

America and Beyond: Roots of our Ancestry and Cultural Relationships that Shape our Community

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*...separation, not integration, characterizes the divided world of
newcomers and established residents.*

~ Bach 35

INTRODUCTION

Immigration and Identity

During a recent class discussion on the wave of early 20th century immigration into America, I asked my students about their personal family stories of immigration. However, when I posed this question, all that greeted me were blank faces. At first, I simply assumed that they were unsure of the moment in time when generations of each of their families had decided to make America their new home. Nonetheless, upon further questioning, I learned that many of my students not only have little or no knowledge of when their families immigrated, but also were uncertain of the reasons why their families left their respective countries. One student, in particular, even responded by saying, “I don’t know where we are from. My family is American. We’re just American.” As soon as I heard these words, it saddened me to realize that my students did not have any knowledge or awareness of their own personal histories. It was time for discovery! I decided that the method my students and I needed to apply in our journey of discovery was to delve deeper into our early social history, our ancestors’ motivations for immigration, and the impacts that these motivations have made on our current cultural practices.

The recent climate surrounding immigration suggests that Americans are divided on the subject of illegal immigrants, and that in cities like Houston where the workforce is heavily dependent upon illegal immigrants, changes are imperative to the health and well-being of all people living in America. A recent poll in an April edition of the *New York Times* suggests that American citizens find that high numbers of illegal immigrants problematic and desire reform that focuses on immigrants and public services (Connelly A16). My own students will enter the labor force in a society that is increasingly facing job competition from people of multiple origins, various ethnicities, and work skills. Accordingly, the generation that will leave its school halls in a short time and enter the American workplace will have to consider what the escalating immigrant population will signify not only for themselves, but also for their future generations. Those living in America will continue to observe their immediate communities become increasingly diverse as immigrants bring new beliefs and different traditions to our neighborhoods. Stephen Klineberg of Rice University closely examines Houston’s diverse population in his essay “Characteristics of a Multiethnic Melting Pot”:

In just the past quarter-century, it [Houston] has been transformed into one of the most ethnically and culturally diverse cities in America...Houston is one of the most rapidly growing and vibrant cities in America, purely because of its attraction to the new immigrants from abroad...All of Houston’s communities are now “minorities.” All will

need to work together to build the new multiethnic future that will be Houston and America in the twenty-first century (21).

The ethnic composition of Michael E. DeBakey High School for the Health Professions is as varied and complex as Houston itself, so it is necessary to provide each of my different classes with a body of knowledge that examines immigration and migration practices for African Americans, Latinos, and Asians. Before students begin their own personal explorations, I intend to devote a significant amount of class time to discussions based around primary sources that investigate narratives of these groups and the manner in which they arrived to reside in the United States, and more specifically, in Houston. This examination of primary sources will facilitate class discussion and activities that will include, but is not limited to, motivating factors for leaving home countries (in the case of African American culture, an effort will be made to scrutinize migration patterns within the United States), trials and tribulations of immigrants in Houston, and success stories of families who have become an integral part of Houston's immigrant community.

In its entirety, DeBakey is an ambitious and motivated high school that possesses a challenging atmosphere with a rigorous curriculum. As a teacher, it is fascinating to observe and detect the different student attitudes emerging from various ethnic groups regarding concerns, such as work and effort, discipline and responsibility. I have noticed that frequently immigrant students have to cope with more pressure and demands from their parents to be academically successful due to a large extent to an attitude that these immigrant families embrace – that their children have “made it” or prospered in America if they are successful academically. At DeBakey, faculty and staff deal with an array of challenging prospects with immigrant students, mainly, helping prepare them for college and the American workplace. It is important for teachers and educators to be aware of the differences students face when entering the American school system for the first time, and it is essential to implement programs that labor to provide assistance for students dealing with those significant changes. And consequently, after making these observations in class, I will require all of my students to explore and consider their own personal and family beliefs about education and schooling.

Personal and family immigration can be an enormously complex and multifaceted topic, so I plan to streamline the subject matter yet provide students an opportunity to select the elements that, for the most part, will interest and appeal to them specifically and individually. Therefore, I would like for students to analyze, thoroughly and in-depth, an aspect of their family's experience with immigration. What impact and influences have been made upon them as families as a whole in addition to the students in particular? They also need to provide exposure to the experiences of teenage immigrants. What experience has been the most difficult for them? How do they reconcile the former, more familiar culture with the new one the surrounds and encompasses their new lives? What new beliefs and different traditions do they share with friends and peers? And do schools provide an adequate environment in which the students' culture is both respected and enjoyed?

SCHOOLS AND IMMIGRATION

Academic and Social Challenges

A particular focus of my unit on immigration will be the impact immigration has on students and their experiences, both positive and negative, in a school environment. In the specific location of Houston, parents, teachers, and administrators regularly contend with challenges that occur from issues surrounding race, ethnicity, and identity due to the fact that schools are considerably ethnically diverse. Many schools fall victim repeatedly to race riots or gang-related activity that is often rooted in racial prejudice or misunderstanding.

It is a well-known fact that immigrant students often face severe challenges and great misunderstanding when they begin schooling in the American educational system. Immigrant children sometimes struggle to assimilate socially but may also make a great effort to persevere with peers in subject areas where they are often as equally talented or gifted, but fall behind academically because of their underdeveloped abilities in English. Language barriers may be just one small fraction of an experience that includes teaching styles radically different from their previous educational background. Grading scales and methods for assessment vary from teacher to teacher, school to school, and even more dramatically, country to country. In particularly rigorous academic settings, the measurement for “success” may be drastically different from that of a student’s home country, hence providing students with little opportunity to excel or show their particular strengths. In addition, academic challenges are simply just one small part of the myriad of problems immigrant students’ experience: many face a wealth of difficulties adjusting to a different social climate in which they find little understanding and acceptance from not just mere peers, but also teachers and administrators. This can be particularly devastating because immigrant students will have lost the most immediate foundation of support supposedly provided from our educational structure (Foner 202, 209-210).

Due to the vast differences in academic and social climates, immigrant students need a system in place that can aid them with serious academic questions and can provide them guidance in a challenging social atmosphere. Programs that provide student buddies, or even an arrangement where one teacher can be responsible for routinely “checking up” on their student to make sure questions are not going unanswered and that the student is adjusting academically and socially in a healthy manner. Immigrant students may sometimes find that despite the language barrier (if there is one), classes in the states are not as challenging in certain subjects as in their home country. Schools need to have a means for these students to work with teachers individually or take classes at accelerated levels. The same is true for students who have the opposite experience: too often immigrant students are assessed by educators as slow learners and are placed in remedial classes that are not fitting to their abilities. This is when it is imperative that schools have programs in place that can truly account for student ability, rather than dismissing students because of language or social barriers.

Racial Tensions

Immigrant children can find themselves prey to a series of racial and cultural stereotypes they may not have experienced prior to attending an American school. These experiences can lead to a desire for students to commune with peers of similar backgrounds. Beverly Tatum’s book, *Why Are All the Black Kids Sitting Together in the Cafeteria?* looks at the reason students, especially those at the adolescent level, tend to gravitate socially towards those of similar ethnic groups. In fact, Tatum argues that students have many identities and their ethnic or racial identity can be the strongest determining factor in their social undertaking (20-22). Furthermore, Tatum addresses the same issues for other minority ethnic groups who face hardships finding acceptance and opportunity outside their ethnic group. She provides the following statement by the Suarez-Orozcos family that addresses efforts made by Latino immigrants to preserve their cultural heritage:

For many second- and third-generation Latinos the immigrant past may also *be* the present...Among Latinos the past is not only kept alive through family narratives but unfolds in front of our very eyes as recent arrivals endure anew the cycle of deprivation, hardship, discrimination that is characteristic of first immigration life. (qtd. in Tatum 138)

The Latino experience of assimilation into an “American” way of life is significantly evident in Houston, a minority-majority population with increasing growth rates. Approximately 1.2

million Hispanic immigrants make their way into America each year. In his article “Hispanics Account for Almost One-Half of U.S. Population Growth,” Carl Haub finds that Hispanics, in the years accounted for (2000-2004), are only 14% of the population but represent 49% of population growth. These explosive numbers suggest that American cultural practices will be deeply affected by an increased presence of Hispanic culture that will undoubtedly be seen in our schools. Many schools with substantial Hispanic populations (states such California, Florida and Texas) have already adopted programs that begin bilingual studies for students as early as kindergarten.

SOCIAL AND CULTURAL ASSIMILATION

Segregated Communities

Immigration is not the only driving factor in the racial tensions prevalent in cities like Houston. African American migration to Houston grew in great numbers after the first World War: “More than anything else, the heightened call for cotton and petroleum goods during and after the war stimulated unprecedented migration streams from the surrounding countryside and into the more urban, industrial centers along the Gulf Coast” (Stabler 48). Scott Stabler writes that African Americans also moved for new social opportunities, but Houston, like other major urban areas, was not always welcoming for Blacks:

For many Blacks who came to Houston in the first half of the twentieth century, migration was a form of protest and activism, since they moved in search of socioeconomic autonomy, sociopolitical self-determination, racial advancement, and peace of mind. Although they could not be certain what fate awaited them in Houston, they knew all too well that the rural South presented very limited opportunities for advancement, extremely poor schools for their children, and an increasingly harsh caste system based on strict racial segregation. (49)

The occurrence of discrimination extended to the workplace and schools, where Blacks found few of the opportunities provided to White citizens. African Americans were paid less and often prevented from gaining necessary job skills that would improve their conditions and wages. In schools, segregation led to conditions that were facilitated by the notion of “separate but equal,” but equality was not easily observable. While there were ethnic neighborhoods and benevolent societies that provided aid to Black migrants, public institutions such as schools only helped create greater divisions between Black and White citizens? White students were privileged with conditions that enabled them to be academically successful, whereas most African Americans were given little educational opportunity and instead worked for low wages in unskilled labor (Stabler 52).

African Americans were often forced to create their own religious and educational opportunities within their communities. Present-day Houston is still home to traditionally Black churches and schools. Booker T. Washington High School, formerly Houston Colored High School, is still a predominantly Black secondary school, and other important institutions, like Texas Southern University provide educational advancement for Houston’s Black communities (Stabler 48).

Racial issues are not always divided by Black and White, especially in Houston, a place where Hispanic and African-American relations have proved to be extremely tense at times. Houston will soon become a majority minority city with a dominant Hispanic population. Many wonder what this will mean for Houston in such areas as job competition, urban development and housing, and school diversity. In the book *Black-Brown*, university professors Tachto Mindiola, Yolanda Niemann, and Nestor Rodriguez examine the events that promoted racial segregation in some of Houston’s most significant neighborhoods. For African-Americans, discrimination by the

white majority in many cities led to migration, and Houston was a city that grew enormously as African Americans left the Antebellum south for the hope of greater opportunity and equality. *Black-Brown* argues that attempts to prevent Blacks from achieving equality in the South not only heightened tension between Blacks and whites, but also created problems between other racial groups because it supported the notion that each race had a specific area to occupy, thus only darkening the lines of division (Mindiola, Niemann and Rodriguez 8).

The Asian American experience has become integral and commonplace in many Houston neighborhoods. Throughout parts of the city, Asian America families have created communities that reflect lifestyles that embrace their known cultures and values, as well as those of “new” American traditions values. Houston is home to the third largest Vietnamese community outside of Vietnam itself, and neighborhoods in Southeast and Southwest Houston are made up of thriving Vietnamese communities. For many, escaping Communism in South Vietnam and coming to the U.S. has given them the opportunity to create strong Vietnamese ties outside of Vietnam, and having a common language and cultural identity has been a main mode of staying power here in Houston (Vu 27).

Although cultural ties are strong, Vietnamese communities in Houston have struggled economically:

The success of very visible Vietnamese businesses has fed a common misperception held by many Houstonians that the majority of Vietnamese Americans are doing well financially. In part, due to the ‘model minority myth’ that commonly lumps all Asian Americans as faring well economically and excelling in education, people tend to embrace such a stereotype and incorrectly tag Vietnamese Americans as well-to-do citizens. (Vu 29)

Language barriers and education seem to be two roadblocks to success in America: many come from Vietnam not speaking English and having relatively little to no formal education. Despite these challenges, Vietnamese communities are integral parts of Houston and are visible to non-Vietnamese communities. Writer Roy Vu mentions the St. Joseph’s Condominiums as a example of the mix of American and Vietnamese values: “The main entrance to St. Joseph’s Condominium...two Southern Vietnamese flags depicted on the entrance sign. Such symbolic gestures remain important for Vietnamese residents here and, in general, for the local Vietnamese American population, to remember and uphold the ideals of their former country of South Vietnam” (28).

Because they are such a significant part of Houston’s population, it is essential that professional and personal relationships across Vietnamese-American cultural lines are formed.

Many of Houston’s public schools show that these cross-cultural relationships are the key to healthy and successful educational experiences. At DeBaKey, a large portion of the student body is Asian (majority Vietnamese American), which has contributed to the identity of the student body as a whole. Many of these children move between “two worlds,” that of their American school experience and their Vietnamese home life. School districts like Houston I.S.D. are making efforts to acknowledge and celebrate its diversity with events, such as Asian culture month and school-wide festivals and cultural fairs. These experiences are essential to insure that students of immigrant families can retain important tradition and values while working to assimilate themselves into mainstream American society.

The challenges of interracial relations are developed early in life, but nourished well into high school environments, in which teenagers are exploring their boundaries and formulating decisions as to what role racial identity asserts in their social lives. Unfortunately, racial groups divide many of the high schools in Houston. These racial groups contribute themselves to harmful

conditions for students. A former Houston Independent School District student remarked that at her previous high school even the floors were segregated. Students stayed in the hallways occupied by their same race because, otherwise, if they strayed beyond the socially imposed boundaries, it was simply an invitation for trouble and created additional racial tension. What kinds of effort do schools perform to eliminate such detrimental and potentially violent situations? What can be done so that students will feel comfortable and safe socializing and integrating with students from different backgrounds? As an educator, I can hope that tolerance and appreciation of diversity is taught at the home, but I would be a fool to believe this to be true. In this situation, schools have unique opportunities to expose students to the fascinating elements of different cultures and ethnic groups – differences that should be celebrated, not disputed

Multicultural Experiences

Students will better comprehend the experience of living in a multicultural society by first examining their own personal experiences. By involving them in a more intimate connection, it will make the process of learning about cultural identity more valuable and rewarding if students speak to individual or family experiences. Family trees or genealogy charts are a fantastic method for students to begin to explore their own roots. In previous projects, many students learn of humorous or heart-warming stories of family members that are often a testament to their unique cultural identity. These oral histories provide great insight into the challenges that immigrant families faced as they started anew in America, and often more specifically, in Houston, Texas.

These challenges might include looking at job opportunities for immigrants, efforts to maintain known cultures (while also assimilating into the American mainstream), and the challenges the families faced in obtaining U.S. citizenship. I also want to create a framework that gives students the opportunity to examine the contributions of America's immigrant groups in the areas of religion, politics, urban development, music, and art. Many of the students are aware of their individual family's beliefs or practices in these subjects, but are lacking exposure to the distinctive elements of other cultures practiced by fellow students, as well as other families living in their neighborhood and surrounding communities.

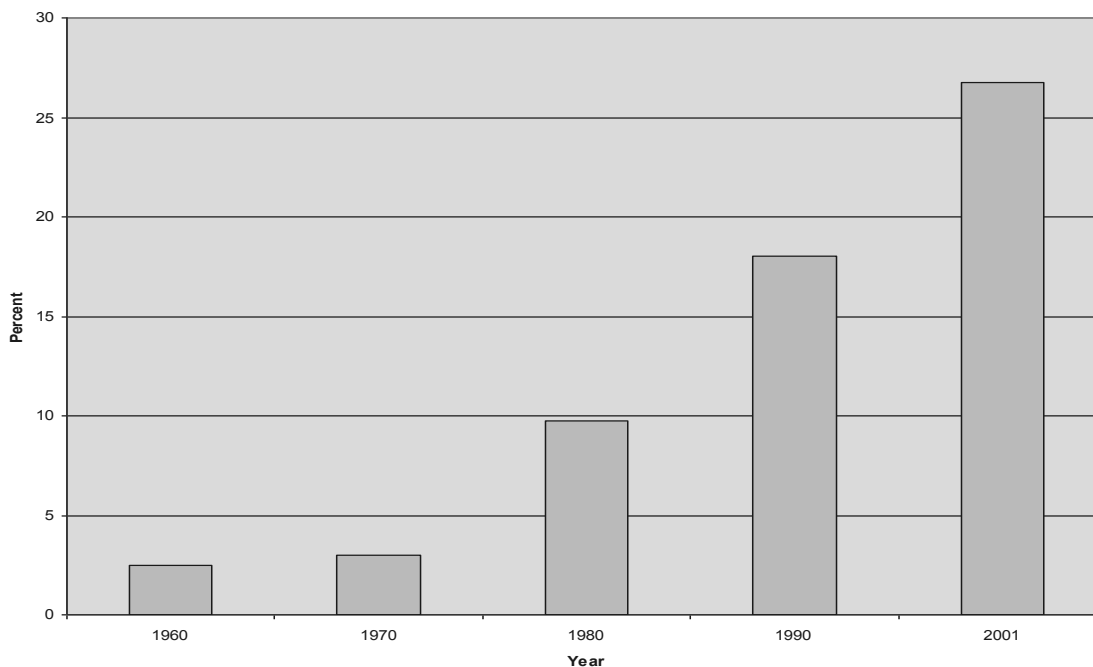
STUDENT OPPORTUNITY

Exploring the Houston Community

Schools have unique opportunities to provide students with exposure to a wide range of cultures in the areas of food, music and religion. At our school, we host an International Festival each spring. Students are allowed to dress in ethnic outfits of their choice and spend weeks preparing for the day. The afternoon culminates with a variety of dances and performances that showcase customs and traditions from different cultures. Students look forward to it all semester. They appreciate and enjoy the opportunity to share what is valued and taught in their own families with their friends and teachers, and seeing their peers embrace various traditions and customs gives students the personal experience that makes them appreciate and value diversity. Events like these put the immigrant experience into context.

Since 1960, Houston's foreign-born population has grown from roughly 3% to representing almost 30% of Houston's population in 2001. The graph below shows this population progression over a forty one year period (U.S. Census Bureau). Certain sections of the city are known primarily by the ethnic groups that dominate those neighborhoods. We have old ethnic neighborhoods that reflect immigrant groups from Europe and the Middle East, and city wards that are reflective of large African American populations (third and fifth wards) and Hispanic populations (second ward).

Houston City: % Foreign Born (Census Data)



Graph created from information at U.S. Census Bureau
[Http://factfinder.census.gov/home/en/datanotes/expsf3.htm](http://factfinder.census.gov/home/en/datanotes/expsf3.htm)

Tenement life in Houston is very much alive in sections in the Gulfton, Spring Branch, and West Bellaire areas. New immigrants are regularly making Houston their home, and they are coming from all over the world: Central and South America, Africa, the Middle East, Asia and Russia (Rodriguez lecture). Because of its great diversity, Houston provides a particularly rich setting to examine various cultural contributions of immigrants. As our city and country grow increasingly diverse, it is essential that our students have an understanding of how traditional beliefs and practices came to be integrated into their everyday lives. The students' ability to know and understand how past generations of their family survived and prospered in America will give them the insight to decide for themselves how to be capable, thoughtful, and open-minded American citizens.

One possible opportunity for students to gain more exposure to teenage experiences might be to read Sherry Garland's book *Shadow of the Dragon*, which tells the story of teenage boy Danny Vo and his experiences living as a Vietnamese American in Houston. Danny struggles to reconcile his school and social experiences with that of his family's traditional Vietnamese lifestyle amid peer prejudice, intimidation, and a deeply troublesome hate crime. Our school has a significant Asian population, and I believe the setting of Houston will allow students to examine the truths and possible inaccuracies of the teenage experience intertwined with that of immigration.

Teenagers offer unique perspectives on stereotyping because they often fall prey to some of the most damaging and critical stereotypes people have about certain ethnic groups. In their reflective response students might benefit from addressing what stereotypes exist of their particular racial or ethnic identity and to what degree they are true or false. Often, inaccurate stereotypes often hinder or prevent the development of positive relations between different ethnic groups. In Houston, where diversity is as ever-present as the warm weather, it is crucial young adults be aware of cultural bias and work to prevent it from harming relationships at school. But

these issues go beyond just the classroom walls. Many of the typical “ethnic neighborhoods” in Houston have become quite diverse even within their own smaller communities, so it becomes exceptionally important that young adults form meaningful and respectful relationships with those of different ethnicities within their own neighborhoods.

Students also often divide themselves socially by race in their school environments because they are encouraged by their parents to acquaint themselves with students of their own race or ethnicity. While it can be appreciated that parents are looking to create familiar and comfortable social settings for the children, it could also be argued that this give students license to encourage social separation later in their adult lives. Robert Bach argues that these divisions will lead to greater challenges for growing racial and ethnic groups to cohabitate peacefully:

Social distance can represent harmonious accommodation. But separation and distance can also imply exclusion, segregation, and discrimination. Social distance in that case obscures conflict, tension, and competition. Separate coexistence can lead to different expectations about the future of intergroup relations and about American itself. Separation may promote accommodation and social peace, but it also may embody such polarization that opportunities to interact become rare and can even turn into occasions for conflict. (35)

Thus, schools then become fundamental in encouraging appreciation and understanding of diversity. No other American institution has the resources to contribute as much as schools: we see kids everyday, and opportunities to educate them on living in a truly global world are essential to helping students understand that the world is not solely their own.

Teaching Unit and Objectives

The unit I plan to create works around a five period block, which will cover a two-week time span for our school’s scheduling. My hope is to spark each student’s interest by first making personal connections throughout the unit. This will involve giving students an opportunity to examine their own family’s entry into America as well as create a family tree or genealogical chart, the chance to read diaries of immigrant families documenting their first experiences in America, and also trace the development of modern-day celebrations that are an important part of many cultural groups that make up Houston.

The two-week unit will culminate with a student project and presentation on a significant American immigrant of their choice. Presentations may take a variety of formats: power-point, slide-show, or skit (these are just some examples). I hope for students to learn more about someone they find interesting and inspiring, and to share this new information with their fellow classmates.

Throughout the unit on immigration I want to push my students to think about how cultural and ethnic identity has both positively and negatively affected both their home and school communities. What contributions have they made to their school environment that is respectful of their unique culture? How can their ethnic identity be seen throughout their school environment? What role will they play in their neighborhoods and family communities that are reflective of their ethnic and cultural identity?

My hope is that students will use this unit as a springboard to further explore in later years their own communities (whether that is Houston or another city) for interesting and influential facets of early immigrant life, and the fusion of these facets into their modern lives. Students of today must consider the world that will be theirs and what role they will take? We all strive to create students who are active and honest citizens, ones who give back to their society. We can start this process by furnishing them the tools to learn about themselves and their communities,

thus enabling them to foresee and execute the changes necessary for our country to embrace diversity as a positive necessity.

LESSONS AND TEACHING UNIT

Lesson Plan One: Creating your Family Tree

This lesson is to be used as an introductory activity to a unit on immigration. Students often have little knowledge of family history, and creating a family tree gives them the opportunity to ask relatives for information that will be relevant to further studies of immigration. It also provides an outlet for artistic students to show off their creative talents.

Objectives

The student will be able to talk to family members to gather information about relatives and ancestors, and learn more about their cultural heritage and family roots. Students will create a family tree that will help them identify interesting stories and facts that help them better understand their family's experience in America.

Materials

Students will be creating projects with little restriction, so a wide variety of art materials will be necessary. Students will likely want to include photos on their family tree, so it is important that they make photocopies or secure photos that can be glued and/or cropped to fit the project framework. Additional materials might include construction board, crepe paper and markers. Teachers should see what schools can provide through art classrooms or donations, as well as supplies and materials students may have at home that they are willing to share or donate.

Directions

Create a family tree that traces back *at least three generations* before you. You may do your mother or your father's side of the family, or both! Include pictures, drawings, and collages and come ready to explain your tree to your peers. Do you have an interesting story to share? What was the most surprising piece of information you learned? What can you connect from your family history to the history of immigration into America?

Student trees do not have to necessarily just be on poster board. They may be three-dimensional: they can take the form of a book, or may include a series of visual representations. Create something that is visually pleasing and unique! Consider also that this project could be given as a gift or token of appreciation to a family member.

Lesson Two: A Day in the Life of an Immigrant

The idea behind this lesson is to give students opportunities to read primary sources that expose students to the challenges immigrants faced on a daily basis. Students will then have the opportunity to write their own immigrant diaries.

Objectives

The student will be able to identify primary sources in the forms of diary and journal entries and examine what problems immigrants faced when they first arrived in America. Students will be able to compare and contrast the experience of immigrants between 1870-1910 and those that arrived in American between the years of 1945-2005. Students will look at tactics immigrants used for political, social, and economic assimilation. Finally, students will then create their own journal and/or set of diary entries representing a historically accurate, but fictional character.

Materials

Students need to be provided with excerpts from immigrant experiences. There are a number of very interesting and informative documents that contain quotations and diary entries of immigrant workers in factories during the Second Industrial Revolution. Provide handouts so that each member of a group (groups should be divided into four students each, or smaller if four is unachievable) is reading something different from other group members. This allows them to each have a unique role in communicating information to fellow group members. Provide brainstorming maps so that students can begin to think about what specific areas their diary entries will focus on. Brainstorming maps are easily available at most on-line teacher resource websites and are free.

Directions

Provide students with sets of journal and diary entries from various immigrant groups specifically that of European, Asian, African, and Latino immigrants. Allow students to work in groups to discuss the entries. Do these groups have similar experiences with immigration? What challenges are unique to specific immigrant groups? Do you see these challenges today, on a first-hand basis? What role does school play for immigrants in helping them assimilate into American culture?

After working with small student groups, students will then work individually to create three diary entries, each entry highlighting a day in the life of an immigrant. Students may choose the ethnicity, age, and gender of their immigrant, and should provide details about their jobs, homes, families, and communities. What were their reasons for coming to America? What are living and working conditions like? How are they treated by others around them? Do they live in ethnic neighborhoods? What do they aspire to do or hope to achieve?

Diary entries must each be a minimum of a page and a half (they may be hand-written for greater authenticity) and should be written in the first person narrative. Remind students that although their characters are fictional, information needs to be historically accurate and relevant.

Lesson Three: Immigrants and Political Machines

The main idea behind this lesson is getting kids to better understand the relationship between political machines and immigrants. Providing background reading (textbook will suffice) is a good idea because this can be a complicated subject.

Objectives

The students will be able to analyze why immigrants were important to the success of political machines, as well as how political machines dishonest practices often ended up hurting immigrants and their families. Students will be given the opportunity to create and a persuasive argument that will give them the opportunity to share their knowledge of political machines and immigrants with their peers.

Materials

Students should be divided into teams of four and, if possible, teachers should evenly divide the groups between classes that are political machines and those that are representing immigrant groups. Students will then work to create persuasive arguments that favor their groups. Students should also be provided with butcher paper and markers if they would like to create a visual to accompany their group presentation.

Directions

Students are often asking for the opportunity to stage debates. The problem can be that many subjects are too broad, students are misinformed, or personal feelings and opinions can easily

change the focus and purpose of a useful classroom debate. This activity will give students an opportunity to debate in favor of their group (political machines and immigrants) while also studying the relationship between the two. Assigning reading regarding political machines and immigrants ahead of time will make this activity run more smoothly.

The idea is for students to create a persuasive argument in favor of their group that convinces the audience (fellow classmates) that the alternative groups (immigrants for political machines and vice versa) are *dependent* upon one another for success. Student arguments that contain substantial facts will have the most pull. Give students the opportunity to create speeches and a banner or visual to accompany the speech. After the respective groups have presented, allow the class to vote on the most convincing speech/argument.

Points to consider: both groups are truly dependent upon one another for success. Immigrants need the resources of political machines to succeed in their new communities. This includes, but is not limited to, health care, educational opportunities, jobs, housing, and funeral arrangements for deceased family members. Political machines in turn provide these necessities to immigrants in exchange for their vote. They cannot continue to practice corrupt financial and business practices without the votes to keep control of city politics. Political machines also worked to expedite citizenship or tamper with poll numbers so that immigrant supporters could vote, when in most cases, their votes would not have been counted by city government. Allow students to craft thoughtful arguments that show they have analyzed and explored the relationship between the two groups. A little competition can be a lot of fun for the students!

Lesson Four: Profiling Famous American Immigrants

This project will give students a chance to learn more about a significant American immigrant and the contributions they made to society. Students will have the opportunity to share information about their selected individual with their class during a presentation period.

Objectives

The student will be able to select and learn more about a famous American immigrant and analyze their contribution(s) to American society. Students will share their information during a presentation period with fellow classmates and create a visual representation (poster, collage, painting, sculpture, drawing) or media presentation (video or power point) to accompany their class presentation.

Materials

Students will need a variety of materials due to the complexity of this project. Materials that would be found or needed for research are listed in the sub-section "Time for Research." Video and computer equipment will be necessary for students whose visuals are in media form. Perhaps at the time of student presentations, a computer with overhead projector and power point capabilities can be in the classroom if not readily available. A television will be necessary with DVD/VCR capabilities for students who have made movies and/or documentaries. Students who are opting to make visuals in the form of a collage, drawing, painting, poster, or sculpture will need individual art supplies. Teachers: see again if you can share supplies with your school's art department or have a project "work day" in the classroom where students can bring in supplies they have at home which can be shared with the collective class.

Time for Research

In this project students are asked to complete a project that will require the undertaking of research. First and foremost, teachers should schedule a time to visit their school library so students know what resources are available to them. Most school libraries also have access to online databases that are full of excellent information, so it might be useful to have a time for

classes to review with the school librarian that different resources that are out there. One requirement that can be useful is to only allow the students a certain amount of web sources. There is an overdependence upon the internet as a mode of information, and more often than not, students are unsure of what constitutes a truly reliable source. One might consider requiring that they have a book from the library in order to facilitate research on campus. Teachers can also pull books that have information ahead of time and reserve them for students.

Prior to conducting library research, teachers may also find it useful to review strategies that will help students create projects that have utilized relevant research information. Providing students with note cards (3 x 5 index cards work just fine) enables them to take down information as they are reading that they can later use for the projects. Remind them of writing down source information in order to create a working bibliography. Having a check up day between library introductions and project presentations will give the teacher a chance to look at student note cards and make sure they are getting important information and citing their sources correctly.

Directions

Choose a significant American immigrant to learn more about. Select someone you find interesting and would like to tell your peers about! There are famous immigrants in lots of different areas: science, medicine, business, politics, and religion. What interests you? Prepare a brief presentation (4-6 minutes) to give to your peers about your person. Possible areas of information to cover: What was their childhood experience? When did they and/or their families immigrate to America? What were the reasons for immigrating? What contributions have they made? Why do we or should we know this person? What challenges did they face? What long-term impacts have they made that are felt today? Why did you choose this person? What was interesting or appealing about your significant figure?

Let's use Andrew Carnegie as an example. One might choose to discuss his childhood in Scotland, his family's reasons for moving to the United States, as well as the challenges the family faced during immigration. How did Carnegie become such a financial success in the United States? How is he an example of the "Horatio Alger" character? What is his legacy? How do we see his advancements in business practices used today? Why is he so significant to American culture? Students should work to formulate questions that make for a thoughtful and relevant presentation.

Students will also create a visual to accompany their presentation. This can take a variety of forms. Students should create a visual that shows their creative strengths! Drawings, paintings and computer graphics are all acceptable. Create a visual that will help to connect the information you give during your presentation to a face! A successful project will allow peers to identify the person you've spoken about as well as provide important and relevant details about their life.

CONCLUSION

We try to teach our children that in order to know where we are going we must first understand where it is we come from. Nothing is as integral to this belief as understanding our present-day community and how various cultures and beliefs shape who we are and what we believe to be true. When students think about challenges early immigrant and migrant families face, they begin to understand the complexity of modern-day society. This is especially crucial in Houston, where business and social interests are infused with a wide variety of cultural traditions, attitudes, and beliefs. In an effort to help our students create meaningful relationships with those around them, we must make appreciation of diversity a number one priority in our schools.

This unit takes immigration and looks at it as a foundation for cross-cultural communities today. How did different peoples learn to interact and overcome language barriers? If teachers can help students use their own experiences to better understand how those from different

backgrounds can work together, we as educators have laid the groundwork for our students to become active and meaningful citizens in their respective communities.

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