

**My Place in America:  
Authentically Representing Multiethnic Students in Mainstream Literature**

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“I am America. I am the part you won’t recognize. But get used to me.  
Black, confident, cocky; my name, not yours;  
My religion, not yours; my goals, my own;  
Get used to me.”  
*Muhammad Ali*

**INTRODUCTION**

What does it mean to be an American? For many multiethnic students, being an American means needing to decide whether fully to embrace one’s cultural identity or completely abandon that identity in order to participate successfully in the dominant culture at the time. For example, one dominant society that clandestinely fosters such practices is that of the American public school systems. Pressured to assimilate, many non-white students often withdraw, isolate, and denounce their heritages while attending American schools. Increasingly more numbers of multiethnic students drop out before finishing high school each year. Thus, I pose the question, how can the American public school system become a catalyst to alleviate these dilemmas? One possible solution might be to incorporate multicultural education into the current Reading and Language Arts curriculum.

Throughout the academic careers of many students of color, the opportunity to examine an authentic depiction of their family’s ethnic and cultural heritages in mainstream American literature will never present itself. Therefore, my focus for this unit is to invite students to explore, connect, identify, and respond to authentic multiethnic literature inside the classroom. Although various classroom settings can use this unit, I will focus on my students within the realms of the Reading Resource Classroom. This class encompasses an array of ethnic groups. The population at Sharpstown Middle, according to Houston ISD Profiles, is 71% Hispanic, 22% African-American, 5% Asian/Pacific Islander, and 3% White. State schools’ averages are 46% Hispanic, 14% African-American, 3% Asian/Pacific Islander and 36% White (2006). These percentages indicate that multiethnic students not only will experience alienation and identity conflicts within the walls of a classroom, but beyond those walls as well, when we examine the current curriculum. This deletion in the curricula continually results in multiethnic students feeling disconnected for most of their academic careers. Consequently, this does not just have an effect on our students of color; it also influences the beliefs and behaviors of our Anglo students. To resolve these problems, a change must occur in how we, as an educational system, view curriculum content, learning, teaching, and the purpose of schools.

**RATIONALE**

Despite the fact that many of us struggle with the idea of an *American*, as educators it is important to provide our students with the most authentic, reliable materials available, so they may discover for themselves what an *American* is, and what it means. Unfortunately, many

middle-school-aged children of various ethnic groups are most assuredly lost because they do not know who they are and where they belong in their culture and in the larger American culture. Supporting this state of being is the public school system core curriculum, designed with middle-class, native English speakers in mind. Because of this, true representation of many students' lives and experiences does not appear in those curricula. Those students deleted from the curriculum are my students at Sharpstown Middle School.

As a middle school resource-reading teacher, over the years I have seen a progressive rise in the rejection of education, cultural identity, and faulting of the dominant culture by multiethnic students, and this alarms me. Research indicates that this negative response is partially due to limited or nonexistent multiethnic literature in core curricula, school libraries, and classrooms, which validates students' beliefs, virtually making it impossible for them to connect or contribute to discussions in a meaningful way. Furthermore, educators are not sufficiently equipped with the resources needed to integrate these literary works into mandated state curricula. This, too, is a major contribution to students' discarding reading, not only for academic purposes, but also for personal enjoyment. Moreover, it is for these reasons that developing and implementing a unit such as the one I have proposed is crucial to the overall well-being of our students and our society.

I have always tried to make reading exciting for my students. As a teacher at Sharpstown Middle School, I am constantly making a cognizant decision to incorporate into my lessons, discussions, and assignments a number of books, such as *How the Garcia Girls Lost Their Accents*, by Julia Alvarez, *Breaking Through*, by Francisco Jimenez, *Hush*, by Jacqueline Woodson, *Slam*, by Walter Dean Meyer, etc. These are books that closely reflect the lives of my students. I have done this for years, with the hope that my students would finally become truly interested and engaged in discussing the books they are reading. Regrettably, my efforts have not always been successful, and with each passing year, it is becoming more difficult to make reading customary in their lives.

## **OBJECTIVES**

The unit will build proficiency in three key areas: literature, written communication, and oral communication. However, as the unit progresses, underlying objectives will start to emerge. It is imperative that students begin to associate with the books they read and become more acquainted with the characters, settings, and problems presented in the stories. Therefore, while reading various multiethnic books, students in grades 6-8 will discover how to make connections between events, characters, and other elements of a text (ELAR.6.11A) while simultaneously discovering one's own identity and one's place in America. Additionally, students will begin making conscious attempts to relate what they have read to their own lives and experiences (ELAR.6.14A). As a result, students gain an opportunity to link the texts in concrete terms, while learning about points-of-view and events that are beyond their own personal experiences. Once students begin to associate with literature, I believe they will not only view reading as an enjoyable activity, but also begin to have meaningful conversations about the books they are reading, which is my ultimate goal.

To improve skills in reading fluency and comprehension, multiethnic literature is introduced and read in order of levels of difficulty. As a part of the unit, students are required to demonstrate proficiency in writing by producing an original composition piece. To ensure that these skills are met, students will use a diverse collection of genres, such as short stories, biographies, autobiographies, poetry, memoirs, and journals as models. In addition, students will concentrate on the texts' structures and styles of writing to improve upon current writing and grammar skills. Throughout the unit, students' written works will demonstrate the various writing forms and the technicalities of writing conventions (ELAW.6.17B). In addition, through oral communication

practice, students will learn how to take part in meaningful discussions and deliver effective presentations. As a final project, students will be required to integrate all three-unit foci through a short, written and oral presentation (ELAW.6.20E), which focuses on a (n) \_\_\_\_\_ - American writer of his or her choice, with one stipulation: they must choose an ethnicity other than their own.

## **UNIT BACKGROUND**

The demographics of the U.S. population continue to shift rapidly. According to the U.S. Census Bureau (2006), approximately 33% of the population is identified as a minority (U.S. Department of Commerce; “Minority Report”). In addition, it is projected that by the year 2010, the nation’s minority population will have increased to 34.9% (U. S. Department of Education). When looking at these statistics, I am compelled to question our current curriculum. Why is there not an authentic representation of all students we service in the public school system when the benefits are so clear? It is essential that we shift towards a diverse educational program in our classrooms. Students of all ethnicities should have the opportunity to read material that authentically depicts how they function as a community living in America.

Over a 6-8 week period, this unit will enable students to develop awareness and/or strengthen existing ideas that identity and cultural connections are as important to humanness as individual development. It is critical that students become (more) conscious of their identity and their history, and what better way to explore these areas than through reading. Rosalie Black Kiah notes:

In a pluralistic society where racial, cultural, and social diversities abound, each group eventually develops traditions and special interests. Within each group are exhibited mutually shared experiences that are unique to and characteristic of people of the relatively same background. It is the sharing of these experiences that provides a cohesiveness, or feeling of togetherness, to a particular group. These experiences become crucial and salient to the members of the groups as they strive to maintain and preserve that which gives them a sense of worth and self-identification. (286)

This statement alone suggests that the current reading curriculum for today’s students will not be relevant to the majority of our students, since the students we are teaching do not reflect the *experiences* of those who create the curriculum nor those who implement the curriculum. So how can we connect the curriculum to our students in a meaningful way? When classroom instructions are more congruent with the cultural value systems of a diverse student population, educators are able to strengthen student feelings of belonging and reduce behavior problems so that all the students can focus on learning (Bazon 83). How can educators work around these discrepancies? The first step in this process is to introduce students to other ethnic groups as well as to their own using literature. Research has shown that by “increasing students’ cross-cultural understanding, and engaging students in exploring the cultural context of the text, English teachers can foster thoughtful discussions that explore diverse issues of literature, culture, and identity” (Dong 369).

This unit will not just teach students valuable reading, writing, and oral communication strategies that will increase reading fluency, comprehension, oral communication and writing skills, but also provoke all students to start connecting with the literature they are reading. In this unit, we will focus on four groups, some they may be familiar with, and others with which they may not. The point is, we must get students thinking about others’ differences, cultures, belief systems, traditions, etc. The groups we will explore are Anglo ethnic groups in America, Africans in America, Hispanics in America, and Asians in America. We will also look at 1<sup>st</sup>, 2<sup>nd</sup>, and 3<sup>rd</sup> generations within these groups and their struggles and successes in reference to balancing family culture and American culture. Then, we will direct our focus towards how these groups became

hyphenated groups (White, African, Hispanic, and Asian-Americans), asking the question why is it necessary to hyphenate when we all live in America, therefore are Americans?

### **Balancing Two Cultures**

History is very complex, especially when referring to concepts of culture and ethnic groups. “Achieving a coherent identity is difficult for many adolescents; however, ethnic adolescents shoulder an additional burden of integrating the discrepant values from two coexisting cultures, the dominant culture and their own ethnic culture” (Kao 110). Many multiethnic students believe that *white* students do not share in some of the struggles integrating into the dominant culture as they do. Additionally, students do not realize that the pigmentation of one’s skin color does not solely define who they are, culturally speaking. For example, the term “Anglo-Saxon” refers to the Germanic peoples (Angles, Saxons, and Jutes) who invaded England in the fifth and sixth centuries A.D., which suggests that whites are multiethnic, too. Furthermore, some early leaders believed that the term “white” was primarily reserved for those of British Protestant descent (Spring 2-3). Therefore, when attempting to define what it means to be “White,” the lines become very diluted. This is the case for many other ethnic groups, such as Africans who are often grouped in one category. However, according to *Wikipedia* online encyclopedia, “Africa is home to innumerable tribes, ethnic and social groups, some representing very large populations consisting of millions of people, while others are smaller groups of a few thousand. Some countries have over 20 different ethnic groups. All these tribes and groups have cultures, which are different, but represent the mosaic of cultural diversity of Africa” (“Africa”). This is the same for Hispanic and Asian cultures as well. Although each ethnic group may share some common values, they are as different from each other as “*black and white.*”

So, we ask, how do we, as educators, connect this piece of information with our students? How do we incorporate it into our lessons, and why is it important for our students to know that misconceptions of others often interfere with one’s own understanding of identity? As a reading teacher, the opportunity is limitless; the implementation, however, is the challenge. One way is through novels. Therefore, I will use various genres of multiethnic books as primary tools to teach these concepts of awareness and identity. Additionally, I will integrate short video segments found on the United Streaming website as well as solicit guest speakers from the community to assist in the implementation of this unit.

From the outset, students will have to begin to develop their reflective and critical-thinking skills. In each lesson, students will be required to complete a pre-activity questionnaire accompanied by a pre-selected reading passage that will touch on issues that are reflective of the questions. After each reading, students will pair off in groups and discuss the selected reading. In each group, students will be expected to find examples that answer the questionnaire and compare their real-life answers with those of the characters in the reading.

### **Overview of Literature and Activities**

In his essay “Nature,” Emerson states:

Self-reliance means to utilize the self and the environment creatively for the improvement, or uplifting and up-building, of one's culture and people. This is particularly pertinent in the new world experience where envy and imitation are counterproductive because traditional thoughts and actions do not always translate so neatly to a new environment. Self-reliance aims to teach people to cultivate a democratic temper for the ideals of liberty, fraternity, and equality. More importantly, self-reliance aims to teach people to uplift and up-build their lives, their society, and their culture through an offensively new world bias, thereby rejecting envy and imitation. (176)

When reading this I was compelled to think of the many challenges that our minority students encounter daily as they struggle through life's obstacles trying to find a place in this new reality called "America." The driving theme throughout each novel stresses self conflicts relating to identity-crises, self-sacrifices, isolations, alienations, self/world-perceptions, and choices. Therefore, it is not surprising that the authors of these novels also have struggled with many of these issues themselves. These are the issues and concerns that our multiethnic students encounter at least once in their lives. Yet because of their ages, backgrounds, cultural beliefs, etc, they rarely find an outlet that validates these feelings or provides a safe place to explore, discuss, and work through the issues that plague their lives as well as their families' lives.

### **Mirror: A Reflective Look at Self**

Students will refer to a series of questions throughout the unit. These questions will accompany several reading selections. For example, students will use Francisco Jimenez's *Breaking Through*, a story about finding one's own identity in America. In this activity, students will explore factors that could influence a positive as well as a negative concept of self. Another selection will be Toni Morrison's *The Bluest Eye*. Students will question why would "I" want to or need to change myself to fit into society. These questions will be used to provoke students to reflect on how they define themselves and how others perceive them. Students will also have to reflect on their feelings and the feelings of others.

1. What do we contribute to our own individuality?
2. How would we describe ourselves?
3. What influences do others play in our lives?
4. How can we learn from those influences?
5. How much do others' perceptions about ourselves influence our own perceptions about us?
6. How does the dominant culture impact individual decision-making?

After students have answered and discussed these questions within their groups, they will then analyze excerpts from Morrison's *The Bluest Eye*, such as "I can't go to school no more. And I thought maybe you could help me. Help you how? Tell me. Don't be frightened. My eyes. What about your eyes? I want them blue" (Morrison 138). Students will have to ask: Why would a little black girl from Ohio want *blue eyes*? Then ask, why would children want to be different from who they are?

### **Thinking about Diversity**

The purpose of this exercise is for students to *reflect* upon different characteristics that we all share and how those characteristics will interact with life. In this set of questions students will use excerpts from Gish Jen's "White Umbrella." In this short story, students will witness how growing up Chinese-American, two sisters creatively try to survive the complexity that being born to Chinese parents in America brings. While cautiously balancing the intertwining of cultures, relatives, friends, and society, Callie and Mona allow readers to participate in self-discovery and react to their understanding of the experiences they encounter as Americans. Students may use *some or all* of the following questions to assist with the answers:

1. What are ways in which students (and ourselves) are different? Similar?
2. How does one fit into the scheme of things? Who are you?
3. What qualities, habits, talents, skills, personality traits, etc. will one bring to the classroom? How will one come across to other students?
4. Where does one fit into these categories? What does that mean in one's life?

5. What concerns, opinions, or knowledge does one have with regard to these categories (whatever they may be, for example knowledge of a second language, lack of knowledge about certain health issues, religious beliefs that affect your opinion of other cultures)?
6. How might these categories affect one's education?
7. Are people satisfied with where they stand in these categories? Does one experience certain privileges as a result (i.e. US citizenship, upper class, photographic memory)? Are there disadvantages to being in certain categories (i.e. having a strong musical intelligence preference/ability when this is rarely tapped in one's daily life, people having negative preconceptions towards one's gender or ethnicity, being monolingual)?

### **Cultural Attributes to Consider**

#### ***Race and ethnicity, sex and gender, socioeconomic class, (dis)ability, language, religion, and spirituality***

It is a very difficult to teach subjects that question people's beliefs, values, religion, and morals. For most people, the idea of being prejudiced, racist, or biased against another group because of their race, ethnicity, sex, gender, socioeconomic class, language, or religion is unthinkable. Mainly because, as an intelligent being, we know having these ideas, whether we admit them or not, is erroneous and frowned upon by society. We also know that throughout history such ideas have been used as justification for many wars and conflicts. So how can we teach students about these subjects without inadvertently doing what it is known to do: cause conflict? One suggestion for teaching such subjects is to explore with students the contributions various races and ethnic groups have made to the world. Another suggestion is to show students that every race, ethnic group, and culture – although they have various names – share many of the same traditions, celebrations, and rituals.

### **Making a Connection**

All around the world, in every culture, race, and ethnic group, participation in the celebration of one's transition from childhood to adulthood holds an important place. Although called by many names, these celebrations are of equal importance to each individual culture. For example, in the United States, one's "Sweet Sixteen" is just as important to an Anglo American as a "Quinceañera" is to a Hispanic teenager. And equally important is an African teenager's "Ahia Ebe," an Asian teenager's "Guan Li," and a Jewish teenager's "Bat Mitzvah" or "Bar Mitzvah." These coming of age celebrations mark the period in which a "child" becomes an "adult." This is a very important benchmark in every child's life regardless of what part of the world one comes from.

As an educator, these celebrations afford the opportunity to teach our students that although we may look different, speak differently, and have different beliefs, we can always find a common factor that connects us to each other. I believe once children can see and experience similarities that learning, understanding, and acceptance begin to emerge.

### **Authors' Journey**

When writing, authors bring in experiences from their own lives with the goal of writing a novel, essay, article, memoir, *etc.*, that will touch all who read it even if they are of a different nationality, have different beliefs, or never experience the same events which they have. However, an exceptional writer can connect with his or her audience in ways the readers never imagine. This holds especially true for young readers with a multiethnic background, but what happens when that same multiethnic student reads works from a multiethnic writer? What connections are made? What secrets are shared between these particular writers and readers? Throughout this unit, I will focus my attention on the impact the selected books have on my students and question why? As we read these stories my students will gain awareness of how

being different is a major preoccupation with Americans, a subject which is seen throughout the novels. As we continue to explore the novels, students will also gain awareness that differences are seldom accepted or embraced in America, although the American people regularly comment, in a proud, boast-like manner, about the many diverse cultures that make-up America.

### ***How the Garcia Girls Lost Their Accents* by Julia Alvarez**

Even though America is often represented as an immigrant country, it is only now that multiculturalism theories and practices are once again being seriously reexamined in the pluralist view of American society. It is this view that Alvarez tries to convey in her story about four sisters' journeys to America after abruptly leaving their home in the Dominican Republic. Alvarez brings her readers through the many obstacles these sisters encounter while trying to adjust to life in America. Alvarez's story is told in reverse, starting from adulthood after the girls have accepted the practices and social structure of their new home, America, and moving backwards to the girls' wealthy childhood. Alvarez continues the story describing many issues immigrant children experience; however, what makes this story so relatable is the fact that many children of all ethnicities can connect with these "characters" through shared experiences. For example, Alvarez writes about feelings of embarrassment when "American" friends meet their family; anger when they are bullied and called "spics"; frustration when unable to defend or adequately express themselves in English; and feelings of uncertainty of how and where they "fit" in their own family, after returning to their home country after living in America for many years.

Alvarez has captured the essence of growing up in America through the eyes of four Hispanic sisters. Through her skillful and seamless writing, Alvarez is able to interconnect resilience, love, identity, and family life both in the Dominican Republic and America, presented in a series of vignettes that will truly captivate all readers.

### ***The Bluest Eye* by Toni Morrison**

Toni Morrison, like Alvarez, grew up during a time where looking, acting, sounding, and even being perceived as different was not "The American Way." Even before Morrison began writing seriously, she understood how being different from the popular group could have harsh ramifications. Born Chloe Anthony Wofford in Lorain, Ohio in 1931, it is apparent that Morrison needed to change her name in order to "fit" within the mainstream. In her first novel, *The Bluest Eye*, Morrison writes about a young African-American girl who wishes to have different colored eyes. She feels that this changed eye will somehow change society's perception of her, would make her better than who she already is. Although this story is so much deeper than the obvious, and intended for upper grades, for the purpose of my students in middle school, I will focus only on the aspect of wanting to be something or someone different.

Again like Alvarez, and many other minority writers and storytellers, Morrison draws from events experienced throughout her life. While struggling with identity, family history, alienation, assimilation, etc, readers of Morrison's novels often recognize themes that reflect black life in America. Morrison is a writer who tries to capture and expose authentic qualities of resistance, excellence, and integrity of the African people and preserve those qualities to share with African-American people.

Furthermore, *The Bluest Eye* also brings up other major issues. Looking at it from a reading teacher's point of view, and the need for using authentic multiethnic literature in the classroom, this novel makes several references to the childhood stories of "Dick-and-Jane." The main character in the story uses these books to validate or, more accurately, to denounce her self-image and provide her with false information of what beauty is and should be. Morrison points out how these books created by the mass culture have provided this little black girl a powerful tool for

self-denial. In this same way the public school system curriculum excludes authentic depictions of multiethnic students or even provides various images of beauty within its pages.

## **Conclusion**

“Multicultural literature can serve as an entry point to validate expression of cultural knowledge, perspectives, and differences that diverse students live by every day” (Dong 381). As an educator and a participant in society, I believe I am obligated to empower my students in a manner in which they, too, will become productive participants in this society regardless of their ethnic backgrounds. By the end of this unit, students are now thinking about others’ differences, cultures, belief systems, traditions, etc., and embracing them while seeing these attributes as assets and not hindrances. Students are also realizing that although we may appear to be different, we also share similarities. It is through continuous exposure, open communication, and a willingness to listen to others that change can and will occur.

## **LESSON PLANS**

### **Lesson 1 – Days 1 and 2: We All Have a Say!**

#### ***Goal***

In this lesson students will be guided through various discussion topics and participate in many activities. Students will research several cultures and reflect on how these cultural influences shaped the unique and diverse country that we live in today. Students will use excerpts from Francisco Jimenez’s *The Circuit* and Duane Big Eagle’s “The Journey” as related material for discussions and activities.

#### ***TEKS: Objectives/Standards***

§110.21 (4) Listening/speaking/culture. The student listens and speaks to gain and share knowledge of his/her own culture, the culture of others, and the common elements of cultures. The student is expected to: (A) connect his/her own experiences, information, insights, and ideas with experiences of others through speaking and listening (4-8).

(14) Reading/culture. The student reads to increase knowledge of his/her own culture, the culture of others, and the common elements of cultures. The student is expected to:

(C) articulate and discuss themes and connections that cross cultures (4-8).

***Duration:*** Two 90 minutes class periods

#### ***Materials***

Overhead or Smart board

Access to the internet

CD player

Chart paper

Markers

Projector

Students’ handouts (maps, language background history of selected groups, vocabulary, rubric)

Note: Teacher collects photos of multiethnic groups as well as music to develop photo collages and cd mix.

#### ***Overview***

Students will enter the room to an environment filled with the music from various ethnic groups. Students will also find a looping video of different ethnic groups engaged in various conversations within their respective cultures on the Smart Board. (Provoke dialogue. Teacher is listening to what students are saying and taking notes to later use in the lesson.) Note: Use subtitle option; some students will want to know what is being said.



### ***Guided Instructions***

1. Tell students that many American families came to the United States from other places in the world as *immigrants*.
2. Show students a slideshow of different countries (Mexico, China, Africa, Canada, etc) and people participating in their day-to-day activities.
3. Explain to students that many of these families bring *customs, artifacts*, and other aspects of their *heritage* with them to America and why they are very important.
4. Ask students share the names of other languages (i.e. Spanish, Arabic, Nigerian, Chinese, French, Native Indian, etc.) that they speak, write, or have heard of (write them on chart paper).
5. Ask volunteers to say some words from those languages.
6. Chart their responses on a separate chart paper.
7. Provide background information on selected languages.

### ***Group Instructions***

1. In assigned groups, have students record languages on sticky notes and place them on their 11x8 poster boards.
2. Students will choose 5 words from the list on chart paper.
3. In the groups students will figure out from which country the word comes.
4. On the poster boards, students will match the word to the language from which they think the word comes.

### ***Student Activities***

1. Students discuss why they matched the words with languages within their groups.
2. Students will agree with decisions and post their answers on the board.
3. Students will present their answers to class and provide rationale behind their answers.
4. Students will research the country from which their families originated. (Students will read excerpts from Jimenez's *The Circuit*.)
5. Students will draw a map routing their family's journey. (Students will read excerpts from Eagle's "The Journey.")
6. Students will exchange maps with peers then group maps that have similarities (i.e. dates, places visited, route traveled, etc.).

### ***Whole Group Discussion***

Students will return to the gathering area where we will discuss both books and what experiences might have influenced the author while writing. Students will have the opportunity to share their families' journey with the class while making references to the selected reading.

### ***Assessment***

1. In their writers' notebook, students will address personal issues and/or experiences they've encountered with references to the lesson's discussions and activities.
2. Students will participate in student-led conferences with the teacher conversing about class discussion and how it relates to their books and selected passages as well as personal connections.

### ***Wrap-Up***

Students are asked to share any writing or reading samples, as well as thoughts or concerns about issues discussed throughout the lesson (could act as an informal assessment).

## Lesson 2 – Days 3 and 4: Find at least two people who...

### **Goal**

The goal of this lesson is to get students to recognize that although we are different, we also share many commonalities with others. Students will interact with each other and record the things they have in common. Students will discuss these commonalities within their small groups, while referring to passages from Julia Alvarez's *How the Garcia Girls Lost Their Accents* and Viola Canales' *The Tequila Worm* (80-91).

### **TEKS: Objectives/Standards**

§110.21 (4) Listening/speaking/culture. The student listens and speaks to gain and share knowledge of his/her own culture, the culture of others, and the common elements of cultures. The student is expected to: (A) connect his/her own experiences, information, insights, and ideas with experiences of others through speaking and listening (4-8).

(14) Reading/culture. The student reads to increase knowledge of his/her own culture, the culture of others, and the common elements of cultures. The student is expected to:

(C) articulate and discuss themes and connections that cross cultures (4-8).

(15) Writing/purposes. The student writes for a variety of audiences and purposes and in a variety of forms. The student is expected to: (A) write to express, discover, record, develop, reflect on ideas, and to problem solve (4-8).

**Duration:** Two 90 minute class period

### **Materials**

CD player  
Chart paper  
Markers

### **“The Hook”**

Students will enter the room to an environment filled with the music from various ethnic groups. Students will also find a looping video of different ethnic groups engaged in various conversations within their respective cultures on the Smart Board. (Provoke dialogue. Teacher is listening to what students are saying and taking notes to later use in the lesson).

### **Guided Instructions**

Continuing with the theme of diversity, reiterate to students that many families originally came from all over the world as *immigrants*. Show students several celebrations that many Americans participate in throughout the year.

1. Tell students that they will be comparing and contrasting traditions *celebrated* in other countries to those celebrated in the United States.
2. Ask students to share the names of some other *traditions* (i.e., Quinceañeras, Bat or Bar Mitzvahs, Sweet 16 Parties, Guan Li, Ahia Ebe) that was not seen or mentioned in previous videos or discussions. (Write responses on chart paper.)
3. On a separate sheet of chart paper, write down the names of “coming of age” ceremonies held in Spanish, Jewish, American, Chinese, and African cultures.
4. Provide background information on all “coming of age” celebrations.
5. Give students an overview of the novel *How the Garcia Girls Lost Their Accents* by Julia Alvarez and Viola Canales' *The Tequila Worm* (\*Note: include information about author in the overview, so students can get a sense of how the author herself copes with issues of migration.)

### ***Whole Group Discussion***

1. As a whole group, students will sit in the *gathering area*. “I” will write questions on chart paper.

#### Students’ Questions:

- Who speaks a second language?
- Who has traveled to more than 5 countries?
- Who has experienced being *discriminated* against?
- Who has more than 2 *ethnicities*?
- Have lived in a country other than the US?
- Who can do a cartwheel?
- Whose parents were both born in America?
- Who has grandparents in another country?
- Who has lived in more than 3 states?
- Who can define the word *culture*?
- Who can explain the difference between *acculturation* and *assimilation*?
- Who loves to read?

Note: italicized words are vocabulary we will be using throughout the unit.

2. After, questions are written, students will write down each question and answer as many of them as possible.
3. As a whole class, students come back to *gathering area* where they will share answers revealing some shared commonalities.

### ***Individual Activity***

1. Students will work individually, so that they will not be influenced by their peers.
2. Students will have approximately 5-10 minutes to answer as many questions as they can.

### ***Group Instructions***

Students will break off into assigned groups and read pp. 224-236 of *How the Garcia Girls Lost Their Accents* and Mary Gordon’s “The Neighborhood,” and discuss some of the issues surrounding misconceptions about people.

### ***Assessment***

1. In their writers’ notebook, students will address personal issues and/or experiences they’ve encountered with references to the lesson’s discussions and activities.
2. Students will participate in student-led conferences with the teacher conversing about class discussion and how it relates to their books and selected passages as well as personal connections.

### ***Wrap-up***

Students are asked to share any writing samples or reading samples, thoughts, as well as concerns about issues discussed throughout the lesson. (This interaction could act as an informal assessment).

### ***Lesson 3 – Days 5 and 6: Welcome to America: A Guide to “Assimilating” Successfully***

#### ***Goal***

The goal of this lesson is to promote cultural pluralism by emphasizing respect for human differences; students will gain an understanding of those who are culturally different from them

by participating in various activities that force them to reflect on their own biases and prejudices against differences.

**TEKS: Objectives/Standards (grades 4-8)**

§110.21 (4) Listening/speaking/culture. The student listens and speaks to gain and share knowledge of his/her own culture, the culture of others, and the common elements of cultures. The student is expected to: (A) connect his/her own experiences, information, insights, and ideas with experiences of others through speaking and listening.

(12) Reading/text structure/literary concepts. The student is expected to: (J) recognize and interpret literary devices such as oxymoron, aphorism, paradox, symbolism, etc.

(13) Reading/inquiry/research. The student inquires and conducts research using a variety of sources. The student is expected to: (C) use multiple sources, including electronic texts, experts, and print resources, to locate information relevant to research questions.

(14) Reading/culture. The student reads to increase knowledge of his/her own culture, the culture of others, and the common elements of cultures. The student is expected to:

(C) articulate and discuss themes and connections that cross cultures (4-8).

(15) Writing/purposes. The student writes for a variety of audiences and purposes and in a variety of forms. The student is expected to: (C) write to inform such, as to explain, describe, report, and narrate.

**Duration:** Two 90 minute class periods

**Material**

CD player

Chart paper

Markers

LCD Projector

Internet connection (poems, and quotes)

Students' handouts (excerpts from Gish Jen's novels *Typical American* and *Mona in the Promise Land* and excerpts from Cynthia Kadohata's "The Floating World.")

**Overview**

**Leading Question:** Is it better for newcomers to America to **assimilate** into the culture or is **acculturation** a better concept? Explain and support their decision.

Students will examine the meaning behind these two words and how the decision to adopt one of those processes can drastically impact the lives of those who are new to America. History has shown how these processes can either "make or break" a people. Students will have to decide which process will best serve not only immigrants to America, but also native-born Americans, while successfully keeping their ethnic heritages despite the pressures to relinquish most or all their former cultural characteristics often imposed upon them by the dominant culture. Students will be called upon to reflect on their own histories and family's cultures and question "what part of my culture can I do without?"

**Day 5: Whole Group Discussion**

1. In gathering area students will find two quotes by Ralph Waldo Emerson on the smart board.
2. Volunteers will be asked to read each quote:
  1. "To be yourself in a world that is constantly trying to make you something else is the greatest accomplishment."
  2. "...that imitation is suicide; that he must take himself for better, for worse, as his portion."

3. Students will be given a brief overview of the author and the time in which the quotes were written.
4. Students will select a quote then break off into groups to discuss that quote.

#### Group Activities

1. Students will define, compare, and contrast key terms (assimilation vs. acculturation). Students will refer to these terms throughout lesson and assigned activities.
2. In reading groups students will select one of the selected excerpts to accompany the quote.
3. Students are to work together and analyze quotes and find examples of their interpretation of the quote within their selected passages.
4. As a group, students will present their interpretations to the class with support from selected reading.

#### Assessment

1. Students will participate in student-led teacher conferences.
2. Students are expected to lead discussion about lesson.
3. Teacher is listening for the use of vocabulary words (assimilation, acculturation, culture, ethnic, etc.) within the context of the conference.
4. Teacher is also listening for personal connection that students make within the context of the lesson as well as their out-of class books.

#### Wrap-Up

*Nineteen year old Chou writes, "What is it like to be an outsider?" ... What is it like when you are an opposite ... (1986)*

1. Students will be read the poem, "You Have to Live in Somebody Else's Country to Understand" by Noy Chou.
2. Students are asked to close their eyes while they listen to me read.
3. Soft music from Cambodia will be played in the background (to set the tone, lights dim).
4. After reading, in their writers' notebooks, students will write an entry that reflects back on the discussions, activities, poems/excerpts and music explored in this lesson. (This can also be used as an informal/formal assessment).

#### ***Day 6: Group Instructions***

1. Review with student the previous day's lesson, focusing on vocabulary.
2. Tell students that today they will work together in groups to create a brochure.
3. Provide each group with a sample brochure for a model and rubric for assignment.
4. Tell students that the brochure will be designed to help students who just entered America get accustomed to the culture successfully.
5. Tell students they will be selecting a language or country previously discussed.
6. Tell students they will collect as much information about that country (language, traditions, culture, celebrations etc.) and put relevant information in the brochure.

The Twist: Tell students that their design must be influenced by the process of assimilation. That assimilation is the best way to become a true "American."

#### Student Activities

1. Students will select a Language/Country and conduct research on selection.
2. Students will work in assigned groups to develop a brochure.
3. Students will research selected language/country.

4. Students will present finished project to the class.

### Assessment

1. Teacher will use rubric to assess students' brochures.
2. Students will participate in student-lead teacher conferences.
3. Students are expected to lead discussion about lesson.
4. Teacher is listening for the use of vocabulary words (assimilation, acculturation, culture, ethnic, etc.) within the context of the conference.
5. Teacher is also listening for personal connection that students make within the context of the lesson as well as their out-of class books.

### Wrap-Up

Students will exchange brochures and focus on why "assimilation" would not be the best process for newcomers to America.

As a group, students will be encouraged to share their thoughts, concerns, and feelings about the brochure and make suggestions on it; if this was a real brochure, what would they include to ensure the success of immigrant students to America?

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