



Curriculum Units by Fellows of the Yale-New Haven Teachers Institute  
1996 Volume IV: Remaking America: Contemporary U.S. Immigration

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## Coming to America

Curriculum Unit 96.04.04  
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Over the past eleven years, I have participated in several wonderful seminars developing innovative curriculum units to supplement my teaching. These projects have motivated my students and myself to investigate new and exciting areas of learning. In recent years, we have explored African-American studies utilizing Jacob Lawrence's paintings of Harriet Tubman and Frederick Douglas to depict the horrors and the struggles against slavery. We have also studied the literature and poetry of African-American greats such as Langston Hughes, Gwendolyn Brooks and Paul Laurence Dunbar.

This year I am developing a unit entitled "Coming To America" which addresses the issues of assimilation into American Society, that is, the United States of America, economically, socially and culturally. This work will become especially important for our school because many of our Hispanic students at Roberto Clemente Middle School have migrated from Puerto Rico to the New Haven area.

The central focus of my curriculum unit will analyze minority immigrants who have willingly traded off their language and culture in hopes of pursuing the "American Dream." Ironically, without their home language and culture, they lack the necessary skills to bridge the gap to the new language and culture of American schools and society. They have come in huge numbers from places like Mexico and other Spanish-speaking countries in search of basic economic and social needs. They have taken calculated risks at losing their lives, of being abused and exploited, of not securing employment, of being deported, of losing their family, or worse, losing their language and their culture. Yet, they continue to come because life in America provides them with an incentive to seek better living conditions for themselves and their families.

As my unit develops, we will introduce a wonderful piece of literature whose central characters typify the struggles, the hardships and the disappointments which accompany their quest for opportunity. This selection entitled "Family Installments" follows a family from Puerto Rico to New York City as they migrate over a period of time, time which allows the family to save and to negotiate loans for additional plane tickets. Edwin Rivera, our author, moves us in many ways as he recounts this warm and wonderful story.

## II. Goals, Objectives and Strategies

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The primary goal of my curriculum unit this year is to address the contemporary issue of migration to the United States with a special focus on the experiences of peoples who have immigrated from Puerto Rico. Many of these newcomers have resettled in Connecticut and their children represent a significant portion of the population demographics at our Clemente Middle School. The concept of origins and destinies will have a significant role in our research as we accompany selected immigrants from their birthplaces to their new homes which may or may not become their final destinies.

As I have noted in my introduction, the primary focus of this unit will analyze the assimilation of recent immigrants as they seek to become incorporated into American society. We will follow Geran Malanguez and his family from their village in Bautabarro, Puerto Rico to Spanish Harlem. And, as we follow them, and they begin to assimilate themselves into American culture, we will develop a multitude of themes which reflect the challenges and the obstacles that immigrants must overcome as they persist in their quest for a piece of the "American Dream."

Certainly a driving force for many immigrants is the aspiration for a better life for themselves and their children. Because the United States is viewed as a land of opportunity, millions flock to her shores and across her borders annually to a land where they hope hard work and sacrifice will be rewarded. Other themes to be explored will be the importance of family unity, respect for traditional family values, and the difficulties and the resistance encountered when decisions are formulated to leave home in search of a better tomorrow. As the families leave their homes and their birthplaces, we will describe the actual migratory experience including the monetary difficulties and expenses incurred that were necessitated by the flight itself.

Other objectives will focus on securing adequate living arrangements, which typically relies heavily on extended family networks and close friends; searching for job opportunities which are often limited by required skill levels, proper accreditation credentials or language difficulties; and attempts to secure employment that is stable, in safe working conditions, with decent wages, good benefits and upward mobility. More often than not, the immigrant is not successful in finding jobs which would afford his family the opportunity to join the American society which forces them to continue to live as outsiders; that is, *outsiders* living *inside* America. Additionally, special recognition will be made to praise the work ethic of the immigrant and to appreciate their pride of accomplishment.

As for strategies, my curriculum unit will assist me in many ways. At Clemente School, our comprehensive school plan strongly emphasizes reading and writing skills. Students will be challenged with oral and silent readings to seek out common themes and main ideas, and to identify and describe all major and minor characters in our novel. Note taking, summarizing individual chapters and developing book reports will help to improve our writing skills. Panel discussions and group debates will enable our students to research specific information critical to their presentations. Role playing will lend itself nicely to demonstrate the difficulties that the recently arrived immigrants faced as they sought to relocate their families and to incorporate themselves, economically and socially while seeking to maintain their cultural identities. Guest speakers representing various occupational areas such as government, education, business, health and other community service agencies and who have assimilated their own families in a similar capacity will be invited to share their experiences with our classmates. These valuable lessons and others like them will serve to recognize the hardships that immigrants have endured and will continue to endure. Hopefully, our students will develop a richer understanding of the heroic accomplishments of these peoples and, in turn, applaud their perseverance.

### III. Causes of Migration

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The term “international migration” encompasses many movements: voluntary emigration, work migration that has been legalized by work and residence permits and flight or expulsion forced by violence or life threatening situations. “Migration researchers differentiate push and pull factors as triggers of migratory movements.” (1) Push factors are considered living conditions at the place of origin which are perceived as threatening or intolerable which move or force people to leave their homes. *Pull factors* emanate from receiving countries that have something to entice newcomers—for example, jobs, prosperity, security and freedom among other considerations.

“In defining the causes of migration and flight, structural push and pull factors from crisis developments in the regions of origin and from economic and social upheavals in the world economy and world society must be differentiated from acute push factors such as wars and civil wars, natural disasters, and political persecution.” (2) As a general rule, people do not migrate because of a single reason but a multitude of motives.

Rapid population growth promotes migration if the predominantly young work force cannot find jobs. Unemployment produces poverty and is a major factor in migratory movement. Impoverished living conditions, that is, the ability or inability to “eek out” a living often generates crime and violence.

Occasionally one of these factors will influence a decision to migrate but, more often than not, the movement results as a combination of these causes.

Other determinants may include environmental destruction to their homes by floods or drought, changes in world economic trends, regional national and ethnic conflicts, human rights violations, and an elimination or serious reduction in the availability of natural resources in their home country.

### IV. Who Are The Best Americans?

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Many folks in America still hold true to the good old fashioned work ethic of hard work, a desire to improve oneself, and a strong sense of family. Yes, these values are the ones that America has built its foundation upon and, today, its these same values that recent immigrants, the “new Americans” are embodying. For example, some forty percent of immigrant households consist of four or more people as compared to twenty-five percent of native born families. Immigrants are more likely to be married and less likely to be divorced or separated.

In terms of education, a typical immigrant is less likely to finish high school, but if he does, then he is twice as likely to earn a doctorate degree. As for working conditions, he is slightly more likely to have a job but he is much less likely to work for the government. Many job opportunities involve working for other immigrants in entrepreneurial ventures or perhaps, owning one himself. The relatively large number of immigrants on welfare are represented by refugees and the elderly and others who are not eligible for social security benefits.

## **V. The United States—A Nation of Immigrants**

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During the 1980's, more than half of the world's immigrants entered the United States legally. Many Americans today feel that the U.S. has reached its saturation point in that the present economy and environment cannot support additional people. "A Time/CNN poll in September, 1993, found that 73% of respondents wanted the government to limit all immigration, legal and illegal." (3) Over the past two hundred years, U.S. policy on immigration has been shaped by political pressure, certain interest groups and foreign policy concerns. Migration to the U.S. during its growing years was limited only by the cost of the voyage and the distance traveled. During those early years, the English dominated the 1600's while the Scots, the Irish and the Germans arrived in the 1700 and 1800's. In the 1840's, the Irish (fleeing the potato famine) and the Germans began to enter the U.S. in large numbers. Formal restrictions began about 1870. By the end of the 19th century, millions of immigrants from southern and eastern Europe, including Italians, Slavs, Greeks and Jews, had arrived on America's shores. Some twenty-five million people entered the United States during the period between 1880-1924.

As people from Europe were arriving on America's eastern shores, Chinese laborers working in mines and helping to build the transcontinental railroad were arriving in the west. Immigration from Mexico was not considered crucial until this century, and especially most recently as the state of California has enacted Proposition 187 to cut off benefits, including education, welfare and non-emergency health care to illegal aliens and requires public employees, including teachers, to report anyone suspected of being an illegal alien to immigration authorities.

## **VI. Changes in Immigration Law**

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The refugee act of 1980 allowed for both a regular flow of refugees as well as emergency admissions. This action was prompted by the arrival of more than 400,000 refugees from southeast Asia between 1975 and 1980. In 1986, the Immigration and Reform Act imposed penalties on employers who knowingly hire undocumented workers. It also allowed illegal aliens who had lived in the United States since 1981 to become U.S. citizens as well as undocumented agricultural workers. Under this amnesty program, almost three million people gained legal status.

The Immigration Act of 1990 raised the limit on the number of immigrants to 675,000. The same act almost tripled the immigrant totals for people who had specialized skills and their families. When the Immigration Act of 1990 goes into full effect in 1995, over 71% of all immigration visas will go to family members of U.S. citizens and legal residents, 27% will go to specialized workers and their families, and about 8% will be given to immigrants from countries that have received very few visas in previous years. Immigration visas and restrictions are not a concern to our central characters, the Malanquez's, because they resided in Puerto Rico, and Puerto Rico has been a possession of the United States since 1898 as a commonwealth.

## VII. Lesson Plans

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These curriculum lesson plans are designed to be taught during a time period of twenty days. Additional readings will be included to enable the students to gain alternative perspectives from a gender or regional point of view. The unit itself is developed in a day-by-day format which allows for teacher-led discussions, oral and silent readings and a wide selection of student-planned activities.

Current research has amply demonstrated that learning activities which focus on hands-on lessons enables the student to maximize their retention of the material which has been disseminated. Additionally, these lessons lend themselves nicely to creative thinking and shared enthusiasm for the experience. Many teachers may choose to devote additional time to certain activities. These lessons have been designed to allow for flexibility and I hope that the instructors will tailor the unit to fit the needs of their classrooms.

### Day 1—“Why Do We Move?”

#### **Objectives:**

∅Students will identify resources which motivate people to move from one place to another.

∅Students will compare and contrast rural living conditions to modern urban settings.

∅Students will analyze educational, economic and social advantages available in urban areas.

1. Lead your class in a discussion on moving related activities that you or your friends have been involved in and freely discuss some of the reasons that have influenced the decision to move.

2. Survey your class to determine the number of students who have had similar moving experiences, whether they were from one side of the city to another, one region to another or one country to another. Have students offer their own reasons for moving and, given the choice, whether they would have wished to remain where they used to live. Be sure that they validate their decisions with substantial evidence to support their choice.

3. Introduce the movie “Why Do People Move?” This video is approximately 15 minutes long and it explores moving experiences and the reasons which motivate people to move in such countries as Brazil, Malaysia, the Netherlands, and to the United States. The first 10 minutes provides a synopsis of the Demerual’s moving experience from the rural countryside of Brazil to the modern city of Rio D’Janeiro. As we follow the Demeruals family from their rural countryside shack to their city favela and finally to their city home with modern utilities, we will also compare and contrast their living conditions, business opportunities, education and social services.

This movie is an excellent resource to introduce this unit because the Demerual’s moving experience closely models the migration experience of the Malagros family in “Family Installments” by Edwin Rivera as Geran Malagros moves his family from the rural countryside of Puerto Rico to the urban city of Nueva York.

4. Concluding discussion questions should focus on how the lives of these people were affected by their moving experiences.

**Homework:**

Students should identify the town or city of their birth and then identify other areas in which they have lived. This information will be kept in their personal folders for this curriculum unit project to be used at a later date to develop a demographic wall map of the place of origin of all class members.

**Day 2 and 3—Geography Skills**

**Objectives: Students will locate countries, states, cities, oceans and mountain ranges using latitude and longitude skills as well as directional information obtained from a compass.**

☞ Students will identify various topographical elevations of hillsides and mountain ranges from information gleaned from map legends and compare these elevations to 0° at sea level.

**Classroom Materials:**

- ☞ Outline map of North America
- ☞ Outline map of the United States
- ☞ Outline map of Puerto Rico
- ☞ World Globe
- ☞ Overhead projector
- ☞ Compasses (optional)

**Classroom Activities:**

1. Using an overhead projector, teach the concepts of latitude and longitude to your students. Latitude lines are parallel to the equator; that is, lines delineated by N as lines north of the equator and lines by S as lines south of the equator. They are imaginary lines drawn on maps and globes to assist in locating places on earth. Longitude lines are lines that extend from the North Pole to the South Pole with the Prime Meridian dissecting Greenwich, England at 0° just as the equator is measured at 0° as well. Latitude lines extend north and south and longitude lines extend east and west.
2. Compass directional skills of north, south, east, and west as well as composites of these directions may be taught on the overhead projector too. If available, allow students to experiment with individual compasses within the school complex itself. The instructor chooses a centralized portion of the school complex, plotting the area for the magnetic north location, and then sends the students individually or in cooperative teams to pinpoint specific directional headings for pre-

chosen locations throughout the school building and grounds.

3. Using the outline maps of North America, the United States and Puerto Rico, have the students analyze the color coded schematic bar graphs that describe various height elevations above sea level. Allow students to compare and contrast land masses on each of the three maps.

***Homework: As a follow up activity to the homework from Day 1, students, having identified the place of their birth and all areas in which they have lived since that time, will plot the latitude and longitude points of each location. Furthermore, using New Haven, Connecticut as a focal point, they will determine the compass directional headings of each area as well. Having accomplished these assignments, they will determine the height above sea level for each of these assignments. Teachers and students in other parts of the world may adjust these locations to fit their individual needs accordingly.***

#### **Day 4—“Family Installments”**

##### **Objectives:**

Students will be introduced to “Family Installments” by Edwin Rivera. This novel will become the primary focus of our unit of study as we track the family history of the Malagros family, grow up with Santos, Chuito and Tito, move to New York with Geran, Lelia and their family, and watch the family attempt to accommodate to American society.

***Required Reading: Students will read chapter one in “Family Installments”. In classrooms where individual copies are not available for each student, the instructor may wish to read each chapter orally or select a student to do the same. Additionally, one might use a tape recorder to pre-record the chapter readings. In this way, valuable listening lessons may be included as part of the unit.***

##### **Classroom Activities:**

1. During the reading of the first chapter entitled “Antecedentes,” the students will be introduced to the patriarch (Xavier Alegria) and the matriarch (Sara Alegria) of the paternal Malanquez family and they will come to understand how surnames change as people move from one generation to the next. In Geran’s case, his mother Sara died of heart failure at the tender age of 35 and his father Xavier, no longer able to bear the agony of his wife’s passing “jammed a small gun in his mouth and open fire on his upper jaw. He died slowly, a lousy shot, or the hapless owner of a rusty, second-rate pistola.” (4) Following the deaths of both his parents, Geran and his two brothers, Mito and Elias, moved in with Sara’s parents and adopted their surname.

2. Additionally, we will meet Aunt Celita, Padre Solivan and Father Klimanskis, Gigante Hernandez, his “eight worthless daughters and one half-ass son,” Abuela Socorro, his wife who dies in childbirth producing “yet another worthless daughter,” and Lelia, one of Gigante’s

daughters who will soon become Geran's future wife.

3. As we continue to be introduced to various family members, the students will be challenged to create a family-tree chart beginning with Xavier and Sara and branching off as our story moves along. This classroom wall display will provide a continuing framework for our unit of study.

***Homework: Students will be challenged to create their own family genealogy trees, researching information from their parents or grandparents. However, this assignment should be of a voluntary or extra credit nature as some students may live with extended families, be adopted, or otherwise be a member of families who are reluctant to share family history information.***

### **Day 5—"Family Installments"**

#### **Objectives:**

☐ Students will locate the villages of Bautabarro and Orocouis as well as the Cordilla "mountain" range.

☐ Understand and discuss the difficulties of "eeking out" a living on an island with extremely limited job opportunities.

☐ Appreciate Geran's efforts to save enough money for plane tickets to New York and the "land of opportunity."

***Required Readings: Students will read chapter 2, "Family Installments."***

#### **Classroom Activities:**

1. Having met most of the major characters in "Antecedentes," students will now follow Geran and Lelia through their early days of marriage trying to cope with limited resources from crops produced on a worthless piece of farm land given to them by Gigante as a wedding present. Having failed as a farmer, a peddler and a part owner of a "colmado," Geran solicits "gateway money" for a plane ticket to New York from his brother Mito's father-in-law through the efforts of his sister-in-law Agripina.

2. Students will create a large wall map of Puerto Rico and plot their names or a combination of their names and photos of themselves or themselves and their family members on the areas of their birth places. This activity will be a follow-up to the homework assignment given on Day 1.

Students will be invited to develop surface land maps of Puerto Rico and of the United States in our Roberto Clemente Community After School Program. Fortunately my wife, Elizabeth Cassidy is an art teacher at Clemente and she has volunteered to help us with many of our art projects. The projects will become a valuable asset to our curriculum unit as it develops as well as



help to decorate our classroom and our display areas.

## **Day 6—“Family Installments”**

### **Objectives:**

∅Students will discuss extended family networks comparing perhaps their own situation to Chuito’s in our story as many of our Clemente students in fact live with aunts and uncles or grandmothers and grandfathers.

∅Share some of their adolescent experiences with the class as Chuito relates his experiences at 15 with Tego age 7 and Santos at age 5.

**Required Reading: Students will read chapter three “Chuito and La Manca.”**

### **Classroom Activities:**

1. This reading exercise will focus on the would be surrogate father-son relationship between Chuito, a distant cousin of Papi, and Geran’s sons Santos and Tego while Geran works at menial labor jobs in Nueva York trying to save enough money to mail plane tickets for his family to join him. Chuito teaches the boys to swim, to carve wooded objects, and gives Santos and Tego their introductory sexual education lesson with one of Papagante’s cows. Other humorous situations occur as Chuito acts as “the man of the house.”
2. The instructor and the students will engage in a classroom discussion focusing on strong family dominated societies such as Puerto Rico as Lelia’s father and brother attempt to convince her to remain on the island.
3. Finally, the tickets arrive but there are only three. Chuito is forced to remain but he is promised that this is only temporary. The chapter closes as Chuito brings the family to the airport by ox cart. Please note the resemblance to the famous play “The Oxcart” which will be one of the suggested supplemental readings.

**Homework: Students will be invited for a second day to Mrs. Cassidy’s after school community program to finish any of their surface land maps but also to begin to build topographical maps of Puerto Rico and the United States made out of plywood, paper mache and various colorful paints. These topographical maps will be constructed to reflect the mountain ranges, the rivers, the cities and the towns of Puerto Rico and the United States as well as to delineate between the different height elevations above sea level. Each map will have a map legend which will provide**

***insightful information. Students will be encouraged to work in cooperative pairings of two or three to share resources and to assist in promoting cooperative learning.***

### **Day 7—“Family Installments”**

#### **Objectives:**

Students will relive some of their early educational experiences in a similar manner to Santos’s early setbacks with Antonio Carretta while in Ms. Lugones first grade class in Bautabarro and while enrolled St. Misericordia’s Academy in East Harlem, New York.

***Required Reading: Students will read chapter 4, “First Communion.”***

#### **Classroom Activities:**

1. This chapter introduces the reader to Santos’s early attempts to solve problems resorting to pugilism at Chuito’s urging, who has had similar problems with older members of the same family. After the family moves to New York, we learn valuable lessons of pride when charity in the form of a new first communion outfit is bestowed upon Santos from Sister Mary Felicia of St. Misericordia’s and Geran takes a day off from work without pay to refuse the outfit and to insist that they will pay for the outfit that they can ill afford.
2. The students will be encouraged to share their experiences in purchasing other items at our local flea market on the Boulevard and, perhaps, these experiences may lend themselves nicely to some role playing as the students act just like Sister Mary Felicia haggling with the vendors to get quality merchandise at a decent price.

***Homework: Students will be invited for a third day to Mrs. Cassidy’s after school community program (It’s rather convenient being married to the school’s art teacher) to finish any of their surface land maps or to continue working on their cooperative topographical maps. However, the primary lesson for the day is the introduction of air brush painting techniques as my good friend Luis Rosa has volunteered to demonstrate air brushing art on tee shirts that the students may wear or may model in our classroom. The designs to be drawn and painted will be the flags that represent the various towns and communities or states and countries that our students originate from. Not only will this be a lesson that teaches our students new artistic techniques, but it will also demonstrate their pride in their ethnic community in which they grew up in or currently reside. Additionally, it will nicely showcase our unit studies as the shirts are modeled by our students throughout their school and the surrounding Clemente neighborhoods.***

### **Day 8—“Family Installments”**

#### **Objectives:**

Ⓓ Students will debate the nature of the use of discipline and rules in their educational lives.  
Ⓓ Students will analyze the conflict of placing students in lower grades because of their inability of speaking English.

**Required Reading: Students will read chapter 5 “Discipline.”**

**Classroom Activities:**

1. Having been in New York now for almost 6 years, we now enter the 7th grade at St. Misericordias with Santos as he is being introduced to the American Christian Brothers and their Cat’s Paw rubber strap for any students caught breaking “more rules of conduct than we could keep track of.” Santos’s new classmate is Pericles Contreras, from Jayuya, Puerto Rico, who because of his “language—interference problem,” has been retained. Needless to say, a situation arises while the boys are playing handball, Pericles gets involved in a fight with a “Red Wings” gang member, and he’s at the receiving end of 10 slaps on each hand of the “Cats Paw” and a 5 day suspension. Upon returning to school, Pericles is subjected to further discipline for telling a joke in class and while Brother Lomasey is dispersing the punishment, he inadvertently hits Pericles on his face. As a result of this, the Brother is transferred to another school and Pericles’s mother transfers her son to public schools . . . and yes, our author suggests that he later became a thug.

2. Panel Discussions. We have 2 topics that we will consider for debates. First, we have the issue of a student conduct code, and secondly, we have to decide school or city wide policy to determine proper grade level placement for students who enter our schools speaking very little English or no English at all. Students will be divided into 4 groups—a “pro” team and a “con” team for each side of each argument. They will be given one week to prepare arguments to state their positions. An arbitrary panel of judges will decide the winners in each debate and these “new” standards of conduct and student grade level placements for the coming school term will be suggested for implementation to our administrative team.

**Homework: Each team member will be assigned a certain aspect of the argument to be researched and they may use any resources at their disposal to support their position.**

**Day 9—“Family Installments”**

**Objectives:**

Ⓓ Students will listen carefully to the pre-recorded reading lesson of “Family Installments,” chapter 6.

Ⓓ Students will engage in note taking exercises.

***Listening Exercises: Students will listen to chapter 6 “Caesar and the Bruteses:A Tragedy.”***

***Classroom Activities:***

1. Moving into the eighth grade at St. Misericordia’s, Santos and his friends are challenged with Shakespearean literature. Brother O’Leary assigns the material to be read over the Christmas vacation and exams to follow upon the return to school. Needless to say, the “second language guys” encounter much difficulty with their reading and everyone, including the class brain Diez, fails the Shakespeare exam.
2. While note taking, students will identify all major and minor characters, cite specific classroom and playground occurrences and develop main ideas as well.

***Homework: Using information gathered in the note taking exercise, students will summarize the events which transpired in chapter six. Additionally, students are encouraged to continue their maps and tee shirt designs during the community school program session.***

***Day 10—“Family Installments”***

***Objectives:***

- ☐ Students will identify ethnic diversity enclaves within major cities such as New York.
- ☐ Students will analyze the issues which divide and alienate various ethnic populations.
- ☐ Students will enjoy young romance in the city as they live vicariously through the experiences of Santos and his friends.

***Required Readings: Students will read chapter 7, “In Black Turf” and chapter 8, “Stoopball.”***

***Classroom Activities:***

1. Having graduated from St. Misericordia’s, Santos decides to enjoy the summer with a visit to Central Park with his “Black” Puerto Rican friend Panna. The north end of Central Park was right across the street from Santos’s tenement. While in the park, the boys watch the Puerto Rican Baseball League games, the mounted cops on horse back, and the young lovers strolling hand in hand. Later in the day, they decide to explore the old fort on 110th street where Santos, isolated from Panna, is surrounded by four black gang members wanting to know “why a Rican is on Black turf?” Fortunately for Santos, these guys turn out to be friends of Panna’s.
2. Judge Degetau’s three daughters were the best looking girls on the block and Santos’s brother Tego went out with Norma, the middle one, and almost married her. Santos has a crush on Delia who was the youngest. Their father, El Judge, was a bank savings guard who was contemptuous

of other Puerto Ricans and he wanted his three daughters “to marry men who could take them out of our neighborhood into a “good” one.” (7)

**Homework: Having practiced their note taking skills last evening, and subsequently summarizing chapter 6, students will review chapters 1-5 using skimming techniques to briefly summarize each individual section.**

### **Day 11—“Family Installments” 3**

#### **Objectives:**

Students will be introduced to the use of “flash backs” as a writing technique as Geran recounts his first job opportunities working in New York City.

**Required Reading: Students will read chapter 9, “Digging In.”**

#### **Classroom Activities:**

1. This reading selection highlights the early job experiences Geran encountered while trying to save enough funds to bring his family members to America. Having misaddressed one too many packages at “Burdock Bride Frocks,” Geran is hired as a construction laborer; that is, he is “a sand-and-rocks” man. “The Malanquez Cadillac” is what the men call his wheelbarrow. (8)

For living arrangements, he rents an SRO (single room occupancy) on Lexington Avenue. The construction work is seasonal and at the end of spring, he is let go. Laundry jobs, dish washing, job interviews and finally a dangerous dead end job at American Combining Company for low pay and no benefits.

Geran keeps his SRO locked because it’s here that he stores Lelia’s letters from home. The letters that “keep him going.” He also networks with his brother Mito and his wife Agripina in the East Bronx for an occasional meal or two, some hospitality and some good conversations.

Geran, still desperate for money after having worked at all sorts of low paying dead end jobs, eventually borrows enough money needed for plane tickets and a down payment on an apartment from Mito. He sends for Lelia and the kids to join him in New York and their “new life.”

**Homework: Students will attempt to immerse themselves into similar job hunting situations. Each student will prepare to apply for one of these positions. At a later date, students will re-enact these interviews in a role playing situation. A classroom session will be devoted to this exercise.**

### **Day 12—“Family Installments”**

#### **Objectives:**

Students will come to understand “Maromas” and why they were so important to Geran.

Students will appreciate Papi's private time in the evenings, when he would play guitar, listen to radio speeches by Calleja, watch Kid Paladia become Kid Disgracia as he lost his boxing matches, and enjoy other activities which would reinforce his cultural heritage.

**Required Reading: Students will read chapter 10, "Maromas" and chapter 11, "Malanquez and Son."**

**Classroom Activities:**

1. These chapters focus on Geran's ability to make ends meet and to develop that special relationship that exists between parents and their children. Although Geran never had a good paying job, he was always able to keep their supply of rice and beans going no matter what. To supplement his fifty dollar a week salary he enrolled his family on Home Relief for one year, against Lelia's wishes. He bought almost everything on installments and lay-aways.

One of his favorite maromas was to "borrow" El Picaro, that is, to attach an electrical extension cord to the light meter in such a way that the electrical usage does not register. Most of Geran's maromas were a mystery to Lelia and she wanted to keep it that way.

2. As the years went by, Papi's career at American Combining Company saw little advancement and when he returned home each evening, more exhausted than the day before, he would spend his personal time practicing his oratorical speeches. On many occasions he would be invited as a local guest of honor to give a speech at a wedding, a first communion or a birthday party. But gradually, Papi, was losing sight of life.

By this time, Tego had dropped out of school, gone back to the "Island," become a croupier at the Caribe Hilton, gotten married, had two kids and never wrote "Christmas cards in his handwriting. If that was what Papi and Mami dreamed about, as I sometimes did, hooking it up in some strange way with 'the death of the family,' they never said. Kept the pain to themselves. So did I." (9)

**Homework: Students will be encouraged to keep up with a variety of assignments. Currently, people are preparing role playing situations, panel debate topics, surface land maps, topographical maps, air brushed tee shirts, and summarizing specific chapters of "Family Installments."**

**Day 13—"Family Installments"**

**Objectives:**

Students will analyze generational cycles of work related experiences which offer little advancement without education.

Students will identify family isolation themes as Geran nears retirement, Lelia shuts herself in

and Santos studies for college exams.

Students will articulate respect for elders and pride in the academic accomplishments of Santos Melanquez, the Melanquez's first college graduate.

**Required Reading: Students will read chapter 12, "Ropes of Passage" and chapter 13, "R.I.P."**

**Classroom Activities:**

1. In this reading selection, students will find Santos experiencing many of the same ordeals that Geran undertook when he first arrived in America except that Santos is secure with living arrangements and currently enrolled in college studies at night. At the Vulcan Office Equipment Corporation, Santos addresses labels and form letters to help pay his tuition. In the past, Santos, Geran and Lelia went to the "Mass of Roosters" to celebrate Christmas, but this year, due to a blunder in the accounting office at Vulcan, Santos does not get paid in time to purchase presents for his family. Embarrassed and disappointed, he fails to go home and instead spends the night at an SRO. Later that week, Santos takes his final exams, with only moderate success.

2. In our final chapter, Papi is dying of M.S. (Maroma Sclerosis), a diagnosis based on symptoms of varicose veins, blurry vision, stomach gas, "fire in his bladder," migraines, and "the shakes." Within six months, Geran had put ten years physically on his life and had taken twenty or more off mentally.

In the closing days of Papi's life, Lelia moves him back to Puerto Rico to an apartment built on top of Tego's house in a suburb of San Juan. Shortly thereafter, Geran passes on. The mourners include several family members, friends, and Tego. Tego manages to talk to Santos alone, and he tries to convince him to stay in Puerto Rico, suggesting that speaking two languages gives him "a big trump card," and that the government would readily hire him.

Before going back to New York, Santos visits his old village, staying the night at Tia Celita's who's now a school teacher. Having gone full circle, Santos meets his first grade teacher, Luisa Lugones, who recognizes him immediately. Later, Celita brags to neighbors about her nephew, the family's first college graduate.

Our story ends on a nostalgic note as Celita and Santos revisit the "ole hillside" where he grew up, walking the same trail that his father had taken with the mule Mafofa to the market that one day with the surplus tubers, and past the sweet lime trees that his father had planted when he and his older brother Elias were born. It gave him something to think about on his flight back home.

**Homework: Students will be encouraged to summarize these final two chapters and then to create an overall synopsis of the entire novel. Their book reports should be submitted with a cover page which may be decorated to reflect an episode in our readings that was provocative for them. Illustrations throughout the report will also be encouraged. All reports are due upon completion of this unit of study.**

## **Day 14—Role Playing**

### **Objectives:**

∅Students will have already prepared themselves for this activity as an outgrowth of Day 12's homework assignment.

### **Classroom Activities:**

1. Students will have chosen a job to apply for that would mirror the jobs that Geran secured when first coming to America.
2. Students will work in cooperative teams, one person representing the job applicant and the other representing the interviewer.
3. Upon the conclusion of each skit, the classroom audience may wish to ask questions of the performers and to provide additional comments or suggestions.
4. The exercise will be completed when all participants have had an opportunity to showcase their talents.

**Homework: Independent research to bring to closure other ongoing activities.**

## **Day 15—Panel Debates**

### **Objectives:**

∅Students will have already prepared themselves for this activity as an outgrowth of Day 8's homework assignment.

### **Classroom Activities:**

1. Students will have chosen to discuss either the issue of a school or city wide conduct code to determine proper grade level placement for students who enter our schools speaking very little English or no English at all. Additionally, they will have decided whether to defend their position or to argue against their opponents position. Ultimately, both sides of each topic will present their arguments to an advisory panel and this panel, comprised of parents, students, teachers and administrators will decide the winners based on the merits of their presentations.
2. The results will also be submitted to the school's administrative team to help to develop school policy concerning these issues in future years.



***Homework: Independent Projects.***

**Day 16—Videotaped Interviews**

***Objectives:***

∅Students will initiate invitations to schoolwide and community based personnel and parents and friends to share their migratory experiences with our classmates.

∅Students will comprise a list of general question that all prospective “immigrants” will be asked.

∅Students will videotape each participant with a student interviewer.

***Classroom Activities:***

1. Introduce each participant to our classroom members.
2. Introduce the interviewer to the participant.
3. Provide a list of the questions to the participant for previewing.
4. Videotape the experience.

***Homework: Independent Projects.***

**Day 17—Immigrant Guest Speakers**

***Objectives:***

∅Students will invite a prominent member of our community to relate their experiences of coming to this country.

∅Students will select individuals who represent various occupational areas such as government, education, business, health, and other community service agencies.

***Classroom Activities:***

1. Students will personally welcome each guest speaker to our class, having pre-selected one student as our spokesperson.

2. During the speaking presentation, students will practice their note taking skills.
3. A question and answer period will follow each guest speaker.
4. Informal refreshments might be served.
5. A letter of appreciation to each speaker will be mailed after each speaking engagement.

***Homework: Continue independent projects.***

### **Day 18—A Slide Presentation of Puerto Rico**

***Objectives:***

∅Students will gain a valuable insight into the countryside and cities of Puerto Rico as we view slides of Contemporary Puerto Rico and those similar areas from about 25 years ago.

∅Students will be able to see first hand some of the dramatic changes that have happened to their island in the last 25 years.

***Classroom Activities:***

1. A close personal friend has agreed to donate his services and to share his slides of his homeland with my students. He will provide a lovely comparison and contrast study as we will view Puerto Rico as recently as last summer but also 25 years ago when he purchased his first camera. I am anxious to see this presentation and to hear his comments as I have vacationed in Puerto Rico many times myself.

***Homework: Please finish up all related projects.***

### **Day 19—Field Trip**

***Objectives:***

∅Students will gain insight through a first-hand experience as we visit an apple orchard (fall) or a strawberry field (spring/summer) to pick produce.

∅Students will pick fruit throughout the day simulating the experience of migratory field work, the job opportunity that many immigrant laborers have, and still do, experience.

### ***Classroom Activities:***

1. The classroom will be transplanted to the apple orchard (Bishop's, in Guilford, Connecticut) or a strawberry farm (Pell's, in Northford, Connecticut) depending on the season.
2. Our students will arrive early in the morning and they will proceed to pick their produce throughout the early afternoon.
3. This field trip will also provide wonderful picture taking opportunities and perhaps a video as well.
4. Students will be encouraged to sample their fruit occasionally, once it has been washed.
5. The following day, we may consider working with our home economics teacher to bake some apple pies or to make strawberry short cakes. Whatever we decide, I'm sure that the experience will be a meaningful one that we can bring to closure in a mouth watering way!

***Homework: Enjoy those fruits at home and be sure to share!***

### **Day 20—"Coming To America Food Festival"**

#### ***Objective:***

Students will enjoy a buffet highlighting some Puerto Rican specialties such as rice and beans, chicken, codfish, boiled green bananas, onion rings, salads, olives, and the like, surrounded by their topographical maps, their photographs on their places of origin, their family tree charts, their book reports, their surface land maps, pictures of their guest speakers and field trip experiences, wearing their ethnic pride air brushed tee shirts and enjoying a sumptuous buffet luncheon, with freshly picked apples or strawberry deserts to top off their experience. Nice—Very nice indeed.

## **Notes**

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1. Ingomar Hauchler, and Paul Kennedy. "Migration: In Global Trends." The World Almanac of Development and Peace (1993).
2. IBID.
3. Karen Rohon, "Immigration: an end to open doors?" Great Decisions (1995).
4. Edwin Rivera, "Family Installments" (1982).

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2. "Many Groups, One People," Henry Trueba, 1992.
3. "One Nation, Many People," Globe Fearon, 1995.
4. "Shadowed Lives." Leo Shavez, 1992.
5. "When I was Puerto Rican." Esmeralda Santiago, 1993.

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