

Energy of a Nation: Immigrants in America - Resources for Learning about Immigration

Name of organisation:

The Advocates for Human Rights

TEACHING STRATEGIES: CLASSROOM ACTIVITIES FOR UNDERSTANDING IMMIGRATION



Outlined below are educator strategies that:

- 1) Encourage non-immigrant students to empathize with immigrants and refugees;
- 2) Build awareness of current world events affecting immigrants and refugees;
- 3) Demonstrate how immigration has changed throughout history (i.e. the experiences of different immigrant groups, the changes in immigration policy, etc.);
- 4) Increase awareness of diverse world cultures; and
- 5) Create a welcoming classroom environment for new immigrant and refugee students.

Building Empathy

- Change the language of all signs in the classroom for a day. Ask the students how it feels to not know what is going on. How would an immigrant feel in this situation?
- Have the class create a "packing list" asking, "If you were moving with your family to a foreign country what would you bring? What if you were limited to one suitcase?"
- Write and perform a skit describing an immigrant family making the decision to migrate. Include reasons for immigrating and some of the reasons why you would not want to immigrate.
- Find excerpts from books or pieces of literature written by authors from different cultures (e.g. *The Joy Luck Club* by Chinese author Amy Tan). The works should be unfamiliar to the students. During the reading ask the students to think about and try to guess the ethnic or cultural background of the author and write down phrases and images that might be clues. Leave out all place names, native language terms and other references that would reveal the author's heritage (in place of these words, simply say, "blank"). The students will begin to relate to the author based on their own diverse cultural experiences. At the end when all is revealed, the students may be surprised by how similar the lives and experiences of immigrants and non-immigrants are.

Current Events

- Divide the class into groups each of which will research and track refugee situations. Why are people leaving? Where do they go? Depending on the area, has repatriation begun? Who helps refugees where they are?
- Create a "Refugee Awareness" bulletin board where students can clip articles and photos of refugees from around the world. Discuss each new item.
- Organize a fundraiser to help refugee children. For example, "Books For Books" is a project where students can collect and sell used books to raise funds for the UNHCR to buy books for children in refugee camps.

A Historical Perspective

- Have students research the immigration roots of their own families or others who they know. Create a map where students can trace how their ancestors traveled to the United States.

Find out how long the journey took, where they stopped, and what modes of travel were necessary.

- Create an illustrated timeline of your state's immigration history. Make it either general or based on specific things like the history of various dwellings, kinds of jobs, events that affected immigration.
- Read historical letters of immigrants to their family members back home (use your county historical society.) Compare and contrast their descriptions to reality of the lives of an immigrant today.
- Research immigration law. How have these laws changed over time?

Cultural Exchange

- As an art project, pick a native art form that could be emulated by your students (perhaps African sculpture or Native American beadwork). Research the cultural significance of the art and what it symbolizes for that culture. For example, one 6th grade class in Virginia researched *mbari* shrines of the Owerri Igbo people of Nigeria. Students could also develop their own symbolism for the art they create.
- Take advantage of the cultural diversity within the classroom by inviting students to demonstrate or show artwork from their culture. This may give new immigrant students a chance to 'be an expert' and share culture with their new classmates. Your new students will realize that they are valuable assets to the class.



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