



Coming to America: Opportunities, Risks, Consequences

Curriculum Unit 96.04.06
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Introduction to the Unit

The opportunity I have had in the past three years to organize the International Week Celebration at Roberto Clemente Middle School, where I teach, has stimulated my interest and excitement in learning about the gamut of cultures, languages, customs, music, and beliefs that form the mosaic that America has become. What are the similarities and differences among these cultures? More specifically, what does the immigrant experience entail? What are the factors that compel immigrant families to come to the United States? What are the risks and consequences? These are the questions that I will explore in the following curriculum unit.

This unit is designed for the students in my own school and my own classroom but can be adapted to a wide spectrum of classes. The students in my school are primarily underprivileged Afro-American children and children of Latin American immigrants. Many of their parents are illiterate and come from rural areas with a high degree of deprivation; moreover, many of the non-native parents do not speak English. These factors make it extremely difficult for these parents to find jobs and be accepted in this society. This background severely handicaps their children both socially and intellectually. Added to these difficulties are the learning problems that the children in my particular classroom experience. These students have been diagnosed as learning disabled and educable mentally retarded, with reading levels ranging from pre-primer to second grade, and with extremely poor written expression skills. Typically, they exhibit a high degree of absenteeism, are poorly motivated in school, and behave immaturely.

The recognition of the difficulties that my students face has compelled me to prepare a curriculum unit that will help them face the challenges of living in the United States. It is my hope that through the reading and study of texts by or about immigrants, such as *When I Was Puerto Rican* by Esmeralda Santiago and *Shadowed Lives* by Leo R. Chavez, these students will learn more about the experience and consequences of immigration. Through learning about their origins, heritage, values and traditions, they will be better enabled to accept and see both themselves and their classmates as individuals who are important and unique. They will, then, be more able not only to face new challenges but also to participate gracefully in ongoing challenges in any area of life.

In thinking about issues of immigration, I decided to focus on the reasons to emigrate, emphasizing social and economical matters rather than political ones. It is my belief that given the low level of skills that these students possess, it makes sense to emphasize those matters that can be explained simply—matters that are

common to many members of the group. I decided to prepare a series of activities that would draw on their own interests: their families, their native land, their celebrations, their native foods, etc. These are subjects that my immigrant students often talk about. I have often heard them discuss things such as their grandparents' house in the countryside, the rivers where they once swam, the fruits that they ate, the schools that they attended, and their relatives and friends in their native lands.

Through the activities in this curriculum unit, the students will read passages, search for photographs and other items that belong to their family, prepare their own family tree, complete exercises at home with their family, and complete other exercises through which they will learn about immigration.

I will introduce the topic of immigration by asking the students if they have ever moved from one area to another. I will encourage the students to talk about their experience to the class, expressing what they liked about their move and what they found difficult.

I will explain in a simple manner the political and economic situations of our Latin countries, emphasizing those countries from which my students came. We will discuss the different situations that caused their parents to see the need to emigrate to the United States. I will talk about the different kinds of jobs available and the difficulty that many immigrants face in finding a job in the United States. We will also discuss reasons that some of our relatives have remained in the homeland rather than emigrate. I will also explain how differences in salary are attached to differences in skills, how one needs adequate skills and education in order to attain better jobs and a better position in society. Additionally, I will talk about health and medical assistance problems that immigrants face. All these topics will be discussed in conjunction with various subjects in the curriculum: math, science, social studies, etc.

I have prepared some reading passages taken from *When I Was Puerto Rican* by Esmeralda Santiago and additional passages from Julia Alvarez's *How the Garcia Girls Lost Their Accents* and Leo R. Chavez's *Shadowed Lives*. (See attached list of page numbers). By reading passages from other persons who have experienced the same things in their childhoods that these students are now experiencing, the students can identify themselves with the process of immigration, the experience of leaving relatives and friends and coming to a new land. The students will comment on the passages, comparing things from their land of origin to things in this country, such as: weather, clothing, food, entertainment, holidays, etc.

In teaching this unit I will use (and I recommend that other teachers use) the whole language approach, which combines different activities in different subject areas.

Objectives

1. To improve reading, thinking, verbal and written expression skills among the students
2. To make the students aware of their past and present, to help them take pride in their own heritage.
3. To enlarge the knowledge and concern of the students about immigrants
—the reasons behind immigration, and the needs and contributions of immigrants.
4. To see that the students enjoy the differences that exist among countries in terms of customs, music, food, language, and traditions.
5. To help the students realize that even though people differ in terms of color, race, and tradition, we are all equals
 - a.) in our humanity: our feelings of love, fear, anger, frustration, and pride and

b.) in our sharing of the same hopes: for peace, love, self-realization, acceptance, and welfare for ourselves and our families (This is one reason that many emigrate in search of a more promising future.)

Classroom exercises and activities will include the following:

- children will draw pictures depicting their trip when coming to North America and describe orally their feelings and experience during the trip
- students will describe orally their first experience in school, their thoughts about their teachers and peers at the time, and their thoughts now about those first experiences
- students will be encouraged to share the folk art, clothing, songs and games from their countries
- students will draw pictures of their native cities/countries: the architecture, the flora, etc.
- new arrivals will be encouraged to write letters to their grandparents, relatives, and friends and to enclose pictures that they have drawn of their new surroundings and friends
- students will listen to music from their countries and prepare dances, songs, etc.
- students will prepare charts with facts about their homelands
- the class will prepare pinatas to celebrate birthdays
- students will make flags and pictures depicting native customs; they will decorate the bulletin boards with these items
- children will engage in writing exercises depicting members of the family: grandparents, cousins, etc.
- students will locate cities, towns, and capitols on dittoed maps of the countries that they come from
- the students will add names and pictures of their family members to a family tree
- other materials presented will focus on the peculiarities and lifestyles of these countries, such as: holidays, family anniversaries, poems, proverbs, folk tales, music, recipes, etc. The materials will be analyzed and discussed, emphasizing the festive spirit, hospitality, and warmth in each of these national groups.

Materials include films, posters, musical instruments, a cassette player, dittos, flags, maps, crayons, magic markers, scissors, construction paper, paper towels, a light bulb, newspaper, water colors and brushes, a pinata and candies for the pinata.

ACTIVITIES FOR DIFFERENT SUBJECT AREAS

Mathematics :

In mathematics, we will examine and design activities around the following:

- charts and graphs of immigrant populations in the United States
- currencies (a comparison of different money values)
- weather charts (a comparison of different temperature and measures)
- the calendar (incorporating different national holidays)
- the metric system

Social Studies :

In social studies, we will

- talk about their countries, the employment problems and the reasons that they came to America
- look at the maps of their native countries and locate the places they came from
- draw and color their native flags
- talk about the main products and exports of each country

Science :

In science we will look for

- the various types of food and nutrition
- the different kinds of sports and exercise
- the native plants, flowers, and animals of each country

Reading and Language Arts :

- Spelling and dictionary skills will arise out of the materials in the unit
- With poetry, we will read, copy, and analyze simple poems describing animals, places, etc. (See the poems, "Las Frutas," "Barranquitas," "Coqui! Coqui!," "Mayaguez sabe a Mango," and "Perla del Sur" in Gomez *et al.* 1958).
- On the board or using the overhead projector, the teacher writes the word *immigration* and asks the students to write in their journals the first three words that come to mind when they hear this term. Discussion and activities follow.
- The teacher helps the students write simple paragraphs about migration by giving the following sentence completion clues: the reasons I would be willing to move to another place are. . .; the reasons that I would not want to move are. . .
- Collect articles from magazines, newspapers, etc., about migration
- One classmate talks about a holiday. Students will describe the way they celebrate holidays in their land of origin and will compare holiday celebrations across nationalities.

Reading Passages to be Used in Reading and Language Arts:

For the following reading material, see *When I Was Puerto Rican* by Esmeralda Santiago, or other texts as noted.

1. Trip to the United States, p. 208
2. Arrival in New York, p. 217
3. The 2nd Day in New York, p. 222
4. The Market, p. 224
5. Snowing!!, p. 236
6. Snow, from Julia Alvarez. *How the Garcia Girls Lost Their Accents* , p. 167.
7. Hector and Felicia's Experience, from Leo R. Chavez. *Shadowed Lives*, p. 120

MAKING MARACAS

(An Activity to be Used with Social Studies or Reading and Language Arts)

Maracas are musical instruments whose origin is derived from the Taino and African indigenous elements of Puerto Rico. Although Puerto Rican maracas were originally made from gourds, a similar musical effect can be produced with more common materials.

Materials

1. burned out light bulb
2. paper towels
3. newspapers
4. glue

Instructions

1. Cover a burned-out light bulb with wet strips of paper toweling.
2. Cover this with more strips dipped in glue.
3. The next layer should be newspaper so you can be sure that the entire surface is covered.
4. Continue adding layers, alternating the towelling and newspaper, until about six layers have been put on.
5. The last layer should be towelling to provide a better painting surface.
6. When dry, decorate as desired—poster paint, crayon, lacquer, or enamel may be used.
7. Break the bulb by tapping sharply on a solid surface. The broken glass makes a rattling sound.

MEXICAN FAMILIES AND NAMES

An Activity to be used in Social Studies

Mexican Families

Traditionally, the Mexican family is very close and united, with two or three generations living together. It is not uncommon to find grandparents, aunts and uncles living together in Mexican homes. Mexican families not only live together, but often work and play as a unit. If the family has a shop or a small business, employees are likely to be members of the family. Farming is usually a family affair, as well. Elderly people rarely live alone or are cared for in institutions such as nursing homes. Rather, they remain with their families and often have the important role of helping raise and educate the children.

What are some similarities and differences in families between your culture and that of Mexico?

Similarities Differences

Mexican Names

The names of Mexican people often reflect a blend of Indian, African, and Spanish cultures. Examples include Pace Ignacio Taibo, Cuauhtemoc Cardenas, or Chango Rodriguez. In Roman Catholic families, it is traditional to name a child in honor of a saint, often including a religious term for a second name. Examples of this would be Maria Rosario (Mary Rosary) or Jesus Domingo (Jesus Sunday). The child is taught about the life of the saint for whom he/she is named and often observes the saint's day with a grand celebration.

As in much of the Spanish speaking world, the last name of Mexican people may be a combination of both parents' surnames. For example, the name of the early 20th century Mexican author Gregorio Lopez y Fuentes indicates his father's last name was Lopez and his mother's name was Fuentes. As names undergo changes today, Gregorio may be tempted to modify his last name to Lopez Fuentes or drop one of the names altogether.

What are some similarities in peoples' names or how people are named between your culture and that of Mexico?

Similarities Differences

MIGRATION: What Does It All Mean?

Directions Here are some terms commonly used when discussing migration. Define each term, using the dictionary. Then compare your answers to definitions from current articles in the media. Also, call the Immigration and Naturalization Service or a legal aid for their definitions. Are these definitions different from one another?

Immigrant
Green Card
Illegal Alien
Migration
Refugee

“Undocumented”
Emigrant
Work Permit
Visa

FAMILY HEIRLOOMS

What is your most treasured possession? Is it a piece of jewelry, a book, a stuffed animal, a figurine, a picture, or something else?

When did you get it? Who gave it to you? What is its history? What makes it so valuable to you?

TELL ME A STORY

Every family has stories to tell. Ask a grandparent, aunt, uncle, or older family friend to tell you a family story which needs to be remembered.

The story may center on a special holiday, a family member, or a family secret. Write the story.

STUDY CHART

Write the cultural heritage differences of your country and the United States.

YOUR COUNTRY UNITED STATES

Indian Spanish Eastern Woodland Indian English

1. Traits
2. Language
3. Religion
4. Food
5. House types
6. Music
7. Weather
8. Fruits

YOUR FAMILY'S HISTORY

1. Tell how and when your oldest relative came to America. Where did this person come from? How did this person get to America? Why did this person come to the states?

2. When your parent(s) came to America, where did he/she live?

3. What kind of job did he/she have?

Lesson Plan One

Theme Snowing!!

Taken from *How the Garcia Girls Lost Their Accents* and *When I was Puerto Rican* (see bibliography)

Objectives

1. to improve reading skills
2. to improve oral expression skills
3. to allow the students to compare their experiences with those of other children and to realize the common positive aspects of these experiences: that the immigrant adventure has enlarged their knowledge in a positive way

Activities The students will:

- study new vocabulary words
- read and compare the two passages
- comment on their own experiences—talk about why schools are closed when it snows; explain what could happen to people and vehicles
- talk about adequate clothing in winter in New England; compare with clothing for their native lands
- complete written exercises

Materials

- dittos with written passages
- black board with new vocabulary words
- map of the United States to show the places that have more snowfall

Procedure The teacher will hand out the written passages to the students and explain that now we will learn

about the experience that other children had when they came to America with the first day of snow. The teacher will review the vocabulary words with the students, ask them to write down the words and look for their meaning in the dictionary. In the interest of time, the teacher may assign one word to each student.

Because the students are weak or non-readers, a model teacher reading is recommended.

Questions for Discussion

1. Do you like snow?
2. Can you explain what you felt when you saw snow for the first time?
3. Did you see snow in your country? Why? Explain.
4. Which weather do you like the best? The least? Explain.

The teacher can ask the students to draw a picture of their country and one from a country where the weather differs.

Lesson Plan Two

Theme Oral and written description of an old family picture.

Objectives

1. To try to evoke in the students memories of the time before their immigration to the United States.
2. To help the students realize the fact of separation when members of the family move to another country
3. To help them see that although they are separated, they can still keep a good relationship with relatives and friends in their native countries
4. To encourage the students to send letters to relatives and friends overseas

Activities Students will:

-bring a family picture from home

- exhibit the picture on the bulletin board and describe it (one picture at a time)
- name every person in the picture
- write down the names of those depicted and the relationships to the student

Materials

- old family pictures for description
- bulletin board
- paper and pencil

Procedure The teacher will exhibit each picture on the board and will ask the student to talk about the picture: when it was taken, where, the occasion, etc.

Also, the student will name every person in the photo from left to right, from top to bottom. The teacher will ask the student to write the names of the persons in the picture and the relationships to the student.

Questions for Discussion

- why do you think it is good to have family pictures?
- how old were you when this picture was taken?
- if you are now 12 or 13 years old, how long ago was the picture taken?
- point to the person in the picture who you like the most

Lesson Plan Three

The Case of Hector and Felicia from Shadowed Lives, p.120.

Objectives

1. To make the students aware of the different types of risks and problems that many people face

during their immigration process, such as: separation (sometimes the mother has to raise the children for a long period of time)

2. To help students see that in this case, as in many others that we have already studied, the parents immigrate to other countries looking for better jobs and for a more secure life for their family

3. To improve mathematical, vocabulary, and numerical reasoning skills: mental computation, problem solving, etc.

4. To have the students compare the lifestyle between urban and rural areas (here the teacher will bridge into Social Studies)

Activities Students will:

-study new vocabulary words

-read the story

-make comments about Felicia and Hector, about their children, about the types of rural tasks, etc.

-locate and identify places on the map

-talk about time and distance

-complete written exercises

Materials

-dittos with the written story

-blackboard with the new vocabulary words

-maps of Mexico and the United States

-paper and pencil

Words to Study

agriculture
income
schooling
field
irregular
economic
demands
although
provide
migrate
household

Procedure The teacher gives the dittoed story of Hector and Felicia to the students. The teacher explains that since we are learning about immigration, we will learn about a Mexican family who decided to come to North America. We will learn about the type of life that this family had in Mexico (here the teacher points to the map of Mexico). We will discover why the family decided to immigrate and about the problems that they faced at that time.

Prior to the lesson, the teacher will write the new vocabulary words on the blackboard, so that the class can review the meanings before reading the selection.

Questions for Discussion

1. Where is Aquascalientes? The teacher asks for a volunteer to locate Aquascalientes on the map of Mexico before beginning the discussion of the reading passage.
2. Can you explain the difference in jobs between urban and rural areas?
3. Hector said that he had had no schooling; he was illiterate. Do you think that he could find a job in the city?
4. Here the teacher will bridge the lesson into Mathematics:
 - If Hector left Mexico in 1972 when he was 26 years old, how old would he be in 1996?
 - What about Felicia? She was 21 in 1972. How old would she be now?
 - Hector wanted to save money. Why? What does it mean to save money?
 - Where do people take money to save it? (This might be an opportunity to teach the students about some of the different means of saving and investing, to point to mutual funds, for example,

or to distinguish between a savings and a checking account.)

-What types of things could Hector buy with the money he hoped to save?

-How long did it take for Felicia to come to the United States with the children?

-How many times in a year did Hector come to Mexico to see his family? (Here the teacher can review the calendar, the months, the weeks, etc.)

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2114 South Grand Avenue

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3900 Wheeler Ave.

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The Two Worlds of Angelita . Video. 73 mins. This concerns the transition from a small Puerto Rican town to New York's Lower East Side.

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