

**Coming to America:
Honoring the Immigrant Experience with Middle School Students**

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Mateo: You the kids from upstairs?

Christy: Yeah.

Mateo: Where you from?

Christy: Ireland.

Mateo: You came all the way to America to trick or treat?

- Irish director Jim Sheridan's 2002 film *In America*.

INTRODUCTION

ESL students who record and voice their experiences 'in America' retain an invaluable part of their family history. By closely reflecting on the many aspects of immigration, students have the unique opportunity to examine their own lives and the forces that have shaped their experiences. This curriculum unit is titled "Coming to America: Honoring the Immigrant Experience with Middle School Students" because honoring that experience through art, performance, or literature allows students to voice an experience that has helped form who they are and where they are. This curriculum unit could be subtitled: "Departure from the Familiar and Entrance into the Unknown." In many cases, the middle school ESL students that I teach in Houston have left family, friends, and homeland behind for life in an unfamiliar country. Often times, the reasons for leaving their countries remain unknown to them. Before they know it, they arrive at the office of McReynolds Middle School in Houston, Texas. A new student from another country registers in the Main Office with his or her parents; forms and paperwork must be completed, giving necessary information about previous school experiences. Next, the student is usually walked to my classroom because I am the Beginning ESL teacher. At McReynolds, I work with middle school students who have entered U.S. schools for the first time or students whose language skills have not progressed.

These ESL students bring a multitude of stories and experiences to the classroom. I find that they teach me from the first moment I meet them. Early on, I make a point to ask them where they are from, and I ask them to show me on my map of Central America. They begin as very quiet, very reticent students who take everything in with wide eyes. Most students speak quickly in their native Spanish; they seem embarrassed when I speak to them in English and they cannot respond as comfortably. The process of teaching ESL to Newcomers is exhilarating and frustrating at the same time. At points, I feel like I know very little about my students, their families, and the places that they have lived. In the past, I have organized projects around "My Family," or "My Country." However, I have never seriously attempted to work with Beginner and Intermediate students to put their experience as immigrants into words, images, pictures, and songs. In

creating this curriculum unit, my goal is to give students a chance to represent and record their family's experience coming to this country. During this project and because of my teaching philosophy, I want to push these ESL students hard in their coursework and in their language acquisition. I believe that all students in my class can learn with the necessary modifications, assistance, and challenging assignments. As a teacher, I expect a great deal out of them because I know that the world expects a great deal out of them. Fair or not, these students must learn the language very quickly to adapt to the American school system. Without the language, their opportunities in this country will be severely limited.

As the teacher of Beginner and Intermediate ESL students at McReynolds Middle School, I teach students born in Mexico, El Salvador, Honduras, Guatemala, and Peru. These students speak Spanish at home, and have little to no ability to communicate in English. They arrive as intelligent, curious, and promising students. There is a natural hunger to process everything around them. However, the eagerness to learn must be honored through strong teachers, curriculum that challenges and engages, and endless amounts of language acquisition. Sometimes, adding to the difficulties of second language acquisition, families enroll students at all times of the year. For example, I have several Beginner ESL students who arrived in the middle of the school year, missing half of a year's worth of English instruction. Due to these circumstances, these students are quiet, nervous, and reserved. They stick together with other ESL students, walking from class to class. At lunch, the ESL students tend to sit together and immerse themselves back into the language of their homeland. They have come to this country for many different reasons. Sometimes, an accident or death has forced a family to decide to leave their country immediately, without warning. Other times, a job or the lure of a job has precipitated the move. These moves are traumatic for middle school children who do not know or understand English. Often times, I am the first teacher that they have met in the United States. In order to make them comfortable, I speak in my Spanish (broken) that I welcome them and that I am here to listen to them and give them tools to help them survive and learn throughout the rest of the year.

A variety of coping mechanisms and modifications emerge at the school when they arrive. For example, in the classroom, I sit them next to students that I know are kind, helpful, and will want to learn about the new student. Some conversation is initiated; information passes across the entire class quietly. Another student pores over the schedule and helps explain directions. As a consequence, a new ESL student makes some of their first and strongest friendships in the United States within the walls of my classroom. Since our school does not use clusters, History, Science, Math, or Gym class could be with students whose English is nearly fluent. They stick out in those classes. So, the ESL class is where the students feel comfortable, accepted, and safe. As I thought about this 'Newcomer' perspective, I was struck by how much it resembled another immigrant that I saw in the movies when I was a kid. E.T., the extra-terrestrial from another planet, finds himself stranded on Earth and has to adapt to totally new surroundings. E.T. must make friendships to survive, learn the language, hide certain

traits, and participate in American traditions like Halloween trick-or-treating. I am still struck by the strength and resilience of these new ESL students, who come to the United States with no knowledge of the language. Through daily practice and assistance from the school community, the ESL student learns how to function and succeed in this school environment.

As a fourth year ESL teacher, I agree with Professor Stephen Krashen that a goal of ESL teachers should be to encourage “meaningful interaction in the target language--natural communication--in which speakers are concerned not with the form of their utterances but with the messages they are conveying and understanding” (Krashen 1). The “messages” that Krashen refers to would symbolize the personal stories that people have about coming to this country. According to Professor Krashen, the guru of modern ESL research, while a person is learning a second language, “attitudinal factors and motivational factors are more important the aptitude” (Krashen 5). I interpret this to mean that the more fearful a student is of making a mistake in a class, the less likely that student is to try and use language in a meaningful context. So, my ESL instruction should be encouraging of attempts and not overly conscious of surface errors. Communication should be the focus. At McReynolds, that means that ESL students speak more in English in my class because they know that there is no shame, no penalty for trying to speak in English and making mistakes. I try to demonstrate that philosophy through my teaching.

During this project, I want to make sure that my students have a low affective filter and that they are not embarrassed, ashamed, or nervous about talking about these issues. How do I do begin to accomplish that goal? I need to create an environment of trust and knowledge within the walls of my classroom. Also, I need to make sure that the students understand that this is a safe place and that their voices are valued. One of the reasons that I want to teach my curriculum unit with ESL Intermediate students is because I have a previous relationship with most of them, having taught them as Beginning ESL students in 2003-2004. This trust will prove crucial when discussing these issues of self, history, and identity. I will send home information several times during the unit, letting the parents know about the kinds of issues that we are talking about in class. I will keep open communication between the parents and the school, because I do not want students to be apprehensive or nervous about this unit.

Learning about immigration in Houston and in America will allow my students to see themselves in a new light. It will hopefully show them the many different ways and times that people have come to America. In addition to adding to their vocabulary and writing development, I feel that this project will enrich them as human beings. They will begin to look at other students in the school differently, noticing the similarities and the differences. Too often my students are focused on the small and the differences. “I am from Honduras,” says 8th grade Intermediate ESL student Kevin Fuentes. “I don’t want anything to do with those Mexicans.” Through working together with another student on this project, Kevin can see how similar his family’s experience is to fellow 8th grader and

CSP student Javier Serna's father's decision to come to the United States. A project will spark dialogue, comparison, and information-sharing. Kevin will realize and understand some of the similarities and differences that concern immigrants in Denver Harbor-Fifth Ward. Both Kevin and Javier will learn more about how recent immigrants at McReynolds and in Denver Harbor-Fifth Ward make friendships and become neighbors. These students may learn how to accept and welcome new arrivals to their community. They will focus on some of the social forces that have always impacted the lives of immigrants to America.

At this point, it is important to note that when I use the name CSP in this paper, I am referring to a group of 7th and 8th grade students that I serve at the school through an Enrichment class. These students have shown interest in going above and beyond what is required of them in the regular confines of the school day. So, in order to prepare them for HS and College now, while they are in Middle School, these students complete extra projects, arrive forty minutes early for school every day, read an additional ten novels a year, and actively improve the community in which they live. Although there are CSP students who have been ESL students (and recent immigrants), these two groups that I work with—ESL and CSP—traditionally do not have very much interaction within the school.

To return to the curriculum unit, I feel that a project that opens up lines of communication among different students at the school will benefit the entire community. So, I propose a project that unites different groups of students who normally have minimal contact with each other. Historically, the Denver Harbor-Fifth Ward community has been one place where higher numbers of Mexican and Central American immigrants have decided to live in Houston. Although other areas of Houston have a larger percentage of immigrants, McReynolds Middle School serves more ESL students than any other middle school in the sub-district of NE Houston (bordered by the Ship Channel, the train tracks, among other lines of demarcation). Currently, our 80 students are new arrivals or progressing out of an elementary bilingual program. These ESL students stand to gain significant language skills through this curriculum unit. More importantly, they stand to gain confidence and experience communicating with other students in the school.

Both CSP and ESL students will learn more about writing, listening, and interviewing during this project. First, the students will learn how to take notes and how to look at film critically. By using the wide variety of immigrant stories, novels, and picture-books, both groups will learn new vocabulary and read about new experiences that are similar and different to what they may know. Close examination of literature and film will continually reinforce the importance of summarizing, analyzing, asking questions, and the importance of constant learning. Second, for some ESL and CSP students, this might be the first time that they have ever seen immigration stories in print. How important is that? I believe that seeing these stories in print is extremely important because it validates what they have gone through in their own lives. It provides a point of comparison and a way of presenting a person's family history. Just reading these stories

about other immigrants will hopefully open the students up to discussing their own family experiences. Lastly, the final skill of presenting to the community is invaluable. Learning how to overcome the fear of public speaking has enormous value. Showing family and siblings a Family History Immigration Project that a pair of students have worked very hard at to complete has great meaning for all involved.

UNIT BACKGROUND

In order to teach a unit on coming to America, I will need to dig deeper into my own family history. I remember writing a paper in American History Seminar class in 1994 about my grandfather's immigration to the United States from Ireland. I will need to locate any resources that I have about my own family's history: photographs, letters, diary entries, interview notes, and reports. I have wanted to work on this for quite a while. As I work on my own family background, I will search for film clips that show the different aspects of immigrating to the United States. This will be a primary way that I will introduce this curriculum unit, supplemented by mini-lessons, photographs, and personal narratives that I have created.

The first film scene that I will use is the scene of immigrants arriving and being processed on Ellis Island in NYC from Francis Ford Coppola's film *The Godfather Part Two*. Ellis Island symbolizes a starting point in my family's immigrant experience. When talking about my own great-grandfather's immigration to this country from Ireland, I will explain to the students what I know about this time period and this experience. I will explain what questions I would ask if my great-grandfather were alive today. As a starting point, it will be personal and consist of photographs, postcards, and an oral presentation (these are the very ways that the students will be encouraged to choose for their presentations). Film will be incredibly useful to put us into the different time periods of history that must be studied when addressing immigration throughout the years. After a two week introduction to immigration history and themes using film, I will pair students up—an ESL student with a group of two CSP students. These groups will select a variety of Literature Circle independent reading assignments from an in-class library of picture-books, short stories, and novels that have themes of immigration, culture clashes, and adapting in new environments. I have a class library that deals with many of these ideas in a variety of forms. The library should have books appropriate for Level 1-2 ESL students, in addition to novels and articles that CSP students can understand. I have found that the "Dear America--My Name is America" series by Scholastic Inc. publishers has incredibly vivid, wide-ranging diaries from Finnish, Jewish, Russian, and Irish immigrant children. These journals are more accessible to my students because of their brevity and their clarity of language (most are written on a fourth or fifth grade level). They also cover many different immigrant experiences beyond the traditional ones expressed in film and narrative. Such works can serve as models and examples for students to study.

Also, the importance of studying local Houston history comes with a study of why immigrants settle in Houston. In my studies, I have learned a great deal about the history of Denver Harbor-Fifth Ward neighborhoods. For instance, the neighborhood of Denver Harbor grew very quickly in part because of its proximity to the railroad tracks: “[the] barrios continue to be inhabited predominantly by Mexican-Americans today. El Crisol (now Denver Harbor) was close to the Southern Pacific railroad yards and derived its Spanish name from the pungent chemicals used to preserve railroad ties” (Melville 1). Historical information about the neighborhood is never included in the regular curriculum of our school. I feel that this project will be a unique way to enter into the history of family and the history of the neighborhood that I teach in, the neighborhood that is home to my students.

CULTURE COMPARISONS: HOW TO GET HERE FROM THERE . . .

Since most of the immigration in the Denver Harbor-Fifth Ward neighborhood comes from Mexico, Central America, and South America, I choose to focus mostly on these countries in my direct instruction. One decision I have already made is to make sure that I have multiple laminated copies of maps of these countries and areas posted around my room. I currently only have one map of Mexico. Then, when students arrive in the school year, I can place post-it notes or some other kind of marker indicating where they have come from. I envision that this will facilitate talking about immigration, where students come from, who is from the same state in Mexico as you, and when the immigration occurred. I want to use maps and if possible, color photo books of these countries. Resources have already been acquired that will make this curriculum unit possible. In addition, surveys and informal discussions with students have helped raise issues of housing, health care, employment, access to jobs, and community involvement. Studying and analyzing how recent immigrants fit (or do not fit) into their new home has important value in this curriculum unit.

In addition, I find that there is great value in having the students identify Houston, Denver Harbor as their new home. I will have the ESL and CSP students create a map of the Denver Harbor, starting with their home and school. These maps will reflect how the students see their community of Denver Harbor, their new home. Making a map requires many things: a sense of direction, a sense of orientation, and a sense of borders (exclusion, as well as inclusion). Where do the students locate the border of their community? Where does the city locate that official border? Where is the de facto border (railroad tracks, highways, etc...)? Historically, what forces have affected how a neighborhood grows and emerges? These questions are very advanced and detailed and require a great deal of reflection. However, I believe that asking questions about what defines a community is important. It has great value.

Visual representation of these places and spaces will heighten the sense of home for these ESL and CSP students. These maps will be supplemented by photographs; I hope to make cameras available to the students so that they can document these places and add

them to their maps. I envision this: a poster board with a color map, details (streets, schools, businesses, friend's homes, parks, library, etc). These maps will be laminated and posted in the hallways of the school, engendering discussion and examination by fellow students.

IMPLEMENTATION STRATEGY

I envision teaching this unit in approximately four to six weeks with sufficient time spent after-school twice a week to have students meet with each other and complete the necessary interviews and group work components. After-school time will consist of 3:30 p.m. to 5:00 p.m. (with some time built in for breaks, water, etc...) I decided upon six weeks because our grading cycles at McReynolds are comprised of six weeks. Any less time I feel would probably cause things to be rushed and therefore not as strong. More time might feel like the unit is being dragged out and it might lose the interest of the students. I envision teaching this from mid-September to mid-October, using the first four weeks of school to get back into old routines and habits, practice our writing through journals and creative pieces, and a basic overview of film techniques and language.

As previously stated, I want to use clips from films to introduce many of the initial ideas about immigration in America. Films like *The Godfather Part Two*, *Gangs of New York*, and *The Joy Luck Club* will be able to show the students an historical perspective (i.e. how immigration has worked in America over the years). I anticipate being able to show brief five to ten minute clips from these films (appropriate language and content will be observed) to the students and have them take notes. For many students, this is an altogether new way of viewing film. Mini-lessons will comprise of how to take notes that are useful and detailed while watching film. Then, we will go over their notes, and talk about what we saw, what we are thinking. In some cases, the class will need to go back and review the film clip a second time. The unit will pique their interest from the onset. Film has always been a successful way to introduce vocabulary and themes to my students. Film scenes are listed below:

A. *Godfather Part II*—The Ellis Island scene in this film is perhaps one of the most powerful cinematic depictions of immigration. Fleeing from Italy, young Vito's last name is changed to the part of Italy that he is from, Corleone. The scene depicts the fear and uncertainty of standing in line at Ellis Island. Overall, the scene shows the audience a glimpse of the massive organization required to accommodate the influx of European immigrants to the United States at this time. The class will talk about family names and why they matter to all Americans—especially immigrants. How does changing a person's name affect them? Are names something that a family holds sacred? Why would the person changing the name not care to take the time to respect the immigrant?

B. *In America*—The Halloween scene with the two young daughters demonstrates the difficulty and joy that comes with learning a new set of traditions. This family

of recent Irish immigrants is not sure what the tradition of trick-or-treating means in America. Together, the mom and the daughters struggle with making costumes, collecting candy, etc.... We will discuss cultural traditions, songs, holidays, and norms that exist in the United States that newcomers would have a hard time understanding. How does a person navigate through an unfamiliar time, place, tradition, or celebration?

C. *Gangs of New York*—The scene with the Irish immigrants arriving in Manhattan, being pelted with rocks from the “Natives,” being instantly conscripted into the Union Army, and put on boats headed South to fight in the Civil War. The scene gathers its power from the fact that the Irish immigrants are starving and do not know any better. They walk from one boat, essentially, on to another boat. One asks the other, “When do we get our loaf of bread?” (Scorsese 2002). This scene will lead to a discussion of how immigrants are received in this country today versus then. How does the United States both scorn and rely heavily upon immigrants? What are the “acceptable” ways to become a U.S. citizen?

D. *El Norte*—Very briefly, the class will view the scene with the crossing over the border from Mexico to the United States in Tijuana. It is a difficult, disturbing scene to show because the crossing of the United States-Mexico border is very real for many students. The journey and the dangers of the crossing must be discussed. After viewing the clip, the students will list the many different ways and time periods when families have come to America. Then, students will search for the similarities and differences in these experiences (for example—what is the same about an Irish immigrant’s experience in 1890s Boston vs. a Guatemalan immigrant’s experience in Houston 2004? Special attention will focus on how the United States welcomes or shuns them upon their arrival and as they make their way to survive here.

E. *E.T.: The Extra Terrestrial*—The film is foremost a study in friendship. Early scenes with Eliot and E.T. chronicle the formation of a friendship. Students will consider thinking of E.T. as an ESL student new to the country that must learn language, culture, and norms from a young friend. Discuss the importance of friendship, family, and guidance in the life of an immigrant. How did friend at McReynolds or their elementary schools assist them? What extra assistance would they have liked? The literary connection to this film—which will be read in conjunction with it—is Sandra Cisneros’ story “Geraldo—No Last Name” from *The House on Mango Street*. The story depicts the death of an unnamed immigrant by a nighttime train. Her closing lines haunt the story as they show a family in Mexico’s grief as Geraldo merely disappears. They never find out officially whether he lives or dies.

Some films like *In America* and *E.T.: The Extra-Terrestrial* deal more with the emotional level of the immigrant experience. For the young couple and their two young daughters in Jim Sheridan's film, what customs, traditions, and holidays are different from their native Ireland? Or, with *E.T.*, what are the most important cultural things that Eliot initially tries to show *E.T.*? What does he learn about surviving, adapting in Earth-culture? Brief film clips, notes, and Post-It note discussions will further flesh out the basic ideas that we will need to think about as an introduction.

After introducing the history of immigration and some of the necessary components, I envision turning the students loose on studying different aspects of the topic. My ESL and CSP students will self-select available books from the class library dealing with immigration. The students will have Book Chat forms that they will need to fill out after reading one of these books. Also, there will be Book Posters up around the room for each of the main texts. These posters will be group message boards for all students to communicate to each other about these books. For example, a student who just finishes reading selections from *I'm Not in My Homeland Anymore* will write a post-it note with questions, ideas, concerns, predictions, or relevant connections to their own life or experience. These post-it notes will be anonymous, but they will be placed right on the poster, so that anyone in class can read them. The goal is for these message boards to be ongoing silent conversations among the class on the shared books. Students may react differently to the texts. Hopefully, the class will respond positively to the post-its, and they will help spark class discussion and ideas about where to go from here.

At the same time, the students in the CSP class will be reading in Literature Circles from their choice of novels: *The House on Mango Street*, *When I Was Puerto Rican*, selections from *Studs Lonigan*, the "Dear America—My Name is America" Scholastic book series, and various other appropriate materials. Students will have different jobs in their literature circle: Discussion Director, Illustrator, Vocabulary Enricher, Summarizer, and Connector. Students will be given control over which books they want to read. At this time, whole-group instruction will center on immigration from an historical perspective in the beginning. I envision using longer selections from the film list, and possibly using more discussion or multiple viewings to further develop these ideas. So, both groups of students (ESL and CSP) will receive general, historical information about immigration in American in the first two weeks. These lessons will be complemented by film viewings and discussions.

Then, I will put both groups in contact with each other through before and after school work. The students will be paired up together with care. Several ice-breaker activities will help the classes learn names and information about each other. Together, these students will complete a small service project around the school. After a few days of working together, I will present several options of projects that these groups of students can work on together to express one part of their experience coming to America. The choices that follow encompass a wide range of talents and interests.

ASSIGNMENT CHOICES

1. Oral History:

Create an oral history of the ESL student's experience coming to the United States. Practice interviewing techniques and record the conversation on an audio tape. Then, use pictures and artwork to create visuals to accompany this conversation. Complete artwork and decoration on the tape and accompanying materials

2. Children's Book:

Create a children's book describing the ESL student's experience coming to McReynolds, Houston, or the United States for the first time. Your book must have over twenty pages, and each page must have a color picture. Books may be written in both Spanish and English.

3. Acting Scene:

Create a brief five minute play or acting scene depicting an event from the student's life in coming to America. The objective is to show an understanding of immigration and the historical aspects. The one-act play can involve something funny, serious, or important that happened to them on their first day in America, the experience of leaving their homeland, or an experience at McReynolds.

4. Map:

Create a detailed map of their two (or more) countries, complete with pictures of important places and people in each. Maps will include a scale, compass rose, arrows describing paths taken, and color. The students will write small paragraphs in English and Spanish to accompany these detailed maps, including descriptions as to why these locations are important.

5. Postcard Project:

Create a series of detailed postcards depicting an immigrant's experience coming to America. Postcards must include color pictures, captions, and personal narratives on the reverse side of the card. Postcards can be larger than normal size and embellished with decoration and design.

6. Speech:

Through songs, pictures, and artwork, the students present a monologue speech describing a particular memory about coming to the United States. Questions to be answered include: Who came with me?, When did we come?, What are some details about the journey?, Why did we make the trip?, and What were my first experiences in the United States and at McReynolds? Monologues must be memorized completely and can be delivered in both Spanish and English.

7. Original:

A Student-Suggested Project (with Teacher Approval).

All CSP students, in addition to assisting with these ESL projects, will be responsible for presenting a three to five minute speech on what they have learned throughout this unit on immigration to Houston. Students can discuss the films, books, fellow students, poetry, songs, food, or their own personal histories in these speeches. Speeches will be delivered along with the ESL presentations at the Student Celebration at the end of the sixth week of the unit. All ESL and CSP students and their families will be invited to the library or the auditorium to take part in a student-led presentation on immigration. Students will present to the audience of teachers, families, community members, administrators, and local news media. Food from the various cultures that we have studied will be available as refreshments.

CLOSING

In order to not only have a successful curriculum unit, but also a successful presentation to the school community, the event will require close coordination with the school administration, teachers, and SDMC (Shared-Decision-Making Committee). With support from members of the faculty, information about this event can be distributed to the teachers in advance, so that they can schedule time out of their lives to attend, if they wish. With buy-in from the teachers and administrators, the actual publicity for the event will become less difficult: flyers sent home in several languages, follow-up phone calls to the families involved, media attention through HISD press releases, contact with local media outlets and newspapers, and reminders for students and teachers of the event on the announcements at school. For an event to be successful at the middle school level, I believe that it is crucial to set goals for the event, determine who will be responsible for what, and follow-through on those assignments. Events have failed in this community in the past due to lack of effort on the planning side of things.

This past school year, I listened to people in my school complain about parents not being interested in supporting the students. When I talked of events for the families of the students, I was met with negative comments from teachers and administrators. “They don’t want to visit the school,” said one teacher, clearly embittered and upset with the school’s relationship with the neighborhood. In response to this, I decided to show that well-planned, well-coordinated events CAN turn out the community in great numbers. In April of 2004, I chaired a “Family Literacy Celebration” at McReynolds Middle School that was attended by over 400 people in the Denver Harbor-Fifth Ward community. This celebration included readings from teachers, students, and community members in both Spanish and English. There were representatives on hand from different community organizations: Project Grad, Character Education, the Cliff Tuttle Library, etc... For this event, a local business discounted the fruit trays and ice cream bars which we bought as refreshments for the parents. The event also served as a Used Book Sale, where teachers could sell books that were not being used or were falling into disrepair. Many students bought these books for nickels, dimes, and quarters. In turn, the hope is that some of the books sold will end of being read in the summertime by the students.

The event was a win-win situation. The school carried off an event of significant size and scope with care. The students who participated from the ESL classes, regular English classes, and the theater classes did excellent jobs performing in front of such a large crowd. The faculty supported the event by calling families and by showing up themselves. We had over twenty teachers attend (our faculty is approximately 40 teachers). The lessons that I learned planning and promoting that event will carry over into this celebration. I want to create another successful chance for the parents, students, and teachers of McReynolds Middle School and the neighboring community to meet and interact in a positive way.

Our goal with the presentation aspect of the curriculum unit is to celebrate and respect the heritage and immigrant experiences of the students and their families. A safe, respectful, and informative event on these issues will have far-reaching effects inside the immigrant community of Denver Harbor-Fifth Ward. If the parents and community members attend and participate and enjoy this event, then those same people will be more likely to return to the school at a later date. Events such as this one will help open the doors of the school to the immigrant families and community members who may not feel especially welcome. Events such as this will provide a forum for community members to meet each other, the teachers, and the other students who will be presenting. With interaction comes understanding. With understanding comes problem-solving and teamwork.

In closing, ESL students at McReynolds Middle School will empower themselves through this curriculum unit by creating original, historical documents for their school and their family. Through interviews with fellow students, close readings of selected texts that deal with immigration, and film analysis, students will gain a greater understanding of the many similar ways that people step into America and become a part of the culture. By validating and providing a forum for these stories to be shared with fellow family members and community members at the school, the climate within the school will hopefully shift in a small way towards honoring and respecting the confluence of events that have combined to result in immigrant students being McReynolds students, and in essence, American students.

LESSON PLANS

Lesson Plan 1: Introduction to “Immigration Unit” with outer space visitors

Objectives

ELA.L.8.3.b, ELA.L.8.1.a, ELA.L.8.1.c, and ELA.L.8.2.a – 8th Grade ELA Houston Independent School District Objectives

Students during the beginning of this unit will begin demonstrating effective communication skills for a variety of purposes. By using film initially, students will have to listen effectively and view attentively. Multiple viewings and note-taking discussions

will help students analyze and evaluate these film clips. Vocabulary specific and pertaining to Immigration will be introduced and revisited constantly in order to develop content specific vocabulary

Materials Needed

TV-VCR/DVD

E.T. film

Post-It Notes

Chart Paper

Gary Larson cartoons (“Far Side”)

Overview

The lesson begins with a Do-Now sheet (see sample attached) that has a brief series of questions, cartoon analysis, and asks students how they could tell if one of their classmates was from outer space. Then, together, we will brainstorm what the telling signs are that a fellow student is from another planet—language, looks, clothing, customs, etc... Brainstorming will take the form of a Chalk-Talk or Post-It Note discussion with the whole class.

Next, the class will watch the ten-minute segment from the middle of Spielberg’s film *E.T.* Before we watch, students will be directed on how to take notes during a film (using the folded paper chart system). We will watch together as E.T. learns how to speak, how to dress, food, and other human habits. After, the discussion will address how E.T. learns to become more human-like. Questions to ask include the following: How well does E.T. fit in with Eliot’s family?, How fast does he learn?, Why do you think he learns quickly?, What kinds of things do Eliot and E.T. have in common?, What are their differences?, and do you think that Eliot’s entire family/community can ever fully accept E.T. into their lives?—Why or why not? I expect that these questions, discussions, and review will last an entire fifty minute class period (if not more).

Lesson Plan 2: Introduction to Immigration with Film--Part II.

Objectives

ELA.L.8.3.b, ELA.L.8.1.a, ELA.L.8.1.c, and ELA.L.8.2.a. – 8th Grade ELA Houston Independent School District Objectives

The students will demonstrate effective communication skills for a variety of purposes through this project. They will be communicating through acting, role-playing, journal-writing, reflections, and through listening to each other. The students will listen effectively in a variety of settings for a variety of purposes, such as to record experiences, to ask questions, to study different experiences of immigration, etc...

Another goal is to analyze and evaluate spoken and recorded messages, which will develop along with the students mastering a content specific vocabulary of immigration

terms and laws. This list need not be exhaustive; however, it will be useful for students and teachers to be referring to the list of terms so that accuracy and clarity are foremost.

Materials Needed

Chalkboard
TV-VCR/DVD
Post-Its
E.T.
Markers
Chart Paper

Overview

Building off of our initial discussion of *E.T.*, we will revisit the film briefly in the first ten minutes of class to refresh our memories and understanding of the issues at hand. Then, we will construct our individual Venn Diagrams, comparing E.T. with people who are coming to the US for the first time (any background—Mexican, Central-American, Russian, Japanese, German, etc...). What are the similarities? What are the differences? How are they treated by the people they encounter?

Students will work in small groups (3-4) to examine the following questions together, using chart paper. First, the students will examine how Americans treat strangers, aliens, and those who are different. Treatment includes words, welcomes, law enforcement, traditions, and institutional acceptance (like schools, jobs, and hospitals). Second, the groups will brainstorm about how a new student in the class would be treated if they arrived today. What could current students do to welcome a new student? Conversely, what could current students do to make such a student feel unwelcome? This assignment will carry over into their homework assignment. The students will write a one page essay for homework on this topic.

Lesson Plan 3

Objectives

ELA.L.8.3.b – 8th Grade ELA Houston Independent School District Objectives

The students will demonstrate effective communication skills for a variety of purposes through this project. They will be communicating through acting, role-playing, journal-writing, reflections, and through listening to each other.

Materials Needed

Class library of ‘Dear America’ books.
Selected picture books and ESL leveled books.
Chart paper.

Overview

A brief mini-lesson on “Think-Alouds” and how to write specific, brief post-it notes with questions, ideas, and comments in the middle of a book as a person is reading it. I will model how to do it with a one-page passage from Kathryn Lasky’s *Home At Last: Sofia’s Immigrant Diary*: “Gabriela is doing very well in her new grade. Her English has improved. She has nearly caught up with me on learning the Paul Revere poem... Why can’t everybody just be fine all at the same time?” (Lasky 52). Students will pair up with their partners in different areas around the room. Students will focus on reading-aloud a specific chapter or scene from one of these books from the classroom library. As they read, students will create a post-it book of Think-Alouds which include connections, questions, and thoughts. Chapters in the post-it book will focus on the following groupings: feelings, experiences, connections, questions, etc... The post-it book will collect and connect a number of these different reactions to the book.

ANNOTATED BIBLIOGRAPHY

Works Cited

“Alien Nation.” *Teen Newsweek*. 2 February 2004.

A brief article stating and explaining President Bush’s proposal of temporary amnesty for illegal immigrants in the United States. Useful for the CSP class.

Bunting, Eve. *How Many Days To America*. New York: Reed, 1990.

A book that will be useful when teaching immigration-related issues to Beginner and Intermediate level ESL students.

Cary, Stephan. *Working With Second Language Learners*. Portsmouth, NH: Heineman, 2000.

Useful and helpful resource about how to approach lesson plans and instructional time within an ESL classroom.

Cisneros, Sandra. *The House on Mango Street*. New York: Random House, 1996.

A powerful story of an immigrant neighborhood in Chicago told from the perspective of young Esperanza Cordero. Particular short stories will be useful to use, especially “Geraldo, No Last Name.”

Daniels, Roger. *Coming To America*. New York: Perennial, 2002.

An anthology of relevant, historical material related to immigration.

Durbin, William. *The Journal of C.J. Jackson*. New York: Scholastic Inc., 2002.

A tale of a family’s desperate struggle during the Dust Bowl to find work. A *Grapes of Wrath*-esque story for a middle school student. Includes factual details on the migration of people West towards the illusion of California—land of endless work and endless opportunity.

_____. *The Journal of Otto Peltonen*. New York: Scholastic, Inc, 2000.

A tale of a young Finnish immigrant’s experience coming to Hibbing, Minnesota in the year 1905.

Farrell, James T. *Studs Lonigan*. Urbana: U of Illinois P, 1993.

Gripping account of recent Irish-immigrant families on the South Side of Chicago. Useful for its comparison between the first generation (Studs’ parents) and the second generation. Catholic Church upbringing vs. the knowledge of the street / gang allegiances.

Kasser, Carol and Ann Silverman. *Stories We Brought With Us. Second Edition*.

Englewood Cliffs, New Jersey: Prentice Hall Regents, 1994.

Formatted textbook on how to create lessons from different cultural perspectives for ESL students. I enjoyed being able to see how different stories were turned into lessons.

Kohler, Christine. *For a Better Life*. Austin: Steck-Vaughn, 2004.
An ESL student resource for refugee immigrant experiences.

Krashen, Stephen D. *Second Language Acquisition and Second Language Learning*. University of Southern California: Pergamon Press, 1981.
Seminal text on ESL teaching and strategies for use with L1 and L2 acquisition.

Lasky, Kathryn. *Dreams in the Golden Country*. New York: Scholastic, Inc., 1998.
A fictional diary of a Jewish immigrant girl's experience growing up in the slums of the Lower East Side of New York City circa 1903. Important to read because of the diary itself (capturing Jewish family life at this time period), but also because of the Historical Note, placing the Jewish immigration to American within the context of Russian history as well. Includes photographs and newspaper clippings.

_____. *Home At Last: Sofia's Immigrant Diary*. New York: Scholastic, Inc., 2003.
A fictional diary of a separation of a family as they pass through Ellis Island. Appropriate for middle school ESL students.

Levine, Ellen. *If Your Name Was Changed At Ellis Island*. New York: Scholastic, Inc., 1993.
A booklet of questions and answers for ESL students about immigration. It contains such information as "Did every immigrant come voluntarily?" and "What did people bring with them?"

Levitan, Seymour, ed. *I'm not in my Homeland Anymore: Voices of Students in a New Land*. Ontario: Pippin Publishing, 1998.
Recent immigrant students in Vancouver, Washington articulate in poetry, short stories, and artwork the countries that they left behind before arriving in America.

McGowan, Joe. "Coming To America." *Time For Kids*. 30 January 2004.
<<http://www.timeforkids.com/TFK/class/wr/article/0,17585,583048,00.html>>.
Middle school level articles about immigration then and now. Charts and graphs with immigrants and countries. Brief first-person accounts from Ray Kanar, a Jew post-WW2 and Guo Hong Wu, a Chinese immigrant.

Melville, Margarita B. "The Mexicans in Houston Today." 30 August 2002.
<<http://www.houstonhistory.com/erhnic/history1mex.htm>>
Rice University project article containing the history of Mexican-American experience in Houston. A source that had the most direct information about Denver Harbor-Fifth Ward neighborhoods in Houston.

- Moreno, Jenalia. "From the Barrios to Big Business." *Houston Chronicle* 1 Feb. 2004.
An article about three local Latino/Latina businesses that were founded by recent immigrants. Descriptions of how these businesspeople pursued the American Dream, dealt with failure and success, and how they view themselves in America.
- Murphy, Jim. *West to a Land of Plenty*. New York: Scholastic, Inc., 1998.
An age-appropriate diary-book about a young woman's journey from New York to Idaho Territory, circa 1883. Useful when talking about immigration within an emerging country (moving from state to state, etc...)
- Nusim, Roberta. *In America Teacher's Guide*. Youth Media International and Fox Searchlight Pictures: 2003.
Helpful guide for teachers of the film *In America*, by director Jim Sheridan which deals with an Irish family's immigration to New York City. Lessons and ideas include storytelling elements (character, setting, and plot), discussions of the American Dream, and a direct comparison of two different cultures.
- Perez, Amanda. *My Diary From Here To There*. New York: Vintage, 2002.
Another student resource that might be useful when teaching Intermediate ESL students how to construct a personal narrative about an immigrant's experience.
- Quiri, Patricia Ryon. *Ellis Island*. New York: Children's Press, 1998.
Beginning level ESL book for students about one kind of experience coming to America. This book contains a variety of pictures and charts in easy to read language.
- Rinaldi, Ann. *The Journal of Jasper Jonathan Pierce*. New York: Scholastic, Inc., 2000.
A Mayflower diary from a young orphan boy from the streets of London. Some of the first American's experiences with the Native Americans, the journey over, and the land itself. A good starting point for talking about American immigration, since European immigration is believed to have begun at this moment (excluding the Vikings, of course).
- Santiago, Esmerelda. *When I Was Puerto Rican*. New York: Vintage, 1994.
A 7th and 8th grade level personal narrative of a young teen's struggle with identity in new country.

Supplemental Sources

- El Norte*. Dir. Gregory Nava. PBS, 1984. (139 minutes).
Although I viewed this freshman year in HS, I can't remember as much about it as I would like. I think it deals with Guatemalan immigrants to the United States through Tijuana. Very harsh, very brutal in its images.

ET: The Extra-Terrestrial. Dir. Steven Spielberg. Amblin and Universal Pictures, 1982. (115 minutes).

Fantastic story of the friendship between ET and Eliot, a fatherless boy in suburban California. I imagine using parts or all of it with my Intermediate ESL students to discuss being a stranger in a strange land. Referenced in the film *In America*.

Gangs of New York. Dir. Martin Scorsese. Miramax Pictures, 2002. (166 minutes).

Epic and brutal depiction of tribal violence in 1840-1860s New York City, focusing on Irish immigration to the Five Points neighborhood and clashes with the so-called “Natives” led by Bill “The Butcher” Cutting. Scenes that will be useful at the dockyards, with Irish walking off the boats and into the arms of the Union Army to be conscripted.

The Godfather Part Two. Dir. Francis Ford Coppola. Paramount Pictures, 1974. (200 minutes.)

Rich, realistic vision of Ellis Island and the slums, tenement houses in 1900s New York City. Scenes showing the changing of names, Italian immigrants and enclaves will illustrate the turn of the century experience of immigration.

In America. Dir. Jim Sheridan. 20th Century Fox, 2002. (103 minutes).

Personal, intense, moving depiction of Irish immigrants in New York City in the 1990s. Scenes will prove useful when discussing moving to another country with small children. Accompanied by the *In America Teachers’ Guide*.

The Joy Luck Club. Dir. Wayne Wang. Buena Vista Pictures, 1993. (139 minutes).

Sharp, focused look at Chinese immigration to the United States through the relationships between mothers and daughters. Excellent scenes to use when discussing the clashing of cultures and the differences between first and second generation. Also, a different perspective for students who are not as familiar with Asian immigration to the United States.

Websites

Houston Institute for Culture. <<http://www.houstonculture.org>>

An interesting composite website which has a great deal of information on the city of Houston and its people.

168 Years of Historic Houston. Veteran’s History Project.

<<http://www.houstonhistory.com>>.

Extremely useful for its article “Mexicans in Houston Today” by Margarita Melville.