



## DIVERSITY MEMO: IMMIGRATION

How do we explore this in the classroom?

**Dear Teacher,**

As you know immigration is a hot topic in the news today, especially with the ongoing and heated debate about SB 1070, Arizona's stringent immigration enforcement law, and the rise in anti-immigration protests and activity around the country. The history of immigration tends to be a source of pride in the United States.

We often refer to ourselves as a nation of immigrants, a "melting pot," and believe that our strength as a nation comes both from our diversity and from being comprised of the kinds of people brave and intelligent enough to risk immigrating to the United States and working hard to succeed here. But our discussion of contemporary immigration—legal and illegal—is more confused. Immigration in the United States is a complicated issue, too often generating strong emotions without corresponding knowledge of the facts.

While discussing immigration can be inflammatory in the classroom, it is one of the cardinal social issues facing our country. In this newsletter, you'll find a classroom activity, some "lesson plan starters" to go deeper into the issue, further resources, and some ideas and thoughts to help inspire you on the journey.

This is a tough issue, but courageous teachers like you can make the difference, ensuring that this generation will focus on the facts rather than the hype.

# Classroom Activities

This brief lesson-starter suggests activities without being overly prescriptive so that you can adapt the activity to your classroom. A pledge or action item is included at the end.



Using your history text book, have students find images of immigrants and immigration from our nation's history; spend some time analyzing the photos and drawings. How are immigrants portrayed? What choices have photographers and artists made in these portrayals? How would students describe these immigrants? Online sites are also a good source for finding photographs, images and even cartoons about immigration throughout U.S. history.

For homework, ask students to bring in recent (within the last two months) photographs of immigrants. Put students in small groups, and have them perform a similar analysis as above.

Discuss how the old and new images are similar or different. Discuss with students whether they think our attitudes towards immigrants have changed. Explore the role that interest groups and the media play in the current debate.

**Pledge:** As a class, have students brainstorm a list of "good-citizen rules" for analyzing news about immigration. Then have small groups use that list to create a simple two-sentence pledge of how they will read news items about immigration and immigrants in the future.

# Lesson Plan Ideas

## Some ideas to get started talking about immigration in the in the classroom.

- Have students watch a national news program or read the front page of a national newspaper for one week and record the stories about immigration. What attitudes are exhibited towards immigration and immigrants?
- Assign students the text of SB 1070 (Google “SB 1070”). Have students note the places in the law where they agree, disagree, and have questions. Discuss as a class. Do the same with the recent court ruling of U. S. District Judge Susan Bolton in the Justice Department suit, United States v. Arizona, which prevented parts of SB 1070 from going into effect.
- Have students skim the lengthy Immigration and Nationality Act at [www.uscis.gov](http://www.uscis.gov) to get a sense of how complicated immigration policy is. Ask students to summarize, to the best of their ability, current U.S. immigration policy.



## Check these out before diving into the topic of immigration.

Some preparations and ideas to create a conducive atmosphere for “storytelling swaps”:

- Create rules for civil discourse in the classroom before engaging in this discussion.
- Keep a neutral, open attitude towards all sides of this issue.
- Read our current immigration laws, federal and state.
- Read the new Arizona law, SB 1070, on immigration and the related ruling by Judge Susan Bolton in the case United States v. Arizona.
- Pay attention to your language: think about whether to call someone “undocumented” or “illegal” and when to use “American,” “citizen,” “immigrant”, and so on.
- Help students see that this issue is more complicated than the political parties and most media outlets would have us believe.
- Connect immigration to the economic situation in other countries and to our own economy, where certain industries thrive on the cheap labor of undocumented immigrants.



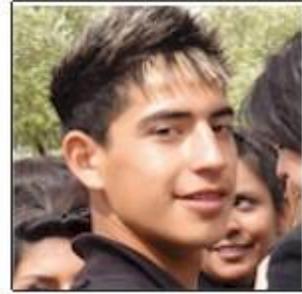
# Resources to help you plan lessons about the topic

Lesson plans for your classroom that use personal stories about the immigrant experience. Resources to help you plan lessons about the topic of immigration.

## RaceBridges Lesson Plans/Teacher Resources

See the Lesson plans for your classroom that use personal stories about the immigrant experience at the end of this document.

- [Bittersweet: A Chinese-American Daughter's Legacy](#)
- [Dreaming of Cuba: Stories that Bind](#)
- [Hidden Memory: Japanese-American Incarceration](#)



## Recommended Resources

Resources to help you plan lessons about this topic.

- [PBS Teachers: Immigration Activities:](#)  
This site has a variety of lesson plans and resources for all different grade levels. Click on “Teaching Tolerance”
- [Day Without a Mexican:](#)  
This movie takes a humorous, satirical look at the immigration debate by imagining what would happen if all Latinos suddenly disappeared from California. An engaging narrative is interspersed with facts about immigration. A great way to interest students in this topic.
- [Department of Homeland Security: Immigration Statistics:](#)  
The most recent immigration data.

Use these quotations at the beginning of the lesson or unit on immigration to spark student interest; try having students respond to them in writing or discuss them in small groups.



***Give me your tired, your poor,  
Your huddled masses yearning to breathe free,  
The wretched refuse of your teeming shore.  
Send these, the homeless, tempest-tost to me,  
I lift my lamp beside the golden door!***

Emma Lazarus  
(inscribed on the Statue of Liberty)

***Everywhere immigrants have enriched and  
strengthened the fabric of American life.***

(John F. Kennedy)

***Do not mistreat the alien or oppress him,  
for you were aliens in Egypt. Do not oppress an  
alien;  
you yourselves know what it feels like  
to be aliens, because you were aliens in Egypt.***

(Exodus 23:9)

**For Laughs:** All the problems we face in the United States today can be traced to an unenlightened immigration policy on the part of the American Indian. (Pat Paulsen)

Use these questions to inspire your own thinking and teaching on the topic of immigration.

- What is your automatic response to the word “immigrant”? What images come to mind?
- Think of the students in your classroom: for whom will this be a difficult discussion? Who will need extra attention or care around this topic?
- Remember the best “difficult” conversation you’ve had in your classroom: what went well? What did you do to facilitate the conversation? What is your strongest skill as a conversation facilitator?

Post this on your bulletin board or photocopy it and pass it out to students to use as a bookmark.

### **A Nation of Immigrants Thinks About Immigration: The Dilemma**

It is human nature to want to “slam the door” behind oneself, just after receiving the benefit we want to deny to others.

The original immigrants to this land were Europeans fleeing persecution at home and/or seeking economic prosperity abroad—this is the case for immigrants today as well. Throughout our history we have maligned immigrants, making assimilation and success difficult, often vilifying immigrants. We don’t have to look far to find instances of “No Irish Need Apply” signs, racist portrayals of Italian immigrants, anti-German-American propaganda during WWII, and comparisons of Chinese immigrants to rats at the end of the 19th Century.

So, while many seek to glorify former immigrants while denigrating the current immigrants, history tells us that we have never been eager to welcome newcomers—whatever their legal status—because they are “other,” “different,” and easy to blame for any of our current economic or social ills.