and I often have trouble remembering to show how my characters feel about and react to those events.” Tell the students that the purpose of this lesson is to help them incorporate the perspectives of the character of the story they have already written.” Show an excerpt of *The Circuit* on the overhead projector. Since the story is familiar to students, there is no need to establish comprehension. Right away tell students to reread the excerpt and look for specific places where the author shows the character’s perspective (you may need to define and clarify what you mean by “perspective”). Underline specific examples in the text. After going through the text and underlining perspectives, wonder aloud by saying: “How would the story change if these perspectives were not included?” Allow students to respond. Building on their responses, ask what was noticeable about how Francisco Jimenez included the character’s perspective. Ask: What kinds of techniques did he use? Where did he use them? With the students, list on the board the ways to show a character’s perspective, namely: 1) Use strong verbs, 2) use descriptive adjectives and adverbs, 3) use similes and metaphors, 4) describe what the character saw, 5) share the character’s thoughts, and 6) show the character’s perspective throughout the story and not just in one part.

Next, have the students practice what they have just learned about how to identify and analyze character perspectives in a workshop environment. Instruct the students to take out their previously written short story drafts. Pass out highlighters and tell them to do to their own stories what you have just done to Jimenez’ story. Monitor the whole class. Stop to make suggestions, to help a student with word choice, and to remind the students to refer to the list of how-to’s on the board. Encourage students to read to you some of what they have already written and be sure to make only positive comments. Refrain from giving any negative criticism since you are dealing with novice writers.

In the discussion that follows, have the students reflect on what they have just done. Ask: “What did you discover about your work?” What else could you do to improve your story?” The time that we spend with students highlighting and revising their work could prove invaluable. Certainly, it makes visible to students how they were able to use a key writing strategy, and helps them to figure out how to revise their work in a concrete way. It is not unreasonable to expect students to turn in papers with substantive revisions that can make their stories more interesting to read.

ONE FINAL NOTE

To summarize, I have presented in this paper how we can turn the study of a serious and relevant issue into lessons that teach students not only the recurring themes and narrative patterns of immigration literature, but also the strategies and techniques through which they can gain and strengthen their reading and writing skills. In explaining how the new immigration literature came about, I furnished a brief survey of the legal map that provided a direction to our understanding of the current state of immigration in the U.S.

A discussion on new immigration literature then followed, focusing on the idea that this body of work consists of writings that share common characteristics. These characteristics have made it possible for us to analyze the works as a separate genre. In the second section of the paper, I presented genre-study as an approach to analyzing new immigration literature. To show how this can be done in the classroom, I described the steps to designing a curriculum unit and presented some sample lesson plans to illustrate the process. It is my hope that by demonstrating how we can make our students inhabit the journey of our new immigrants, and by showing how the study of the new literature of immigration can help us meet the prescribed goals and objectives of the curriculum, teachers will find it worthwhile to teach the immigration experience as a distinct curriculum unit in Language Arts, reading, and/or English. My ultimate aim is to share one more voice in the conversation about good, effective, and meaningful teaching.

Editor's note: Page numbers for parenthetical citations were unavailable at time of publication.

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