



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

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## **Dramatizing The Immigrant Experience**

Guide for Curriculum Unit 96.04.10  
by Paul E. Turtola

My own challenge as a theater artist and teacher is directed towards using drama to enrich other subject areas so that young people may think creatively and express themselves in a clear, articulate and productive manner.

Dramatizing the Immigrant Experience will introduce immigration, a topic many youngsters are familiar with on a first-hand basis, through literature and current news and events in a drama class. It will give them a chance to appreciate their own movement as well as other people's desires to make the United States home. In the course, an understanding that this country began as a nation of immigrants will be a central theme, and that today, more than ever, it continues to live up to that credo.

The course will be divided into three sections, and should take approximately ten weeks to complete. To begin, the class will spend a significant amount of time reading and discussing Rene Marques' play, *The Oxcart*. It is an important play that very clearly portrays the experiences of a Puerto Rican family who struggles to find happiness and success.

The next section of the course will be introduced as our reading of the play commences. It will include a number of lessons with exercises that deal with learning how to write a play. These playwriting lessons will prepare students for their final project, an immigrant drama. Each students will write a play or a scenario that retraces the movement of an immigrant to the United States.

The final section of the course will be an informative, fun and interesting way to understand the many different people that choose to come to live in this country. We will discover the hardships and joys of many foreign individuals and families whose strength and determination have resulted in gaining American citizenship. We will uncover the plight of the many hard working, loyal family members who strive to become legal residents, but continue to live and work illegally in a country they cannot call home.

Students should be supplied with a copy of Rene Marques' *The Oxcart* and Esmerelda Santiago's *When I Was Puerto Rican*. Copies of articles and chapters from other published books will be distributed when appropriate. It will be important for each student to keep a notebook so that over the duration of the course, drafts of the final project, a written immigration drama, will be produced.

(Recommended for English and Drama, grades 6-12)

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