

Curriculum Units by Fellows of the Yale-New Haven Teachers Institute 2013 Volume II: Immigration and Migration and the Making of a Modern American City

A Modern American Family: Creating a Historical Record in the Middle-School Social Studies Classroom

Curriculum Unit 13.02.04 by Tara L. Ehler

Introduction

This unit will ask 8 th grade students to write the story of an American family in the 20 th century through "primary" documents and artifacts. That is, to create newspaper articles, journal entries, photographs, drawings and letters in order to tell the story of the last five generations of a modern family in New York. This collection will have to touch upon three themes of American history: conflict, class, and migration.

These themes intersect and overlap in many ways. Conflict can relate to any of the major American wars, as well as to the conflict of encounters between different groups and interests in American history. Understanding class and this history of social mobility (or lack thereof) is vital to understanding the American condition. Migration comes up repeatedly; the first Europeans, forced African migration, Westward expansion, major waves of immigration and the Great Migration north. Migration and immigration was often dependent upon class, and could lead to conflict.

For each of their five artifacts, students will have to write a "secondary" analysis document that explains the context of the item, both in its role within the family and its connection to American history. This will be the students' opportunity to explain their thinking, and will be the basis for a brief presentation to their classmates.

This unit will be a cumulative project to be completed in June after students have spent the year studying American history. We end with the 20 th century in the 4th quarter, so this will be the project that covers the span of the 1900s. Students will have the opportunity to demonstrate their understanding of modern American history, the difference between primary and secondary documents and the work of historians, all while employing creative strategies. It is important to note that at this point in the year, students will have had extensive experience reading, analyzing, discussing and researching primary documents. The aim of this project is to reinforce the difference between primary and secondary documents, NOT to teach students how to read primary documents as they will have had considerable work on this all year. Similarly, this is not a project linked to the study of one narrow time period, but rather an assessment of what concepts and history students have retained from an entire quarter of teaching. The lessons in this unit assume that students have already completed units on immigration, the Progressive Era, WWI, the 1920s, the Great Depression, WWII

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and a brief survey of post-war America. A family history focus allows students to connect these different periods of 20 th century US history together into one family's history, so that they can see continuities as well as changes over time. This project, while utilizing many of the same skills and teaching techniques as a traditional research paper, will engage students of all learning styles and abilities and is ideal for differentiation in diverse classroom. However, it is most likely to be successful in an honors level class, and would require modification for use with struggling students.

Rationale

Context and Background

As a Social Studies teacher, one of my primary challenges is finding ways to engage students who are often so focused on the here and now, and ask them to think about the past. Because history teachers tend to love nothing more than diving deep into a historical place or time, we can forget that our students often struggle to connect with and find the relevance of people long dead and events long past. We take for granted our worldview, which already understands how events are layered upon one another and the past shapes our present. We know that history evolves; or at least our understanding of it does. These are all new concepts to 8 th graders, and as they prepare to make the leap to high school classrooms, I feel an urgency to impress upon them the importance of history and historical thinking.

What makes this task even more challenging is the marginalization of Social Studies in the primary curriculum. In my district, for grades K-6, Social Studies can often be an after-thought rather than a focus of study in the classroom. Even fifth graders are allotted thirty minutes a week of Social Studies in the district curriculum plan. I've heard teachers complain that, with three-hour daily literacy blocks and an understandable emphasis on math skills, even this thirty minutes can be hard to accommodate. I imagine this is true in many places, especially urban districts who have moved almost entirely to a reading/math curriculum. Social Studies is also not an explicitly tested subject on state mandated standardized assessments, although we of course work on reading and writing skills through our engagement with primary and secondary documents, as well as research, essay writing, and journaling throughout the year.

This all serves as context for any unit of study I write. Content, while important, is no more vital than methodology. Midway through my first year of teaching Social Studies (though I've taught Language Arts for three years at the middle level), I've had reasonable success with first-person historical journal entries. Students assume the voice of historical figures, real, or more often, imagined, and demonstrate their understanding of a particular time period through the language, details, and subject matter in their writing. This bit of creative writing, done regularly, both reinforces content and engages students as they have the opportunity to be imaginative. I've had so much success with this type of assignment that I plan on making journal writing the cornerstone around which I organize my 8 th grade course next year. This project will be a natural extension of that work.

I chose to expand this unit beyond immigration and migration to a broader family history that includes a study of class and conflict because the 8 th grade class is a survey course and we move through content very quickly. As this will be a cumulative project, it will require students to demonstrate their knowledge of these

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themes, as well as their understanding of historical events.

Students will have to write a brief introduction to each document they choose to include in their collection, stating why it is important in this family's history and how it connects to American history. I believe that by placing the family in New York I will open up more options as to what the family's history may be. The students can choose to create a character of any ethnicity, race, class etc. New York is also close to my home district of New Haven, so students can relate to the types of histories that might relate to a family in the Northeast.

Ultimately, I hope this creative project will engage students, reinforce prior learning regarding historical themes and types of sources, and finally solidify the message that each of us is a culmination of a series of choices, historical events, movements and conflicts.

Rationale for Methodology Employed in this Unit

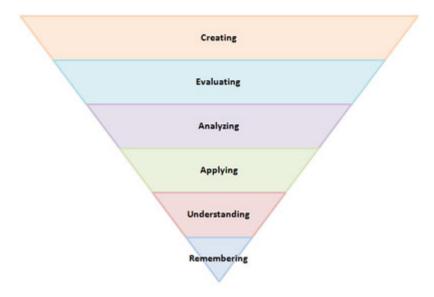
Common Core State Standards

The new Common Core State Standards are written for English Language Arts and Math. While some Social Studies educators may be moan the fact that our discipline is left out and this could again be seen as marginalization, I agree with those that feel as though the Common Core offers an opportunity for the rejuvenation of the discipline. A close examination of the literacy standards reveals that the Social Studies classroom is the natural home of many of the skills emphasized and we are once again relevant to the national debate and discussion on education.

I've included relevant standards in Appendix A to this document, but it is worth discussing these at somewhat greater length. The difference between primary and secondary documentation is a critical component in these standards. When one looks at Bloom's Taxonomy of Learning Domains 1, it becomes clear that the highest order of thinking is creating. We can ask children to remember the difference between primary and secondary documents. We can even ask them to apply, evaluate, and analyze both primary and secondary documents in hopes of embedding the differences between both and how historians look at them. But I would argue that students will best learn what a primary document is and "analyze the relationship between a primary and secondary source on the same topic" 2 if they are creating artifacts and writing secondary interpretations of them.

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Bloom's Taxonomy



Revised edition by Lorin Anderson (a student of Bloom)

In addition, this unit will directly address standards asking students to interpret visual as well as textual information, summarizing main idea, analyzing perspective and point of view, as well as distinguishing between fact and opinion. In preparation for new state assessments aligned to Common Core, it is important that any unit directly address the skill set necessary for student achievement on these assessments, and this unit does so through its activities and objectives.

1 st Person Journal Writing/Artifact Creation

"Writing, reading, storytelling. Some truth. Some fiction. And always our lives." ³ Tom Romano uses these words to describe the impact of his daughter's English class assignment in which she used her knowledge of family history and early 20 th century America in order to write the fictionalized story of her grandfather's immigration through Ellis Island. I believe Romano captures exactly the promise of an interdisciplinary unit such as this one. Even the most scholarly historian knows there has to be an aspect of ¹ imagination in order to engage with history. This is especially important for middle schoolers just beginning their engagement with historical thinking.

Student engagement is the elusive key to all student success. It can't always be predicted and sometimes what teachers believe will be the most high-interest lesson falls flat. However, I have seen fluent, creative, and accurate writing when I ask students to assume the role of a historical character, and this, to me, reflects high levels of engagement. According to EdD Gayle Thieman,

An effective method of teaching US and world history courses is to have students write fictional journals about a fictional character whose lifestyle is affected by the events occurring during the specific historical period being studied. The students are required to add new information to the journals as they gain more knowledge about the topic. This teaching method impels students to use their creativity and resourcefulness to learn more about a topic so that they can fill their

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journals with more interesting and relevant facts. 4

As Thieman notes, this sort of first person journaling demands that students apply, rather than regurgitate, their understanding of the past.

This kind of assignment also speaks to understanding the impact of perspective. I have had students write fascinating journal entries from the perspective of slaves and slave owners, British soldiers and American founding fathers, Dust Bowl farmers and depression-era bankers. It is important to me that students understand there is not a single story in American history, but a collection of perspectives and experiences that, taken together, can begin to explain our history. First person historical journaling accomplishes this better than any other activity or lesson I've tried.

While journaling may be an aspect to this unit, students will take this a step further in creating all types of artifacts. This, I hope, will further engage struggling students who may shy away from writing. Creating photographs, maps, drawings, or other items will help differentiate for all learners. I would also be open to students developing a theme across time (drawings, wedding photos, letters, etc.) as this may help struggling students develop their materials if they are focused on one type of artifact and how it may change over generations in a single family.

A Note on Historical Content/Accuracy

One potential challenge to implementing this unit is ensuring historical accuracy in students' work. It does presume that students have studied the 20 th century, so the lessons contained within the unit do not explicitly address the historical content. Is it fair then to hold students accountable for 100% accuracy for such a wide swath of time? Students must understand that historians and writers, including fiction writers, concern themselves with accuracy and conduct extensive research before beginning a project, and there will be certain standards and expectations for students to meet.

The goal of this unit is really to assess students' understanding of broad strokes of history. That is, do students understand change over time in society regarding women's roles, race relations, working conditions, and other social conditions in an urban center? Can they create a family that will reflect these changes? Do they acknowledge the role of major world conflict in disrupting family life or creating industrial growth? Since this is geared toward 8 th grade students, it is foundational work for their high school study of American history.

This project is asking students to synthesize all the work they've done in the 4 th quarter in order to create this family. My interest in assigning this project is to pull the picture together for students in a creative way—not to hone in on specific details. This is how the work students do might differ from a research paper or History Day project. It is more akin to writing historical fiction. While I will ask them to strive for accuracy and will mark them off for anything blatantly incorrect, I am mostly asking them to rely on their class notes, rather than conduct intensive research and so cannot hold them accountable for minor errors. I will provide a timeline for students to refer to and check themselves against, especially when it comes to immigration dates,

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Ideas for Modification

This would be a very difficult unit for struggling students to complete. It asks students to synthesize information on many different levels. They must have a clear understanding of the chronology of the 20 th century, understand changing social conditions and norms, create artifacts, conduct some individual research and be both creative and analytical in their work. Below, I will list some ideas for modifying this unit, while retaining the main idea behind it for developing students:

- · Create the family for students. Give everyone the same family tree that reflects the most important ideas from the 20 th century for your classroom. Ask students to create artifacts from this tree.
- Ask students to work in groups. Each student can create one artifact from the family with analysis, but together the group's work can span the 20 th century.
- Focus on one time period (ie the tenement houses and early urbanization in New York). Ask students to create one artifact from this period that they think a historian could use to learn more about life in that time.
- Focus explicitly on chronology and change over time. Give students a timeline of the 20 th century with important dates. Ask them to create a poster or presentation that demonstrates how one aspect of society would change over time and how this reflects a changing society (a great example for this would be women's clothing, but it could also include categories like transportation, housing, writing technology, etc.)

Objectives

Content

- Chronology- Students will be able to create artifacts from five generations in the 20 th century in order to demonstrate their understanding of the sequence of important events in American history.
- Class- Students will be able to create artifacts that reflect their imagined family's socioeconomic status in order to demonstrate their understanding that class impacts experience.

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- Conflict- Students will create at least one artifact that relates directly to a major conflict in American history in order to demonstrate their understanding of how conflict can shape society and impact families.
- Migration- In primary or secondary artifacts, students will include their family's immigration or migration in order to demonstrate their understanding of the impact of movement on American history.

Skills/Enduring Understandings

- Change over time- Through the development of their imagined family, student will reflect our ongoing study of how society changes over time. Students' projects should reflect the changing role of women, race relations, language, education or other social issues.
- Primary vs. Secondary Documentation- Students have completed research throughout the year using both primary and secondary documentation. This project will assess students' understanding of what constitutes a primary document (their artifacts) versus what a secondary document might look like (their analyses).
- Analytical Writing- Students' analyses of their primary documents/artifacts should reflect their ability to analyze material, a skill we've been working on throughout the year. They should know how to explain the historical importance of a document, as well as examine perspective and point of view in primary artifacts.

Strategies

In this section, I will highlight some of the teaching strategies that may be most effective in presenting this unit in narrative. Some of these will also be included in the sample lesson plans.

Inspiration from Real Documents

In order to understand the work of historians, as well as the types of artifacts historians look at when writing

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about history, students will need to see actual primary source documents and read secondary analyses of them. We utilize primary documents throughout the year, but in particular students need to see them in the format I will be asking them to create. The main source I plan on using for this is a college reader, *Major Problems in American History*. It includes short primary documents and brief analyses of them.

However, this text can be quite challenging for the middle level. Other ways of approaching this introduction may include using images and/or text from Jacob Riis's *How the Other Half Lives*, historical maps of New York, or some of the excellent collections of images and documents available on the Library of Congress's website. It will be essential to show students the basis in reality for their creative work (see Sample Lesson Plan 1)

Planning: Fictional Family Tree

It will also be important for students to have a mental concept of just who their modern family is before they can create the items that will tell the family's story. Students should map out a family tree at the start of the unit. They can then highlight which family members and historical periods to include when creating artifacts.

Depending on the nature of the classroom, teachers can be more or less structured when assigning this family tree. For example, if teachers want to highlight migration from North to South, WWI, immigration in the early 20 th century, or more recent immigration, they can require students to include family members/artifacts from particular periods. I will require students to include one artifact from each of the family's past five generations, in order to cover the span on the 20 th century. Teachers can also decide if they will allow students to base their fictional families on their real families. If this is the case, it will of course be harder to require students to include various time periods or events (See sample lesson plan three).

It may be a good idea to ask students to focus on one branch of their fictional family tree, as this will help mitigate students who may end up confusing themselves with complex family narratives.

Modeling

This unit would benefit greatly from modeling an end product. This will help students visualize teacher expectations. Because so much creativity is necessary for this unit, modeling will in no way limit students. Every family can have remarkably different stories.

If I were to use my actual family as a model, I could bring in items that would tell my story. These might include my maternal great-grandfather's WWI portrait (conflict), the passenger list from my paternal great-grandmother's immigration from Italy (migration), my maternal great-grandparents' wedding portrait from England (class), a regiment list from the Civil war that included members of my paternal grandfather's family, a photograph of my husband's grandmother in her WAC uniform or a letter from Niccola Sacco to my husband's great-grandfather. I would write secondary commentary on these items (See Lesson Plan Three).

The difficulty in using actual family mementos as models would be that I would be not modeling the creative process and the range of American experiences represented would be limited. While this would demonstrate how primary documents can tell the history of family, it might not demonstrate the range of experiences or historical events that are open to kids, or might be off-putting to students who do not have extensive documentation of their family history. For example, while I am Caucasian, most of my students are African American and the historical experiences of African Americans would not be represented in my personal experience. In my case, it may make more sense to model a fictional family.

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Artifact Creation

Students can create a range of artifacts including photos, letters, journals, government documents, passenger lists, paintings, tickets, school papers, or legal documents. While I would like students to create all items, teachers can also decide whether they would allow their students to incorporate fictionalized versions of Library of Congress (or other) photos. For example, in class recently we were analyzing images of working women during WWII. One image was two African-American women working in a factory in New Britain CT. Perhaps these women were members of this fictional family and that image can be one of the artifacts.

Depending on access to cameras, students may be able to stage photographs as well, and apply filters to make them look older. In this case, students will have to model their work on actual photographs from the past and write a written analysis about the choices they've made in composing their family photo. I will require at least one written document and no more than two photographs in order to ask students to diversify their work and incorporate a variety of sources. This will also reinforce the concept that historians must look to many sources in order to understand a particular moment.

Teachers can require specific artifacts, set guidelines for length of written documents, or differentiate for struggling and/or high achieving students as necessary.

Analysis Writing

When modeling the secondary documents (written analysis of the artifacts), it will be important to emphasize the dual purpose of this short document. It must first identify the item and its role in the family's history (what is it and to whom does it pertain) and secondly, students must explain the connection to a historical period. For example, if I were going to write about a family wedding portrait I have from the early 20s, I might explain how the clothes reflect the fashion of the time, as well as the family's social station, in addition to identifying the family members in the photo and their personal story (the photo was taken shortly before they emigrated to the U.S., etc.)

The analysis is just as important as the artifact itself, as the analysis will be the true assessment of the students' understanding of historical chronology, culture and content.

Technology Option

In creating a 21 st century classroom, teachers are always looking for ways to implement technology standards. While every classroom has different access to equipment, this would be a great unit to post online. Students can use presentation programs like Prezi, Google Presentation or Powerpoint to consolidate and present their artiacts (or photographs/scanned images of them), along with their analyses. Alternatively, there may be blogs or classroom pages where all students' final projects can be collected. Students may be able to comment on each other's work and make connections between their imagined families.

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Sample Lesson Plans

Unit Overview:

Week One: Review actual primary source document and analysis, introduce assignment, model with family portraits

Sample Lesson One: Reading Primary Source Document and Analysis

Objective: Students will be able to write an analysis of a primary source document in order to demonstrate their understanding of how historians might use these resources in their work.

Activities:

- 1.) Do Now: As students enter the room, have the following prompt up on the board: Why and how do historians use primary documents? (Remember, at this point in the year, students will have been using primary documents regularly, so this will be a review for them). You can have students write a brief response, or turn and talk for a few minutes, before leading a brief discussion on the work of historians and how primary documents are important keys to understanding the past.
- 2.) Explain that today, in preparation for an upcoming project, we will practice writing our own analyses of a primary document. We're going to focus on a image from the early 20 th century, from the tenement houses of New York. Review this time period briefly with students.
- 3.) Hand out the photograph analysis worksheet from the National Archives (it can be found here: http://www.archives.gov/education/lessons/worksheets/photo_analysis_worksheet.pdf

Explain the process of examining photographs.

- 4.) Project or pass out one of Jacob Riis's iconic images. Guide students through the analysis process (observe, list, infer, question).
- 5.) Lead a brief discussion on the photographs, and what students could learn about life in the tenement houses from it. Explain that historians follow the same process, but go one step further in writing secondary texts about what they learn.
- 6.) Pass out primary document with brief written analysis (I might use a piece from *Major Problems in American History, Volume II*. It's also possible to find pieces from the National Archives. Here is one example of the Zimmerman Telegram, which is something I study with my students and would be familiar to them: http://www.archives.gov/education/lessons/zimmermann/)
- 7.) Read analysis together and lead discussion as to how it analyzes and explains the importance of the document.
- 8.) Ask students to revisit their worksheet analyzing the Riis photograph. Give them time to write 1-2 paragraphs, explaining the photograph and what they learned about life in the tenements from it. Collect these paragraphs as students leave (this could also be homework, depending on timing).

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9.) If there is time, students can share out their paragraphs, and the class can discuss the strengths and areas for improvement in some examples. This can also be done the next day in class.

Assessment: Written paragraphs analyzing Riis photograph.

Week Two: Plan fictional family tree, Complete first artifact, Peer feedback, Working time

Sample Lesson Two: Planning a Fictional Family Tree

Objective: Students will be able to map out an imagined American family that will reflect social and migratory patterns of the 20 th century.

Activities:

- 1.) Do Now: Ask students to draw a map that represents their family. Don't give them any specific directions, but just say that it should include family members. Have students share out and discuss how they have chosen to visually represent their family.
- 2.) Explain that today students will be using family trees, which is one kind of map for a family, to create their imagined family. They will be responsible for mapping back five generations, in order to cover the 20 th century. Explain that in real life, generations can look quite different, but for our purposes we are going to space them out 20-30 years. Pass out family trees and explain how to fill them in.
- 3.) Tell students that they should mentally plan who their family is before filling out the tree, and that they should fill it out in pencil in case they change their minds. You might want computers available so that students can look up historically accurate names and double check facts like immigration patterns to make sure they are not historically inaccurate.
- 4.) It may be necessary to model filling out a family tree, or to have a model ready so that students can understand the chronology of each generation.
- 5.) Give students most of the class to plan their families.
- 6.) At the end of class and for homework, ask students to use their completed family trees to identify potential artifacts/documents for each generation.

Assessment: Completed family tree.

Week Three: Complete all artifacts, present digitally, in small groups or to whole class

Assignment Sheet

8 th Grade Final Significant Task: Creating a Modern American Family through "Primary" and Secondary Source Documents

This task will ask you to be creative and scholarly as you tell the story of a modern American family. You will use your knowledge of American history to create "primary artifacts" and secondary source explanations that tell the story of a family living in New York today.

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You will create an imaginary family that will represent American history. You can decide who these people are and how they arrived in New York. While you can base aspects of this family on your own family's history, you should not try to re-create your exact family history.

Requirements:

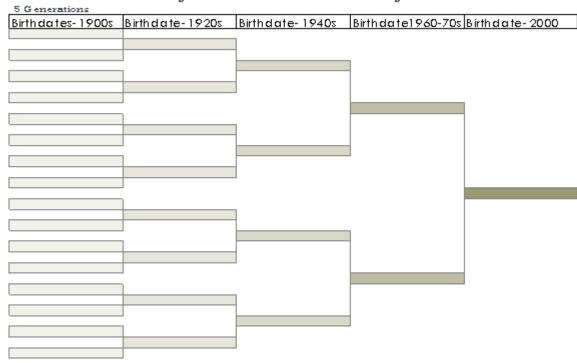
- Family Tree- In class you will map out the family's history in the 20 th century. Think about when the various branches of the family tree came to America. Are there Native American ancestors in the family? How did ancestors arrive (immigration, slavery, etc.)? Your family can be very diverse.
- 5 Artifacts "Primary Sources"- In order to tell this family's history, you will create five artifacts from various points in the family's history (one for each of the last five generations). These can take a variety of forms including: journal entries, letters between family members, drawings, photographs (you can "stage" photographs from the past OR use ONE actual photograph), newspaper articles, ticket stubs, or any other item that you think family members might save and pass down. At least one "artifact" has to be written text (one page in length).

- Secondary Source Explanations- For each item, you must write a 1-2 paragraph explanation of the item from the perspective of a historian. Your explanations must answer the following questions: What is the item? What information does it reveal about the family's history? How does it relate to or reflect its time period?
- Themes: Class, Conflict, and Migration- As we have studied American history this year, we have touched upon the themes of class (high, middle, lower), conflict (wars and social conflicts between groups) and migration (movement from outside and within the country—think immigration and the Great Migration). Your items should somehow develop these themes. For example, you might include a letter from a father to his wife after moving north during the Great Migration to provide for his family (migration) or a dog tag from WWI (conflict).

Family Tree Worksheets:

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FAMILY TREE for My Modern American Family



20th Century Family Tree

5 Generations

n: 11 1 1 1 1 1 1 1 1 1 1 1 1 1 1 1 1 1	a: 11 1 1 a a a a			a: 11
Birthdates- 1900s	Birthdate- 1920s	Birthdate- 1940s	Birthdate1960-70s	Birthdate- 2000
	The Great			
	Depression struck			
Think about what	in 1929 and	This generation		
this generation	shaped life in the	would grow up in		
would	1930s. Was this	the 1950s during		
experience. Did	family moving as	the Cold War.		
they immigrate	a result of the	They lived		
fromEurope?	Dust Bowl? Did	through the		
Participate in the	someone	invention of		
Great Migration?	participate in the	television and the		
Did someone	New Deal? How	creation of the	Hippies, Vietnam,	
fight in World War	did WWII affect	suburbs. Where	disco, the 1980s	4
I or work for	this generation's	did this	and end of the	What does it
women's	life and work?	generation live	Cold War. The	mean to be a
suffrage? Tell the	Create an	and work? What	1990s, Bill Clinton	teenager today?
story of this	artifact that will	is one artifact	and 9/11. What	What item would
generation	tell this	that would	would your	capture your
through one	generation's	capture their	parents choose	story and your
artifact.	story.	liv es?	to tell their story?	generation?

Important Dates Pertaining to Immigration and Migration:

Students may be directed to the following websites in order to cross check their immigration narratives or teachers can create handouts with the dates most relevant to their work in class:

http://ocp.hul.harvard.edu/immigration/timeline.html

https://www.excelsior.edu/web/taking-root/history-of-immigration

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Appendix A: Connection to Standards

Relevant Common Core State Standards

Key Ideas and Details

- CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RH.6-8.1Cite specific textual evidence to support analysis of primary and secondary sources.
- CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RH.6-8.2Determine the central ideas or information of a primary or secondary source; provide an accurate summary of the source distinct from prior knowledge or opinions.

Craft and Structure

- CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RH.6-8.6Identify aspects of a text that reveal an author's point of view or purpose (e.g., loaded language, inclusion or avoidance of particular facts).

Integration of Knowledge and Ideas

- CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RH.6-8.7Integrate visual information (e.g., in charts, graphs, photographs, videos, or maps) with other information in print and digital texts.
- CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RH.6-8.8Distinguish among fact, opinion, and reasoned judgment in a text.
- CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RH.6-8.9Analyze the relationship between a primary and secondary source on the same topic.

Range of Reading and Level of Text Complexity

- CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RH.6-8.10By the end of grade 8, read and comprehend history/social studies texts in the grades 6–8 text complexity band independently and proficiently.

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Notes

- 1. "Bloom's Taxonomy"
- 2. Common Core State Standards"
- 3. Tom Romano, "Family Stories and the American Dream."
- 4. Gayle Thieman, "Using Fictional Journals to Study Underrepresented Groups in

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